



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 6, 2004

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 6, 2004

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Brampton—Springdale.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

JOSEPH HOWE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today for the first time as the member of Parliament for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Joseph Howe, the father of responsible government in Canada. Born in Halifax, he resided for a key part of his life in Dartmouth, where his great work is being remembered this week in a series of events, including symposiums, citizens' forums and the naming of the Joseph Howe Park.

His fight against colonial control and corruption led to his famous six-hour speech defending himself on a charge of libel. As the most influential reformer in what became the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, Joseph Howe in 1848 was the architect of the first responsible government ever elected in a British colony.

Today, Michael Bawtree wonderfully recreates the life of Joseph Howe and he reminds us that responsible government was, in the words of Howe, "achieved without a blow struck, or a pane of glass broken".

As we embark upon this historic 38th Parliament, I hope all members join me in saluting the father of responsible government in our country.

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CANADIAN IDOL

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, it has been my great honour to represent the people of

Medicine Hat, but I doubt that I was ever more proud than when Medicine Hat's Kalan Porter won CTV's *Canadian Idol* competition just under three weeks ago.

Kalan is not just a phenomenal talent. More important, he is a humble and phenomenal young man, a tribute to his upbringing on a buffalo ranch just outside of Irvine, Alberta.

I wish to extend congratulations to Kalan's parents, Rick and Janet, and special congratulations, too, to his grandparents, Bob and Donna Lee Porter. Bob, of course, was the member of Parliament for Medicine Hat until 1993. Clearly Kalan comes from very good stock.

I know I speak on behalf of the people of Medicine Hat and of course this Parliament when I say congratulations to Kalan on a job well done. Look out world, here comes Medicine Hat's Kalan Porter.

* * *

EDUCATION

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, education is the responsibility of each province and territory in Canada. There are many challenges facing education in our country.

Access to quality education across the realm of childhood and adulthood allows individuals to achieve self-supporting status for life.

We need quality elementary and secondary school programs. We need quality community colleges to fill the gap for people who did not acquire needed skills in high school. We need quality universities that attract top students, endowments and researchers.

Colleges and universities can be huge economic engines in this country. I call upon my colleagues in Parliament to join me in supporting the work done by Canada's provinces and territories to ensure that we do not shortchange our children. They are the future of our country. They need access to a quality, affordable educational system.

* * *

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

2004 FEDERAL ELECTION

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 28, Quebecers spoke as a people, mandating the Bloc Quebecois to act as guardian of their values, defender of their rights and advocate of their difference in the federal political arena.

S. O. 31

We are grateful to Quebecers for placing their trust in us. We are aware of the responsibilities it entails as we reiterate our commitment to making their voices heard. A special thanks to the people of Rivière-du-Nord, who have supported and re-elected me for a fourth term.

With an effervescent yet balanced approach, we will stand in this House for Quebec's distinctiveness. With vigour and renewed faith, we will continue to ensure respect for the powers of the National Assembly and the indefeasible right of our people to develop to their fullest.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mayors gathered in Quebec City today after the closure of several RCMP detachments was announced. They want to make clear that they totally disagree with this decision. And I share their view entirely.

This decision affects not only my riding but several areas of Quebec: Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Coaticook, Baie-Comeau, Lac Mégantic, Granby, Saint-Hyacinthe, Roberval, Rivière-du-Loup and Joliette. The detachments involved are located in remote areas. This is sad news. Once again, the biggest losers will be the people living in regions of Quebec.

At a time when the cultivation of marijuana is at its height and our borders require closer surveillance, the closure of these regional RCMP detachments is announced. This is an unjustified decision, and I ask that it be reversed.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to stand here today. I am grateful to the people of Niagara West—Glanbrook for their faith in electing me to express their views in this Parliament. I trust that I will be a worthy representative.

The future of the greenhouse industry in my constituency is at risk because of delays and complications at select border crossings. U.S. customs has now implemented a policy of inspecting 100% of Canadian cut flower shipments for potential infestations. Ever increasing numbers of shipments are being unjustly turned away. Our grape growers are also experiencing difficulties due to extreme waits at border crossings.

I would ask that the government address both of these issues immediately.

Agriculture industry exporters are particularly vulnerable because of the perishable nature of their products. It is time for federal intervention. Whatever negative comments some government members may have about our neighbours to the south, we need to establish a better working relationship with the U.S. government, specifically in this regard. Quick action must be taken to resolve the barriers to efficient agriculture exportation.

BREAST CANCER

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday I joined 160,000 fellow Canadians participating in the largest single day fundraiser in Canada dedicated to eradicating breast cancer.

Cancer is one of Canada's worst killers, and when breast cancer strikes a woman, this killer strikes at an organ which symbolizes nurturing and life itself.

What is especially tragic is the frequency of this killer. It is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among Canadian women.

The eighth annual CIBC Run for the Cure will support breast cancer research, education, diagnosis and treatment. The five kilometre run, and I can still feel it in my legs today, or the one kilometre walk was held in 40 communities nationwide and raised over \$18 million.

I join all members in congratulating the volunteers, organizers and participants in the CIBC Run for the Cure.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ATHENS GAMES

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the constituents of the riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue who put their trust in me to represent them in the House of Commons.

As the Bloc Québécois critic for sport, I wish to bring to the attention of the House the performance of Quebec and Canadian athletes at the recent Olympic and Paralympic Games held in Athens.

To participate in competitions at this level, athletes must train hard over a long period of time. Despite the lack of financial and technical support to help them prepare and train, these athletes persevered and constantly pushed their limits. The results they achieved are therefore all the more impressive.

On behalf of my fellow hon. members, I congratulate and thank these women and men who are models of courage and commitment for everyone.

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[*English*]

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know it would sadden this House to learn that a home fire kills one person every day in Canada. I would like to inform the House that this year Fire Prevention Week takes place from October 3 to 9.

This year's theme reminds us to test our smoke alarms. If properly powered and tested regularly, smoke alarms can save lives. These efforts can minimize the suffering and loss that can affect not only our citizens, but our brave firefighters and their families.

On a more positive note, I was pleased on the weekend to bring greetings from all members of the House to two volunteers of the Yarmouth Fire Department, Mr. John Murphy and Mr. Robert Reid, who each celebrated 50 years of service in volunteer firefighting in rural Nova Scotia.

I wish to congratulate, and thank them and their families for a lifetime of sacrifice.

* * *

• (1410)

CANADA POST

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the promised Liberal appointments process turned out to be just a ghost.

The revenue minister quickly broke the shiny new guidelines that were supposed to stop Liberal cronyism. Why? To appoint his crony, Gordon Feeney, as chairman of Canada Post. Then the minister tried to make Canadians believe he had acted “in the spirit of the guidelines”.

So welcome to the Liberal spirit world, a world where former cabinet ministers like André Ouellet can claim millions from taxpayers with phantom receipts; a place where the sponsorship scandal casts its dark spell; and a place where shady dealings haunt the corridors of Liberal government.

Those who wonder how much to trust yesterday's throne speech promises should pay close attention to the chilling tale of the revenue minister, his good buddy Gordon Feeney, and the case of the disappearing guidelines.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RIDING OF HULL—AYLMER

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the constituents of the riding of Hull—Aylmer for electing me. I wish to reiterate to them my commitment to represent them to the best of my ability and to continue to actively protect their best interests.

I intend to pay more particular attention to certain issues. One such issue is that of employment, in order to ensure that 25% of the federal jobs in the national capital region are in the Outaouais, and another is the public servants disclosure protection act.

Access to better social programs for our seniors and the establishment of social policies for the young and the poor are priority issues to which I will pay particular attention.

I will also strive to ensure that the McConnell-Laramée highway is completed and promote the building of a bridge between Aylmer and Kanata.

S. O. 31

[*English*]

It is a privilege and an honour to represent the constituents of Hull—Aylmer, and I thank them for their confidence.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the people of my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan for their confidence in electing me to be their member of Parliament.

I rise today to congratulate our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, and the members of the NDP women's caucus for insisting that the House establish the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. It is appropriate that this committee will get started during women's history month.

As the recent federal report on pay equity in the public service proved, we still have a long way to go. It is time to recognize that despite the great strides that women have made with respect to their qualifications and experience, women still earn less than men.

Women make up over half the population of this country and finally we will have a committee to address the issues on our behalf. I look forward to being a part of it.

* * *

TRADE

Ms. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, my first time addressing this distinguished House, on behalf of the remarkable people of Newmarket and Aurora.

Yesterday we learned the broad lines of the Liberals' priorities. The language sounded so familiar and it paled when compared to what has actually been done over the past 10 years.

I am looking ahead now to the allocation of adequate resources and strategic planning. When the spending estimates are presented soon, then Canadians can judge whether the grand words of the throne speech are real or not.

Trade is not about abstract numbers, but rather about quality of life. It is our lifeblood. The throne speech yesterday described the status quo and the status quo is not good enough. Border delays are still a major problem, exports are falling, and Canada's productivity is judged mediocre.

There is no indication that trade will be given the resources it needs from the government. It then ceases to be a priority and the country will pay the price.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in anticipation of the Speech from the Throne, the Bloc Québécois had come up with five priorities involving employment insurance, the fiscal imbalance, health, the missile defence shield, agricultural supply management, parental leave and child care.

The message sent by Canadians and Quebecers was ignored right from the first day. Liberal arrogance and thoughtlessness are back in full force, and every Bloc recommendation has been ignored.

In case the Liberals have already forgotten that they are in a minority position, they can count on the Bloc to remind them. With such a scornful attitude to Quebec's demands, the Prime Minister might have been calling an election next week, which he would otherwise not have done.

Unless he makes some adjustments soon, he may be in for a rude awakening.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since taking office the Prime Minister has engaged in a smorgasbord of patronage that is so impressive it would make even his predecessor blush.

Gun registry bungler Allan Rock becomes UN ambassador; ivory tower Liberals Sophia Leung, Sarkis Assadourian and Yvon Charbonneau get cushy vacations as foreign advisors and ambassadors; Liberal yes man, John Harvard, hit the jackpot as Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. The revenue minister personally appointed his banking buddy, Gordon Feeney, as the chairman of the ad scam plagued Canada Post.

Why is the Prime Minister turning back on his promise to do politics differently? He promised to condemn to history the practice and politics of cronyism. If this new king of cronyism will not stop the Liberal bonanza, the only thing Canadians will condemn to history is his government.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, health care is a key commitment that was outlined in yesterday's Speech from the Throne.

For a long time Canadians have been telling their governments to stop arguing about funding and to get down to the business of fixing the current state of our national health care system. All Canadians therefore welcome the work of the Prime Minister, the provincial premiers, and the territorial leaders to agree on the 10 year plan to strengthen health care.

The plan holds all governments to account by setting clear targets to achieve meaningful reform. It will ensure better access to key tests and treatments, reduce waiting times for critical services, and

increase the number of doctors and nurses and other health care professionals, including faster assessment and integration of those trained overseas.

As a newly elected member of the House, I look forward to working with my colleagues from all parties to ensure that Canadians receive the benefits of a strengthened and revitalized health care system.

* * *

NIDHAN SINGH BANWAIT

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay respect to a dear friend, the late Nidhan Singh Banwait.

Sadly, on the morning of July 16, 2004, Mr. Banwait was taken from his family and friends when he succumbed to an illness. My condolences and sympathies go out to his wife, Malkiat Kaur and his sons, Kiran Singh Parkash and Kamal Singh Parkhash. All of Etobicoke North feels this loss.

Nidhan Singh Banwait was a selfless person who always put others ahead of himself. In the early 1980s he formed the South Asian Seniors Association. He was that organization's president and guiding light. Nidhan Singh Banwait also served the community as a director of the Ontario Health Coalition, the Ontario Council of Senior Citizens Organizations and Panorama India Canada.

He was the first in his community to receive the Caring Canadian Award from the Governor General of Canada. Nidhan was a leader and a great Canadian who bettered the lives of those around him. He will be truly missed.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know I speak for all members of the House when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with the crew of the HMCS *Chicoutimi* and their families. There are apparently nine injured crewmen and the crew remains stranded in the north Atlantic. Contrary to the defence minister's claims yesterday, weather conditions there are not good and the fire apparently was more severe than first announced.

Could the Prime Minister properly update us on the condition of the ship and crew and on when we can expect them to be returned safely?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for asking the question and for his expression of regret. I know he speaks for this side of the House, as well as all us in the House.

I spoke to Commodore Pile this morning. It is difficult to maintain radio contact with the sub but he has assured me that in terms of heat and food, which at one point were in doubt, there is no problem. Medical personnel have now arrived on the ship and those who suffered smoke inhalation are being taken care of.

A British escort ship is alongside the *Chicoutimi* and as soon as the seas calm down it will be able to undertake the tow back to port.

* * *

● (1420)

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the Prime Minister's answers and of course we will all be watching the situation carefully.

I have a question on another matter. In recent weeks new and damaging documents have come out of the Gomery inquiry into ad scam. More seriously, this was information that was never given to the public accounts committee even though the Prime Minister had promised that every single piece of information would go to that committee.

Clearly a decision was made to withhold information from Parliament and from the public accounts committee. I want to know who in the Prime Minister's Office made the decision to do that.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no such decision was taken, but I am glad to say that the Gomery commission is now well underway. I am sure that the information the hon. member is seeking will be forthcoming as the commission completes its work.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not simply up to the Gomery commission to be forthcoming. It is up to the government to be forthcoming as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Liberals had planned this cover-up since the beginning. The Prime Minister said he was mad as hell, yet he hid information until after the election.

Why did the Liberal government plan this cover-up?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only was information not hidden, but this government has been very open and very transparent. Furthermore—and this is unprecedented—even cabinet minutes were disclosed to the parliamentary committees.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as well as being mad as hell, the Prime Minister assured us that every single piece of information and every fact on this matter would be made public as quickly as possible. That did not happen.

The Gomery commission has tabled an e-mail sent by Treasury Board official Michael Calcott outraged about Groupaction's exorbitant charges for work not performed. This was never provided to the public accounts committee.

With an election looming, why did the Prime Minister and his government hide this information from the public and the electorate?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we not prejudge the work of Justice Gomery. Justice Gomery has been given a very broad mandate, significant resources and in fact over 10 million documents—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I cannot hear the minister's answer due to there being so much noise in the House. We have to have some order. Let us start out on the correct foot.

The minister has the floor but I cannot hear him. I want to hear the answer.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the fact is Justice Gomery has been given a significant mandate with complete cooperation by the Government of Canada. In fact, over 10 million documents have been turned over to Justice Gomery. We are looking forward to his report. We will not prejudge the work of Justice Gomery. I would urge the hon. member to give the same respect to an independent judicial inquiry.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): There was a time, Mr. Speaker, when that member actually cared about getting to the bottom of this matter.

The cabinet documents given to the Gomery commission show that the government's strategy on national unity involved a substantial strengthening of its Liberal Party in Quebec. This is an unprecedented breach of public trust and of cabinet concentrated discussions on partisan interests.

We know from the recently released audit that the ad firms cited by the Auditor General donated \$1.5 million to the Liberal Party of Canada.

Why did the government's strategy to strengthen its party's fortunes in Quebec include donations from ad agencies receiving government contracts?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we will not be discussing the day to day testimony of the Gomery inquiry because we want to get the full picture and have a look at the report. We are taking that very seriously because we on this side of the House in the Liberal Party want to get to the truth.

The fact is that the president of the Liberal Party of Canada has committed to returning any funds received from any firm that was involved in wrongdoing at the end of the Gomery inquiry to those individuals.

* * *

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 28 the people of Quebec once again elected a majority of Bloc Quebecois members of Parliament to represent Quebec in Ottawa. In a minority government situation, the Prime Minister is obliged to take Quebec's concerns into consideration. He has not done so, and the throne speech proves this in black and white.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he has not done his duty and that he lacks respect for Quebec, as he continues to push for more centralization and more encroachment?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is the leader of the Bloc telling us that health is not a priority for the people of Quebec?

Is he telling us that the environment is not a priority for the people of Quebec?

Is he telling us that the Canada's role in the world—the situation in Darfur, for example—is not a priority for the people of Quebec.

I am from Quebec and I can guarantee that these are priorities for Quebecers.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can talk all he likes about cooperation, but he shows no concern for the priorities of Quebecers when it comes to managing their own affairs in their own areas of jurisdiction. That is one of their priorities and he is not recognizing it. Centralization pervades this throne speech. There are encroachments in education and manpower training, day care and municipalities. The government wants to create more Canadian programs with Canadian standards.

Will the Prime Minister at least have the decency to recognize that in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction he, like Jean Chrétien, has his foot on the gas and on symmetry?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only is there no encroachment, but we have complete respect for all provincial jurisdictions, including that of Quebec.

I would like to take the opportunity in this House to congratulate Premier Charest on his leadership in bringing about the agreement on health. It sets a very important precedent from which all Quebecers and all other Canadians will benefit.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, scarcely a month ago, the ministers of this government were talking about the discovery of the century: asymmetrical federalism. This was to be the antidote to centralizing federalism.

How can the Prime Minister explain the total absence from the entire Speech from the Throne yesterday of any reference to this concept of asymmetrical federalism? Instead, we got national standards, Canada-wide studies, accountability in the health care field. What has become of asymmetry?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister has always said that his federalism would be flexible and respectful of differences.

What are the guiding principles set out in the throne speech? Seven in number, they include recognition of diversity. And what is that, if not asymmetrical federalism?

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will read a quote if I may:

The Government will work with the provinces to ensure that our shared fiscal challenge is dealt with co-operatively and creatively.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Michel Gauthier: I can understand the hon. members' applause, since that is a quote from the Jean Chrétien government's 1994 throne speech.

My question for the Prime Minister is this: Is this not proof that the language has not changed, nor has the attitude, so we can expect the same confrontations as under the Chrétien government? The more things change, the more they stay the same.

• (1430)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can readily understand that the Bloc Québécois is having trouble acknowledging our past successes in the health field or celebrating those successes.

The Prime Minister walks the walk as well as talking the talk. He has proven this with health care, as he will in all the other fields referred to in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's Speech from the Throne marked the fifth time this government has promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

However, since the first promise 11 years ago, Canada's pollution rate continues to rise. Canada is one of the worst polluting countries in the industrialized world.

My question is for the Prime Minister. After so many fine speeches and empty promises but no concrete action, why should Canadians believe the Prime Minister this time?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate the leader of the New Democratic Party, who is a new member in this House. I congratulate him on being elected.

Now, I can assure him that we are very concerned about the whole issue of greenhouse gas emissions and the Kyoto protocol. It is certainly our intention to meet our obligations.

[English]

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps as expected, more words and more promises.

While I appreciate the good wishes, the government does not seem to have the sense of urgency that must be applied to the issue of the climate change crisis. What we have had are speeches after speeches, throne speech after throne speech with the same promises and yet we fall further and further behind.

Will the Prime Minister give us some reason to hope that there will be some action this time rather than more broken promises, such as we have seen year after year?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me simply give the hon. member one example. As he knows, when he was with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities he asked for municipal funds to deal with the environment. The fact is that we delivered and they have been very successful.

Then we said that when the shares of Petro-Canada were sold that a substantial portion, up to a billion dollars of that money, would go into environmental technologies. I am glad to say in the House, after one of the most successful secondary offerings, I am certainly prepared to congratulate the Minister of Finance. We have that money and it will go into environmental technologies.

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Deloitte & Touche Canada Post audit screamed Liberal corruption. It found President André Ouellet directed contracts to Liberal friendly firms. He ran up more than \$2 million in expenses without receipts and skirted hiring rules to push for jobs for Liberal friends and family members.

The report was pure political dynamite. Will the Prime Minister tell the House why this scandalous report was not made public prior to the election?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that action has been taken on the matter of the receipts of Mr. Ouellet. In the first place, the chair of the board wrote to Mr. Ouellet on September 21 requesting those receipts. In the second place, I am pleased to inform the House, in my capacity as minister responsible for Canada Post, that the Canada Revenue Agency is in the process of conducting a single purpose audit surrounding the expenses of the president's office over the past five years.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, due diligence only when caught.

The fact is that the Prime Minister was given the Deloitte & Touche audit prior to the election, but he chose not to release it. Why not? Former revenue minister Stan Keyes had the answer. He said that was just too sensitive for politicians to deal with. He meant Liberal politicians. The fact is the Prime Minister delayed the truth and in so doing he hid the truth.

Will the Prime Minister admit to the House today that not only does he not want to get to the truth; he cannot handle the truth?

• (1435)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the portfolio before the election was handled very capably by my predecessor. What I can say is that the report is public and that the government is taking action. The board is taking determined action and it has a timetable to take action upon.

In terms of the item which has generated the most attention, the receipts, I just have informed the House that those have been requested and that according to Canada Post, an audit is currently being conducted to examine the receipts and the expenditures surrounding the president's office over five years. That is action.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the revenue minister appointed a friend of his and former banking colleague as the chair of Canada Post. The appointment violated the Treasury Board guidelines that the government established, and has demonstrated yet again that the government has a lot to learn when it comes to transparency and accountability.

Canadians want to know why did the revenue minister break the rules to give a job to his friend?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts of the matter are that the board of directors of Canada Post proposed names to me, one of which was Mr. Feeney, whom I recommended to the cabinet for the position of chair of

Oral Questions

Canada Post, which, by the way, carries an annual salary of a maximum of \$17,100.

In the spirit of give and take befitting a minority government, Mr. Feeney has agreed to appear before a parliamentary committee between now and October 28. I will listen very carefully to anything that the opposition members have to say about him.

[Translation]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a committee review of the candidate is not enough. The minister's friend is slated to fill this new position effective October 28. The decision has already been made and the minister knows it.

Will the minister rise today and tell us why we should believe that he will not bend the rules again in favour of his friends?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already explained the procedure. I have full confidence that Mr. Feeney has the necessary qualifications for this important position, which carries an annual salary of \$17,000.

However, if hon. members on the committee want to ask him questions, he is prepared to comply. As for me, I will listen carefully to anything the opposition members have to say.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said that the throne speech was vague and ambiguous and he deplored the fact that it is completely silent on the notion of asymmetrical federalism. The federal Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs replied that this notion was now a principle, a fait accompli. She said that this work with the provinces can be found throughout the speech.

How can the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs claim that the notion of asymmetrical federalism is a fait accompli when we can see that the federal government's real intention is to step up encroachments on Quebec's jurisdictions such as education, manpower training and municipalities?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to hear the Bloc Québécois talk about federalism, in whatever form. Yes, we in this government are implementing asymmetrical federalism. Yes, we are working to set common objectives. Yes, we are offering the necessary flexibility to all our provinces and to all our territories, so that they can implement their programs and achieve these common objectives. Yes, we have a federalist government in Quebec that just happens to be participating in the establishment of these common objectives.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that the throne speech could have stated that this asymmetry should apply not only to Quebec's jurisdictions, but also and particularly to federal jurisdictions, so as to allow Quebec to pursue its own agenda in the areas of telecommunications and justice, for example, or so that it may speak for itself at international forums?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has become a federalist party. Hooray for asymmetrical federalism for all our provinces and territories, promoting national unity. This is precisely the direction taken by our government.

* * *

● (1440)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne, the government made a commitment to continue, and I quote, “to review the employment insurance program to ensure that it remains well-suited to the needs of Canada’s workforce”. To hear this from the government is surprising.

How can the Prime Minister write such a thing when the citizens of all regions of Quebec keep repeating that the current EI system does not work?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise to me to read such a sentence in the Speech from the Throne. It really shows that the government is aware of the importance of the topic and of doing whatever must be done to resolve problems that affect not only the regions of Quebec but also those across the country.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the same topic, the government has plundered the EI fund to the tune of \$45 billion for purposes known only to it. And it continues to do so. The employment insurance program has become a disguised tax instead of insurance for those who lose their jobs.

Why did the government not commit, in its throne speech, to put an end to such shameless robbery by creating an independent employment insurance fund truly designed to help the unemployed?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the advice of the Auditor General, there has been no separate EI account in existence since 1986. All surpluses and deficits are part of the consolidated revenue account. We have in fact reduced premiums every year since 1993.

Our objective is to achieve equilibrium between revenue coming in and expenses going out, and we think we will in fact achieve that this year with premium rates at \$1.98.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised to bring transparency to the appointment of Supreme Court of Canada judges. Instead, he sent the justice minister to tell Canadians what he decided in private.

The promise of transparency has been abandoned for a rubber stamp process. Why did the Prime Minister break his word again?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the hon. member who is breaching the agreement that he himself agreed to; that the Minister of Justice would appear before that committee.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians want to hear from the person who actually made the decision, not his messenger.

The Prime Minister's position that further transparency would politicize the process is simply disingenuous. The fact is that this process was only designed to retain the absolute authority in the Prime Minister's hands.

Why has the Prime Minister abandoned his commitment to democratic reform in favour of centralizing power in his own hands?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the Prime Minister who first stated, as a matter of principle, that there would be parliamentary review of appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada and it was the Prime Minister who made it, as his first act, to refer that matter to the justice and human rights committee of Parliament.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 10, 2004, after finally giving in to farmers' demands for action on the BSE crisis, the agriculture minister announced an inadequate aid package.

Today, there are still no application forms for farmers to apply for this desperately needed money. Cash strapped livestock farmers are going out of business. Why are there no application forms available, a full month after the announcement?

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating my critic on her appointment.

The reality is, over the last 16 months the government along with our provincial governments have put forward initiatives totalling \$1.9 billion to assist the beef industry. On September 10, we announced another round of funding, one quite frankly that we developed with the industry, that we developed with our provincial counterparts, and a program which is seen that will be of great of assistance to our beef producers in Canada.

● (1445)

Mrs. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, administering farmers' BSE relief through the CAIS program is a proven recipe for disaster. To quote the president of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association, “CAIS is a mess. It's all part of the mess of BSE”.

Many farmers are still waiting for the CAIS cash advances for 2003. If that is the government's definition of an advance payment, how long will it take to get a delayed payment for 2004?

Oral Questions

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, working with the industry this past month and with the provinces for this latest round of BSE support, we have been doing a number of things: first, continue to work to open the US border; second, initiatives to expand our marketplace beyond the US and around the world; and most important, bring some rationality back to the marketplace by balancing supply and demand by both investing in new slaughter capacity on the one side and helping with set aside programs on the other.

This is what the industry indicated to us was a priority and this is what we are proceeding with.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am extremely proud to have this opportunity to ask my first question as the member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

I am pleased to see that the Minister of the Environment has decided to appeal the Federal Court decision concerning the Belledune incinerator, and I congratulate him on that.

Can he tell us when the people of Belledune and of Restigouche will see an environmental assessment process put in place?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche for addressing this issue from the moment he was elected. He has been of invaluable assistance in the decision I have had to make about this appeal.

Not only will we appeal, but I am today announcing that I have instructed my staff and legal counsel to speed up the appeal process and move as quickly as possible on this file.

* * *

[English]

ELECTORAL REFORM

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. I want to begin by complimenting the Prime Minister for finally including electoral reform in a throne speech.

In this context, considering that the present electoral system almost invariably produces parties both on the governing side and on the opposition side of the House that do not in any way reflect accurately the regional votes in Canada and thus, this in itself, contributes to regional conflict, will the Prime Minister promise that before the Christmas recess the government will take concrete action to implement this commitment?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too wish to congratulate the member for his re-election to the House and congratulate him for his appointment as the critic for democratic reform.

The suggestion of the member is one that we certainly will take note of. There is a commitment on the part of the government to take a look at electoral reform. We will do that, but we will do so in a way that engages citizens, that engages Canadians and that engages parliamentarians. In due course the government will state its intended course of action. I am sure that the member will be quite encouraged in the manner in which we will do so.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. It seems odd to us that at the same time as the government is contemplating the enormous expense of being involved in George Bush's national missile defence plan, we do not seem to have the money to properly and safely outfit our submariners. Therefore, at the same time as we express concern about the crew of the HMCS *Chicoutimi*, I want to ask the Minister of National Defence this. Is there an intention on the part of the government to go after the British government for having sold us this equipment in the first place and to go after it for the costs associated with what are obviously inferior submarines?

• (1450)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister made clear in his answer in the House earlier, the present concern of the government is the welfare of the extraordinary men who are serving aboard the submarine under very difficult conditions with tremendous professional capacity.

The submarines were acquired by the navy because they will serve Canada well in this program.

We of course will be looking at all remedies, but this is not the time to discuss legal action. This is the time to discuss getting the sub home, getting our men safe and looking after what we have to do first.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's promise to end patronage and cronyism has fallen by the wayside. His appointment of his pal to be ambassador of UNESCO has startled Jewish groups and other fair-minded citizens right across the country. The former Liberal MP has accused Israelis of everything from genocide to economic terrorism.

Did the Prime Minister even check his old pal out before he gave him this appointment? If he did check him out, why did he go ahead with something that has offended so many Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Charbonneau has extensive experience which makes him very well placed to fulfill the role of Canada's ambassador to UNESCO. He has worked for years and years in the field of education, human rights and the environment. He was an outstanding member of the House of Commons and represented very well his constituents and the Government of Canada.

Oral Questions

As Mr. Charbonneau assumes his new position, he will represent Canada very well and reflect the views of the government on all of the issues.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before the Prime Minister goes globe trotting, I would have thought he would answer a few questions himself.

He does not rein in his present MPs who bash Americans, but when a former MP attacks and bashes Israelis, he awards him with an ambassadorial appointment.

Will he take the step toward breaking his addiction to patronage by reconsidering this appointment and putting in place a process that is open and honest?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Charbonneau has been an outstanding member of the House of Commons. Being a member of the House of Commons should not discredit any individual for future jobs or the future career of an individual.

Mr. Charbonneau will be a very good ambassador for this country. He will represent the views of our country and our diplomacy.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Charbonneau is a serial anti-American.

The throne speech repeated the Prime Minister's broken promise to fix Canada-U.S. relations, so why is he letting the American-bashing member for Mississauga—Erindale continue to sit in his caucus and become the de facto Liberal spokesman on U.S. relations?

Last year she famously said, "Damned Americans, I hate those bastards". Now she is at it again, calling our U.S. allies idiots in their coalition against terror.

Does the Prime Minister really believe that mutual respect can exist when he tolerates such hateful attitudes and if not, will he remove that member from his caucus?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our relationship with the United States is a fundamental cornerstone of our foreign policy. We mentioned it in the Speech from the Throne yesterday. Our government is absolutely determined to strengthen the relationship with the United States.

We will continue to have an independent voice in the world. We will want to increase Canada's influence abroad, but we will want to make sure that the North American continent that contributes so much to our prosperity and where we have built the best continent in terms of justice and human rights continues to be a thriving continent.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is thriving in the Liberal caucus is anti-Americanism. We need leadership from the Prime Minister to put an end to it.

The Prime Minister said that he would fix Canada-U.S. relations. Therefore, why is the member for Mississauga—Erindale sitting in his caucus? Why did his heritage minister say this summer that the United States constituted a menace? Why did he appoint to

UNESCO an ambassador who bashes the United States and compares American foreign policy to that of the Third Reich?

If the Prime Minister is serious about fixing our economic relations with the United States, why does he not kick those people out of his caucus and stop tolerating the anti-American wing of his party which is hurting our economic interests?

• (1455)

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the Conservative Party and that member to get as outraged when sometimes some congressmen say outrageous things about Canada. Those things happen. Parliamentarians sometimes say things. They do not represent necessarily the view of our government. But they never get outraged when there are things said sometimes about Canada.

We will tell members one thing. Our government will continue—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The minister has the floor. Members want to hear the answer he is giving. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has the floor. We will have a little order.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew: Mr. Speaker, this government is absolutely determined to continue to strengthen our relationship with the United States.

We have the best allies, the best neighbours. We will continue to build a strong North America. However we will want to make sure that all parliamentarians behave and we expect the same thing on the other side.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to understand how the government avoided publicly clarifying its position on the missile defence shield in the throne speech, unless that position was implied when the speech mentioned strengthening economic and security relations with the United States.

When the government says we must strengthen relations between Canada and the United States, are we to understand that they are announcing—indirectly—that they intend to join in the missile defence plan?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister clearly indicated that we are currently negotiating with the United States. We do not yet know what the conclusions will be, but as soon as negotiations are over, they will be submitted for cabinet approval. Then we shall consult the House, as the Prime Minister has promised. We will have an opportunity to discuss all the benefits and possible disadvantages.

Since the United States is our ally, it seems obvious to me that we should build strong relations with that nation, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said.

Oral Questions

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister is sincere in his desire to reduce the democratic deficit, will he agree to submit this plan to a vote, before any decision is made? I do not mean a take-note debate or consulting the House, but a real vote in the House of Commons.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a longstanding practice that international treaties are the responsibility of the executive in our system of government. However, we have already had discussions on this.

[Translation]

Our tradition is a long-established one. In Canada, international treaties are the responsibility of the government.

Still, it is obvious that these debates and discussions are now taking place in the House of Commons, and this practice will continue. It is obvious that parliamentary committees will also do their work. However, the responsibility for international treaties rests with the government.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is collecting more taxes than necessary, while the provinces are no longer able to make ends meet. In the meantime, the Prime Minister continues to stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the existence of the fiscal imbalance and is forcing the provinces to tax their residents more.

Why is the Prime Minister denying the very existence of a fiscal imbalance?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the provinces have very serious and onerous responsibilities to discharge; so does the Government of Canada. We have very similar tax bases. Indeed the provinces have access to some tax resources that the Government of Canada does not. I think of royalties and lottery proceeds for example.

All in all, each of us within our own jurisdiction must discharge our responsibilities to the full extent of our fiscal capacity. I would point out that through health care, equalization and a number of other programs, we are transferring not just traditional amounts but substantially increased amounts of federal revenue to assist the provinces.

[Translation]

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given that all of the provinces have demanded that the federal government resolve once and for all the fiscal imbalance issue, the Prime Minister's stubbornness speaks volumes about his lack of respect for the jurisdictions of the other levels of government.

Will the Prime Minister call together the provincial premiers in order to discuss this publicly, or will he not?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will be a very important discussion on issues related to equalization, for example, on October 26 in response to the request of the premiers. The Government of Canada was perfectly prepared to have that full discussion at the health summit a number of weeks ago, but it was at the request of the provinces that that discussion was delayed.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Hurricane Jeanne has devastated the Caribbean and the United States, leaving in its wake thousands of fatalities and thousands of other people homeless and without food, particularly in Haiti.

What more is the Government of Canada prepared to do for the people of Haiti?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I extend my most sincere condolences to the victims of this disaster. As well, I wish to thank the Canadians who have generously contributed to emergency aid.

CIDA has provided \$3.5 million for emergency aid in the aftermath of the devastation caused by Jeanne, in addition to aid in kind such as plastic tarpaulins, blankets and food aid. In addition, Canada will be providing over \$180 million for the reconstruction of Haiti.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that HMCS *Chicoutimi* had a fire at sea and is currently adrift. This is the most recent of a long list of problems plaguing the submarine fleet.

Will the Minister of National Defence confirm that the government will commit whatever it takes in terms of extra funds and effort to make the submarines fully operational and safe for our sailors?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question from the hon. member.

I want to inform the hon. member and members of the House that I met with the chief of the defence staff and the chief of maritime command just before question period. The chief of maritime command reminded me that the purchase of these submarines was at the navy's request. These were submarines that the navy requested to deal with security issues off Canada's coast. They are the right submarines to do that. Of course we are going to work with our navy to make sure that these submarines are operational and are providing the strategic defence of our coast which is absolutely essential for this country.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of National Defence confirm whether HMCS *Chicoutimi* had the proper and complete sea trials before it was sent into the Atlantic Ocean? Was it dispatched with all the appropriate procedures?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I met with the chief of maritime command who assured me that HMCS *Chicoutimi* left port under appropriate naval conditions and was proceeding to Halifax to enter into its trial run. That was what the submarine was doing under the command of the navy. He assured me it was done under appropriate procedures.

* * *

[Translation]

PARENTAL LEAVE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last May, just before the election, the government signed an agreement in principle on parental leave with Quebec. Undoubtedly inspired by the imminence of the election, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development used glowing terms and described the agreement as historic.

Since there is no mention whatsoever of this measure in the Speech from the Throne and the election is now behind us, can the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development tell us when he intends to conclude a final agreement on parental leave with the Government of Quebec?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I talked to my counterpart just three or four days ago. Negotiations continue as planned. I am not yet prepared to discuss results as negotiations are continuing as they should.

* * *

• (1505)

[English]

MAHER ARAR INQUIRY

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The Arar inquiry continues to raise very disturbing questions about the involvement of CSIS and the RCMP in this case. Mr. Arar and his family have now lived under a cloud of suspicion for two years due to unproven allegations and independent innuendo by both agencies.

Will the minister now insist that these agencies, both under her direction, either bring forth evidence and lay charges so Mr. Arar can defend himself or admit they do not have evidence and he is innocent?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the hon. member's long-standing interest in this matter. Indeed, the government has taken this matter very seriously. That is why we established an independent commission of inquiry. Mr. Justice O'Connor is at this time hearing witnesses and

reviewing evidence, and I think that as the hon. member is aware it is important to let him finish his work.

* * *

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 38 of the Access to Information Act, to lay upon the table the report of the Information Commissioner for the period of April 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004.

[Translation]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS

JUSTICE

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by residents of Vernon and Coldstream in my riding of Okanagan—Shuswap who are concerned about serious violent crimes by repeat offenders living at the Vernon halfway house. The petitioners call upon Parliament to require that Corrections Canada take stronger steps to protect law-abiding citizens.

LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased on this very first opportunity before the 38th Parliament to table petitions containing over 400 signatures and dealing with a serious matter of the House. The petitioners call on the government to honour the will of Parliament and implement the motion adopted almost unanimously by Parliament three and a half years ago to require labels on all alcoholic beverage containers, labels dealing with fetal alcohol syndrome. For three and a half years the Liberal government of Canada has been in contempt of Parliament. These petitioners want an end to this and labels warning of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy dealt with immediately.

* * *

• (1510)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on my first occasion to speak as parliamentary secretary to the House leader, I will say what I think you will hear many times. I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from October 5 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you will bear with me if my first words will be to thank the people of Calgary Southwest, to whom I owe once again the honour of standing in this House today in reply to the Speech from the Throne. As you can imagine, I have been frequently absent from the constituency of Calgary Southwest and therefore I am extremely honoured to have received such a strong mandate, not just for the work I do in the constituency but obviously for the work I am required to do on behalf of my party across the country.

On June 28, electors of Calgary Southwest joined almost four million other Canadians to entrust the new Conservative Party of Canada with the responsibility of forming the official opposition in this Parliament. I am humbled, and I know we are all humbled, by this high mark of confidence and we are fortified by it in our determination to ensure that this Parliament will listen to all those who are demanding better from their national government.

There should be no doubt in anybody's mind that our ultimate objective is to replace this government and give Canadians a government they can finally trust and be proud of.

At the same time, I will reassure the Prime Minister, all members of the House and Canadians and pledge that my party and I, as the official opposition, will always seek in the meantime to respect the results of the election, to uphold the honour and sovereignty of our country, to defend the interests and the ideals of its people, and to respect the rules and traditions of this special place.

Without hesitation or reservation, I would like also to congratulate all members of all parties who earned the confidence of their fellow citizens in the recent election. We are all—and we should never forget it—very honoured and privileged to be here, to have earned this confidence, and to have earned the responsibilities that we have. We have the responsibility individually of living up to the expectations of our constituents and collectively to the history of our country.

Those men and women who unsuccessfully defended the ideals and ideas of their respective parties and their vision of a better Canada also deserve our respect. I would like particularly to say this to our own Conservative candidates who are not with us today, to remind them that in politics, as in war, the heroes are not only those who triumph. On the dawn of a great battle, nobody knows who will prevail at the end of the day. I am reminded that in much graver circumstances, for instance on the morning of August 19, 1942, the sailors who charged the cliffs below Dieppe were every bit as heroic as their comrades who would storm Normandy two years later, and those who fell at Dieppe have the same eternal respect today as those who triumphed on D-Day.

I also offer special wishes, and my collaboration, up to a point, to the Prime Minister, who must discharge the responsibilities of the

The Address

country's highest elected office under some challenging circumstances. This will be a minority Parliament, but an overwhelming majority of Canadians want Parliament to work better, no matter what the partisan composition of the House.

The party I am so proud to lead, the new Conservative Party of Canada, will demand better in this Parliament, not by being blindly obstructionist, not by toppling the government at the first opportunity and not by paralyzing Parliament. We will continue to demand the changes the country needs by being responsible and responsive to Canadians.

[Translation]

It is not my intention, as Leader of the Opposition, to represent in this House only the position of my party or the interests of those who supported us.

We will be the voice of minorities oppressed by abusive majorities, a bulwark protecting the weak from the strong. We will protect the democratic prerogatives of this House as well as Canadian values against the excesses of executive powers and encroachments by judicial powers.

We will represent and work with all the Canadians who want change and a better way of doing things, who expect integrity and accountability from the government.

I will always bear in mind that the people express their wishes as much through the opposition as through the government.

• (1515)

[English]

Our fundamental constitutional role as official opposition is to offer an alternative government to Her Majesty and to the Canadian population.

I have already told members of my party that our goal is not to become a perennial opposition party. Our objective from this day on in this Parliament will be to show Canadians that we are a government in waiting, ready and capable of expressing their values and hopes, and of fulfilling their needs and aspirations.

Our fundamental disagreement with the ruling party on many fundamental issues that affect the lives of Canadians has not been erased or diminished in any way by the results of the last election.

Like the government, we will continue. We have an obligation to defend our core beliefs. We will continue to ask that personal and business taxes be reduced across the board to create jobs and attract more investment to this country.

We will continue to demand that integrity and accountability be restored to the management of public moneys and public finance. We will continue to demand that our health care system be improved through long term innovative solutions, not only by giving money to the provinces.

We will continue to advocate that we defend and protect our men and women in the military who defend and protect us. As the events of the last two days have shown, we must do a much better job.

The Address

We will continue to ask that decisive action, not empty rhetoric, guide us in the protection of our environment. We will continue to ask that meaningful democratic reform be applied to our institutions.

We will ask that our criminal justice system be realigned by maintaining tighter supervision of our parole system, by completely eliminating all legal excuses for child pornography, and by scrapping the wasteful gun registry.

We will ask and demand that our relations with the United States be improved, not further jeopardized, in the interests of our workers and our companies.

[*Translation*]

We will continue our battle to get the government to restore fiscal balance between the federal government and the provinces. We do not believe that the Canadian federation can function efficiently with a central government that is rich while the provinces are poor.

The Prime Minister will soon be discussing adjustments to the equalization formula with his provincial counterparts. Such adjustments are necessary, but they will not be enough. The government must have the courage and the vision to look at the whole issue of tax inequities fostering the federal government's control over the social and economic development of our provinces.

We believe in cooperative federalism where the central government and the provinces work together, sharing common resources equitably and respecting each other's jurisdictions.

• (1520)

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, as you know, in our parliamentary tradition the Speech from the Throne has always been a solemn and serious occasion. Over the last decade, however, I see that the Speech from the Throne has lost much of its lustre and even some of its credibility.

This is the eighth Speech from the Throne since 1993 and the second one this year alone. Under successful Liberal governments that have been obsessed by their political prospects and their leadership issues, the official opening of a new Parliament has become little more than an attempt to slap a new coat of paint on a shaky building rather than fixing its foundation.

Too often the Speech from the Throne has largely turned the Senate chamber into an echo chamber for Liberal electoral ambitions and spin lines. Too often we have seen partisan posturing replace national purpose and political expediency overshadow the quest for excellence.

Canadians are not interested in the government's plan to garner favour for a few months or maybe just a few days. They want a blueprint for the next few years.

The speech delivered by Her Excellency yesterday is unfortunately not very different than the one I commented on back on October 1, 2002, when I made my first major address in the House as leader of the opposition.

I remember saying then that the Liberal government strategy as laid out in successive, almost identical, throne speeches could be

boiled down to five tactics: first, identify a cause that trumps everything else; second, demonize anyone who questions the truth of this instant moral insight; third, proclaim a scheme that would produce the great leap forward; fourth, call upon Canadians to spend heaps of money as a sign of concern; and fifth, forget about looking at any results and move on to other ventures, bigger plans and greater expectations.

Regretfully, under a new general, the Liberal strategy has not changed nor have the old tactics. The victory of the Liberal Party still triumphs the greater good of the country.

I will start with an example from this throne speech. The government has once again indicated that it intends to make health care its priority. Of course, most Canadians, we ourselves, share this view and as a party we support this direction. We support the five principles of the Canada Health Act and we want them to be respected not only in practise but in spirit as well.

The Prime Minister is touting the recent health accord the provinces concluded with him as a major breakthrough. The accord in reality represents only a partial reparation for the damage inflicted by the Liberals on our health care system since 1993.

During more than a decade of Liberal government, our health care system has struggled from crisis to crisis. In 1995 it was the Prime Minister, who was then minister of finance, who inflicted the most grievous cuts to health care funding by ripping some \$25 billion out of the system; something that has never been done before or since by any politician in the history of this country.

As a consequence, over the last decade Canadians have seen hospitals closed, services reduced and waiting lists grow longer. Much remains to be fixed. Many critical areas were also left out during last month's negotiations. Some of these became apparent when we compare the contents of the latest accord with the 2003 accord on health renewal, also agreed to by the Prime Minister and all the first ministers.

This was an accord, by the way, which we supported in the official opposition but which the Prime Minister never saw fit to implement. The 2003 accord, for example, already included a commitment to reasonable access to catastrophic drug coverage, but the new health accord now only commits to yet another study. We will never accept that people should be forced into debt or poverty in order to afford necessary medications for unforeseen or serious medical conditions.

Given the role of the federal government in testing and regulating drugs, we have always thought it made perfect sense for the federal power to play a lead role in this area. During the recent election campaign we advocated that the federal government assume all costs for catastrophic drug coverage over \$5,000 per person per year and that the federal government, in consultation with the provinces, develop a national formula of eligible drugs.

Different reports written by Senator Kirby and another by Roy Romanow, in both cases hardly well known conservatives, recommended some form of federal participation in a national catastrophic drug program.

The Address

• (1525)

Here is what the 1997 record said. Its author, I believe, is present with us today. He promised “a timetable and fiscal framework for the implementation of universal public coverage for medically necessary prescription drugs”. That was seven years ago.

Canadians in dire straits, Canadians who need help, their families and their loved ones who want help are still waiting, as they are still waiting on so many things that have been in the throne speech on health care and so many other subjects in edition after edition.

Many other Canadians also continue to face unacceptable delays in getting access to life-saving drugs because of federal red tape. Last year average drug approval time in Canada was 704 days compared to 393 days in the United States, which, by the way, is seeking to actually reduce its own timeframes. Longer review times mean that Canadians wait longer for the benefits of new and improved drugs, and they make the Canadian pharmaceutical industry less competitive internationally.

Furthermore, while Canadians are being denied timely access to new major pharmaceuticals, they are also having difficulty getting access to natural and complementary health products. We hope and strongly recommend that the government will abandon its boastful fix for a generation attitude.

Nobody in this country believes that the government and the agreement signed with the provinces is going to fix health care for a generation in the course of a three day conference. There is still a lot of work to do in the critical area of health care and not all of it can be done simply by cutting a cheque to the provinces to get out of a conference.

In the last election, the Liberals again promised a national day care program. They promised 150,000 spaces. This is a promise they have been making regularly since 1993. Yesterday, the government promised once again to act. At this speed, by the time the government actually does something about child care, the generation of children who hoped to be included in it in 1993 will be raising children of their own.

We believe the government has a role to play in supporting families, helping parents balance work and home life, and that child care is an important component of the challenge that many of us face everyday, but we would go about it differently. We do not think this government or any government should be in charge of raising our children. We see what happens over there when government is in charge of raising children.

We believe that parents generally know what is best for their children. We believe that a deduction or credit given to all parents of young children would best empower them to make their own decisions about how to care for their own children. We also urge the government to respect the fact that social services, such as child care, are an area of provincial jurisdiction. To their credit, during the health talks, members of the government recognized that Canadian federalism need not be a one size fits all framework, particularly when it comes to provincial jurisdictions.

[*Translation*]

However, the principle of asymmetrical federalism, as it has been called, is not new. Our successive constitutions and our history include several examples of formulas that take into consideration the different realities of the various regions of our country.

Quebec in particular, through its elected representatives, has chosen to help create the Canadian federation, precisely because its distinctiveness would be respected and protected there.

The new Conservative Party which I have the honour of leading is a young party: it will turn one later this month. However, we are very proud to be the heirs of John A. Macdonald and George Étienne Cartier, two Conservatives who managed to unite English and French Canadians in a federal system that became one of the major achievements of the 21st century.

I therefore urge the Prime Minister and all his ministers to respect the will of the provinces that want to sign specific agreements with the federal government when they decide to cooperate with it in jurisdictions granted to them under the Constitution.

The Liberals like to say that they want to conclude a new deal with municipalities. However, the final document does not really deliver the promise in the slogan. For the past few months, the government has desperately been trying to come to terms with the expectations of municipalities, but still does not have a specific plan for sharing revenues generated by gasoline taxes.

The government is also committed to recognizing that municipal governments are partners regarding numerous items on the national agenda. That is fine, but one of the government's primary responsibilities to its partners is to tell the truth. In other words, the government must give them specific dates and data on the funding promised.

• (1530)

[*English*]

We in this party have long and realistically advocated a transfer of at least 3¢ of the federal fuel excise tax to municipalities through a national infrastructure agreement that would have to be concluded with the provinces.

While we are on the subject of gas taxes I should add, since Canadian consumers still face record high gas prices, that it is time the federal government did something about the GST on top of the excise tax on gasoline. It is time we axed the tax on tax. We would also eliminate the GST portion on gas prices that go above 85¢ per litre to prevent the government from reaping windfall profits on top of high gas prices.

I have to mention that it is a little ironic that it was not too long ago the Liberals claimed that they would eliminate the GST completely. Now they will not even cap it to help control runaway gasoline prices.

The Address

One area where the government does deserve a lot of credit for being faithful to its promises is in the area of environmental policy. We have to recognize that the government, in doing its throne speeches, has been faithful to the principle of recycling; recycling the same old promises for a decade.

We all agree that clean air, clean water and clean land are important parts of the legacy we must leave to future generations of Canadians. Currently the federal government and nine provinces have agreed on voluntary Canada-wide standards for particulate matter and ozone which are the most urgent threats facing our air quality. We believe that these standards are a good benchmark but we are concerned that present ozone and particulate matter targets may prove to be yet more empty rhetoric, just like the Liberals' Kyoto greenhouse gas reductions which they have no realistic plan to achieve in spite of spending hundreds of millions of dollars to publicize.

Now it is time for the federal government to ensure that the targets for smog causing pollutants are reached by the 2010 deadline. We suggested that this could be achieved by enacting Canada's first clean air act. We do not need more environmental talks. We do not need more hot air on global warming. We do not need more grandiose schemes. We simply need some action. We need practical measures to improve our air, land and water, and the way we should start is by dealing head on with the problem of smog in this country.

I have also been reading 10 years of throne speeches on aboriginal affairs. In fact, over the past 10 years the Liberals have done very little to improve the lives of aboriginal Canadians. All they have done really is raised expectations while doing little to meet those expectations.

Yesterday's Speech from the Throne actually went backwards. We are now down to devoting just six paragraphs to aboriginal issues. There is nothing to indicate that federal money designated for aboriginal programs will actually get to the people who need it most, rather than being consumed by federal bureaucracy or inefficient governance.

As Conservatives we believe in the importance of self-government, in devolving taxing authority, land ownership and economic decision making to aboriginal communities. We also believe that the government should pursue other matters to enhance individual freedom and opportunity for all aboriginal Canadians on and off reserve.

Our critic for aboriginal affairs, the new member for Calgary Centre-North, will be making suggestions for improving living conditions and prospects for aboriginal Canadians over the course of the throne speech today.

In yesterday's speech the government almost completely ignored Canada's farmers and rural Canada generally. The BSE crisis is one of the greatest crises ever faced by our agricultural sector but BSE is not the only problem faced by our agricultural sector. We have an avian flu crisis that is devastating much of the poultry industry. Our grain and oilseed farmers are being crippled by foreign subsidies. Federal income support and relief programs do not seem to be working.

The government has not designed farm support programs that actually stabilize farm incomes under stress from international subsidization, unfair trade practices, drought and all the other factors that are beyond the control of producers.

• (1535)

We believe, for example, that we can do some things. We believe the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly on grain marketing should be abolished. Farmers should have options. They should be able to market their own grain when they decide and take advantage of market conditions to maximize profits not image.

The Conservative Party of Canada believes strongly that it is in the best interests of Canada and Canadian agriculture that industries under the protection of supply management remain viable but we still have no indication that the government will fight at the WTO to preserve our supply management system and to ensure it continues to provide a reasonable rate of return for producers who supply high quality food at a fair price to consumers.

When it comes to agriculture it would be remiss if I did not discuss trade. Again and again, election after election, throne speech after throne speech the Liberals have promised to defend and expand Canadian trade. They have promised but they have not produced. In fact they have seriously jeopardized our commercial relations with our most important trading partner, the United States. Nowhere is this more cruelly evident than in the ongoing border closure which is severely punishing our beef producers and many related sectors.

The government put off helping this vital industry until the crisis reached the tipping point. It assured producers and all Canadians this summer that the border would be open by the end of the summer. It turns out that the only strategy it had was to hope that it might just come true. Now it is October, the border remains closed and there are no signs of it opening again. We have no idea when it will reopen.

Producers are getting more desperate every day. The crisis in the livestock industry is ongoing and it is worsening across the country. This is a huge industry. Members know that cattle farmers are not the only ones affected. The dairy farmers and producers of other ruminants, such as sheep, elk and bison, are also affected. This is strictly a political problem. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the quality or safety of Canadian beef.

While the government has not been up to this task in this national emergency, we will continue, led by our new agricultural critic, to press for action in the House and across the country and make sure producers' voices are heard. However, to be fair to the actions or inactions of Canadian government officials, I should add that they are not the only ones to blame for this situation.

The United States government and Congress are far from blameless. Once again Canada has been caught in the crossfire of American elections where protectionist posturing is often at a premium for both candidates and commentators. However we cannot sit idly by and hope the Americans will come around. We must press our case with greater vigour and greater tact, not with an ongoing string of anti-American outbursts.

Those outbursts have just compounded the situation just as they have with the critical problems we face in the softwood lumber dispute. A NAFTA panel ruled at the end of August that Canadian lumber was not a threat to American producers and that the 27% duties levied since May 2002 could not be justified. The panel said that it would be an exercise in futility to pursue further review of this case but the US is still not accepting this ruling and it is likely to file yet another extraordinary challenge.

We have not heard from the government a clear strategy on how to deal with these ongoing trade disputes with the United States. However I will say that if the United States continues to ignore the spirit of our trade arrangement and, by doing so, continues to undermine it, it will ultimately affect all our trading relations and be to the detriment of the United States as well as this country.

For the sake of Canada's farmers, lumber producers and countless other industries, I do hope that the Prime Minister will develop some much needed backbone and, frankly, that some of his members will better control their jawbones on this issue. We have to understand that good relations with our best friend and most important customer is not a sign of weakness and bad relations with the United States is not a badge of honour.

• (1540)

The Prime Minister might remind some of his members that it is possible to disagree without being disagreeable. We may not have the same priorities as policies as the United States or even the same view of the world, but we do share a continent and we need to be able to work effectively together to achieve common goals and common prosperity.

I would like to speak on national defence for a second. Other than vague commitments on peacekeeping, we did not really hear much about national defence in the Speech from the Throne. As a matter of fact we have not heard much about national defence from the government since 1993.

Over the past 10 years the Liberals have in fact cut \$20 billion in purchasing power from the Department of National Defence. As a percentage of our economy, our defence spending is lower than every other NATO country except for Luxembourg. As a result, we have fewer personnel, older equipment and are excessively dependent on our allies, principally the United States. The government is still not even capable of actually going out and finding a replacement for a helicopter that should be in an aviation museum, and I understand there are yet more delays. Defence is simply not a priority for the Liberal Party. Canadians must understand this. It has not been a priority for 30 years.

As in health care, the Liberal government should have the foresight and the fortitude of repairing what it has undone. It should have gradually increased the strength of the regular force over the

The Address

long term to 80,000, the strength it was at when the Liberals took office in 1993, and targeted the strengthening of existing units, not go out and create a costly new peacekeeping brigade.

The Liberal government should also focus on equipment priorities that strengthen the protection of our sovereignty, global transport capabilities and the safety of overseas missions. The events of 9/11 showed us how threats can migrate to North America with devastating effect. It would be naive and irresponsible in the extreme to assume that Canada is somehow immune from the threats that other free nations face.

Like all Canadians we are extremely proud of Canada's peacekeeping tradition. We believe it should be continued whenever and wherever it is possible and advisable. However, armies do not exist only to intervene before or after a conflict.

We also would do well to remember that the name of the government department charged with our security is national defence, not international peacekeeping. Its mission is three-fold: protecting Canada; defending North American cooperation with the United States; and contributing to peace and international security. All three are equally important. Let us never forget that we cannot keep the peace with terrorists and rogue states. They already consider themselves to be at war with our very civilization.

[*Translation*]

However, there is no need to be unduly pessimistic. It was reassuring to me to find out that our colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord recently took part in a deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina for six days with the 12e Régiment blindé du Canada. If members of the Bloc Québécois are prepared to serve in the Canadian Forces overseas, then anything is possible.

• (1545)

[*English*]

In the next few days the Prime Minister will embark on the first of a wide-ranging series of international trips. I said yesterday that the Prime Minister was so excited about his government's agenda that his first act was to leave the country. In all seriousness, I do not have any problem with the Prime Minister travelling abroad. In fact I would encourage him to take about 35 Liberal members with him whenever he leaves the country. They would make a tremendous delegation.

As I told the Prime Minister in other circumstances, we cannot confuse movement with momentum. Important decisions do need to be taken here at home and a clear vision of our role in the world needs to be expressed if we are to regain the influence we have lost on the international stage during what has been a decade of drift.

What we have seen so far is hardly encouraging. Even the *Toronto Star* has taken a dim view of the Prime Minister's debut on the world stage. Let me quote a *Toronto Star* columnist who wrote:

The Address

[The Prime Minister's] maiden speech to the United Nations last week was a triumph of political recycling. It essentially amounted to a repeat of Chretien's final address to the same body pronounced at this time last year

[*Translation*]

In terms of international cooperation, the Liberals are responsible for the greatest decrease in international aid in the history of Canada. Cut to half of what it was under the Mulroney government, Canada's aid is now well below the OECD average.

The Liberals the party of Wilfrid Laurier, Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau no longer perceive Canada as a leader among nations. The Prime Minister was recently advised by members of the United Nations General Assembly on how to handle global crises. When the crisis erupted in Haiti, instead of sending the disaster assistance response team, which was created specifically for this type of emergency situation, the government only sent Denis Coderre.

[*English*]

We would strengthen the government's commitment to national defence, to foreign aid—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition will want to set a very good example in his remarks. He knows that referring to members by name is out of order. Even reading something with a member's name in it is out of order. We cannot do that to get around the rule that we have in place. He will want to speak respectfully and refer to the member by his constituency name or other title.

Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I will apologize and I will say respectfully that it is necessary from time to time for me to make sure you are paying attention.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition knows that if I were not, there are lots of other members who would help me out.

Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I have noticed that as well.

We would of course strengthen the government's commitment to national defence, to foreign aid and to vigorous diplomacy. We believe also as well, and this is important, that Parliament should have a voice on crucial foreign policy issues of the day.

For example, the Conservative Party has always supported Canada's continued cooperation with the United States in our shared continental defence. We believe Norad is a key strategic alliance that allows us to be fully involved in the defence of North American security and also the defence of our own sovereignty.

At the same time, we believe there are many issues which the government must openly address before we would support full Canadian participation in a continental missile defence system. We need to know clearly the objective of this initiative, whether it is technically feasible, exactly what role Canada would play, as well as the potential costs and benefits, the nature and length of any Canadian commitments.

We believe, and I know all opposition parties believe and I am quite certain many government members believe, that the final decision on whether to participate in the continental missile defence shield should be a decision supported in this House. We urge the government to call for a full debate and vote before the government signs on to any treaties in this area.

Ensuring such a parliamentary vote on missile defence is simply one small step in ensuring greater respect for parliamentary democracy. The Conservative Party, in conjunction with the other opposition parties, will use this minority Parliament to demand true reform in this place.

The Prime Minister has talked effusively about eliminating the democratic deficit for several years now. However, in his first few months of office we saw precious little difference from his predecessor's style of management or mismanagement as we call it over here.

There is an old saying that nothing focuses the mind like a hanging in the morning. We are hopeful that the precarious position of this government will lead them to dust off their fine promises on democratic reform and actually implement some of them.

On this side make no mistake, we stand for free votes in this Parliament. We cannot have a free vote unless we can first vote. We should be able to vote on the definition of marriage. It should be voted on by the representatives elected by the people, not the judges appointed by the government.

The Supreme Court of Canada should not be asked to do the work that we were elected to do. It is not proper to ask Supreme Court judges, because they have enough on their plate already, to approve in principle laws that have not yet even been proposed to Parliament just because the government of the day is too confused, too divided and too timid to face the issue head on.

All of us are representatives of the people. We are charged with adopting legislation according to the wishes and beliefs of those who have elected us and according to the oath which successive generations of MPs have sworn upon their election to this place. The court should determine only whether the laws that we adopt after study, debate, amendment and a majority vote are constitutional in theory and how they should be applied in practice. Their role is not to rule on political, social and moral issues on behalf of the Canadian population in the place of their elected people.

The fundamental separation and balance between the legislative, executive and judicial branches that make up the democratic system must be protected at all times in the interest of its citizens. In the interest of democracy we will also press this government to end the appointment of senators. We believe very strongly that anyone who wants to sit in the Parliament of Canada in the 21st century should be elected by the people of Canada.

● (1550)

We will continue to advocate for elections to be held on a fixed date every four years, as has been enacted successfully by the Liberal government—

The Address

An hon. member: Okay, let's do it right now.

Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I have to tell the member opposite that it is not four years from the last election already, but I see he does want an election.

This has already been enacted by a Liberal government in British Columbia, which understands that the next election should not be called just in the interests of the Prime Minister and his party but in the interests of all Canadians.

We need to closely evaluate the fairness and efficiency of our electoral system and compare it with more modern preferential and proportional systems that are used in other advanced countries.

I want to thank both the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the New Democratic Party for working with us on a series of changes to our Standing Orders, which we believe will make the House more effective and more democratic. These were not advanced to favour our partisan interests or to stymie the government but to make this minority Parliament work. I have said that if I were Prime Minister, I would sustain and live by these rules.

The fundamental responsibility in this area lies with the government. I have to say in the area of democratic reform we are so far not impressed. It is simply not true, for example, that we were consulted in any meaningful way about the contents of yesterday's Speech from the Throne. It is certainly not true that any input was sought. I, on the other hand, worked closely with my opposition colleagues to find common ground for our response, and I would have engaged in these consultations myself were I prime minister in a minority Parliament.

Let me address one last subject and that is public finances and accountability. We all realize that the throne speech is not a budget speech but we are all very concerned about the orgy of costly promises that the government indulged in during the last election campaign and has now continued in the Speech from the Throne. According to the figures, if one believes the figures in the Liberals' 2004 election platform, its recent promises have already exceeded the amount available to fund new initiatives between now and 2009-10. In fact, at the conclusion of the recent health summit the Prime Minister doubled his entire health care promises overnight.

There is virtually nothing in the throne speech about tax relief. All Canadians, individuals and businesses, are paying too much tax compared to our major competitors. We need tax cuts across the board on investment, on consumption, on high marginal earners, on everyone. However, in the Liberal tax and spend world, the tax burden does fall far too heavily on lower and modest income Canadians and their families. Surely all parties in the House could agree that we should begin, with all the surpluses the government has had, with some tax cuts for those who are in the lowest income brackets.

Not only in the campaign, not only in the throne speech, has the government been blind to the crushing tax burden it has placed on hardworking Canadians; it has compounded that over the past decade by shamelessly diverting employment insurance premiums to its general revenues. This has been a \$50 billion theft of revenues from workers and businesses to general revenue that frankly has been used to fund not just the programs but also the scandals of the

government. This must stop and it must never be allowed to happen again. What we believe we need—

An hon. member: Shame, shame.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1555)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor and perhaps we could have a little order so we can hear his words.

Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, occasionally I need to know if they are listening as well.

What we need at this point to avoid what has occurred in the past decade is an independent tripartite commission of business, labour and government to ensure that every dollar in EI contributions is used for the benefit of workers and not for the surpluses and scandals of the government.

We also know that the government has been wildly inaccurate in its forecasts and spending projections over the past five or six years. In recent budgets the Liberals have lowballed surplus numbers by an average of \$6.5 billion per year. In the U.S. they do not have this kind of debate. There is a congressional budget office. People there, like here, may disagree on fiscal policy, but they should not have to guess if the numbers they are using are accurate.

We believe that an independent, non-partisan parliamentary budget office should produce forecasts of revenues and spending which are universally available and accepted by all parties and experts of all stripes. Such a body would ensure that the government is genuinely accountable for taxpayers' dollars and that we maintain fiscal discipline at the federal level.

Finally, in the last election Canadians clearly demonstrated that they did not approve of Liberal waste, mismanagement and corruption. It is frankly galling to us that a government that has dragged and is still dragging the country through the worst scandal in our history had not one word to say yesterday on integrity and accountability in government. It is as if nothing has happened at all, no sponsorship scandal, no police investigations, no judicial inquiry, no missing millions. It is business as usual for the Liberal government. However, it is our business, it is the business of the House and it is the business of the people.

We will remind the government at every turn that the money of Canadians is not the government's money to squander, to divert and to hide. What it did before the election, what it did during the election and what it has done since the election will be exposed by the official opposition because that is our job and responsibility.

The Address

In conclusion, let me return to where I began, which is to reiterate my party's commitment to ensure that this Parliament will serve Canadians effectively. We will support the government or other opposition parties every time we feel it is in the interests of the country that we do so. When we do not, we will oppose and we will offer concrete and constructive suggestions, conservative suggestions. But collaboration is a two way street and all opposition parties expect the government to be more forthcoming than it has been up to now.

I believe that even when a government holds a majority it is not relieved of its obligation to consult with the opposition, with the House and with the people on important matters. That obligation is surely even more imperative when a minority government situation exists. It is the government's obligation to craft a working majority to advance its agenda by taking into account the policies and priorities expressed by the three opposition parties in the House.

We all remember what happened in 1979 when Joe Clark decided to govern as if he had a majority when he did not. The Liberals then pulled out all the stops to defeat the Clark government after only six months. We have no plans or intentions at this time to use procedures or politics to interrupt the life of this Parliament, but ultimately the government's attitudes and actions will determine whether this Parliament will be able to serve Canadians effectively and give them the kind of government they expect and deserve.

The first thing the government must do is actively find common ground with the opposition parties to better serve the Canadian population. I have tried to do precisely that by discussing with my opposition colleagues certain measures that could greatly benefit the population.

• (1600)

It is in the spirit of collaboration and democratic reform that I will offer today some sensible and useful proposals to amend the motion that is before us. These amendments do not require the House or the government to swallow the Conservative election platform whole. They are reasonable, moderate proposals that reflect the viewpoints of several parties, and frankly, of the vast majority of Canadians. They are not inconsistent with the throne speech, the kind of amendments the government House leader said he would consider, but they do put some meat on the bare bones of the government's very vague promises.

I urge members of all parties represented in the House, including the governing Liberal Party, to support the amendment. Voting for the amendment does not imperil the support of the government, far from it. We may well disagree later on with many individual items in the throne speech, but I can assure the Prime Minister that if the amendment is adopted, I pledge that my supporters will then support the approval of the throne speech as a whole.

Therefore, I move:

That the motion to adopt the Speech from the Throne be amended by adding:

“And we urge Your Excellency's advisors, when implementing the details of their proposals,

to review the employment insurance program to ensure it remains well suited to the needs of Canada's workforce,

to reduce and improve the fairness of taxes,

to be unwavering in the application of fiscal discipline,

to examine the need and options for reform of our democratic institutions, including electoral reform,

and to rise above partisanship to address the public interest;

That Your Excellency's advisors consider the inclusion of the following:

1. The establishment of an arm's length, but not privatized, tri-party commission to ensure employment insurance premiums are used only for workers' benefit;

2. The reduction of taxes for low and modest income families;

3. The creation of an independent parliamentary budget office to give regular advice on fiscal forecasts of the Government of Canada;

4. The establishment of a non-partisan, independent citizens' assembly to examine changes to the electoral system, including proportional representation; and

5. Measures to ensure that there be a vote in the House of Commons on any proposed continental missile defence treaty”.

• (1605)

The Speaker: The question is on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the member for Davenport and the member for Gatineau, the mover and the seconder of the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I want to begin this afternoon by expressing my appreciation, on behalf of all Parliamentarians and indeed all Canadians, to those members who have not returned to the House with us. We thank them for their service to their constituents and to their country.

I want also to offer a special welcome to all the incoming members of Parliament, the strong new voices that will sound in this place. We have been entrusted by the people to serve them, to represent them, to debate here and vote on their behalf. I say to you today let us make them proud.

I consider it a tribute to the diverse, multicultural nature of Canada that 34 members who sit in this House were not born in this nation but chose Canada and came to live here from a total of 20 countries. Our Parliament is richer for their presence.

• (1610)

[*English*]

The work of the 38th Parliament has begun. The elected representatives of this great land have again gathered in this Chamber, where Lester Pearson announced the creation of medicare, where John Diefenbaker rose on Dominion Day to introduce the Bill of Rights, and where Tommy Douglas told us it was not too late to build a better world.

As we stand and speak here today, as we engage in this ceremony of renewal, we are adhering to a tradition older than our country itself. On this day, Parliament is at the centre of the national conversation and it must remain there.

The achievements we forge in this place and in our nation will not be those of one person or one party. We act here and speak on behalf of the people of Canada, almost 32 million strong. Our accomplishments, our triumphs and so too our failings will become part of the collective legacy of our time.

The Address

What are we as Canadians to pass on to those who one day will work where we do and live where we do? What kind of Canada will it be? Will we honour the sacrifices of the past by handing over an even better country for the future?

If the answer to that question is to be yes, and it must be yes, then we in this minority Parliament have a critical role to play in building a 21st century economy, in protecting and strengthening our social foundation and securing for Canada a role of pride and influence in the world.

I know a lot of people are wondering, in this Chamber and across the country, if we can make this Parliament work for Canadians; if we can make cooperation not just rhetoric but reality.

In the House, we feel strongly about our beliefs and we express them with vigour. This is a place of passion and partisanship. That will not change, nor should it.

However, in a minority Commons we all have a responsibility to make Parliament work for the people. We will fulfill that responsibility if we embrace and build on the democratic reforms initiated during the last session, and if we are prepared to allow the partisan to give way to progress.

The Governor General spoke yesterday to the values we share across this country. She also spoke to the government's commitment to uniting Canadians in common purpose and building a better future for all.

As we pursue these goals, let us understand that nothing we want to do in our country, nothing we want to help do in the world, can be accomplished if we allow ourselves once again to be caught up in the vicious circle of fiscal irresponsibility.

Keeping the budget in balance is about providing opportunity for Canadians. It is about government doing all it can to create the conditions for Canadians to prosper.

I am part of a generation that for decades borrowed against tomorrow to pay for the needs and desires of its day. For 27 consecutive years our national government was unwilling or unable to make ends meet. The result was an ever-rising national debt and an underachieving economy. For Canadians, it grew harder to find and keep a job, harder to afford a house, and more difficult to pay the bills.

We were caught in a trap of our own making, a vicious circle in which chronic deficits contributed to economic lethargy, which in turn contributed to even higher deficits and then to greater malaise. We could not let that stand and we did not let that stand.

Ten years ago we stamped an expiry date on the federal deficit. We said we would eliminate it and we did. As the budget returned to balance, as Canadians began to grow more secure in the finances of their nation, the economy too began to thrive. Today, interest rates are low. Inflation is low. The rate of unemployment is almost 40% lower than it was a decade ago.

Our growth and living standards are first among the countries of the G-7. Our job growth is the fastest among the countries of the G-7. Our budgetary surplus is alone among the countries of the G-7.

●(1615)

[*Translation*]

There is today a new confidence among Canadians. We are focused on possibility. We are ready to compete, to excel, to showcase what we have to offer.

The vicious circle has been shattered. Canadians now enjoy the benefits of the virtuous circle. Our balanced budget helps foster a strong economy, which in turn increases business and consumer confidence, which further fortifies our economic success.

The virtuous circle has enabled us to lower taxes in an equitable way and to invest in social programs. We will continue in this vein. But we must remember that the virtuous circle is not a birthright. To protect the collective future of Canadians, we will continue to budget a contingency reserve, a practice that has kept us out of deficit even as many other countries have returned. We will provide transparent, accountable management, treating every tax dollar with respect. And we will continue to bring down our national debt, to 25 % of our GDP within the next decade.

We will do this not to thrill the economists of the world but to ensure that future generations of Canadians have even greater freedom to make their own decisions.

[*English*]

To that same end, we will as a government work to ensure Canada and Canadians remain competitive in the global economy. We will help workers to upgrade their skills and provide small business with venture capital. We will make it easier for new immigrants to quickly find their way into the workforce. We will introduce the learning bond to better enable low income families to save for post-secondary education. We will continue our government's successful efforts to fund innovation and research and development so that Canada is at the cutting edge of new technologies.

For that reason, I am announcing today that the Government of Canada will mandate the Canadian Academies of Science. We seek to create a national alliance of leading scientific and engineering societies, one that will operate at arm's length from government and receive operational funding of \$35 million over the next 10 years.

The new Academies of Science will be a source of expert advice on scientific aspects of important domestic and international issues, and will give our country a prestigious voice among the choir of international science groups.

The Address

Canada has had two speeches from the throne this year. It has had an election campaign. Canadians know what this government stands for and what we have pledged to accomplish for them: on health care, on aboriginal issues, on early learning and child care, on cities and communities, the environment, and the international stage. Our focus as a government now is exclusively on the work ahead.

[*Translation*]

We began in the summer by addressing the top priority of Canadians and working with the provinces and territories to secure a 10-year agreement for better health care. The accord will kickstart a reduction in waiting times for key medical procedures, such as heart and cancer care, hip and knee replacements, cataract surgery and diagnostic imaging.

The accord also mandates robust reporting requirements, requirements that include science-based benchmarks and targets that will be made public, driving change, enhancing accountability to Canadians and shifting the focus to the needs of the patient.

It will improve access to health care professionals, launch the expansion of home care and pharmacare, and address the unique health needs of Aboriginal Canadians and the far north.

The health accord sets out common objectives, but recognizes the different needs and circumstances that exist among the provinces and territories. By recognizing these, by pursuing an asymmetrical approach, we find strength in our diversity.

This 10-year agreement will initiate tangible change. It was signed by all the first ministers. And it enjoys the support of health care stakeholders across the country. Over the next decade, the federal contribution to health care will increase by \$41 billion. That is a lot of money, but we believe as a government that our investment must be sufficient to bolster medicare and bring real reform to the number one priority of the people who sent us to serve here.

● (1620)

[*English*]

Furthermore, I set out during the first ministers' meeting a proposal to address the concerns of premiers about the funding and the predictability of equalization on territorial formula financing, programs whose volatility make it difficult for the provinces and territories to plan and budget for health, education and other public priorities.

On October 26, I will meet with the first ministers to put in place some of the most meaningful reforms to equalization since it was introduced almost 50 years ago. These reforms will lead to improved public services for Canadians. In essence, what will happen is that the federal government will make the most of its sound management and fiscal health and will take on the challenge of assuming more risk in managing the country's swings in economic fortune.

Prior to our meeting on health care, the premiers and I sat down with aboriginal leaders and agreed to work together to develop a blueprint to improve the health status of aboriginals. The Government of Canada announced a new program, a new investment of \$700 million, money that will be used for health protection, promotion, disease prevention and better health results for aboriginals.

Better health is just part of what is required to ensure that for aboriginal Canadians the future is more likely to be one of prosperity than poverty. Our government will continue to focus on the areas that will hold the most promise to improve living conditions: lifelong learning, better and more affordable housing, good jobs, clean water. We will continue to ensure step by step, day by day, that the gaps in life chances between aboriginals and other Canadians are reduced. We look forward to a second meeting of aboriginal leaders and first ministers to pursue agreement on a comprehensive agenda of action for the benefit of all aboriginal people.

During the election campaign, we talked to Canadians about the need for a new deal for our cities and communities, the places where we live, where we work and raise our families, where our cultural industries thrive, where new Canadians enrich our perspective, where national policies touch individual lives.

This is an issue that needed to be brought to the national table. Canada's communities, large and urban, small and rural, face very different challenges and require very different solutions. However, both are key if we are to achieve our social goals and ensure our economic competitiveness. Both are facing enormous financial pressures. They are having trouble finding the money they need to build good roads, to maintain clean parks, to provide better transit. They are struggling with the challenge of coming to grips with the need for affordable housing. Our government understands this and we are doing something about it.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Our new deal for cities and communities is about making the lives of Canadians better by making the places they live better. It began in our first budget with a rebate for municipalities on the GST, which translates into a federal investment in communities of some \$7 billion over 10 years. It will continue this fall as we work with provinces, cities and communities on the mechanism and ramp-up for our transfer of a portion of the gas tax, which will mean an additional federal investment of \$2 billion a year when fully implemented.

The Address

The GST rebate and the gas tax transfer amount to a permanent source of new revenue for municipalities. Our goal is to ensure these funds are predictable and reliable enough for every community, should they wish, to go to a financial market and use this ongoing federal contribution of new money to access funds more immediately. The choice and the freedom will be theirs.

We will also be working with the other orders of government on infrastructure and regional development. We are committed to strengthening our regional resource economies, to ensuring our resource sectors benefit from modern technologies, to building on our core strengths in agriculture, fishing and the range of our natural resources. Because we believe that Canada is strongest when all its parts are strong.

[*English*]

Let me speak here of a region of particular challenge and remarkable opportunity, our far north. As a young man I worked on a tug barge riding the Mackenzie River into the Beaufort Sea. Like anyone who spent time in the north, I was enthralled by the majesty of the land and by the very idea of its vastness. I touched the Beaufort again this summer while spending several days in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon. I spoke with the elders and I walked again out on the tundra. In Whitehorse I was presented with a gumball by an eight year old boy whose uncle had as a child presented a gumball to Pierre Trudeau. I did not know whether to turn it over to the National Archives or eat it. Let the record show I ate it, and I will declare it.

The north is a land of mystic grandeur, of mountains rising through the clouds, of valleys carved deep by glaciers, of icebergs shaped by wind and wave. It is also a part of the world that is on the ecological front lines, a fragile place where we can see the unsettling effects of pollution and global warming.

The modern north retains the echo of the ancient but it is still a place of great promise for the future. As a government, we will work with the territories, their governments and aboriginal groups to further develop the economy of the north. We will do so in a way that will sustain the environment and benefit the people.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting science and research in the north, both on our own and in collaboration with our circumpolar partners. Let there be no doubt, we will protect Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

As we look more broadly to the future, we understand that our success and our quality of life are increasingly tied to our relationship with our environment. The decisions we make now have profound implications for the future. For instance, we need to align our policies and incentives to advance Canada to a position of leadership in the fields of renewable energy, efficiency and conservation.

Environmental stewardship reflects a key element of our heritage. It is both a shared value and a fundamental imperative. For it is vital not only to our health and well-being but to our economy and our competitiveness. Vital to the ability of our cities to attract talent and investment.

That is why, for instance, the Kyoto accord on climate change, a treaty that is now more significant because of the Russian decision to ratify, is important for Canada.

And that is why we will devote a significant portion of the net proceeds from our sale of Petro-Canada, at least \$1 billion, to support, develop and commercialize new environmental technologies, -technologies that will help not only Canada but other nations achieve a healthier environment.

[*English*]

During the campaign we spoke to Canadians of our plan to create a nationwide program of early learning and child care, a high quality system open and available to all, affordable, and geared to development. This represents a major initiative. It is going to take some time, but it is worth the effort and it is worth the investment because of the potential benefits, to our economy, yes, but most important, to the lives and the future of our youngest Canadians.

Let me say that one of the accomplishments of the Liberal government of which I am most proud is the introduction in 1997 of the Canada child tax benefit. That too was a program that started small, but look at how it has grown. Look at how it has made a difference in the lives of families and children. By the year 2007, the government's annual contribution through the credit will be more than \$10 billion, money that directly helps the children who need it most.

Our plan for early learning and child care will follow that pattern. Once established, it will grow. It will help more families and it will teach more children.

Because the program will be focused on early learning and development, it will help children to be ready to learn when they start school. It will give them a tangible head start and set them on the path to lifelong achievement. Because the program will be open to all, it will level the playing field for children who are disadvantaged by birth or background.

Because the program will be affordable and of high quality, parents who choose to participate more fully in the paid workforce will be able to do so, with the comfort and the security of knowing that their children are in a nurturing, stimulating environment.

We are dedicated to working with our provincial and territorial partners to make this program a reality. We are dedicated because we believe that a strong Canada-wide program of early learning and care for our children is the single best investment that we can make in their future and in ours.

It is my belief that like those who were in this place at the creation of medicare, and who decades later look back with such pride at that defining moment in Canadian social policy, so too will members of this House recall the forging of this important social achievement.

The Address

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

The government cannot do everything, nor should it try. Let us understand that when we face challenges as a society we prevail because citizens in every part of the country take responsibility and take action.

We see this in the flourishing volunteer sector. In the expanding and exciting social economy where Canadians young and old are joining together in new forms of public enterprise to fight poverty and promote social responsibility.

It is in this spirit that we will work with the provinces, the territories and stakeholder groups to increase support for family caregivers – Canadian women and men of dedicated volunteerism, who have made the choice to care for aged relatives or adult relatives with disabilities.

And that is why we will increase payments to seniors under the Guaranteed Income Supplement—to reflect the fact that wages are growing at a rate greater than inflation, to ensure our least wealthy seniors are able to live better and with dignity.

[*English*]

In our current age, the changes to the world's economic security and political landscapes are increasingly seismic and global fault lines more unstable and more numerous. We see it in the headlines of our day and we feel the anxiety of a world on edge. As Canadians, we must be active beyond our borders to protect our values and our interests: security in the face of terrorism, the increasing threat of nuclear proliferation, and our trade relationships with the United States, with Mexico and throughout the world.

In all that we do it will be Canadian interests that will prevail, and that will be the case with ballistic missile defence. As we have said before, that is why we will have a debate in the House prior to a government decision.

We must also seek to advance the concerns of embattled peoples who seek freedom, stability, democracy and, above all, a better life. Canada has answered the call in the international fight against AIDS, leading the way in the efforts to combat the disease in the developing world. Canada has answered the call in Afghanistan. Canada has answered the call in Haiti. Brave members of our military and our police force are helping to secure the peace and build the institutions that are crucial to thriving states.

We as a government will expand Canada's ability to play this kind of essential role by increasing by 8,000 personnel the Canadian Forces and Reserves.

We will continue to urge the world to act collectively on the basis of our common humanity. Specifically, we will speak out for reform of the United Nations. We will speak out for the establishment of guidelines to enable the international community to intervene more swiftly and more effectively inside sovereign states that perpetrate or fail to stop massive human suffering such as the ongoing tragedy in Darfur.

During the late 1990s, at meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Canada took an important lead in working

to reduce the debts of the world's poorest nations. Many of these are in Africa, and we will continue to help them.

At the G-8 summit in Kananaskis, Prime Minister Chrétien urged the world's richest governments to focus compassionately on the needs of Africa and its people. We will continue this work. We stand ready to build on both our commitment to Africa and our tradition of peacekeeping. For instance, I am proud to be able to tell the House that we are offering to train African military specialists in how best to secure and preserve the peace so that they can in turn build and train an effective homegrown force that is attuned to the cultural, the geographic and the historic realities of conflicts on that continent.

Quite simply, there are so many instruments of war in our world. Let Canada continue to be the instrument for peace.

•(1640)

[*Translation*]

Our priorities as a government serve our goals as a nation: prosperity, opportunity and security for the Canada of now, for the Canada to come. A system of early support so kids get the best possible start in life. Vibrant cities and communities that are great places to live. And better health care so Canadians have the confidence that the system will be there whenever and wherever they may need it.

These are the issues that today rank among the highest priorities of Canadians. And they fall within areas where the provinces and territories have frontline responsibilities and are accountable to their own citizens. As a government, we have no desire and no intention of infringing in these domains.

But neither do we believe that Canadians want the federal government to be absent on the issues that matter most to us collectively.

[*English*]

There is nothing we cannot achieve if we come together in common purpose, if a strong national government articulates and defends our shared interests and each of us rallies to national objectives.

When the first ministers met in Ottawa to discuss health care we found common ground in the needs and desires of Canadians. The people around that table stood up for medicare, stood up for our country, and signed their names to a deal for better health care, a deal for a decade.

When the Government of Canada brings together its 13 territorial and provincial partners, when it agrees with them on a 10 year plan that will mean shorter waiting times and improved access to health professionals, that is a testament to the strength of our federation.

The Address

Canada is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. True national leadership recognizes the diversity among our provinces and embraces it as an asset, a source of creativity and innovation. But at the same time, true national leadership is about naming a destination down the road and helping to forge the national will and the consensus to ensure that we get there together.

We see the importance of national will in the health deal. Because of our agreement, there will be greater accountability. Data on waiting times will be published. Benchmarks and targets will be set, marking progress and unlocking and unleashing ingenuity.

We see the importance of national will in defining Canada's place in the world. More than ever, our prosperity and security, the quality of life in our communities, and the strength of our families depend on our ability to access markets, to compete with determination and resourcefulness, to attract talent and investment, and to build multilateral approaches to peace, security, human rights and environmental stewardship.

We see the importance of national will in protecting the values that define and inspire us. Let us understand that within our charter of rights are enshrined our basic freedoms. We as a nation of minorities must never allow these fundamental rights to be compromised if we are to protect our national character and our individual freedoms.

Let us understand that the pride we take in our diversity, in our linguistic duality and our rich multicultural society, the satisfaction with which we present ourselves to the world as a country of inclusion, will ultimately erode and be lost if we are not vigilant, if we do not vigorously combat racism and exclusion, if we do not all together stare into the face of hate and declare, "That is not our Canada".

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, let me say, on June 28, each of us earned the privilege of a seat in this chamber and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of Canadians and the life of Canada. The message of the election is clear: Canadians want us to do better as a government. We have heard that message and we carry it with us. The demand going forward is equally clear: Our government and all parties must make this minority Parliament work for Canadians.

[*English*]

For me, the election campaign ended with a 24-hour sprint across Canada and back, a race to the finish that started in Halifax and ended in Montreal, with eight stops, two oceans, 10,000 kilometres and about 30 cups of coffee in between.

We started in the early morning. We crossed Nova Scotia by bus. We boarded our campaign plane and stopped in Gatineau. We touched down in Toronto and Winnipeg. As darkness fell, we went on to Vancouver. We had dinner at midnight.

As we flew back east, the plane was silent for the first time in 36 days. Yes, Mr. Speaker, even the media had finally succumbed. We arrived in a beautiful summer dawn in Montreal. I had a chance in the quiet hours of that morning to reflect on all I had seen and heard during the five weeks of the campaign, during my seven months as prime minister, during my 16 years as a member of Parliament.

And I remember thinking: What an incredible country this is. What a vast and diverse and magnificent land. And how privileged we all are to live here, to feel our bold national spirit, to contribute to our nation's rise to excellence. That feeling never left me, not during the long night of election returns, not in the weeks that followed. That feeling has never left me.

Our goal in this Parliament, in all our pursuits, must be to ensure that future generations of Canadians have every reason to feel the same way about their country. To feel the way we do. To experience that surge of pride, that jolt of confidence, that intangible but unmistakable feeling that we are all part of something special.

The work of building an even better country begins today. Let us get to it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the most recent federal election, Quebecers chose once again to put their trust in the sovereigntist members of the Bloc Québécois to defend their interests in Ottawa for the fourth consecutive federal election. This is a mandate that was legitimately obtained. We have a mandate just like all the other members of Parliament who sit here.

Consequently, with its 54 members of Parliament, the Bloc Québécois will continue to dog the federal government tirelessly so that it responds to the concerns of Quebecers. This is the mandate that was given to us and this is the challenge that the Bloc Québécois team intends to meet, with all the respect and the sense of responsibilities due Quebec electors, and with the most profound respect for Canadians.

The Bloc Québécois believes that only sovereignty will allow Quebec to freely make all the collective choices that are appropriate for it. Because we are not proponents of the politics of the worst case scenario, which is the worst kind of politics, we will tackle the issues that affect Quebecers one by one. We will do so with all the necessary openness, with rigour, with realism, by taking fully our responsibilities, without ever losing sight of one thing: at all times, the interests of Quebec will guide the Bloc Québécois.

Let us fact facts. In its present form, the Speech from the Throne does not meet the needs of Quebecers, in many respects.

The Address

I take employment insurance as one example. The government is merely promising to continue to review the employment insurance program. It has been examining, studying, investigating this for ages. Even with unanimous recommendations from House committees, the government has ignored what all parties were unanimous on. There has been no specific commitment to any move to improve the situation of seasonal workers, older workers, young people or women, and this has a terrible impact on all regions of Quebec, and of Canada as well.

In our opinion, an independent commission needs to be struck and given the mandate of determining contribution rates and administering the assets of the independent employment insurance fund in the best interests of contributors and recipients. There is nothing on this in the Speech from the Throne. It is high time that the government stopped stealing from the employment insurance fund.

There is no mention of the softwood lumber issue. Of course the government wants to see Canadian and American businesses have access to the American market, but that's it. Of course that is desirable; everyone wants it. The federal government ought to realize that an assistance plan for workers and businesses is required in the meantime. The American strategy is obvious: drag out the legal proceedings as long as possible, since they know the U.S. will lose. In so doing, they tell themselves, by the time they are finally defeated the victors will no longer be around.

We have to support our businesses by complying with the rules of the World Trade Organization and NAFTA. This can be done, but the government is not doing it. We have been waiting three years for Phase 2. We were told that it would be forthcoming when things became urgent. Well, the situation has now become extremely urgent.

There is not much on agriculture either. Here again, the government preaches access to markets but with no firm or clear commitment on protecting supply management. There is nothing concrete. The farmers of Quebec and of Canada are worried. There is nothing concrete in this Speech from the Throne.

There is no mention of the missile defence shield. Unless when the Prime Minister talked about the need to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Canada he meant that Canada needs to take part in the missile defence plan. If that is what he meant, then there is cause for concern.

•(1650)

The House needs to vote on this matter, not just talk about it. We are not in a Parliament where we just talk for the sake of it. A decision on this issue has to be made here, in this House, whether the government agrees or not. No issue is more important than war or peace or issues of national defence and foreign policy.

We have to be able to express our point of view on this, as they do in the British parliamentary system, and in Australia and New Zealand. This can be done here, by someone concerned about the democratic deficit. If it is just words, I understand why he does not mention it. I had hoped for more from this Prime Minister regarding the democratic deficit. Here is an opportunity for him to improve the situation on democratic debate.

Furthermore, the intentions of the Liberal government, as expressed in the Speech from the Throne—because we have to read what is written and not what is between the lines—once again undermines Quebec's ability to make its own decisions.

The federal government talks about cooperation. I have been hearing that since 1993 and even earlier, because I have been here since 1990. Yet in reality, the Liberals' centralist intentions remain. Encroachments on Quebec's jurisdictions have increased in this Speech from the Throne.

I am referring to the problem of the workforce. We have heard that the government intends to reinvest in occupational training, through a new workplace skills strategy.

I thought that the manpower issue had been settled in 1997 in an agreement with Quebec. I thought that when we were talking about training, it was part of either labour or education, both in Quebec's jurisdiction. But no, they are going to interfere in this area. That is encroachment.

Regarding day care, we have heard that they will handle the matter with a beautiful national program. I expected that they would say this issue is in the domain of the provinces and Quebec and that there would be a right to opt out without conditions and with full compensation. That is what would be offered to Quebec; that is what the people of Quebec wanted to hear. But no—that was not in the speech. There is another fine wall-to-wall, pan-Canadian program, with its pan-Canadian standards.

Within its own areas of jurisdiction, the federal government could have provided assistance to parents and day cares by making changes in taxation. Parents in Quebec lose \$250 million a year because of the deductions for day care costs. It contrasts with the reduction in day care costs in Quebec. We have lowered the costs and we give more to Ottawa, and all the time we are losing money. It is that simple. It amounts to \$250 million, which adds up to \$1 billion in four years. That is a lot of money. They could have done something about this problem. It would have helped the day cares and the parents of Quebec.

As for the municipalities, they said it was important. Many people live there. We knew that. There are many problems. That is the urban condition; that is development. We all know that.

Having made this observation, they decided to meddle. It is as if Quebec said that because national defence is important, it would buy helicopters or submarines, which might help out the federal government. But the jurisdictions have been defined. Municipalities are not a federal responsibility.

I would have liked to read in the Speech from the Throne that the money would be provided to the provinces, to Quebec, which would decide for themselves the priorities and conditions and work with the municipalities, without needing big brother *Ottawa*, with its *Ottawa knows best* attitude. It is always the same.

The Address

It is the same in the environment sector. This time the government talks about a unified environmental assessment process. Yet, the BAPE has existed for 25 years in Quebec. The government tells us that it will present us with something. This will not be imposed to us, it will be proposed to us. There will be some money with the proposals. They will not be conditions, but if the provinces want this money, perhaps they could adopt this unique process, with full respect for jurisdictions, with full cooperation. We know it. I think the Prime Minister has some expertise in this sort of things.

● (1655)

Manpower training, day care, municipalities, environment, all these priorities have as a common denominator the fact that Ottawa wants to use its huge financial means—our money—in jurisdictions that are not federal.

There is another clear sign. Following the euphoric statement on September 15 on asymmetrical federalism, I thought that the government would talk about it in the Speech from the Throne, that it was the discovery of the century and that the problem had just been solved.

We read the Speech from the Throne. We looked everywhere. We were prepared to talk about asymmetry. It was not there once. I know that some people in the Liberal Party are annoyed about this issue. There are documents in English Canada in which this concept is less popular. There is not one word on the subject. Yet, this was the evidence, as the Prime Minister told us, that it was the way to go in an area of jurisdiction that, let us not forget, belongs to Quebec.

As I said before, it is not so much asymmetrical federalism as asymmetrical meddling. However, the federal government has gone even further than that. It is no longer talking about asymmetry, especially in the area of health, where it now refers to the September 15 agreement in terms rather different from those it used the day after this historical find.

It is now talking about Canada-wide objectives and accountability. We are back to the same old “Ottawa knows best” approach, to meddling, centralization and Canada-wide standards. Asymmetry in areas of federal jurisdiction is not even an option.

I welcomed the health agreement when it was reached and I said I was happy about it. At the very least we should be able to do things in our own areas of jurisdiction, with our own money. It is a good thing when Quebec makes gains. But the fact is that Quebec is going nowhere when it is only treading water. The focus is more on protection and resistance than anything else.

For Quebec to go forward, we need asymmetry in federal jurisdictions, just what Jean Charest is asking for in areas like telecommunications, appointments to the Supreme Court and international relations for instance. These are areas where asymmetrical federalism is to be found. No need to be a partisan to recognize it. They make their own choices. They will defend them. In my mind, these are gains, and every time Quebec gains something, it is getting a step closer to becoming a country. This is how we see things.

When Lesage managed to patriate his programs, it was a good thing for Quebec. Sovereignty has not suffered a setback. Support for sovereignty jumped from 8% to 49% in the last referendum and

49% in the last federal election. When Lévesque signed the Cullen-Couture agreement, he did not turn into a federalist. He stood up for Quebec and made some gains. So much the better if an agreement was reached!

However, could we contemplate having the same kind of agreement in international relations, for example, with bilateral arrangements in areas where Quebec is involved in international forums? Could we agree on the doctrine put forward by Paul Gérin-Lajoie? That was a long time ago. It goes back to the 1960s. Paul Gérin-Lajoie told us then that Quebec had to be able to express its own views worldwide and to do so in all areas under its jurisdiction in Canada.

I would have liked to hear what the government had to say in this regard. Then we could talk about asymmetry.

As for parental leave, this is a fine program. We were told in May that a historic agreement had been reached. We often fool ourselves around here thinking that we make history. This is something different. We were told that a historic agreement had been reached. Everything was settled and things were going forward. However, there is nothing about it in this throne speech. On the subject of asymmetrical federalism, I would have thought that the federal government would agree that it came under the jurisdiction of Quebec. I would also have thought that it would have recognized that, with respect to Quebec social programs and policies, no appeal would be made to the Supreme Court. We settle all that, we give the money and we agree on this fantastic child care system that exists in Quebec. Its praises are sung everywhere, and it might be a good idea to recognize it.

There are other areas where we could use this concept of asymmetrical federalism, for example in the case of young offenders. In Quebec, we have a system for young offenders. Everybody agreed: the defence lawyers, the social workers, the police officers, the judges, everybody, all the political parties, all the stakeholders.

Here the law has been changed. The asymmetrical federalism could mean that even if the Criminal Code comes under federal jurisdiction, Quebec could be allowed to exercise its own jurisdiction, according to its own orientation, the one that best suits the province, in this area of federal jurisdiction. We are not saying that it is better that what is done elsewhere. We are simply saying that it is good for us.

● (1700)

We do not want to impose it on others, but neither do we want the opposite to happen. This is what we want and this is what asymmetrical federalism would be.

The Address

I am thinking of the antiscab legislation we have proposed three times here. The Liberals voted in favour the first time, when they were in opposition. Once in power, of course, they changed their minds, and not for the first time. We want to see this legislation extended to all of Canada. But, if the rest of the Canada does not want it, what would there be to prevent the federal government from saying that, even in areas of employment governed by the Canada Labour Code, there would be no recourse to strike breakers in Quebec, in order to speed up negotiations and reduce violence? What is there to prevent that? This would be true asymmetrical federalism. I saw nothing on that in the throne speech.

The same thing goes for the Kyoto protocol. In Quebec, we have made progress on environmental issues, while between 1970 and the present, Ottawa invested \$72 billion in coal, oil, natural gas and nuclear power. We in Quebec paid one-quarter of that. The \$329 million for clean energies, we paid to Hydro-Québec on our own, one-quarter of what Ontario Hydro, which is nuclear-powered, cost. And now, we are supposed to pay for one-quarter of the harm done?

We want a bilateral agreement on the environment that will take into consideration what Quebec has already done. This is what we want. We do not want the federal government to impose on us the effects of policies that have had a disastrous impact on the environment and that, moreover, we helped fund. To get taken—to put it mildly—once is bad enough. We do not want to get taken a second time. This is not like the advertisement for milk.

The fact is that even if we were to settle all these issues, until we have the means to put in place our own policies in our own jurisdictions, a major democratic deficit will continue to exist, namely the fiscal imbalance. This is an issue that can no longer be ignored.

The Prime Minister told us “We are the model country that eliminated its deficit”. He should have said “We are the country that made others, namely its unemployed and the provinces, pay for the deficit”. This is what he should have said, because it is the truth.

But there is nothing in the throne speech on fiscal imbalance. They talk about equalization, but that is not enough. The government must go further. The next conference should not deal strictly with equalization. Moreover, the formula should be thoroughly reviewed.

Let me conclude by saying that a throne speech is a statement of intentions. It contains some intentions we will support and others we will oppose. But it happens that the government is not the only one with intentions. Some 70% of Canadians and Quebeckers voted against the Liberal Party and also expressed certain intentions. That should be taken into consideration.

When the Prime Minister tells us that he wants to work in a consensual way, if that means we should think the same way he does, this is not what we call a consensus. When he tells us we should rise above partisanship, if being non-partisan means being a Liberal, we will get nowhere. We should all work together. We are ready to do that. We are willing to take our responsibilities, but not at all costs.

Our amendment to the throne speech does not call for the whole speech to be discarded, something which has been done in the past. We simply want to amend it by including a number of realistic

measures to meet the demands and needs of Canadians and Quebeckers. That is why I move an amendment to the amendment by the Conservative Party.

I move:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the word “treaty” the following:

“and we ask Your Excellency’s advisors to ensure that all measures brought forward to implement the Speech from the Throne, including those referred to above, fully respect the provinces’ areas of jurisdiction and that the financial pressures the provinces are suffering as a consequence of the fiscal imbalance be alleviated, as demanded by the Premier of Quebec.”

● (1705)

The Speaker: Resuming debate on the amendment to the amendment.

● (1710)

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again I would like to congratulate you on your election. To other public servants, namely the members of the Public Service Alliance, I express my thanks and my solidarity.

I extend my congratulations to the Prime Minister, to the leader of the official opposition and to the leader of the Bloc Québécois on their re-election.

[*English*]

I want to send a special thanks to our NDP caucus for its patience and tolerance while I was hanging out in the lobby these last many months. I want to thank, in particular, the member for Elmwood—Transcona. I hope one day to be as faithful a parliamentarian as he is and has been. I also want to thank the two leaders of mine who are joining us in the caucus, the members for Ottawa Centre and Halifax, who are examples of wisdom, intelligence, decency and service to us all.

[*Translation*]

I would like to take this opportunity to quote a man who is very special to me:

On this first opportunity I have to rise as a member of this House, I thought I should express my special appreciation to all those back home, on the shores of Montreal, who have given me the chance to serve in this Parliament.

My father spoke these words nearly 20 years ago, in 1985. I am proud to be his son. Like my father, I am proud to come from Quebec and proud to represent a riding located on the shores of a lake.

[*English*]

That brings me to a thanks to the constituents of Toronto—Danforth for having bestowed in me their confidence to serve here in the House and to work with all members. I particularly want to single out one of those residents, the deputy leader of the New Democratic Party of Ontario, Marilyn Churley, who also sits with me as the representative for Toronto—Danforth in the Ontario Legislature.

The Address

I would like everyone to know a little bit about Toronto—Danforth. It is a community of enormous diversity. It holds one of the largest Chinese communities in Canada and indeed I have been blessed to have the support of the Chinese community in Toronto—Danforth on a very active basis.

[Member spoke in Chinese and Greek]

And of course we know the Danforth. We have heard of the taste of the Danforth. It is the centre of Greek culture, activity, music and food. I invite everyone to my riding to share in the magnificence that is the taste of the Danforth with another million aficionados of garlic and fine wine.

It is also the location of the South Asian community markets and businesses on east Gerrard where people talk to me about their families and about their desire to end discrimination including racial profiling in our society.

Finally, I would like to mention that it is the location of a very special church called the Metropolitan Community Church. It is a church wherein the first gay marriage was performed in Canada. I had the experience of being there and I am very proud to have been there. It is the home of the gay and lesbian community in many ways and it is one that speaks out on the issues of human rights.

Toronto—Danforth is very special for many reasons and Toronto itself, as my home city now of 30 years, is very special to me. I have a particular role to play as the lone member of the opposition from Toronto and I can assure members that I intend to take that role very seriously.

However, needless to say, the most important part of Toronto for me is my family. I particularly want to thank Olivia Chow, my wife, Mike and Sarah, my kids, and of course, my mother Doris Layton who is watching and I appreciate very much her support throughout.

Let me speak a little about the purpose of this Parliament and the circumstances in which we find ourselves in the House at this very moment and in the weeks to come. David Lewis, another distinguished parliamentarian and former NDP leader said in his maiden speech in 1962, “We have seen in the last few years that the Liberals have revealed themselves to be thoroughly unreliable”.

[Translation]

The more things change, the more they stay the same, we might say.

[English]

However, it was a minority parliament at the time, a parliament with Lester Pearson as Prime Minister. In Pearson's minority parliament, we created public pensions and public health. They would never have occurred with a majority. They would never have occurred without my party. We have 19 MPs here with the support of 2.1 million Canadians. We will not play chicken with historic opportunities to make positive change in this country.

If our party had played chicken in earlier minority governments, we would not have the health care program that we celebrate today. If our party had played chicken in the minority parliaments of the

sixties, we would not have the national pension plan that we have today.

In a later minority parliament, often referenced as a good example of how minority parliaments can get progressive things done, from 1972-74, if our party had played chicken, we would not have had a national housing program that houses almost two million Canadians today.

• (1715)

We have an opportunity to create and build once again or we can play politics and let Canadians down. The ones we will be letting down are the families who are sitting at home wondering how they are going to provide for their children and how they are going to meet their needs for child care. The ones we will be letting down are the ones who are trying to breathe clean air and are wondering where they are going to be able to get clean water as they face yet again another boil water order. The ones we will be letting down if we play chicken and play politics instead of getting to work and seizing the opportunities are those who want to see our voting system changed and made more democratic. We have an historic opportunity to do so in this Parliament.

[Translation]

I have observed debates in this place under majority governments and I think that, like me, the public did not like what it saw. That is why we have a minority government now.

Let me be clear: I do not share the Prime Minister's values.

• (1720)

[English]

We do not draw our values from the same well as the Prime Minister suggested during the election campaign. He talks about rights, but he dodges on equal marriage for all. He promised to help cities, but he is the one who abolished the affordable housing program. He promised to bring in child care time and time again and did not. He promised to cut pollution and it is up significantly.

It seems that progressive ideas emerge from the Prime Minister and his team only when it suits them. We would like to change that. If he is serious about the environment, if he is serious about cities, and if he is serious about democracy and jobs, well then, we would like to help. If he is serious about child care, we will be there.

I would like to quote from the maiden speech made by the member for Halifax in 1997. She was referring to broken promises and said:

Women are the most vulnerable. It is no surprise that this government has abandoned women. The first 1993 red book promise broken was that of a national child care program. Canadian families and Canada's children are still waiting.

That was seven years ago. Seven years ago our party leader at the time had to bemoan a seven year broken promise. It is now 14 years. This leaves families in real trouble.

The Address

I was calling to get a taxi to go to the airport three days ago and the dispatcher said to me, "Mr. Layton, I hope you go up there and make them keep their promises". I was not sure which promise he was going to pick. He was coming on quite strongly

He said that the Liberals promised a national child care program in 1993 and they broke their promise. On the basis of that promise his wife went out and took early childhood education to become trained to be a daycare worker. They decided to have a family in the expectation that there would be child care available and that her job would be as a child care worker.

I found it amazing to hear this guy speaking this way. He then said that his wife is now looking after their kids at home. She was unable to find a job. Without child care, at the cost that it is available, it was simply impossible for the family to function in any other way.

Broken promises attack the very foundation of what Canadians are looking for, which is some sense of hope. The member for Halifax was waiting seven years ago and we are still waiting.

I say to my fellow opposition leaders that our collective responsibility is to make this place work. We must choose our battles. We must choose the battles not over what the Prime Minister says, but by what he does. My party will do just that and we will always speak up for the people that we represent.

Let me say a word or two about the throne speech itself. Again, I am finding some inspiration from former leaders in their maiden speeches. If members do not mind, I would like to reach back to 1936 when Tommy Douglas was first present in this House prior to being Premier of Saskatchewan. Here is what he said about the Speech from the Throne at that time, "I would point out that the Speech from the Throne is notable, not so much for what it says but for what it fails to say".

One wonders what Tommy would think about specifics for debt reduction being laid out with such specificity, but with no specifics for child care. The biggest spending priority that has been announced by the government in the throne speech, and again in the Prime Minister's reply today, is the reduction of debt.

• (1725)

Let us be absolutely clear about that. The reduction of debt is being put as the *sine qua non* of the government's fiscal strategy. This means that it will stand ahead of the environment, of people's basic needs, of affordable housing, just like we have seen for the last decade. Yet we have no specifics on something as important, grand, significant as a child care program.

Let us have some specifics on child care. For example, 3 million kids in Canada have mothers who work, but there are only 515,000 child care spaces in this country. There are fewer child care spaces in my city of Toronto today than there were in 1993. We are falling backwards under this government.

In St. John's it now costs \$415 a month for child care per child. In Yellowknife it is \$605. In Ottawa it is \$750. There are no targets, no dates, no specificity on child care. This is not acceptable.

[*Translation*]

Tommy Douglas would also have had a few well chosen words about the Prime Minister's seeming desire to help George Bush launch the next arms race, without mentioning even once in the throne speech the so-called missile shield.

Let us hope that this omission means that the Prime Minister has converted to peaceful values and decided to say no to George Bush's star war.

[*English*]

Let us hope that the Prime Minister's values shift from the promotion of war and arms race to the values of peace.

My party wants to build a 21st century economy in Canada, one that is green, that is smart, that has child care, that invests in education and that puts investments into the economic engines of cities. I would like to speak briefly about these.

As members know, I have taken on the responsibility of being our party's energy and climate change critic. After four Liberal throne speeches, I simply do not believe the fifth. We have a commitment to climate change efforts, but time and again that promise has been broken, and I do not believe that it will be followed. We intend to bring forward proposals and I hope the government will take a look at implementing them.

In 1993 the Prime Minister's own red book promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%. Instead we have received a report from the OECD saying that we are last among the industrial countries and that we have a massive increase of global warming emissions.

We are facing a global crisis. It is transforming the very planet on which we live. Species that we may or may not care about are losing their capacity to survive on the planet. Hundreds of millions of people will find their lands flooded and their ability to live with any kind of quality of life attacked. That means we have to take urgent and direct action. It is not enough to call for more talks and more discussions of possible plans down the road. I was part of those talks in the past. They led no where.

Let us get going on these issues. It is possible to find solutions. I had a considerable amount to do with the wind turbine on Toronto's waterfront, as did others. I commend the mover of the motion on the Speech from the Throne for his help on that project, but it took six years to get up one turbine.

How long does it take to make change in the country? Surely it cannot take that long.

Let me quote another leader, J.S. Woodsworth, in 1922, on the matter of communities, cities and investment. He said, "As a taxpayer I objected decidedly in my own little municipality to paying out taxes and receiving nothing whatsoever for those taxes".

The Address

What can one say about the commitment to cities and communities in the throne speech? It is pathetic. I stood on the stage with the Prime Minister when he made a promise to municipalities and said there would be 5¢ per litre of the gas tax. Why can the number 5¢ per litre not make its way into the throne speech? Is there something so distasteful about a promise that it cannot be repeated?

What is going on? We see a rapid retraction of commitment on this issue and it is not something that we intend to accept. Instead, we hear about a portion of the fuel tax being phased in. These are the words of someone who frankly does not intend to follow through on a commitment once the election is over.

Also, there is no separate infrastructure program. It will now be folded into the gas tax, I guess. There is no dedicated fund for public transit so we will have more smog and gridlock. That is something to which we can look forward. The infrastructure deficit is growing by \$10 million a day and yet the Prime Minister chooses to spend \$11 million a day on debt reduction. There is the priority. That is the value wellspring that is being utilized.

Let me turn to the words of the member for Ottawa Centre. He gave a maiden speech in 1968, which is instructive. He said, "serious deficiencies which still remain about which the government gives almost no indication of seriously concerning itself. One, the abysmal lack of affordable housing". We saw in a minority parliament a national affordable housing program that took us somewhere, that housed hundreds of thousands of Canadians. As soon as the majority Liberal government came into power, it eliminated the whole program and homelessness began to grow across the land with terrifying consequences.

I would like to close on a more positive note by mentioning that the last words in the Speech from the Throne called for a democratic renewal, including the electoral process. We welcome this initiative. We intend to work very hard to achieve the concept of a citizens' assembly and ultimately a referendum so we can fix this place, so we can see that the democratic politics that Canadians want to see in full operation are able to function and clean up Parliament as we know it, clean up the process that we have seen, the scandals and the corruption, and represent the voices of Canadians.

• (1730)

We are ready to work. We are ready to go. Let us end the games of chicken and the politics and get on with the job.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question, specifically in respect to the national child care framework being proposed by the government. I noted the member mentioned statistics, that there were working mothers with 3 million children and that there were approximately 500,000 daycare spaces, which left about 2.5 million government approved daycare spaces that needed to be created.

My specific concern is that my riding is primarily a rural riding. I would like to use the quote from J.S. Woodsworth of 1922. As he said, is this just a program where one group funds it but gets none of the benefits? That is what many rural Canadians feel about the national daycare program, which creates spaces in large cities but gives none of the benefits to rural Canadians.

There are many examples of that kind of disparity. I know the member rode his bicycle to work. In rural Canada, where work is sometimes 30 to 40 miles away on a gravel road, it is a tough thing to do.

However, I want to focus just on the child care. How do we help rural Canadians with those specific needs?

Mr. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, our critic in this field has just finished a cross-country tour, getting right down to work on the question of child care. In fact, he visited small rural communities and represents that type of northern Ontario region himself. He found that smaller communities right across the country had an enormous interest in a child care strategy.

The tragedy of this is that women, who primarily bear the burden of looking after children, are unable to work and make the contributions they might like to make, and unable to have the choices that they wish their families had. They were counting on the promises to be delivered. I think we have waited long enough.

The good news is that we have a minority Parliament, the kind of Parliament that produced our health care program, something put together by the New Democratic Party government, the CCF government in Saskatchewan. The fact that we have a pension plan emerged from a minority Parliament right here in the House. In fact, the principles of asymmetrical federalism were recognized at the time. It shows that it is possible to put together a strategy to address Canadians' needs no matter in what community or province they might happen to live, whether it's a large or small community.

We have the capacity as Canadians, if we work together, to address these issues and solve these problems. The question is, will we actually take the opportunity we have to realize these opportunities or will we squander it in a game of chicken.

I have looked at the amendments that have been proposed, for example. They are very interesting amendments. Of course the fundamental question is not whether the amendments contain good ideas. In fact, some of them are ideas that we discussed. The question is will the government fall on the vote. It has nothing to do with the content of the words. Any words whatsoever could have been composed. This is the political gamesmanship that is underway.

I argue that what we need to do is get to work. The other parties are playing a game of brinkmanship. It is like people speeding up their cars heading toward each other to see who will blink first. I say to the other party leaders, in whose hands these questions reside, that they should not to get into a blinking game. They should open their eyes to what Canadians want to see done. They want to see us get to work. They do not want to see the shenanigans and the politics that we see unfolding here.

We look forward to having an opportunity to vote on these issues in a forum that will actually make a difference, a vote in the House of Commons on missile defence. I would like to quote the words we just heard from the Prime Minister. He said "In all that we do, it will be Canadian interests that will prevail, and that will be the case with ballistic missile defence".

The Address

Not one page later he said “There are so many instruments of war in our world. Let Canada continue to be an instrument of peace”.

Let us start by saying no to the weaponization of space and the spending of money on missiles on the North American continent.

• (1735)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member and all members throughout the House will agree that investing in our children is one of the most important investments we can make, which is why I am so proud of what we have achieved: the child tax benefit, the child care expense deduction, maternity and parental leave extension to a full year.

I know the finance committee was instrumental in other changes. I think there was a committee chaired by Nick Discepola on caring for our children. These are the principles with which we deal.

In that vein, the member will know that in this place we are seized with a demand from the electorate to govern and to act in a responsible fashion. I think everyone will agree with that. However when the member talks about breaking promises I think we also have to recognize that we have to be clear, concise and correct in our facts.

In 1993 the undertaking of the government in the red book was to create 150,000 new child care spaces once 3% growth of GDP was achieved and asked for matching funding from the provinces. The member will know that the provinces refused to participate and unfortunately we could not go forward. However in this throne speech the government's commitment is to move forward with these child care spaces even if the provincial governments refuse to participate. That is the difference.

This is not a broken promise from 1993. I hope the member will acknowledge that and help us to move forward and make sure the provinces participate so we can get more child care spaces in Canada.

• (1740)

Mr. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, the condition of 3% growth in GDP was achieved within three years of the promise. We have had almost 10 years. This project could have been on the go but it did not happen.

The old line about matching funds is the oldest trick in the book. First one says that one has a great idea and claims credit for it. This is the strategy of the Liberal Party. The Liberals say that they have a wonderful idea but that they have to ask the provinces to pay part of the costs. Then they ensure cynically that they never have the capacity to meet that obligation and then do it by cutting huge amounts of transfers from the federal government to the provinces.

I must say that it was a brilliant strategy, if one is a cynic. It was a brilliant strategy because it allowed the Prime Minister to claim the status of hero when it came to deficit reduction simply by transferring the deficit to the provinces which, some enthusiastically, others reluctantly and some resisting, transferred that deficit on to the municipalities, or worse, directly on the shoulders of individual Canadians whose poverty levels went up, whose student debt went up, whose homelessness went up and whose illness went up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make it clear right from the beginning that we are not in a minority Parliament. I have heard this expression used here. It is not the Parliament that is in a minority situation, but rather the government. This is quite different. It is important to understand the difference and I am not sure that the members really understand what it means.

In his speech, the member for Toronto—Danforth said that he wanted to accelerate change. I have a question for him. Would the best way to accelerate change not be to support the amendment presented by the Conservative Party and the subamendment presented by the Bloc Québécois, dealing with subjects that the member himself and his party have put forward, such as proportional representation, employment insurance, the jurisdictional issue and the missile defence shield? Will he turn into the minority liberal government's puppet or will he assume his responsibilities as an elected member of this House and ensure the adoption of a report produced by the whole House? This is what we want to know from this party.

Mr. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, it is up to the Prime Minister to determine what is a confidence issue. In such a case, by voting for these amendments, we are in fact putting an end to the work that we wanted to do. Elections will have to be called or something even worse could happen.

What I mean is that we support the proposals in these amendments when they refer to something real, when they represent something that can produce results. However, what we are seeing here are merely political games, schoolyard games. We want no take part in them.

[*English*]

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election. I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak today in response to the throne speech and in particular to highlight our commitment in a rapidly changing world.

Canadians want a government that while recognizing the importance of sound economic management, ensures there is a continued commitment to stable communities, a sustainable environment, a solid agenda for families, a strong health care system, a commitment to our founding peoples and an opportunity to enable us to take our place in the world. The citizens of Burlington share these priorities.

The measures related to families, which were outlined in the throne speech, are all-encompassing for our youngest citizens to our seniors, for those who need care and for those who deliver it. The government will meet its commitment to the development of early learning and child care based on principles arrived at by parents and child care experts: quality, universality, accessibility and development.

The Address

Caregivers for our seniors and people with disabilities will benefit from improved tax-based support. The throne speech commits to increasing the guaranteed income supplement and a renewed new horizons program, measures that are important to Burlington's vibrant and sizeable seniors community.

Burlington's citizens are interested in the agenda outlined in the throne speech for Canada's place and influence in the world. As Kofi Annan said right here, Canadians want to know that they are contributing to those countries that need them. Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, or CIDA, and many organizations across this country are making a difference in the world.

Through CIDA, Canadians support social and economic development programs in partner countries through governments, non-governmental organizations and institutions, community groups, businesses and through international bodies, such as UNICEF and the World Bank. CIDA support takes many forms: financial contributions; technical support such as information skills or equipment; support for human rights; environmental sustainability; and more effective aid programs. Support is based on the needs and priorities of our developing country partners.

[*Translation*]

The 2004 budget provided supplementary estimates of \$248 million for foreign aid in 2005-06. This 8% increase is a significant step toward meeting Canada's commitment to double its development assistance by 2010. This substantial increase will help CIDA plan long term interventions and make our assistance more efficient.

[*English*]

CIDA is investing in sectors where we know that Canada can have a lasting impact. We are committed to sharing our expertise and experience with developing countries in areas such as education and health, including the fight against HIV and AIDS, private sector development and good governance. Canada has responded to the HIV-AIDS pandemic with a generous financial commitment, a comprehensive coordinated approach to our programming and strong strategic leadership.

● (1745)

We are stepping up our efforts and taking a smart approach to fighting the spread of the virus, working to prevent more infections while helping those already infected live longer and better lives. As well, we are helping to build capacity in developing countries to deal better with this pandemic.

We are investing in education on sexual and reproductive health rights, on finding a vaccine, on providing care and treatment to those affected and infected by the virus and strengthening the health systems and human resources.

Reversing and halting the spread of HIV-AIDS is also about strong strategic leadership. Earlier this year the House passed groundbreaking legislation to allow the export of lower cost medications to developing countries.

In another important area, making business work for the poor is a way to improve people's lives across the globe. By fostering opportunity through local private enterprise supported by effective,

efficient and transparent indigenous democratic institutions, we can help to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of developing countries. Canadian businesses are helping develop that support.

Economic growth as much as progress in social and environmental sectors is critical to development. Canada is fully committed to implementing the recommendations of the UN Commission on the Private Sector and Development, a commission our Prime Minister co-chaired.

While CIDA's work supports long term development efforts, Canada stands ready to respond to humanitarian crises with rapid, strategic and coordinated assistance.

In the wake of hurricane Ivan and tropical storm Jeanne, the government announced immediate aid for hard hit countries. Canadians provide humanitarian assistance for Haiti and other affected Caribbean countries.

In response to the grave humanitarian crises in the Sudan, Canada has adopted a comprehensive approach: protection for those affected by the conflict, assistance to alleviate suffering, and support for peace building efforts. We are providing relief to internally displaced persons and strongly urging the Sudanese government officials to meet their responsibilities to protect civilians.

We have increased our humanitarian aid for Darfur by \$10.8 million, bringing Canada's total contribution to the Sudan to more than \$37 million since October 2003. International development helps people help themselves. Our goal is to facilitate people in developing countries to lift themselves out of poverty for the long term.

There are many Burlington residents whose efforts distinguish them in this field. For instance, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, founded in 1962 and headquartered in Burlington, works to improve lives in 27 countries throughout the world through community development, relief and education. They are involved with some 100,000 families and communities in the most troubled places. Many citizens across Canada support their activities by working on projects and donating funds each week to the collection plate.

Through CUMIS, Burlington residents support an incredible international cooperative movement that makes a difference, especially through offering micro credit initiatives that support small business development.

Careforce International located in Burlington focuses on social, educational and medical needs. Burlington residents have worked on some of its projects in Burkina Faso and other places.

IDEA Burlington provides social justice education programs for our community for faith groups and schools. Its members network with other organizations and facilitate selected national and international campaigns for peace and social justice.

The Address

Burlington residents work through initiatives like CESO in communities in South America, Africa and the emerging nations of the eastern bloc. Our residents have assisted in elections for emerging democracies as observers and training election officials.

Each spring in our community we have the most incredible effort at Clarksdale Public School. The teachers and parent volunteers organize a Clarksdale world tour. Students explore different parts of the world. They set up booths and they discuss issues of importance, such as our initiative to ban landmines. They prepare food. They talk about the clothing and art.

In a world where 11 million children under the age of five die every year from preventable diseases, and nearly one billion people do not have access to safe water, Canada and Canadians as individuals, through non-governmental organizations, universities, professional associations, cooperatives, religious institutions and their own companies, are doing their part.

● (1750)

Canadians have a role to play in the world, a very important role. CIDA is one important vehicle to ensure that Canadians and their government work to create better conditions for citizens around the world, so they can build better lives for themselves, for their families and their communities.

[*Translation*]

Together, we can build a better world.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have just heard another member of Parliament saying she was proud of the throne speech. She has the right to be proud, but it is the reasons why she is proud that I am questioning.

She talked among other things about the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, saying that the government would improve the supplement. That is the first thing that she mentioned to show us how proud she was. As a matter of fact, I am extremely disappointed for the same reason, and not for the improvement of the supplement.

Is she aware that the government has been robbing the poorest seniors for years? Indeed, it has collected \$3.2 billion by taking this money away from the most disadvantaged seniors. It is now in the government coffers, along with the \$45 billion or \$50 billion from employment insurance.

We are asking, together with seniors, that they be reimbursed for this theft. We know that, if seniors did not receive what is rightfully theirs, it is because they were not informed enough. Indeed, the government has been mean-spirited about the way that it must inform vulnerable people in our society.

I know some seniors and older couples. Just yesterday I met a couple who had been robbed of \$180,000. When they were 88 years old, this man and woman realized they had never received what they were owed. The retroactive payment is for 11 months. It can be proven that these people were not informed and that is why they were not given what they were owed.

I would applaud this measure if, in addition to increasing the supplement, the government said it was prepared to pay back money that had been stolen. There are people still living who continue to be in a difficult financial situation and who are owed money.

I know of a couple who at age 70 realized that they had been robbed of \$4,000 a year for the past five years. They were paid back.

● (1755)

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Deputy Speaker): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Champlain, but the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation has the floor.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Speaker, I feel that the hon. member has a great passion for this subject. It is, I believe, very important to improve the situation of all the people in our ridings. I have been here since 1993. Back then, I sent a message to everyone in my riding, telling them "Look into it carefully. A better choice is available to you. You can benefit from the guaranteed income supplement, but only if you fill in the right tax forms."

I gave workshops in my office where volunteers filled in the forms for people so they could get the money they were entitled to. The situation of this country's seniors is still serious, however. I believe it is important to find more money for these seniors and to make more residential accommodation available, and the like.

This choice is available to us because we have exercised a great deal of discipline as far as this country's budget is concerned. Now we can improve the situation. We can do better than in the past.

As for the specific situation to which the hon. member for Champlain has referred, we can work together to find the best solutions. I trust he and I share that same objective.

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place with all parties and I believe that you would find consent to revert to statements by ministers in order to hear a short statement by the right hon. Prime Minister and leaders of the other parties as well.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Deputy Speaker): Is there agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has been advised by the chief of defence staff of the tragic death of Lieutenant Saunders while he was being transferred from the HMCS *Chicoutimi* for medical assistance. The circumstances of his death have yet to be determined, but I know all of us in the House will want to pass on our condolences and those of our country to his wife, Gwen, and his two children. He gave his life serving his country and we pay him our profound respects and his family our deepest condolences.

● (1800)

Mr. Speaker, I would ask you, on behalf of all of the House and on behalf of all Canadians, if at the end of the tributes by the other leaders in the House we could have a moment of silence.

The Address

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all I can say is I think the full House and Canadian people will be extremely saddened at the tragic and terrible news that the Prime Minister has relayed to the House these days. I am sure time will come for investigations and recriminations, but what we all want to do immediately is express our condolences to Mrs. Saunders and to her children for the sacrifice that has been made today.

We are, unfortunately, frequently reminded of the terrible risks that our men and women in uniform take on our behalf on a regular basis. Those risks do not restrict themselves in any way strictly to combat. Those risks are endured on a daily basis in all kinds of situations.

All I can do is express my own regret, the regret that I know we all feel on this side and all of our constituents feel at this terrible news. I will remember Lieutenant Saunders' sacrifice, Mrs. Saunders and her family in my prayers tonight.

Anything the official opposition can do to assist the government in dealing with this family from here on in, I would certainly be happy to oblige.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was distressed to learn moments ago of the death of a sailor who was serving his country on the submarine HMCS *Chicoutimi*.

I want to express, personally and on behalf of all my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, our sincere condolences to his wife, his children and all his comrades in the Canadian navy and armed forces.

We will certainly be discussing all the circumstances of this event later, but this evening, I believe, is a moment for grief and support, as much as we can do to offer our support to his family.

I have heard that there may be other wounded sailors in critical condition. We should hope that these other wounded people survive. We offer them all our moral support and we send all our wishes to the families who do not deserve the unhappy event that has just happened.

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we join with everyone in this House, at this very serious moment, to

offer our condolences to Lieutenant Saunders' wife, his family, and his comrades.

[*English*]

It is a terrible moment. It is a moment in which we are thinking of a lost Canadian and thinking of the family. We are thinking of the comrades who risk their lives on our behalf, as so many have done before, as Lieutenant Saunders has done, to protect the freedom we have, to protect our quality of life, to allow us to have these debates in these chambers, and to have the kind of society we have.

Any time that a life is lost among our armed service personnel not only do we need to be thankful for the sacrifice that has been given and not only do we need to let the love and support simply flow without hesitation to the family, the community and the friends, but we also have to recall that there is an entire complex of service personnel there who will carry on with the work that needs to be done even in the face of such a tragedy, and it is for that we need to be thankful.

We join with the other party leaders in expressing our deep and sincere regrets. We will assist the government in whatever way we are able to follow through in the appropriate fashion and in the memorial to this man's life.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Deputy Speaker): I invite all members to rise for a moment of silence in respect for what we have heard today.

[*The House stood in silence*]

• (1805)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in respect for what has happened, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Deputy Speaker): The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:09 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, October 6, 2004

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS			
Joseph Howe			
Mr. Savage	23	Mr. Brison	27
Canadian Idol		Mr. MacKay	27
Mr. Solberg	23	Mr. Brison	27
Education		Speech from the Throne	
Mr. Malhi	23	Mr. Duceppe	27
2004 Federal Election		Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	28
Ms. Guay	23	Mr. Duceppe	28
Royal Canadian Mounted Police		Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	28
Mr. Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi)	24	Mr. Gauthier	28
Agriculture		Ms. Robillard	28
Mr. Allison	24	Mr. Gauthier	28
Breast Cancer		Ms. Robillard	28
Mr. Wrzesnewskyj	24	Mr. Layton	28
Athens Games		Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	28
Mr. Lemay	24	Mr. Layton	28
Fire Prevention Week		Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	28
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	24	Canada Post	
Canada Post		Mr. Pallister	29
Mrs. Ablonczy	25	Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	29
Riding of Hull—Aylmer		Mr. Pallister	29
Mr. Proulx	25	Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	29
Status of Women		Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	29
Ms. Crowder	25	Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	29
Trade		Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	29
Ms. Stronach	25	Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	29
Speech from the Throne		Intergovernmental Affairs	
Ms. Demers	26	Mr. Bergeron	29
Government Appointments		Ms. Robillard	29
Mr. Poilievre	26	Mr. Bergeron	29
Health Care		Ms. Robillard	30
Ms. Ratansi	26	Employment Insurance	
Nidhan Singh Banwait		Mr. Lessard	30
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	26	Mr. Volpe	30
		Mr. Lessard	30
		Mr. Goodale	30
		Government Appointments	
		Mr. Toews	30
		Mr. Cotler	30
		Mr. Toews	30
		Mr. Cotler	30
		Agriculture	
		Mrs. Finley	30
		Mr. Mitchell	30
		Mrs. Finley	30
		Mr. Mitchell	31
		The Environment	
		Mr. D'Amours	31
		Mr. Dion	31
		Electoral Reform	
		Mr. Broadbent	31

Mr. Bélanger	31
National Defence	
Mr. Blaikie	31
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	31
Government Appointments	
Mr. Day	31
Mr. Pettigrew	31
Mr. Day	32
Mr. Pettigrew	32
Canada-U.S. Relations	
Mr. Kenney	32
Mr. Pettigrew	32
Mr. Kenney	32
Mr. Pettigrew	32
National Defence	
Mr. Bachand	32
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	32
Mr. Bachand	33
Mr. Pettigrew	33
Taxation	
Ms. Ambrose	33
Mr. Goodale	33
Ms. Ambrose	33
Mr. Goodale	33
International Cooperation	
Mr. Boudria	33
Ms. Carroll	33
National Defence	
Mr. O'Connor	33
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	33
Mr. O'Connor	34
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	34
Parental Leave	
Ms. Gagnon (Québec)	34
Mr. Volpe	34

Mahe Arar Inquiry	
Ms. Catterall	34
Ms. McLellan	34
Information Commissioner	
The Speaker	34

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Petitions	
Justice	
Mr. Stinson	34
Labelling of Alcoholic Beverages	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	34
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. LeBlanc	34

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Resumption of debate on Address in Reply	
Mr. Harper	35
Amendment	42
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	42
Mr. Duceppe	47
Subamendment	50
Mr. Layton	50
Mr. Toews	53
Mr. Szabo	54
Mr. Crête	54
Ms. Torsney	54
Mr. Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)	56
Mr. Valeri	56
National Defence	
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	56
Mr. Harper	57
Mr. Duceppe	57
Mr. Layton	57
Mr. Godin	57
Motion	57
(Motion agreed to)	57

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