



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 041 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 8, 2004

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 8, 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 Timmins—James Bay.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning's *La Presse* reported that R and D expenditures had increased in Quebec. I want to take this opportunity to state that Canada Economic Development had an important role to play in this excellent news.

Canada Economic Development has made innovation one of its top priorities. The relative share of financial assistance granted by the agency to innovation projects has increased considerably over the past five years. In 1999-2000, it was 24% of total financial assistance, while in 2003-04, it reached 61%, for a total of \$113.5 million that made it possible to conclude 585 new partnerships.

These figures clearly demonstrate the need for initiatives by Canada Economic Development and confirm our commitment to helping small and medium size businesses in Quebec to develop innovative projects in the coming years, including in the riding of Gatineau.

* * *

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House of Commons will soon close for the Christmas break, but we still have no word as to whether the Prime Minister will keep his

June election promise to allow Newfoundland and Labrador to keep 100% of its offshore oil revenues.

The Prime Minister has said that he will honour his promise if he can reach an agreement that is good for Canada as well as being good for Newfoundland and Labrador. The real truth is the Prime Minister made his election promise because he thought it would be good for the Liberal Party. There were no strings attached and no conditions in the election campaign.

Letting the province keep 100% of its oil revenues will help us to stand on our own feet economically, and surely that is good for Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada. The Prime Minister said yes to Newfoundland and Labrador during the election campaign. How long does it take to negotiate “yes”?

* * *

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

ORLÉANS - ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of the House the great success of the annual Christmas drive held by the St. Vincent de Paul organization in Orléans last Sunday. During the drive, more than 400 volunteers took to the streets of Orléans. It ended with a supper in the basement of St-Joseph Church. The volunteers collected a whopping \$30,000.

This, along with the collection of a great number of food items and clothing, is unprecedented. St. Vincent de Paul members in Orléans have reason to be proud today. Thanks to the generosity of all those volunteers and the people of Orléans, the society will be able to continue its help to more than 150 families in need.

Orléans St. Vincent de Paul is a community model for all Canadians and, on behalf of all those who have benefited from its efforts in the past and all those who will benefit from them in the future, I want to congratulate this organization for its work. Ottawa—Orléans is a great place to live.

I also want to thank and congratulate Ronald Leduc for his ongoing dedication and leadership within the community.

In closing, I invite all my colleagues who are early risers to attend the next event, the guignolée des médias—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

S. O. 31

EDUCATION

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate Jacqueline Caron of le Bic, on receiving a medal from the Université du Québec à Rimouski at the graduation ceremony held at the Lévis campus this past November.

This distinction was in recognition of Ms. Caron's contributions to education as a teacher, primary and secondary school principal, and educational consultant in Quebec, Canada and francophone Europe. She was also recognized for her contribution to creating an inspiring continuing education program for teachers.

At the ceremony, Ms. Caron expressed five wishes for the teaching profession, which were indicative of the life-long values guiding this consummate teacher.

Congratulations and thank you, Ms. Caron.

* * *

[*English*]

SHAAR SHALOM SYNAGOGUE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it brings me great pleasure to rise in the House today to speak about the 30th anniversary of the Shaar Shalom Synagogue in my vibrant riding of Thornhill. The synagogue has doubled in size over the last 30 years, and is currently one of the largest community based facilities in my riding.

At the anniversary gala dinner last Sunday, two distinguished congregants, Keith Landy and Erna Bader, were recognized for their outstanding work over the last number of years.

The congregation is renowned for bringing the community together and encouraging the family approach, one in which everyone is welcomed. The congregation's intent is to go from strength to strength, serving the community. This joyous event fits so well as the Jewish festival of Hanukkah approaches.

It brings me great pleasure to say bravo to the Shaar Shalom Synagogue, and happy Hanukkah.

* * *

SABLE ISLAND

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the federal government assumed responsibility from Nova Scotia for managing Sable Island in 1867.

In 2000, federal cost cutting led to Sable Island Preservation Trust taking over responsibility for operating the station. The trust has now given notice to terminate activities next April due to further federal funding reductions.

The annual cost to run the station is about \$1.2 million. This maintains five people on staff and they are important as the only human presence on this fragile island.

Recently the government set up a multi-departmental group to make recommendations about the federal future role on Sable Island. The working group has now recommended that the station remain

open and the federal government once again assume full responsibility.

I urge the government to adopt the recommendations of the working group.

* * *

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a new instructional manual and DVD developed in my riding will help solve the learning dilemma for many global positioning system users.

A book entitled, *What Do Those Numbers Mean Anyway?*, written by Bill Steer, has recently been published by the Canadian Ecology Centre Foundation. The visual and written content explains the relationship between the map, the compass and the GPS unit.

According to Ken Waller, a professor at Nipissing University in North Bay, there is a real need to have consumers and those working in rural situations properly trained to understand these basics.

This book will serve to educate paramedics, police and fire personnel, educational and outdoor leaders, as well as those working for utility companies, so the GPS technology can be used efficiently and enhance overall safety.

On behalf of the people of Nipissing—Timiskaming and all hon. members, I wish to congratulate Bill Steer on his excellent work, and would encourage anyone who spends time in the outdoors to buy a copy of *What Do Those Numbers Mean Anyway?*

* * *

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

MARIE-HÉLÈNE PRÉMONT

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to draw hon. members' attention to the phenomenal accomplishments of cyclist Marie-Hélène Prémont of Château-Richer. On November 30, she was proclaimed athlete of the year for the Quebec City region and awarded the *Mémoris d'or*.

Marie-Hélène is an international calibre mountain biker, who has excelled on the world cup circuit in this specialty. Her performances this year have shown without a doubt that she is a top notch athlete.

At the Athens Olympics, she competed in sweltering heat of close to 40 degrees Celsius, and her amazing determination and courage earned her a silver medal in the mountain biking event, the culmination of many years of sacrifice and hard work.

This was the first time a Quebec competitor has ever come away from the Olympics with a silver in cycling, and these were her first Olympics. Marie-Hélène is determined to continue to make her mark on the world scene.

We extend congratulations on all her successes, to Marie-Hélène. Côte-de-Beaupré, all of Quebec is proud of her.

[English]

PEACEKEEPING SERVICE MEDAL

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay homage to Mr. Domenic Cirone, a constituent of mine and a recent recipient of the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal on behalf of the Department of National Defence.

In 1993 Mr. Cirone was recruited by CARE Canada to work for the United Nations Protection Force. Domenic was dispatched in May 1993 and was stationed in the territories formerly known as Yugoslavia, routinely travelling to wartorn areas of eastern and southern Croatia and northwest Bosnia-Herzegovina. During that time, Domenic exemplified the Canadian spirit while serving on behalf of our country.

Queen Elizabeth II approved the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal in 1997. It recognizes the service of Canadians deployed outside our country with the agreement of the Canadian government in support of United Nations peacekeeping missions. I have the honour of awarding Domenic this prestigious award later this afternoon.

I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Domenic on his service and commitment to this country.

* * *

THE SENATE

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the prime ditherer over there keeps saying that he favours democratic, parliamentary and senatorial reform. However he just cannot bring himself to do anything about it.

Albertans have just elected the people they want to represent them in their upper house. Now the prime ditherer has a choice. When he fills the three Alberta vacancies, he can either choose people from his list of Liberal Party hacks or he can choose from the list that the people of Alberta have given him, democratically chosen.

Since in either case he will be appointing people from a list, I would like him to explain how choosing from his personal list of people he wants to reward is more democratic than choosing from the people's list.

I dare him to stop being so chicken. Why not take at least one bold decisive step instead of allowing the democratic deficit to grow and grow?

* * *

FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic prosperity will increasingly rely on new immigrant workers until we reach the point where all net labour force growth will be immigrant based.

In light of this, we must do a better job of recognizing the education and credentials that newcomers receive from other countries.

It is for this reason that on December 6 I visited stakeholders in Calgary. I wanted to discuss the issues of foreign credential

S. O. 31

recognition and to hear about other barriers to employment that skilled newcomers face.

I am happy to say that the Government of Canada is working diligently with its partners to address this important issue. Our partners include the provinces, the territories, regulatory bodies, sector councils, colleges, schools, unions and others.

Our work on foreign credential recognition is a critical component of the government's new workplace skills strategy, which seeks to ensure a highly skilled, adaptable and resilient workforce; a flexible and efficient labour market; and that the needs of employers and workers are met.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, December 1 marked World AIDS Day and also the beginning of the international year of recognizing women and girls with HIV-AIDS.

There is much that Canada could be doing to help women and girls living with HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria around the world. There is also something Canada should be doing for women and their children living with HIV-AIDS here in Canada.

Canadians secondarily infected with HIV receive lesser compensation than victims infected with the hep C between 1986-90.

Now that fund of \$1.1 billion has a surplus intended to benefit this group as well, which numbers 100 people, the majority being women and their children. We must not leave them out. They must be included as equals in the negotiations. They are not asking for special favours, and we agree.

* * *

•(1415)

EUTHANASIA

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 60 years ago Canadian troops were fighting and dying in Holland for the liberation of that country from the evil of the Nazi regime. That regime represented a culture of death which began with a deliberate policy of euthanizing those deemed weak, infirm or imperfect.

In a sad irony, Holland has now chosen to embark on the same slippery slope toward desacralizing human life.

Three years ago the Dutch parliament made it legal for doctors to kill adult patients deemed to be suffering. Now the Dutch medical association has proposed legalizing the killing of children under the age of 12, including infants.

Predictably, this practice has already begun, with the revelation that sick babies are being killed in Dutch hospitals, babies that obviously cannot give their consent for their lives to be taken by medical professionals in cold blood.

Oral Questions

The slippery slope has become a vertical cliff. Holland today has become a cautionary tale for those here in Canada who would legitimize the taking of an innocent human life. We hope that our friends in Holland will reconsider this slippery slope and embrace the values of those who liberated them 60 years ago.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HANUKKAH

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Jewish festival of Hanukkah began yesterday at sundown. In Quebec, across Canada and around the world, Jews will be celebrating the victory of the Maccabees in the first national war of liberation, which is an integral part of the liturgy of Hanukkah.

On this occasion, the first candle of the chanukiyah is lit using the shamash candle. The chanukiyah candelabrum has nine branches, including the shamash, unlike the traditional menorah, which has seven. An additional candle is lit every day for eight days.

According to Jewish tradition, the light dissipates the darkness by introducing clarity. It represents the triumph of enlightenment over obscurity and victory over oppression and assimilation. This light is the symbolic representation of a living Judaism.

[*Member spoke in Hebrew as follows:*]

Beshem ahmitai ba Bloc Québécois, anee mihvahkesh

Le shloah shefa brahote le hag Hanukkah sameah le kol

Haverenu haezraheem ha youhudeem.

[*English*]

On behalf of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, I want to extend our most sincere best wishes to our Jewish compatriots for a happy Hanukkah.

* * *

[*English*]

HANUKKAH

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, with the setting of the sun, millions of families across the globe lit candles to celebrate the first day of Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights.

Every year when the days are darkest and the nights are longest, this festival of hope and light causes all of us, Jews and non-Jews alike, to remember a miracle that occurred more than 2,000 years ago when Judas Maccabee and the people of Israel drove the Seleucid invaders from Jerusalem, but found the temple in ruins.

Only a single jar of pure oil could be found to light the huge menorah, but miraculously, this tiny supply of oil lasted for eight full days and thereby became a symbol of hope to all civilized people that neither barbarism nor tyranny can extinguish the light of true faith.

This is a festival of special joy in which the lighted menorah is placed in an open window or door so that all may share in this light.

Mr. Speaker, I wish you, all members of the House, and every Canadian, a very happy Hanukkah.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the BSE crisis has driven home to us the importance of being able to track cattle, sheep and all animals used for food. Our primitive tagging system for beef cattle allowed us to track the single animal that triggered this crisis back to her home farm.

International expectations are now such that much more sophisticated tracking will be required in the future. I urge that we move directly from tags to DNA tracking, bypassing the computer chip implant system which some propose.

Canada is a leading nation in genetics, including DNA research. A simple, cheap test at birth, or on entry into the country, provides a unique identification for each animal. Using this, the animal can be tracked throughout its life and meat from every animal can be identified.

The RCMP has a sophisticated national DNA database system. It would be easy to extend it to produce a national DNA system for cattle, sheep and other ruminants. Let us do this now and invest in our farmers.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

● (1420)

[*English*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked about an illegal unreported proxy donation to the immigration minister. It turns out that the real donor sits on the Liberal riding executive and stickhandles immigration cases, and during the election the minister funnelled eight ministerial permits to this donor's group.

I ask the Prime Minister, will he admit that this is the real reason the minister did not report the donation in the first place?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has already said that very soon after she learned of the donation she informed Elections Canada and she returned the donation. That is what she has done and she did it very soon after she learned of the donation. She has stated that. Those are the facts.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the standard over there is that they can deal with something once they are caught.

[*Translation*]

That is an operation I would call cash for permits.

[*English*]

The immigration minister told her Liberal colleagues that she would not issue ministerial permits during the election and then she turned around, went behind their backs and handed out at least a dozen permits to her own political donors and campaign workers.

Oral Questions

This is my question for the Prime Minister. Does he know how many ministerial permits the minister handed out to her riding and supporters during the election campaign?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that I find that line of questioning absolutely deplorable.

The Ahmadiyya movement in this country is a highly respected, highly established group of people, probably reaching about one million people. The fact that those members would turn around and smear the reputation of an organization that has contributed so much to building this great country is frankly disgusting.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): What is disgusting, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister will never answer a straight question until she is caught red-handed.

We all know about the preferential treatment for the stripper program, yet Canadians can see today on television the Bondarenko family put to sea in a rickety boat in the north Atlantic during winter. I wonder how the Prime Minister and his immigration minister, the minister of hopes and dreams, can explain these priorities of compassion and humanitarianism to Canadians.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the family in question is presently in Halifax. It is difficult to talk about any individual case, but I want to reassure the hon. leader of the official opposition that both the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the Canada Border Services Agency are dealing with this family in an appropriate fashion.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a Senate report on national security and defence said today that Canadians depend mainly on luck when it comes to national security. The committee, like the Auditor General last spring, identifies inadequate background checks of airport employees and a lack of controls in restricted areas as major security problems. The Minister of Transport's "the dog ate my homework" attitude over the loss of more than 1,100 uniforms is alarming.

Will the minister now listen to his Senate colleagues and the Auditor General and immediately begin rigorous background checks on those with access to restricted areas, before his luck runs out?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had a look, a brief look to be sure, at the Senate committee report. It is a very useful report. Over the years, various departments have drawn on it. When we have reviewed all the recommendations, I will ask my department to prepare a clause by clause answer to this report, because I take it very seriously.

My first meeting as Minister of Transport was with Senator Colin Kenny, because I believe his work is essential to the country's security.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Transport is a fashion expert. However, as he says, his airports are as leaky as sieves. There are not enough employees and

they are poorly trained. Packages and goods go through without being checked. Entry into an airport is far too easy.

Will the minister address this interminable list of flaws?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course. Moreover, all recognized employees in these airports must pass a security test. The previous five years of their lives are investigated to ensure they have nothing questionable in their past and that passenger and airport security are not endangered.

As a result, the system is in place, but we will be going further, for we intend to make greater use of biometrics to recognize our employees. The technology that will be used is currently being tested in four airports in Canada. Obviously, we intend to increase the level of security at every opportunity.

* * *

● (1425)

MIRABEL AIRPORT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one after the other, the transport minister's arguments in the Mirabel issue are collapsing. After falsely accusing the Bloc Québécois, on November 29, the minister recognized in the House that Bombardier did not need the 11,000 acres of land requested in order to develop. After Bombardier, the minister hid behind ADM. "We are going to respect ADM's lease", said the minister on the same day.

Given that, yesterday, in committee, ADM's president recognized that, lease or no lease, he would do as Ottawa decides, what is Ottawa waiting for to give the land back to the people of Mirabel?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I trust the word of ADM's president, who said, "By maintaining our property reserve of 11,000 acres, we are safeguarding the future of the Montréal Mirabel facility. To sell back the land at this time would be an error with serious consequences for both Aéroports de Montréal and the Mirabel area". That is what Mr. Cherry said and, I believe him, until proven wrong.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he said clearly yesterday that it was up to Ottawa to decide. Let us take a look at the minister's analysis. With 6,000 acres for current and future activities, Mirabel has twice the area of Dorval, and twice that of Heathrow in Great Britain, with its 63 million passengers, whereas Dorval has a mere nine million, and Mirabel fewer than one million. That does not make sense, especially after ADM's president recognized that there were no plans. These are the same arguments we were given in the 1970s. We have a distinct impression of déjà vu.

Will the minister show more respect for people than his government has in the past?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a lease was signed. The fact of the matter is that the Conservatives signed a 60 year lease with ADM. We are going to respect their signature. I trust what ADM's president said, which is, of course, that it would be an error with serious consequences for both Aéroports de Montréal and the Mirabel area. That is what he said; it was in his press release, and we have to take his word. He is the expert, and the lessee until 2052. I trust his word.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unlike the minister, I was at the Standing Committee on Transport, and that is not what the president of ADM said at all. What James Cherry told the Standing Committee on Transport yesterday is that of the four projects submitted in response to the recent calls for tenders, none planned to use the 11,000 acres of land expropriated for Mirabel in 1969.

How can the Minister of Transport continue to refuse to transfer the 11,000 acres of expropriated land to the people of Mirabel, when all the reasons he used no longer hold water?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member skipped a few paragraphs of what the president of ADM said yesterday. Obviously, if the Government of Canada ordered it to return the land, ADM would receive financial compensation and all the rest. We decided that we would not break the lease. We are going to respect the Conservatives' signature, and I stand by what the director of ADM said in his November 25 press release. This man who spoke on November 25 is, I hope, the same man who appeared before the committee yesterday.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the Minister of Transport is inventing reasons not to return the land expropriated for Mirabel. After using the excuse of the lease, he tried Bombardier and finally talked about hypothetical development over the next 30 years.

With the testimony before the transport committee yesterday, the minister has run out of excuses.

What is he waiting for to respect the motion adopted by this House, respect the people of Mirabel and repair in some small measure the terrible mistake that weighs so heavily on the federal Liberals?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say that the Bloc policy with regard to the return of Mirabel property, as expressed by the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, is that the lands must be returned and if needed, could be re-expropriated. I find this totally irresponsible and it is not the kind of argument we will accept. The Bloc wants to return the land only to re-expropriate it again later. That is totally irresponsible.

* * *

• (1430)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister was attempting to brag about—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The last question is over.

[Translation]

It is now over. We have moved on to another question. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth is the one who has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister was trying to brag about his environmental record, but today, right on cue, we have evidence to the contrary. We see that toxic pollution in the air is up. Toxic pollution in water is up. Toxic pollution in the soil is up.

My question is for the Prime Minister. If he is as good as he says he is, why is pollution still going up by more than 50%?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome this report which we will study carefully because the topic is very complex. It is reporting about 10 pollutants and their trends between 1995 and 2002. During these years, thanks to the national pollutant release inventory that this government created, the methodology has changed, the number of substances taken into account has changed, and the facilities have increased a lot. We can see that it is a very important topic. We will study it carefully without being alarmist like the hon. member.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, excuses, excuses, that is more or less what we would have expected, and this from a government that apparently is going to do absolutely nothing to stop China from buying Canada's oil in order to accelerate the climate change crisis.

Yesterday the NDP raised the issue of genetically modified fish. Today we learned that apparently Aqua Bounty is going to apply to the government for permission to market genetically modified salmon. I think Canadians would want to know that the government will say no to genetically modified fish in our ecosystem. Right now, today, let us put a stop to it.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the import and manufacture of genetically modified fish is regulated by the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. GM fish is not allowed for commercial use or release in Canada.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allegations continue to grow that the immigration minister misused her position for political purposes. She needs to answer the question that the Leader of the Opposition just asked. So I ask again, and I do expect a straight answer, how many ministerial permits did the immigration minister issue to her supporters and in her riding during the 2004 election?

Oral Questions

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even through an election I am still the minister. I still have to respond to members of Parliament, like I did for the official opposition critic on June 11. I still had a job to do. I continue to do that job, which is what Canadians expect of me.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that the minister did not answer the question.

The question is, how many ministerial permits did the immigration minister issue to her supporters and in her riding during the 2004 election? How many?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to go and look at the allegations of supporters. I am very proud that I and many of you are supporters in the Ahmadiyya community in this country. How much richer this country is because of the work that community does here for all of us to move this country forward. Any help I give that community or any other one, I am very proud of what I did, and I will do it some more.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the immigration minister claimed ignorance about the illegal campaign contribution, dismissing it as a “clerical error”, but today we learned that she actually attended the donor's event on the same day that the cheque was issued.

Is she still claiming ignorance, or will she finally admit her incompetence, rethink her answer of yesterday, and resign?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that I attended that event for the Ahmadiyya community, as I attend events for all the ethnic communities in this country. It is those ethnic communities that we care about. Clearly the opposition has only got one issue at hand and that is how it can continue to smear immigrants and vulnerable women.

•(1435)

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a previous attempt to spin this mess, the minister told the House that she was out of commission for the last three weeks of the campaign, but apparently she was well enough to attend meetings, issue permits for political supporters and accept illegal donations.

It is time for you to stop hiding behind the Ethics Commissioner and to start accepting the responsibility—

The Speaker: I want to remind the hon. member that I am not hiding behind anything. If she wants to address her remarks to somebody, she is to address them to me. She is following very bad examples that have been set earlier in this House, and not today. I would invite her to address her remarks to the Chair, please.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, it is time for the minister to stop hiding behind the Ethics Commissioner and to start accepting the responsibility that Canadians demand. When will the disgraced and incompetent minister resign?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this circus has been going on for about four weeks now. We have heard unfounded allegations in these last four weeks. We have had staff being smeared and a whole variety of things.

Frankly, we came to Parliament, to this House of Commons, to move forward on the facts of what matters to the government. Clearly, our government and our Prime Minister are doing such a great job that all opposition members can do is to continue smearing new immigrants.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Malcolm Brown, assistant deputy minister for the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, told the Subcommittee on the Employment Insurance Funds that lowering the qualifying threshold for the employment insurance program to 360 hours, for everyone, would only cost \$390 million.

Does the minister realize that, instead of reducing the EI contribution rate by three cents, he could have allowed thousands of workers to have access to employment insurance benefits at a similar cost? Why did he deliberately make the wrong choice?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, the general actuary, we have made a fair and appropriate choice. We are in the process of making several decisions, and these decisions should be evaluated together, not individually.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to reducing contributions, the minister does not look at the overall picture. Mr. Brown also stated that lowering the number of hours required to 360 would make employment insurance accessible to an additional 90,000 people, who would no longer have to live in poverty.

Is this a case of bad faith? Why does the minister stubbornly leave all these people and their families in hardship, when he has ample means to come to their aid?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is a hardship here is the lack of honesty of the party opposite.

I would like to indicate to the hon. members of that party that, over the past 10 years, we have created three million jobs, which generated a lot of hope and benefits while also creating a positive future for all Canadians.

During the last year alone, we created 59,000 jobs in Quebec.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with implementation of the Kyoto protocol at last only weeks away, we learn that Canada's water and air are more polluted than ever. Over the past decade, Quebec has had the best performance as far as reduction of greenhouse gases is concerned, and this is why we are calling for a bilateral Canada-Quebec agreement.

Oral Questions

Rather than acting as the voice of Canada, could the Minister of the Environment focus his efforts instead on a territorially based agreement with Quebec, one that acknowledges Quebec's past efforts?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the negotiations with the Government of Quebec in connection with the Kyoto protocol are going smoothly, particularly since the Bloc Québécois is not interfering.

• (1440)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although there is a federalist government in Quebec, as the minister has said, no progress is being made on anything, child care, fiscal imbalance, parental leave, let alone the environment.

Does the minister recognize that only an agreement based on a territorial approach can do justice to Quebec and its past efforts to deal with climate change?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is one political blueprint in Canada that would be disastrous for the environment, it is this party's separatism.

The worst possible thing would be to place international boundaries between provinces that are working together to achieve cleaner air and safer water, and particularly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to return to the questions that the immigration minister refused to answer. She has been asked three times today about the number of ministerial permits she granted to members of her constituency, Liberal volunteers, and donors in her constituency.

She has avoided the question on three occasions. Here is a fourth opportunity for her to put it on the record. How many ministerial permits did she issue?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be quite clear. Permits are issued to foreign nationals. Permits are not issued to people who are living in this country. They are issued to foreigners.

I issued permits to over 20 countries in that period of time. Some of them were for the opposition. There were a few others. I issued eight for the Ahmadiyya community. It had a conference of almost half a million people coming up on July 2, 3 and 4. In fact, if I am not mistaken, several members over there were also there.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Well, Mr. Speaker, let the record show that the question goes unanswered again. Is the Prime Minister aware of any police, RCMP or CSIS investigations into the conduct of the immigration minister or any members of her staff, past or present?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that there are no investigations that I am aware of, for myself or any of my staff. I stand here and will put my integrity up against any guys on the other side, anytime.

HEALTH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the 2004 Fraser Institute report on waiting times, it shows that waiting times have increased exponentially since 1993. One of the major causes is the shortage of doctors and specialists across Canada. While the immigration minister is handing out “get into Canada free” passes to strippers, there are doctors waiting in line and waiting a long time, like everyone else.

When will the Prime Minister get his priorities straight and help the doctors who want to come here?

• (1445)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said in the House before, we arrived at an unprecedented health care accord with the provinces and territories, and we will put \$41 billion into health care over the next 10 years.

A significant amount of that money will be used to train our new doctors and nurses, and other health care professionals in this country. It will bring into our health care system all of the doctors and nurses who are here from other countries, who need to be re-skilled and retrained, and will be integrated into our system, so that we can deal with the wait times.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I can stand in this House and ask this question, the Prime Minister can certainly stand and answer. It is an easy choice. If I had to choose between doctors or strippers, I would choose doctors. That is where the immigration minister and I disagree.

When will the government stop fooling around and get serious about the shortage of doctors and specialists in Canada?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we will pour over \$41 billion into health care over the next 10 years. It is important to recognize that a significant amount of that money will be used to train more health care professionals in Canada. A significant amount of that money will be used to retrain, re-skill and integrate international medical graduates into health care work here, so that there are no wait times for Canadians.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government announced steps to extend benefits to veterans and their caregivers which would allow our veterans to lead independent lives. Along with taking care of our veterans is the duty to commemorate their service.

Can the minister tell the House what the government is planning to do to commemorate our veterans during the Year of the Veteran?

Oral Questions

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there can be no greater priority than to serve those who have served Canada. The year 2005, the Year of the Veteran, will be a national history lesson and a national show of gratitude for the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who wore the Canadian maple leaf in defence of our country.

I invite all members of the House to join us and join veterans in the official launch of the year next Tuesday afternoon, December 14, right here on Parliament Hill.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Supreme Court will decide on equal marriage for lesbian and gay couples. The Prime Minister has avoided this issue for years.

I have a question I know many would find comfort in his answering. As a citizen, as a gay man and loving partner, a clear answer to my question would be very significant.

Does the Prime Minister support my right to marry the man I love?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer in one word is yes.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's clarity, but I would have preferred an answer from the Prime Minister.

I hope that clarity will result in swift introduction of legislation that acts on those words. I hope that the Minister of Justice will be in the House tomorrow to table legislation ensuring equal marriage for gay and lesbian Canadians. When will this legislation be introduced?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have draft legislation before the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada will deliver its advisory opinion tomorrow. Consequent to that advisory opinion, which we believe will be organized around the principles of equality and respect for freedom of religion, we will move with all deliberate speed to introduce legislation in the House.

* * *

• (1450)

UKRAINE

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the world has been gripped by the struggle for democracy in Ukraine. The great need for sufficient numbers of objective election observers must not be denied. Today Poland generously offered to partner with Canada and increase its commitment from 100 to 300 observers, if Canada will share the cost.

In the interest of international democratic progress, will the minister, in addition to committing 500 observers, consider providing \$300,000 to partner with Poland to send 200 more observers to Ukraine?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand why the hon. member is unable to rejoice in our announcement. It was an announcement

wherein we said that we will send the largest number of observers ever to Ukraine to assist in ensuring that there is a transparent election.

We will send up to 500 observers, more than any other nation. We will do that at a cost of up to \$3.5 million. We are very proud of Canada's stand in Ukraine and on sending these people.

Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister justify shortchanging Ukrainians by not committing the necessary number of election observers? The current CIDA budget is over \$2 billion a year. Let us not forget that we are still sending \$54 million a year to the undemocratic Republic of China.

Why will those ministers not put their money where their mouths are and commit more observers and sufficient funding to bring true democracy to Ukraine?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are participating in building governance in countries such as China and Ukraine. That is why we are sending observers. That is why the Canadian bar is working in China to create a separate and independent judiciary. That is why we have the programs we do, to assist these countries down the road to democracy.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I am very proud of CIDA. I am very proud of the foreign policy of the government.

* * *

BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Ms. Bev Oda (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage said she could not interfere and hid behind the independence of the CRTC when Canadians wanted Rai television and CHOI radio, yet she feels free to meddle with CBC programming.

Why is it necessary for a Liberal appointed president of CBC to ask the minister to stop interfering?

[Translation]

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had read the entire text instead of just the headline, she would have also seen that Mr. Rabinovitch said, "I have been here for five years. During these five years I have never received a phone call from a minister about programming". I have never called to ask him to change programming. Mr. Rabinovitch reiterated that his "rapport with the Minister of Heritage is very good" that "Liza Frulla is a woman of ideas"—that is what he said—and he indicated that he was "open to discussion with the minister", but he stressed that, in the end, he is the one who makes the decisions.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage is just grumbling. She is spreading her culture like jam and gets away publicly with censorship. The president of the CBC may not have been her choice, but he is sticking to his mandate, unlike Telefilm Canada, and respectfully suggests the minister do the same.

Oral Questions

Can the minister resist the temptation to interfere in programming?

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I will give a little lesson in French and I will re-read the third paragraph: "I have been here for five years. During these five years I have never received a phone call from a minister about programming".

That said, when a sensationalist headline is used just to create controversy, it would be nice if we could be professional and mature enough not to fuel the rumour.

* * *

FACULTÉ DE MÉDECINE VÉTÉRINAIRE DE SAINT-HYACINTHE

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in December 2002 the Minister of Agriculture announced investments of \$113 million to modernize the four veterinary medicine faculties in Canada. Of this, \$35 million was allocated to the Faculté de médecine vétérinaire de Saint-Hyacinthe, but this amount did not meet the real needs of the faculty, which still has only a partial accreditation.

Will the minister finally release the additional \$24 million requested by the administration in order to carry out all the work needed for full accreditation for the only francophone school of veterinary medicine in North America?

•(1455)

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a federal government we are very committed to ensuring that we have the right mix of science and education. We do that through our veterinary colleges right across Canada, including Quebec. We support those significantly. We constantly review our programming to see how we can do it better. We are always working hard to ensure we accomplish that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the latest election campaign my Liberal opponent, accompanied by the current hon. member for Outremont, boasted that the day after the election the cheque for \$24 million would be on the desk of the faculty administration. More than five months later, the cheque has still not come.

Can the minister explain why the Faculté de médecine vétérinaire de Saint-Hyacinthe is still waiting for its cheque, while the three other faculties in Canada have requalified for full accreditation?

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again we hear the hon. member from the Bloc. Is he concerned about agriculture? Is he concerned about increasing our knowledge? No. This is about one part of the country against the other and we will not play that game with him.

We will support agriculture right across Canada from coast to coast to coast.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not long ago the Minister of Public Works and Government Services said, "We should be getting rid of the long gun registry. A billion dollars would have been better spent on the RCMP".

My question is for the Minister of Finance. There are thousands of RCMP officers required to fill vacancies across Canada, particularly in Saskatchewan. Seventy-six per cent of Canadians want more police, not a billion dollar boondoggle registry.

Why has the Minister of Finance failed to find the resources to fill the RCMP vacancies across Canada and in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are training more RCMP officers. We are training them in fact in Regina, Saskatchewan to serve all across this country.

Just to give hon. members an idea of some of the commitments that we have made, the investments in Canada's national police force, recently we have invested an additional \$112 million to fight organized crime, \$100 million to update criminal record and fingerprint analysis technology, \$42 million to address the criminal use of guns, \$34 million to address the criminal exploitation of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

* * *

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the president of PSAC, the largest union of government employees, informed us that the Liberals failed to consult the union when it drafted and tabled the whistleblower legislation.

In failing to work with Canada's public servants, the Treasury Board minister has clearly chosen to alienate a key stakeholder. Ironically, it has been public servants who have come forward to reveal the government's most serious wrongdoings.

Will the minister finally admit that his bill is in fact designed not only to discourage whistleblowers, but also to cover up on his government's past wrongdoings?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there were lengthy consultations on the creation of this bill. We believe it is an excellent response to the concerns identified by whistleblowers.

We looked very carefully at surveys and interviews that were done with people who had actually experienced it and we produced a very fine piece of legislation. If the committee would get on with approving it, we could actually implement it.

[Translation]

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning the newspaper *La Presse* says that Montreal and Quebec City are the only two Canadian cities where private sector spending on research and development increased in 2003.

What has the Government of Canada done to encourage private sector research?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 1997 the Government of Canada has invested over \$13 billion in research, from basic to applied to commercialized research.

We have used the research to retain some of the best experts that Canada has. We have reversed the brain drain. We have made sure that technology is being infused throughout the Canadian economy and trading economic opportunities from coast to coast and in remote areas of Canada.

We intend to continue that program going forward. We are not done.

* * *

SABLE ISLAND

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since Confederation, Sable Island has been the total responsibility of the Government of Canada, but in the mid-1990s, the Liberals abandoned their responsibility and turned it over to a preservation trust. The preservation trust has now said it can no longer manage the island, though horses, migratory birds and the safety station are at risk.

A multi-departmental working group has just made a recommendation to the government that the government retake possession of the island and resume management.

Will the government announce today that it has accepted that recommendation to take full responsibility for Sable Island again?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand and share my hon. colleague's concern about the future of Sable Island. The fact is my department is working with Environment Canada, Treasury Board and other parties to find a solution to the situation.

I look forward to discussing this issue further with my colleague in the future.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, EI payments to 137 former Whirlpool employees are five weeks behind, leaving these workers with no income, because they transferred their pension funds into RRSPs, and it took the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development a while to let them know that this money would be considered income.

Oral Questions

Given that it was HRSDC's mistake to begin with and that these workers are now being penalized, is the minister prepared to give this case special consideration and to find a solution?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that employment insurance benefits are always there for workers who are laid off through no fault of their own by their employer.

That said, I know the hon. member will agree with me that the statutory rules have been applied in this case. Should these constituents find that the rules were unfairly applied in their case, they are free to ask for a review. They may also make use of the independent and impartial appeal process designed to ensure proper application of the law.

* * *

[English]

HIV-AIDS

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, HIV-AIDS is an important health issue that has tremendous impact on families and communities throughout the world. In the year 2002 there were 7,700 women that were diagnosed with HIV-AIDS.

Could the Minister of Health please tell us what his department is doing with regard to the growing number of women who are affected with HIV-AIDS?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to strengthening our role in dealing with the HIV-AIDS epidemic in Canada. To enhance our efforts, our funding for HIV-AIDS is going up to \$84.4 million. That is doubling in the next five years. It is very important to remember that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Health Canada are working with the Public Health Agency to make sure that we continue our research with respect to HIV-AIDS and women.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

The Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 81(14) to inform the House that the motion to be considered tomorrow during consideration of the business of supply is as follows:

That the House recognize that the maintenance of the sockeye salmon stocks in the Fraser River is crucial for conservation and for commercial, recreational and aboriginal users; that the Government's investigation into the collapse of this resource cannot be considered independent; that this resource has been mismanaged; that past decisions have been made without the proper science; and that, as a consequence, the House call on the Government to establish an independent judicial enquiry to determine the cause of the collapse of the sockeye salmon stocks on the Fraser River.

[Translation]

This motion, standing in the name of the hon. member for Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, is votable.

Copies of the motion are available at the table.

Routine Proceedings

• (1505)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Chair to clarify two issues for me. Having occupied the chair and knowing that often there is too much back and forth, there are two issues that I feel I have to bring to the attention of the Chair.

The first issue is that certain hon. members on the opposition side, during a question in question period today, impugned motives. I understand the Standing Orders to indicate that we cannot, neither in the question nor the answer, impugn motives before an answer is given.

The second issue I would like to bring to the attention of the Speaker is the fact that there were questions asked today which should have been addressed, in my opinion, to a political party rather than a member of the House.

I would like some clarification on the two issues that I have raised.

The Speaker: Perhaps the member could assist the Chair by telling the Chair to which questions she was referring. I thought the questions that were asked today seemed to be about the responsibility of the government. If she could be more specific, I would be glad to review the matter and come back to the House in due course.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I am referring to the question that was asked by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill in particular, and also the questions that were asked by the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey.

The Speaker: I will be more than happy to review the questions that were asked, but my recollection at the time was that they were asking about the number of ministerial permits, or visas or whatever documents were issued at a specific time and place. I will review the matter. If that is not what they concerned, or if I misunderstood them, I will be more than happy to deal with the matter. My recollection at the time was that they were all right.

Of course the Speaker can make mistakes, painful as it may be to admit that, but it is a quick judgment call that is made at the last minute as these things transpire in the House. The Speaker does always try to do his best to uphold the rules and practices of the House, and I will continue to do that.

I thank the hon. member for her assistance.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2004, NO. 2

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-33, a second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 23, 2004.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament for the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, I am proud to submit two petitions on behalf of concerned hard-working constituents of this great riding.

The first petition is on behalf of 120 school bus drivers. The petitioners say that driving a school bus is a highly responsible profession contributing to the safety and education of our children, that in the past a Canadian school bus driver could qualify for employment insurance benefits after working approximately 20 weeks and that under current rules, eligibility for benefits is based on the number of hours worked. They say that the federal government collects billions of dollars more in EI payments each year than it pays out in benefits.

Therefore, they call upon Parliament to enact legislation that would base eligibility for employment insurance premiums on the number of weeks rather than the number of hours worked.

• (1510)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition concerns supply management, and it is signed by 794 concerned citizens of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. It says, “much of the economy of this riding and of rural Ontario and Canada in general depends in large part on the profitability of dairy, egg, poultry and other types of farming, that candidates and representatives of the—

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but he must know that he cannot read a petition. He must summarize it briefly.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I was summarizing.

The Speaker: When the member said “it says” and started reading it, it sounded to me as though he was reading the petition, and he will want to summarize it.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, the petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to urge the federal government to explicitly declare that supply management should be maintained.

CANADIAN FORCES HOUSING

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and present three petitions to the House. The first is from citizens of Merlin, Ontario and Trail, B.C.

The petitioners would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that Canadian Forces Housing Agency does provide housing for some of our military families who happen to live on base and many of those homes are below acceptable living standards, yet they face annual rent increases.

Routine Proceedings

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to suspend any future rent increases for accommodation provided by the Canadian Forces Housing Agency until such time as the Government of Canada makes substantive improvements to the living conditions of housing provided for our military families.

CHILD ADOPTION EXPENSES

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from Weyburn, Regina, and Moose Jaw citizens in Saskatchewan.

The petitioners wish to draw to the attention of the House that adoptive parents make a significant social contribution to our society and that those parents often face significant adoption related costs, but out of pocket expenses are not tax deductible.

Therefore, they call upon Parliament to pass legislation to provide an income tax deduction for expenses related to the adoption of a child, similar to that contained in my private member's Bill C-246.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last petition I have this afternoon is on behalf of citizens in Fort St. John, Charlie Lake and, in particular, Pink Mountain in my beautiful riding of Prince George—Peace River.

The petitioners wish to call to the attention of the House that the addition of sexual orientation as an explicitly protected category under sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code could lead to individuals being unable to exercise their religious freedom as protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to protect the rights of Canadians to be free to share their religious beliefs without fear of prosecution.

FISHERIES

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member opposite from Richmond would probably like to have his name on the bottom of the petition I have today. The petition recognizes that two million sockeye salmon were missing on the Fraser River this past summer. The petitioners are unhappy with the inquiry that the government is proposing be undertaken now.

Therefore, they call upon the government to initiate a judicial inquiry into the missing salmon.

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am pleased to present a petition from a large number of constituents from St. Peters, Souris, St. Charles, in fact all through the Cardigan riding.

The petitioners want to draw to the attention of the House that children need protection from sexual exploitation. Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking necessary steps to raise the age of consent from 14 to 18 years of age.

●(1515)

COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to section 36 of the Standing Orders to table a petition from citizens of Toronto, Ontario, and Antigonish, two booming metropolises.

I table on behalf of the petitioners, a petition calling upon the government to enact amendments to the Criminal Code, pursuant to sections 450 and 452, that deal with the punishments meted out for being in possession of counterfeit money or uttering these counterfeit documents.

The amendment calls for the lessening of charges from an indictable offence to a summary offence if the amount of counterfeit currency in question does not exceed the amount of \$100.

MARRIAGE

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to table a petition with 53 signatures from my riding of Saint Boniface.

The petitioners state that protecting the moral good of society is a natural and serious obligation of elected officials and that it cannot be left only to religious leaders and institutions. They say that the defence of traditional marriage as the bond between one man and one woman is a serious moral good and that marriage as a lasting union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of others cannot and should not be modified by a legislative act or a court of law.

They request that Parliament take whatever action is required to maintain the current definition of marriage in law in perpetuity and to prevent any court from overturning or amending that definition.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 5, 7 and 23 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 5—Mr. John Cummins:

With regard to the environmental and economic issues posed by the development of salmon farm aquaculture sites in bays and inlets along the coast of British Columbia: (a) have guidelines been developed for the siting of open net salmon farm pens that would prohibit placement of salmon net pens in salmon nursery and juvenile rearing areas or migration routes in coastal inlets, bays and fiords and, if so, which of the farm sites presently in operation are in violation of these guidelines and which conform to the guidelines; (b) have authorizations or approvals been given for the establishment of salmon farm net pen aquaculture operations in the coastal waters of British Columbia and, if so, what are the locations, who is the operator of each approved site and what is the nature or type of authorization or approval given; (c) have species other than salmon been approved for these sites, if so what sites and species are involved and are these species now present in any of these approved sites; if so, which ones; (d) have provincial authorities licenced salmon farm net pen aquaculture operations in Canadian coastal waters without Canadian Environmental Assessment Act assessments and, if so, what is the specific location of each licence; (e) how many salmon farm sites are in operation without authorization and are awaiting approval under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, name or identify the sites and operator of each site; (f) what recommendations has the Commissioner for Aquaculture Development or the Office of Sustainable Aquaculture made to expedite Canadian Environmental Assessment Act environmental assessments and have individual site assessments been reduced or eliminated; (g) which of the sites licenced by a provincial authority and presently in operation are within five nautical miles of nursery or juvenile rearing areas or migration routes of wild salmon; (h) what studies or research have been undertaken or funded with regard to diseases and parasites associated with salmon net pen aquaculture, their possible transfer to wild stocks, and what were the findings; (i) what such diseases or parasites have been found at salmon net pen sites in each of the years 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003, and what was the location of each farm site having these diseases or parasites; (j) has either the Pacific Fisheries Resources Conservation Council or Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientists ever advised the government of problems with sea lice and disease emanating from salmon sites that threaten wild salmon runs; if so, when, which farms and what wild stocks were involved; (k) has there been baseline research conducted of sea lice infestation on fish stocks on British Columbia's central or north coast; (l) what is the level and composition of waste from net pen salmon aquaculture operations by farm site presently in operation; (m) what is the authorized density of fish at each site, and which of these sites exceed the authorized limits; (n) has the Department of Fisheries and Oceans established a carrying capacity for bays and inlets that may have a number of farm sites; if so, what is the carrying capacity by bay or inlet where such carrying capacity has been established and where such limits have been met or exceeded; (o) have PCBs been found in farmed salmon, how many times and at what level; (p) how many persons presently involved in salmon farm environmental assessments or reviews have been formerly employed by the British Columbia department responsible for aquaculture development and expansion; and (q) how many persons presently involved in salmon farm environmental assessments or reviews have been formerly employed by fish farm companies, who are they and which companies were they employed by?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 7—Mr. John Cummins:

With regard to the environmental and economic issues posed by the development of halibut or sablefish aquaculture: (a) has a comprehensive environmental impact analysis of halibut and sablefish aquaculture been completed under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, Fisheries Act, the Navigable Water Protection Act or some other authority and what were the findings; (b) has a comprehensive economic impact and cost/benefit analysis of halibut and sablefish aquaculture been undertaken to determine the total impacts and net economic benefits to British Columbia and Canada been completed and what were the findings; (c) have the locations of nursery and juvenile rearing areas of various species of halibut and sablefish in coastal inlets, bays and fiords of British Columbia been established and if so where are they; (d) have guidelines been developed for the siting of halibut and sablefish aquaculture that would prohibit placement of halibut and sablefish net pens in nursery and juvenile rearing areas in coastal inlets, bays and fiords; (e) have authorizations or approvals been given for the establishment of halibut and sablefish net pen aquaculture operations in the coastal waters of British Columbia and if so what are the locations; (f) is a sablefish hatchery operation or operations, that would have as its objective the providing of stock for sablefish aquaculture operations, under construction and if so what is its location or locations and what measures have been undertaken to ensure that its production will not be placed in net pen

aquaculture operations in Canadian waters until assessments under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act have been completed and authorizations given under either the Fisheries Act or the Navigable Waters Protection Act; (g) has Fisheries and Oceans Canada undertaken or funded research into the development of halibut and sablefish aquaculture and if so what were the results and what species of sablefish were studied; (h) have provincial authorities licenced halibut and sablefish aquaculture operations in Canadian coastal waters without Canadian Environmental Assessment Act assessments and if so what is the specific location of each licence; (i) which of the sites licenced by a provincial authority are within five nautical miles of nursery or juvenile rearing areas of wild halibut or sablefish; (j) what studies or research have been undertaken or funded to ensure that these provincially licenced sites are not within five nautical miles of a halibut or sablefish nursery or juvenile rearing area; (k) what studies or research have been undertaken or funded with regard to diseases and parasites associated with halibut or sablefish aquaculture, their possible transfer to wild stocks, and what were the findings; (l) what studies or research has been undertaken or funded with regard to the level of escapes from net pens, whether escaped halibut and sablefish tended to migrate north toward Alaska or south toward California in the manner that wild stocks do and what were the findings; (m) what is the level and composition of waste from Fisheries and Oceans Canada experimental halibut and sablefish aquaculture operations or experimental operations funded or authorized by Fisheries and Oceans Canada; (n) what is the cost shared funding arrangement for the research and development work undertaken by Fisheries and Oceans Canada; (o) what is the cost to Fisheries and Oceans Canada with regard to all research and development activity involving halibut and sablefish aquaculture, including staff time, salaries and contributions; (p) what is the nature of the consultations with halibut and sablefish fishermen with regard to the development of halibut and sablefish aquaculture; (q) what measures have been established to compensate fishermen should halibut and sablefish aquaculture lead to a collapse of wildfish stocks or a reduction in fish caught; (r) what measures have been established to compensate fishermen should the production and marketing of farmed halibut and sablefish aquaculture lead to a decline in market prices for halibut and sablefish and a resulting loss of the income by fishermen; and (s) what measures have been established to restrict or prohibit the export of live halibut or sablefish broodstock?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 23—Mr. Gurmant Grewal:

With regard to temporary resident visas, for each year from 1997 through 2003: (a) what is the global approval rate for applicants to Canada; and (b) what are the ten countries from which Canada has received the largest number of applications and, for each country, identify by year: (i) the total number of applications received; (ii) the total number of applications that were rejected; and (iii) the non-return rate for people granted temporary residence visas?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East was inquiring about some questions he had on the order paper a couple of days ago. I am sure he will be very pleased to see these returns tabled today.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted. As you well know, I am sure it was your intervention and the good work of my friend across the way that got those two questions answered.

I have as well Question No. 14, which was asked way back on October 12, and is now past due. When could we expect to see that one answered? It has to do with the purchase of the used hovercraft for the Coast Guard on the west coast. We would like the answer on that one as well.

Government Orders

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, there is an old adage that if you give an inch, they want a mile. I was very happy to answer the questions that the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East put today. I know his questions are always germane and are on important issues of public policy. He should have every faith that it will be answered entirely within the prescribed time.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. member: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved that Bill C-30, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Salaries Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-30, the parliamentarians' compensation bill.

The bill is the result of a commitment made by the Prime Minister to the Canadian people. On September 30 the Prime Minister said that the government would delink, or break the link, between the salaries of MPs and those of judges. He also said that the increase in salaries and the increase in MPs salaries would reflect essentially the increases negotiated by Canadians.

What we are doing today, in debating this and having introduced this bill into the House, is taking action on that commitment.

The bill is pretty straightforward and uncomplicated and follows the legislative process in the House of Commons. It is my hope that the legislation will go to committee for review and that it will come back to Parliament for a vote in the new year.

I think all MPs will want to deal with this question in the same straightforward manner. I know that at times issues like this are difficult issues to be debated on the floor of the House, but the government made a commitment to treat the compensation of parliamentarians separately and apart from that of judges. Therefore it is logical that we would take this step and present a bill independent of the Judges Act, which deals only with the

compensation increases of parliamentarians, and deal with the question of compensation increases for judges in a subsequent bill.

In determining the compensation increases for parliamentarians, the bill itself describes a measure that tracks private sector wage increases as the benchmark that we would follow. The HRSD, or Human Resources and Skills Development, annual average wage settlement index tracks the wage settlements of the Canadian private sector, and so linking parliamentary compensation increases to this index will mean that parliamentarians will fare neither better nor worse than the people whom parliamentarians represent.

I would like to illustrate for a moment how straightforward and uncomplicated the bill is. The index used to measure the wage change is published every February. It documents the wage changes of the previous calendar year. Under Bill C-30, parliamentarians' compensation would receive the Human Resources and Skills Development index effective April 1, 2004.

There is support for making this move that the government is undertaking. I just want to flag a couple of editorials that reflected this. The following was stated in the *Regina Leader-Post* back in September:

MPs and cabinet ministers...work long, unsocial hours. However, workers in many other sectors can make the same argument, yet an average pay increase of 2.5 to 3.1 per cent is what most Canadians can expect to receive this year, according to government and private forecasters.

The *National Post* on October 2 also praised the decision by the Prime Minister to delink compensation increases for judges and MPs by stating:

The Prime Minister has also correctly recognized that there should be no correlation between remuneration for judges and politicians and is acting to correct the policy that arbitrarily weds the two to a single pay scale.

How did we end up with this particular index? We looked at number of indices before settling on the HRSD one. It had a number of advantages. For one, it is the only major index of private sector wage settlements that is widely available and easily accessible. When we look at the index itself and how it is made up, it is readily understood by everyone, and I believe, as I am sure many others will if they have the opportunity to look at this index, that it will be a fair and representative indicator of the general wage settlement trends in the economy.

It is also very important, and this again is an advantage of using this particular index, that we use an index that does not include wage increases negotiated by public servants because Parliament, from time to time, may need to legislate on public service compensation. Thus, using an index with a public sector component could in fact be perceived by some as putting Parliament in a conflict of interest.

Government Orders

•(1525)

Some people have put forward the cost of living index, COLA, which is used by Statistics Canada as a possible measure for linking MP compensation. However, what this particular index does is it tracks the prices as they rise and as they decline of the goods and services in the economy. It does not reflect the changes in wage increases received by Canadians across the country. The prices of commodities can rise and fall dramatically depending on trends in the economy. Therefore we believe that we should base salary changes for MPs on what is happening to Canadians in the economy, not on the supply and demand curves of goods and services.

For those reasons the government has chosen to use the private sector wage settlement index that is published by the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development as it is an authoritative index. Both the government and industry use it. It is a data source that many use in analyzing wage settlement trends in our economy. It is published monthly in the Wage Settlements Bulletin and quarterly in the Workplace Gazette.

Therefore there is a lot of accessibility and there is I believe an understanding of what this index actually does and what it means for the economy. It covers a broad economy: primary industries, construction, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, education and health services, finance and professional services.

The index itself measures the average annual salary increase negotiated by collective bargaining for private sector units with 500 or more people. It is comprised of over 430 collective agreements in the private sector and these agreements apply across private sector units of 500 or more people. It means that the wage settlement data that we expect to use as an index are really reflective of what more than 8,000 people across the country are getting in terms of wage increases. It represents mostly a unionized workforce but it also has a very significant component of non-unionized employees as well, so there is that mix in this index.

For the reasons that I have laid out before the House, we think this index meets the test of linking the increases in compensation for parliamentarians to the increases obtained by Canadians. By aligning future compensation increases with changes in the private sector wage settlements, parliamentarians can be assured and will be assured that their salary increases will be the same as those of other Canadians.

The way it would work is that we would look at the average wage increase for the previous calendar year, which is published in February, and have an assessment. We would then have the change reflected in the compensation for members of Parliament.

I would like to provide some background. As members know, parliamentarians received a 1.3% increase on April 1, 2004 based on the industrial aggregate average, which is also an index that is used to calculate annual changes in the compensation for judges. The base salary for MPs in 2003 had been \$139,200. With this increase under the industrial aggregate average, it moved up to approximately \$141,000, which is an increase of about 1.3% or \$1,800.

Under the parliamentarians' compensation bill, Bill C-30, parliamentarians would receive increases in line with the HRSD

index for 2003 with an effective date of April 1, 2004. The HRSD index itself for 2003, which was published in February 2004, was 1.5%, not 1.3%. If we were to apply Bill C-30, that would mean an increase of about \$2,000 to MPs' salaries, or MPs' compensation, rather than the \$1,800. I wanted to make that clear because there has been some confusion on this.

•(1530)

The new index would provide for a slightly higher increase than is provided for under the current legislation but that increase reflects the increases received in the private sector in Canada. In effect, it means that parliamentarians would be getting the same increase as the people who they represent.

As we go forward into the future, the legislation would establish a system for receiving salary increases in what I think will be a very uncomplicated and straightforward manner. This is a commitment the Prime Minister made to Canadians and it is a commitment fulfilled. It is an example of another commitment that we are following through on.

The government has a track record of following through on commitments. We believe that Canadians can benefit from strong communities, a strong economy and from a nation that is a strong player on the international stage.

When we talk about commitments we not only talk about that commitment, but we can also talk in the context of what the government has accomplished and what the government is intending to do. We can look at the health care commitment of \$41.3 billion in an agreement with the provinces and territories. It is a deal that will enhance health care for the next decade. It will also provide benchmarks for performance, which is something the Prime Minister talked about and committed to. This will ultimately result in reduced patient wait times for diagnosis and treatment.

Canadians have the commitment with respect to this legislation on parliamentary salaries, the commitment in health care and the commitment, which we are following through on, in the early childhood development and lifelong learning. We are laying the groundwork, which has been laid in conjunction with the provinces and territories. Dialogue is ongoing and ultimately we will end up with a program of early learning and child care.

When we talk about commitments with respect to Bill C-30, commitments in health care, commitments in early learning, in the economy, when we think of the reduction in debt and the \$100 billion tax cut, all of these are commitments that we have maintained. What I am suggesting to the House is that the government is committed to fulfilling and seeing this legislation become law.

Through this particular act we have acted on our other commitments, whether it is in health care or on the \$100 million investment in the redevelopment of Ford Motor Company in Oakville, or the new deal for cities, we are fulfilling the commitments.

While we talk about our domestic goals and fulfilling those domestic commitments, and this is certainly one of them, it is also fair to say that we also strive as part of our overall objective to strengthen Canada's influence in the world. We have seen a lot of work to that end very recently with the Prime Minister in different parts of the world ensuring that Canada's voice is heard in building and rebuilding fractured states and ensuring that democracy is alive and well, whether it is Ukraine or whether in going to Iraq. We are committed to meeting our goals and objectives.

Bill C-30 is pretty straightforward. There is an index. It will reflect Canadian wage settlements. It will essentially reflect the wage increases that Canadians receive. We represent these Canadians. I believe parliamentarians work very hard and are very dedicated, as are Canadians. They also work very hard and are very dedicated in whatever sector they work.

We have taken the opportunity to bring forward legislation to tie this index to the salaries of members of Parliament. The legislation makes sense. It is clear, straightforward and very transparent.

• (1535)

I do think that we are on the right track on this. That is reflected in a number of editorials. I am hopeful that when others get up to speak on this particular piece of legislation they will look at the legislation for what it is and send it to committee.

This bill will follow the regular process. This is not about bringing a bill into the House just to have it proceed very quickly because it is about MPs' compensation. It is about putting this on the floor of the House to put in place a very transparent and simple, straightforward way of dealing with this issue. I think that in fact this is what Bill C-30 does.

As I have said, this is a commitment that was made by the Prime Minister this September to delink increases in parliamentary salaries from those received by judges. It links them to those received by Canadians in the private sector.

We have moved quickly on that commitment and have introduced this bill, Bill C-30. Members of the House will now have the opportunity to fulfill that commitment made to the Canadian people.

I think I should also be very clear and say that this is up to Parliament. Parliamentarians will decide whether this legislation will proceed. I do believe that once the legislation is reviewed and once we hear from others in the House we will build some support and a consensus that this legislation go through. I believe it is the right thing to do and I certainly hope the members of the House on all sides will come together and help us do just that.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two motions with respect to committee travel.

Government Orders

There have been discussions among all parties. I believe that if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, in relation to its studies on the new citizenship legislation, recognition of foreign credentials and family reunification, seven members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Quebec and Montreal in February and March, 2005, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, in relation to its studies on the new Citizenship Legislation, Recognition of Foreign Credentials and Family Reunification, seven members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, Vancouver, Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo in February-March 2005, and that the necessary staff do accompany the Committee.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier I referred to the riding of a certain member during question period. I would like to make a correction in terms of the blues. I referred to the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey, but I meant to refer to the hon. member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam. I apologize to the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1540)

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Salaries Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed I listened very carefully to the opening speech on Bill C-30, just made by the House leader for the government, and I have three quick questions I would like to put to him.

The first would be pre-empted by a statement, perhaps, on the fact, if I heard him correctly, that he said the Prime Minister made this commitment to bring forward a bill to delink MPs' compensation, in other words, our salaries, from the judges' compensation. It was his own government in a previous Parliament that had linked the two. Now the government is delinking it. He said the Prime Minister made that commitment in September.

As I recall it, the Prime Minister was under pressure from the Leader of the Opposition, my colleague from Calgary Southwest, who last spring made that commitment to the Canadian people in the lead-up to and during the election campaign.

Government Orders

My leader, the member for Calgary Southwest, stated unequivocally that a Conservative government would not allow a pay package increase to go ahead that would have been 10%, which was what was leaked out of the commission that looks at judges' remuneration. That leaked out last spring. There was quite a debate about it in the media.

So those commitments, I believe, were made quite some time ago, not just in September. At any rate, we are here to debate Bill C-30. The first question I would put to the House leader deals with the actual increase. Certainly I think it makes eminent sense to attach our compensation to some form of cost of living index that other Canadians are faced with, at least when they begin to negotiate their salaries and any increase in their salaries.

But what is the actual increase that we will be getting? Is it half a per cent for this year or is it one and a half per cent? What is it? I ask so that people watching the program at home today will clearly understand what it is that we are talking about.

The second deals with the linkage to the judges. It was this government, as I already have said, that indeed initially linked it to judges' remuneration, so I would simply put this question: why is it that they are not bringing forward the judges' package at the same time instead of waiting until next spring to deal with it? I understand that is about 11% over four years, a substantial increase, and over and above their cost of living increase, I might add.

The third question is again for clarification. It is my understanding that once Bill C-30 passes and MPs' salaries are linked to the cost of living index there will not be a requirement in the future for the members of the House of Commons to debate and vote on our own remuneration.

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, if I counted right there were four questions, but I will try to deal with them as quickly and as directly as possible.

On the first question with respect to the commitment or the comments made by the hon. member's leader, I guess I can take from that, and judging by the comments made, that the leader of the official opposition would be very attracted to this type of legislation and probably would in fact support it, judging from the comments.

The purpose of introducing this legislation is in fact to delink, as I have said. Under the present arrangement there has been a 1.3% increase as a result of an index in the Judges Act, so members of Parliament have received a 1.3% increase, which takes us from about \$139,000 to about \$141,000.

With Bill C-30, in fact, the difference would be about \$200. There would be a \$200 difference, and the actual index averaged 1.5% for the previous year, which is published in February, and that would be the number for the year 2004.

With respect to the Judges Act itself, I think it is very clear that the intent here is to delink and that by doing so we have in fact brought forward an independent piece of legislation for the House to deal with specifically on members' salaries.

I might also remind the member that for the judges' salaries it is a bit more than 11%; actually about 16% over four years. This piece of legislation would obviously serve to delink members' salaries from

that particular proposal. I think it better reflects, frankly, what Canadians are looking for in MPs' salaries and certainly I think it better reflects the will of Canadians.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know the following from the government House leader.

When his government introduced here in the House of Commons the last bill linking the remuneration of judges and members of Parliament, one of the basic principles at issue at the time was that the salary of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada should never exceed that of the Prime Minister. Everyone watching us knows that this is a basic, well established principle. The Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court are paid, for all practical purposes, the same salary.

How can the government House leader justify the fact that, suddenly, through a legislative provision like the one he has today, the salary of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will be \$26,000 a year higher than the salary of the Prime Minister, in the first year. That is my first question for the government House leader.

My second question is as follows. If we find ourselves obliged again today to reconsider the remuneration of members of Parliament, is it not because the Prime Minister basically lacked courage when he saw the results of the report? Instead of asking the committee to do its work again, the Prime Minister decided first to say that he would not take his salary increase. Everyone burst out laughing. It is well known that he is a millionaire several times over and does not need this salary. After that, he managed to say: "It is far too much for Canadians."

So this is my question. If the Prime Minister is honest and sincere when he says that an 11% pay increase for members of Parliament is far too much for Canadians—and I am one of them—how is it this same government thinks, in deciding to introduce a bill like this one reducing the pay increase of members of Parliament to more normal levels, that 10.8% or 11% for judges is not too much? It is too much for Canadians who are paying the salary of members of Parliament, but it is not too much for Canadians who are paying the salary of judges.

I would like to understand where this is fair. I would like to understand the government's logic, if this is not in fact just a bill based on cowardice.

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member's first question and the salary the Chief Justice would receive with respect to parliamentarians, what we all have to understand about this, and I think Canadians do understand, is that ultimately Parliament will decide. If in fact my hon. colleague believes that the Prime Minister can and should receive the same salary as the Chief Justice in this particular circumstance, with this Parliament being a minority Parliament then that could happen.

Government Orders

He suggested in his second question that the Prime Minister brought this forward for some reason. In fact, the reason the Prime Minister brought this forward is that he believes in and is proposing a salary increase that reflects what the average Canadian receives. The average Canadian will look at this and say it makes sense. Why should MPs not receive what average Canadians receive in terms of salary?

If members have difficulty with this, they can certainly argue that this is not what we should be doing in the House. They can stand in their places and argue that members of Parliament should receive a salary increase that is somewhat different. I am prepared to listen to those arguments and I know that my hon. colleagues are prepared to listen to my arguments.

With respect to judges, the Judges Act will come to the House. Parliament will deal with this piece of legislation like any other piece of legislation, and in a minority Parliament, if in fact changes are made, I am sure that parliamentarians on all sides of the floor will take responsibility for those changes.

• (1550)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. House leader has some curious responses to some curious questions from the Bloc in defending the Prime Minister's salary. This is a new day in the House of Commons.

I was initially filled with some amount of confidence in the House leader's description of this as a simple and very transparent piece of legislation until he made reference to the government's great track record on following through on its commitments. Thoughts of the GST, reviewing NAFTA, the actual implementation of Kyoto and reducing student debt loads came to mind and I started to worry about this commitment. For some strange reason, the House leader then strayed to Iraq and mentioned the idea of going to Iraq. I am not sure why he referenced that with respect to this piece of legislation. I wonder if he could clarify that.

There was an initial decision to tie our salaries to those of judges. The Prime Minister stepped away from that for some reason. I wonder if he could clarify the reason the Prime Minister stepped away from what I assume was a very clear and logical position.

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, I think my answer was clear. The Prime Minister has proposed this piece of legislation because he believes that the salaries and compensation that MPs receive should reflect what the average Canadian receives. My hon. colleague from the NDP has a problem with that. He has a problem in fact that MPs' salary increases should not reflect what the average Canadian receives. He thinks that this index is the wrong index. As a matter of fact it is an index that reflects collective bargaining and that is made up of both union and non-union sectors and represents the broad economy. It is a curious position for my hon. colleague from the NDP.

In any event, the legislation is before the House and I certainly look forward to the positions that the other parties have on it. I look forward to engaging in the debate and I welcome it.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be in the House today to listen to my colleague across the floor and also my friend in the Bloc. I think all three of us were here when the House

debated not too many years ago the great solution we had to this problem of MPs' salaries. That great solution was that we were going to tie the prime minister's salary to the chief justice's, and everybody thought that was pretty fair. We would live with the independence of the Supreme Court justices and what they were going to get in their salaries. Meanwhile we would all get nice cost of living increases every year, which has brought our salaries up a few thousand dollars a year since that time. Everything was running along pretty well until a report came out.

It is interesting that the government House leader will talk about editorials, saying they all support it and this is a good idea. Yes, I think the average Canadian would think it is a good idea to have our salaries tied into a cost of living that comes from an index of wage settlements of Canadians. It always sounds like a good idea, but it is interesting. I read editorials when we did this last time and all the editorials said that it was very good that parliamentarians were tying their salaries to the judges' and they would no longer decide themselves what the increases would be.

We really have to wonder about some of these editorialists who thought it was a great idea until a 10% figure came along and then we were all terrible and we should knock it back to something different. Nevertheless the government has brought in this bill and my party is going to support this legislation.

The government House leader should know also that when they bring the judges' bill before the House, we are still going to live by the same ideals that we had before. The judges are going to live with the same incomes that we have as members of Parliament. They are going to be put on an index just like we are. If it was a fair thought a few years ago that our salaries should be tied to judges' salaries, then it is a fair thought now and that should never change. I am happy that members on the Liberal side are applauding that.

I would expect that whatever the government puts in the legislation for judges, it better expect it to be amended so it will read exactly the same as for everybody in the House, from the prime minister to members of Parliament. I hate to tell them that at Christmastime in case they have gone out and spent the money already, but 16% would not be accepted by Canadians at any level right now, and they should look at that.

The private sector wage settlement process is a very good one. I think Canadians can accept that. I hope we will never see it in the House again where we have to have another debate on jumping up the salaries. Let us just live with this issue, but give us that increase every year so we do not have to debate it.

I was not going to get into these issues in this speech, but I could not help it. I just wanted to talk about the issue but the House leader opposite talked about all the good things the government has done. I will give him credit, the government has done some good things and we voted for some of those good things.

Government Orders

There was a question in the House today that was answered by the minister of immigration about doctors as immigrants to this country. There are literally hundreds of well qualified doctors in this country who cannot practise their profession because the government is dragging its feet. Also provincial associations, whether they be medical, dental or other professionals, are dragging their feet, but all of these associations only operate with either provincial or federal help and they should be told to speed up their act.

I have a situation in my constituency where there is a surgeon who is operating every day and has been told by immigration that he will be given his landed status once he gets his certificate that he can practise medicine. He has been practising with a temporary permit from his association for two years doing surgery in Powell River, yet he has not been finalized yet. Are they telling me that somewhere along the line this association has taken two years and might take another to finally say he is qualified? What if they say he is not? He has been doing surgery every day in Powell River. There are hundreds like him everywhere in this country. There are also hundreds of others who are doing nothing. They are driving taxi cabs, waiting tables in restaurants, or taking other jobs when they could be out practising medicine.

I would ask the government, instead of debating this issue here today, why not solve that problem? Yes, it talked about putting \$41 billion back into medicare but we all know it took out \$25 billion, and that is what caused the crisis from 1993 to 2003.

There are other issues. We are going to debate one of them tomorrow, the Fraser River fishery problem and fisheries in general, both on the east coast and the west coast. There is a lack of good scientific evidence. The fisheries have been dying off in a country that is famous for fisheries, not only commercial fisheries but sports fisheries. In my province it is costing people a lot of jobs. Why can the government not solve that problem? Why do we have to bring in a motion from the opposition to get it to debate that issue and get a judicial inquiry going that might solve that problem?

How many thousands of students around this country are having serious problems with their debt loads? Why are we not coming up with a program to make sure that every Canadian citizen can get post-secondary education, whether it is to become a plumber, an electrician, a doctor, or a nurse, to make sure they can do it, not just if their parents have enough money? That should be a guarantee for every Canadian citizen, an education. Why are we not seeing a program for that?

Finally, there is the Prime Minister's travelling road show. We know why he is travelling. He does not want to be here in the House of Commons with us. He does not like those serious questions every day about the issues of the nation. As much as we like to see our Prime Minister in certain things he is doing, when the House is sitting, this is where he should be, answering questions every day.

• (1555)

Mr. Speaker, I should have mentioned at the start of my speech and I forgot, but I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Calgary Centre-North.

The Deputy Speaker: On that issue, the hon. member is on the first round of speeches and he will have to have the unanimous consent of the House to divide his time.

Is there consent in the House to allow the hon. House leader to divide his time with someone else?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, it is amazing. Minority parliaments work so well.

It has worked well. I see all my colleagues and House leaders are here. We can say that the opposition parties, whether it has been on the throne speech debate or on other issues, have worked very hard to make this government do things and make things happen in this Parliament. We can all go home for Christmas knowing that we have done a good job as members of Parliament, in keeping the government doing business in an honest way and in a way that is good for all Canadians.

I would say that we are not happy about how this whole process took place because we thought we had an agreement. However, we will support this legislation.

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what would my colleague think would be reasonable percentages in the circumstances that we are talking about?

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that if we support this bill it has anything to do with reasonable percentages. We are agreeing that the private sector wage settlement process is something that is coming forth from this government. I am saying that in the last Parliament we all agreed that there would be a process. Now we have changed our minds again. We have to finally get to a system that we all agree to so the public understands it. We thought we had one. It did not work this time.

• (1600)

Hon. David Kilgour: Mr. Speaker, the process led to a percentage. In the present circumstances of inflation and the private sector agreements and people looking at us for leadership, what would my colleague think would be a process that would lead to something Canadians would respect, rather than thinking that we or the judges are simply ripping the taxpayers off?

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, we have a bill before us. I will not answer a hypothetical question.

The member has raised a hypothetical question. We have a bill. The bill says the private sector wage settlement process is 1.5%. My party is accepting that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the House leader of the Conservative Party a question. Given that the government is launching into a process guided mainly by the Prime Minister's inability to properly take on his responsibilities, does the leader not find that it would have been better for parliamentarians to refuse any increase in pay?

It does not seem to me that salary increases are a priority right now. We should have refused any increase in pay, sat down with the government and figured out what was wrong with the mechanism currently in place so that the appropriate corrections could have been made.

Government Orders

Why accept a salary increase now and rush to implement a new system without having the time to study all of its consequences, when there is absolutely no reason for rushing? We do not need an increase in pay. We should have carefully examined and reviewed the current legislation in serious terms and not from the standpoint of political opportunism.

[English]

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the point of view expressed by the Bloc's House leader. I am very pleased that this bill will be going to committee. It is going to give members an opportune chance to speak at this level and put their opinions forth. I certainly respect his opinion on this issue. I would rather be debating anything in this House, and I mentioned the issue of student loans and getting doctors through immigration. There are a lot of things we should be doing in this House. We should not debating the amount of money for ourselves.

Sooner or later, we have to solve this problem because the government has created another problem by not believing or listening to what it did in the last Parliament, which is not unusual for the government. The bill will have a chance to go to committee where we can discuss those issues.

Maybe we will get some unanimity in committee that we should receive zero as long as the judges receive zero. We made a commitment in this Parliament, at one point, that the chief justice of the Supreme Court would get the same salary as our Prime Minister and the rest would be scaled down from there. I believe it is going to stay that way.

I look forward to getting this to committee where we can discuss those issues brought up by my colleague from the Bloc.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments on how this House has been able to work effectively together and in some cases very much so; however, DFO has not been responsive to the travesty on our west coast with respect to salmon stocks.

I wonder if he could comment on, as effective as this House is, the apparent vacuum of power in leadership that is happening on the government side. The indecisiveness that we are seeing on a number of files, not just this one, and making a consistent decision and then falling away from it so quickly.

I wonder if he could comment on the leadership or the lack of leadership that has been displayed.

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I could say to my hon. colleague from the NDP that part of the reason that we have that problem is the fact that the Prime Minister has probably been outside of Canada more than he has been in Canada since this House reconvened. There cannot be a government when the leader is not around while parliament is sitting.

If I remember, the Prime Minister said one day when he was a little angry at the Leader of the Opposition, "I'd rather be anywhere than in this place with you guys". That sort of gets across. I do not doubt that for a minute when he had the member for Mississauga—Erindale who caused him nothing but grief until she had to resign, and he has a Minister of Citizenship and Immigration causing the same problems today, and who knows who will be next.

I believe that the Prime Minister, for his new year's resolution, should promise to be in the House of Commons every day next year so we can get down to real business and solve the problems that a number of us have talked about here today.

• (1605)

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of Bill C-30. In doing so, I support our House leader and the comments which he has just made. He has been good enough to share his time with me and I thank him. I also speak in support of the position of the leader of our party who has spoken adamantly against this 10% salary increase.

I have listened very carefully to the government House leader, as he spoke in relation to Bill C-30. It would seem to me that we are in agreement as to what needs to be done. I would add that it seems as though the government has been forced on this issue by the other parties in the House of Commons and by editorial comment in the media of this country to eventually adopt this position.

As a new member of Parliament I struggled to understand this issue. I examined some of the previous commissions which have studied this issue in the context of our parliamentary history in the last 25 years. I speak of the Hales commission of 1979, the Lapointe Commission of 1994, and the Blais commission of 1998.

These commissions all seem to eventually seize upon five principles by which the remuneration of MPs should be judged. I would like to reference these in my opening comments.

First, it is important, since Parliament is such a valuable institution in this country, that we elect and retain competent and qualified people, and that good pay is essential to do that.

Second, MPs should not be expected to cover the expenses which they incur as a result of their lives as an MP out of their own pocket.

Third, and this is very important, MPs should not become wealthy or profit excessively as a result of their public service, nor should they see pay increases when other Canadians are suffering from financial hardship or not experiencing similar pay increases.

Fourth, MPs should not vote for their own pay increases since this constitutes a conflict of interest.

Finally, regardless of any determination of what constitutes fair compensation for the value of the work that they do, MP remuneration must be consistent with public expectations. Public expectations may in fact require MPs to be paid less than an amount which is properly what they should receive.

Public service is a choice. No one is forced to seek elected office and all of us in the House have done so willingly.

I will now turn to the legislation and judge it against those principles. Although the legislation is reasonably complicated, Canadians need to understand that this is essentially how it works.

In clause 55.1 of the bill, the salary of members of the House of Commons is set at \$141,200 plus an annual amount that will be added to that in each year thereafter.

Government Orders

Canadians need to understand the way in which that will work is set forth in clause 67.1 of the bill which defines an index. Essentially, parliamentarians will now receive the same salary which they have received in the previous year plus an increase which is calculated with respect to the cost of living. The actual formula is indexed to the bargaining units of 500 or more employees in the private sector. MP salary increases will be commensurate with other Canadians.

In terms of whether MPs are to receive a pay increase at this time or not, it is worth noting, as the government House leader has pointed out, that the effect of this formula applied today, parliamentarians will receive a salary increase of only \$200 in the coming year. That is a very important point to make in this debate.

With respect to the principles of which I have spoken, that MPs should not become wealthy or profit excessively, it is the position of our party and has been the position of our party that the 10% salary increase which was to be proposed by the commission, and which I gather was leaked publicly, was outrageous and unnecessary. It was excessive. Our party has not supported it. Our leader has not supported it. I do not support it.

We have been opposed to the 10% salary increase from the very outset. I am proud to say that it is our leader who was the very first person to say so publicly. I would note in that respect that a salary of \$141,000 effectively places members of Parliament in the top 2% of Canadians in terms of what they earn. That should be sufficient. We do not need salary increases beyond that.

• (1610)

In recognizing the public policy discussion that has led to this conclusion, not only did our party reach this conclusion but respected commentators such as the *Calgary Herald* in this country on March 3, 2004, spoke eloquently about this in an editorial. It pointed out that the approach which the government had been following, the commission approach, was not working and that any approach which would result in a 10% salary increase was clearly flawed. I recognize the leadership that many people in this country have taken, including the *Calgary Herald*, in speaking on this issue.

To that I would add that the second principle of relevance in this is the delinkage from the salaries of judges. As has been said earlier today, I understand that the whole issue of the Judges Act and the salary increases to which judges are entitled will be brought before the House in a separate debate at a separate time.

As the our House leader has said, there will be very close scrutiny at that time of the proposed increases for judges because they are being paid very well in our society at this point in time. Further increases along the lines of what has been indicated, 11% over 4 years plus cost of living increases on top of that in addition to the salaries they receive, are not warranted at this time. This is not good policy. It is our hope that the House will not proceed in that direction at that time.

The approach which is contained in this legislation has in fact been applied with success elsewhere in Canada. I speak in terms of my own province of Alberta. In Alberta, since 1999, the annual pay raises for members of the legislative assembly have been tied to percentage increases, or for that matter decreases, in the average

weekly earnings for Albertans in the prior year depending on Statistics Canada information. That pay hike amounted to a modest increase in 2002 of 2.81%; in 2003, 2.25%; and in 2004, 1.36%.

This has resulted in a system in Alberta where members of the legislative assembly have been able to secure wage and salary increases which are fair and commensurate with inflation and cost of living increases, but which are not excessive along the lines of the 10% which was being proposed by the commission in this Parliament at some time earlier this year. This is a system which can work. It is a system which has worked elsewhere in this country, and it is a system which we support.

This brings me to the third principle of which I spoke, namely, conflict of interest and the process by which MP salaries are set. MPs should not be voting for their own salary increases or decreases, for that matter. It is a demeaning process. It is demeaning to the House and to the fine men and women who serve here with the best of intentions. I do not believe anyone comes to the House of Commons for the money. To have MPs voting on their own compensation year after year is not a wise process and does not advance democracy in this country.

One of the real benefits of what is being proposed in this legislation is the indexing. We will take care of that and it will not be necessary to have this debate on an annual basis. For these reasons, I support Bill C-30. I am against the 10% pay increase which otherwise would have fallen.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member for Calgary Centre-North who obviously put together a coherent presentation. He drew parallels which I thought were interesting and appropriate with provincial legislatures. I appreciate his stated intention to support this bill, at least to send it to committee.

One thing I hope the member for Calgary Centre-North might enlighten us on is his comment that he had some significant hesitation with respect to the increases proposed for federally appointed judges. I was hoping to ask the same question of his colleague, the opposition House leader who had made similar comments.

As the government House leader indicated, the government will introduce at some point legislation to put into effect the quadrennial commission report, which reviewed the issue of judicial remuneration.

The member for Calgary Centre-North has significant experience in law. I am concerned that if Parliament begins to refuse or change recommendations from the quadrennial commission with respect to judicial remuneration, we could get into a complicated constitutional problem in terms of the independence of the judiciary. We may find ourselves with judges going to court seeking to put into effect a quadrennial commission report with respect to their own remuneration against, and it is a hypothetical circumstance, what Parliament might want to do.

How might square the issue of judicial independence from the possibility of Parliament refusing the quadrennial commission report which the government has supported?

Government Orders

•(1615)

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my learned friend for his compliment about the coherency of my presentation. I appreciate that.

The question which he asks is a difficult one. The government House leader has spoken about this and about the government House leader's position with respect to judge's salaries. I have followed suit with similar comments.

The hon. member is correct, I did practise law in this country for some 22 years, and I hold the judiciary in our country in the highest of regard. I have also read the Prince Edward Island reference case, as it is called, which deals with this issue and the entire question of judicial independence in the setting of judicial salaries.

I think it will depend very much on the legislation which the government brings forward on this matter. Today, I agree that the delinkage of judges' salaries and parliamentary salaries is a very good thing. It is a step forward. Clearly, the government will have to be careful about the judicial authorities on point.

I would point out, based on the judicial compensation and benefits commission work which has been done today, that judges are being paid extraordinarily well compared to members of the legal profession who are in private practice. This is something upon which I think most members of the legal profession would agree. We do not wish to trench upon a constitutional issue in dealing with judges' salaries, but judges should be compensated fairly but not excessively.

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member for Calgary Centre-North perhaps recall that the provincial judges in Alberta went to court over this very issue? Does he think there are any lessons that we might draw for the federal judges from the experience of the provincial judges in our province?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the provincial judges in Alberta did proceed to court. Although, I think the eventual decision of the courts in that case was subsumed within the P.E.I. reference decision of the appellate court eventually and then eventually of the Supreme Court of Canada.

The only comment I would make on a lesson learned is, as my hon. friend has said, we have to be careful about the constitutional relationship of the distribution of powers and the balance of powers between this hon. House and the judiciary. The Supreme Court decision sets out the way in which to deal with that and the way to achieve an independent setting of the salaries of judges in the country. However, it does not mandate or require that excessive salary increases be approved or that we adopt a system which results in increases which are a departure from what other Canadians are receiving.

•(1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a little about the past. In all parliaments, whether the federal Parliament here or the Parliament in Quebec City, where I was for a while, or other parliaments in other countries, setting the salaries of members of Parliament is always an extremely

difficult and thankless task for one simple reason. Members of Parliament are generally well paid and even very well paid, and the citizens who pay our salaries will always find some reason for saying that salaries are too high—and sometimes they are right.

It is really a thankless job that we have, and this is why, in the last Parliament, after some long sessions, the Liberal government decided to suggest a method of setting members' salaries that was completely beyond the control of Parliament. The judges' category is a category that parliaments have used to give themselves independent methods of setting salaries. Judges' salaries are set on the basis of recommendations based on studies done by a committee of experts that studies the economic situation and labour markets in general and makes a proposal.

Principles of independence are all very well, but returning every year or two to Parliament to ask the members to determine whether they should have a 1%, 2%, 3% or 5% salary increase puts the onus on the very people who daily see people in their ridings facing terrible problems, losing their jobs, plants closing, and people victimized by the cuts to the employment insurance plan decreed by the government.

It is an inhuman task. There has never been unanimity on this, except in the former Parliament when all the parties agreed that Parliament's independent mechanism for judges could also set our salaries.

We were happy to work with the government, several of whose members are still on the benches opposite, and several members of the current cabinet were in cabinet at that time. They took the decision then and made some recommendations. They did the work that they had to do. They assumed their responsibilities. They got our support, and the system worked.

But what has happened that we find ourselves here now, in this House, forced to go through this debate again when we thought that we were forever finished with it? This is what happened. The committee that determines judges' salaries did its work. It made recommendations. These recommendations leaked out and in the newspaper the headline, which lost the focus on judges, read, "MPs give themselves 10% salary increase."

No MP in this House, certainly not on this side of the House, anyway, was informed of this percentage. No one had any idea that the committee had made such a wild recommendation. We were just as speechless, surprised and even indignant as the general public, to see such a high percentage. Still, we took the responsibility. We said to ourselves, "The committee did its work badly."

In such circumstances, when one is responsible and reasonable, when one is not a demagogue and not trying to score political points with such difficult and delicate matters, one must simply say the committee did its work badly. If the percentage is too high, the government has the option and even the duty to receive the recommendation and determine whether it is correct or too high. It can make changes to the recommendation.

Government Orders

•(1625)

What did the government do? What did the Prime Minister do? Expectations were that the Prime Minister would announce, like a reasonable man, “Look, the recommendation you have seen in the papers is clearly exaggerated. The government will shoulder its responsibilities. We will have a critical look at this percentage, reduce it, bring it into more reasonable proportion, or we may ask the committee members to use different parameters. If they have used the wrong parameters, perhaps they can work with the ones that Treasury Board could provide, which are used to determine salary figures for public servants based on private industry, increases in wealth, on this and that, to finally arrive at some increase in salary.”

But no, that is not what the Prime Minister did. The Prime Minister ran to the nearest microphone to say that he would not accept his salary increase. He meant it when he said it. He dissociated himself from all the other partners in this House, and that is worse. He said that he, personally, would not accept his salary.

Everyone started laughing. The Prime Minister has tens of millions of dollars. There are a few members in this House, unfortunately I am not one of them, who could fulfill their duties here on a voluntary basis and continue to give money here and there without any problem. Good for them. However, when one fulfills the duties of a prime minister, one does not have the right to use himself as a standard and try to look better than the others. He said he would not collect his salary.

When everyone started laughing, the Prime Minister came back to the microphone and said that this did not make sense, that he was going to change it and cut the members' salary increase. Everyone was in agreement with the Prime Minister. However, what we expected from a responsible Prime Minister was that he would tell us that the committee would have to go back to the drawing board and make an acceptable increase proposal to us, for the judges and for us members of Parliament.

Instead, he took the microphone and said that 10% would be much too costly to Canadians. We agree. We do not want a 10% or 11% salary increase, but we do not want either to undo a whole process, just because the Prime Minister does not have the courage to do his job and to do it correctly. But that is another story.

I was one of those who helped devise that process. During my career, I had many opportunities to work on the salary of parliamentarians, both in Quebec City and here in Ottawa. We defined some principles. Let me begin with the first one. We felt that the public could not possibly disagree with the following principle, namely that the Prime Minister of Canada should have a salary equivalent—\$1 more, I think—to that of the chief justice of the Supreme Court, whom he appoints. The latter has much greater job security than the Prime Minister of Canada does, particularly this one. Indeed, his job is constantly on the line. He might not last very long here. So we felt that the Prime Minister should earn the same salary as the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

Is there anyone here who thinks this does not make sense? Yet, today the government just betrayed that principle.

Second principle. It is said that a minister does not work as hard as a Prime Minister, has fewer responsibilities and should earn three-

quarters of the Prime Minister's salary. This only makes good sense and seems perfectly acceptable. No one would do a double take over this.

The Prime Minister earns the same salary as the chief justice, ministers earn 75% of the Prime Minister's salary and members earn 50% of the Prime Minister's salary. Seems reasonable. I do not think anyone listening to us would be shocked by this. We have established defined amounts.

If the Prime Minister had the courage to respect this, we would not be here today. How do you judge a man who acts on political opportunism? He wants to look good to the public, he wants people to like him, he wants to give the impression that he is fair and modest, and that he cares about people.

•(1630)

The Prime Minister had numerous opportunities to show he cared about people, whether in the area of employment insurance, health care, the fiscal imbalance or seniors. The Prime Minister had many opportunities to demonstrate his humanity. But no, he has decided to take his turn at members' salaries, the one subject, unfortunately, that lends itself most readily to demagogy.

Still, we would follow the Prime Minister in this respect if the government said today that it had decided to clean house and implement a separate system for judges and parliamentarians. We would look at this, and maybe we could work with it. In fact, this is what we are proposing. We want to look at new mechanisms or a mechanism with new parameters.

The same Prime Minister who said, when the results were released, that this was far too high for Canadians, changed his tune in cabinet and gave government approval—again requiring a bill—with respect to judges.

So, I would like to know how Canadians, who do not have the means to give MPs 10% more, a fact that we corroborate, suddenly are able to do this when it is for judges. I need an explanation of how a Prime Minister, who has looked into the situation of his fellow citizens, can reach the conclusion that they cannot afford to give 300 MPs a 10% raise, but they can do it for hundreds and hundreds of judges. I just do not get it.

This is irresponsible. The public needs to know that their Prime Minister makes decisions on a day by day basis. There is no other reason the Prime Minister could use to justify his government drafting a bill that, on the one hand, cuts the pay increase for MPs while, on the other, hand making the decision to give this kind of increase to judges, who are not exactly in dire straits.

Government Orders

The consequences of such an approach are scandalous. Are people aware that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who up to now has earned as much as the Prime Minister of Canada, and furthermore is appointed by the Prime Minister, and has job security, will now earn \$26,000 more per year than the Prime Minister? It is unbelievable. People listening who do not earn even \$15,000 per year must understand that this government has decided to give a \$26,000 annual increase to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The government is acting shamelessly.

The position of the Bloc Québécois is quite simple. We cannot agree to, nor do we want any salary increase for parliamentarians. Even the increase proposed by government seems, at this point, inappropriate.

We do want, however, the Prime Minister to deal with this matter in the following way. A parliamentary committee must be created that will set slightly more serious parameters for the judges compensation review committee. There is no need to deal with compensation for members and judges separately. The only thing we need to do is ask the committee to reconsider the issue using new parameters. The ridiculous recommendations that are often announced year after year are creating a huge gap between judges and the rest of Canadian society in terms of wealth.

We have seen it, the minister talked about 1.3%, 1.5% and 1.7% per year. Do members know that judges, in addition to the 11%, get a cost of living adjustment? In four years, this represents a 15% or 16% increase in salary. Who, in Canada, gets a 15% or 16% salary increase in a four-year period? Few people do. Almost no one gets that.

How can the government justify such a thing?

• (1635)

We are disappointed and deeply offended by the attitude of the Prime Minister, who, for political expediency, and because of his inability to assume his responsibilities as Prime Minister, has attempted to wreck an entire system without even asking himself if that system was not the best one. The Prime Minister did not hesitate to trample, to destroy the arguments in respect of a system that the previous government, of which several ministers were members, had put in place and implemented to finally resolve this issue.

The Prime Minister does not respect anything, except perhaps this sort of paranoia about the popularity he wishes he had. Moreover, he does not understand that he will not make headway with demagogic behaviour like this. If he wants to be popular with the public, they should set aside the issue of salaries for MPs and tackle unemployment. We have to examine the employment insurance program before the recess.

We have to deal with the million of children living in poverty in this country, who need help and whom the government should help. But no, we are not dealing with poor children, or the unemployed, or the elderly, to whom the government owes billions of dollars. Instead, we are dealing with the salaries of MPs. That is indecent. While this matter could easily have been dealt with in committee, had the government so decided, the government, is increasing the salaries of judges and, to a lesser extent, that of MPs, but not dealing

with anything else. If the Prime Minister wants to be popular, he is going to have to learn to set real priorities.

In closing, I would like my colleagues in the opposition to ask themselves: if we agree today to an increase in MPs' salaries are we not acting in complicity with the government? Are we not agreeing to this bad strategy of the Prime Minister by letting him have his way and saying, "You have more reasonable figures. Let us look no further. Let us change the system"?

In my opinion, all opposition members should stick together and tell the Prime Minister that we do not appreciate his way of doing things; that we refuse to destroy a system that can work and that is based on reasonable parameters, provided we give directions to those who work within it. There is no need to rebuild the whole system; we simply have to be reasonable and assume our responsibilities. However, whenever something comes up, the Prime Minister starts acting like a ship at sea that is going in all directions because of the wind. Back home, we refer to this as a ship with a lot of sail, but no rudder. It is disturbing to have a Prime Minister who has a lot of sail, but no rudder. This is what we have before us.

Therefore, I am asking my fellow opposition members to say no to this bill. Let us force the government to put this issue back into the hands of hon. members through a parliamentary committee. Let us ask them to look at the process. Let us ask the committee to set adequate parameters to give reasonable salary increases to members, judges, public servants and all the citizens who deal with the government and whose salaries are paid by the government. This is what we should do. This is what we are asking, and this is why we will oppose this bill. We will oppose it and we urge the government to assume its responsibilities by adopting the system that we are proposing, because it is much more effective, logical, sensible, and respectful of the public, and it is not based on a demagogic approach.

• (1640)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes, Intergovernmental Affairs; the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Fisheries and Oceans; and the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey, Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I aspire to one day have such a capability of presenting ideas and notions in the House as the hon. member now has.

[Translation]

I am going to speak in English so my question is really clear.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The member made a comment about the Prime Minister acting as ship without a rudder. I would suggest that perhaps it is a ship that is not paying taxes. It may be one of the reasons why he feels at this time that it was so opportune for him to be able to dismiss any pay increase, a notion that for many of the people in my riding of Skeena—Bulkley Valley would be absolutely obscene, but I suppose when one is a multi-millionaire several times over in the avoidance of taxes one is able to make such suggestions and is able to hold to it.

Now that we have reopened this can of worms, as it were, and are now preparing to look at another way of compensating members of Parliament due to this lack of leadership, I am wondering if we could consider this. The House is meant to represent and defend many of the issues the member raised in terms of poverty among children, student loans and student debt loads. I am wondering if we would not consider tying our salaries to an index related to those issues.

If Parliament is functioning and doing well on something like health care or child poverty, then we should be compensated equally as well if we are doing our job. Many in the private sector have looked to such a system in order to compensate their managers and upper managers; when the company does well, they too do well. In this House, regardless of what poor legislation gets passed year after year, the salaries continue to rise, while for people in Canada the wage gap continues to grow and people become poorer.

Would there not be another index available to us, one that ties the members in the House to the quality of life experienced by Canadians, particularly lower and middle income Canadians? We can measure our society by how we treat these people. I am wondering if the House might eventually consider such original and diverse thinking as this.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Madam Speaker, the hon. member's question perfectly illustrates the challenge of resolving this issue.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that members' salaries had been discussed in both parliaments in which I have sat, and, in each, at least on two occasions, if not more.

All sorts of suggestions were made. Some claimed, I think quite rightly, that members' salaries should be tied to collective wealth. Others claimed that members should accept the lowest index based on a certain number of similar categories. Still others claimed that pay increases should be comparable to those given to government officials. Every possible suggestion was made.

Our own personal values can guide us in choosing one method over another. As to the hon. member's concerns, one thing is certain. We were all taken by surprise to see a potential salary increase of 10%. We are not irresponsible.

So what should members' salaries be based on? The mechanism proposed by the government leader is not a bad idea. To some degree, it could be considered fair in relation to society. I do not know. It is a difficult issue to resolve.

This is why the sensitive issue of the salary of parliamentarians should be taken out of our hands. The process must be based on something else. It should not be up to us to decide how much we will

pay ourselves, or what criteria will apply. In fact, this is why we had all agreed, that is the New Democratic Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party of Canada and the Liberals on a process whereby a committee would make an independent review of the judges' salary. This is what was proposed to us by the other side.

What I find most despicable is that while the government was proposing that approach, which we found to be fair, this whole thing came up with the Prime Minister and the leak in the media. The Deputy Prime Minister was going around, telling everyone not to compare the salaries of members with those of judges, because the work was not the same. What do we compare an MP to? To a church warden? To a city councillor? To who? To an American senator? We cannot compare members of Parliament to other groups, because they do a different and unique type of work.

It seems to me that the person who makes the legislation is, in a way, rather close to the person who interprets the legislation and the person who defends it. We are part of a legislative system. The Deputy Prime Minister told us that it was outrageous, that we had nothing in common with judges. Today, we are being asked to give ourselves a salary increase as if we were plumbers, plant workers, nurses or electricians. Perhaps the Deputy Prime Minister finds the work done by these groups more closely related to the duties of a member of Parliament.

This is ridiculous. These arguments are only meant to serve the interests of those who use them. What we are saying is that there is no ideal indexation. There is no solution. It will always be a painful debate. It is a painful debate right now. This is why we are not asking for any raise of the members' salaries.

We think that this is far from being an urgent matter. We could very well take a fresh second look at the issue, as regards both members of Parliament and judges. We could consider suggestions, such as the one made by the hon. member, or other ones that may be made here today. This would be much more responsible than the approach used by a government that is panicking and trying to save face for the Prime Minister and justify the commitments that he made in an unacceptable fashion. This is what is happening here and this is what we object to.

● (1645)

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my hon. friend, who is a very experienced member. He is a respected member and also a good speaker.

He was right when he spoke of the Prime Minister. What is the government's motivation for introducing this bill? What does he think it is?

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

He asked me what motivated the government. Its motivation was, in fact, very simple. I touched on it at the end of my remarks. On the government side, there is a need to cover this excessive reaction of the Prime Minister, which was not based on rationality, was neither proper nor respectful of ongoing processes, showed no respect for the people and was solely designed to make him look good in the newspapers the next morning.

Government Orders

That is what is going on. The government is covering the inappropriate, hasty and unjustified decisions of a Prime Minister who has not yet understood that the person who holds that position has to be able to weather the storm, think things over and, then, propose appropriate solutions, not be all over the place in an attempt to please the public.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, usually when I get up to speak in the House, I say that I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak. Thinking about this particular bill, realistically and honestly, I do not feel like I am pleased to have this opportunity. I am doing it because I am the House leader for the NDP and I am doing it to reflect the position of our caucus. Quite honestly, I am fed up with this issue as are many people. Here we are again in 2004 debating compensation for members of Parliament.

I listened very carefully to what the government House leader had to say. At one point in his remarks he said it was very logical to take this step, that is, Bill C-30. I began to think about that in terms of the logic of what is taking place here today in debating Bill C-30.

I suppose one could argue that it is logical from the government's point of view once the Prime Minister had made his political statements that he was going to undo what Parliament had previously done. From the government's point of view, one could argue that it has some logic. However, in the greater scale of things, it is unfortunate that we are yet again debating what seems to be a perennial issue on the compensation of members of Parliament.

One of my colleagues asked the government House leader why the government wants to have this particular index. The government House leader said the index was based on average wage settlements in the private sector and was a reasonable thing. Why is this index acceptable now, but in 2001 another measure was somehow acceptable? This question was brought up by my colleagues in the Bloc, and is the question we need to ask.

I feel that yet again this issue has become politicized. All members on all sides of the House would agree that we want, what we have been striving for, is a system of deliberation and implementation of pay increases for members of Parliament that is independent, rational, defensible and realistic.

I happen to believe, and I think most members of the House believe, that we get paid very well. I, like other members, work very hard at what I do. I consider it to be an enormous privilege to be a member of Parliament. I consider it to be an enormous privilege to be one of 308 members of Parliament representing the diversity of our ridings across this country. We get paid well for that. We all work hard. All members share in that sort of commonality and solidarity about what this place is about.

I do not want to be here debating our pay increase yet again for politically motivated reasons. Bill C-28, the former bill dealing with pay increases for members of Parliament, was passed in this place on June 7, 2001. I looked at the record and in actual fact the member for LaSalle—Émard voted in favour of third reading of that bill.

House leaders have spoken of the process they went through at that time to establish a sense of independence and rationality when dealing with compensation. I was not a part of that. Our former

House leader, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, now the dean of the House, was very much a part of that.

He has put forward the principles of establishing an independent process, and criteria and benchmarks for determining our compensation. We believed that happened in 2001. Presumably the member for LaSalle—Émard believed it also as did other government members because they voted for that bill. All of that has been undone. Here we are today with another version and another index.

I could argue, like other members have, that this index, which is based on Human Resources Development Canada and the average wage index in the private sector, is a reasonable thing. What really gets people's backs up and why we are reacting as we are to the bill today is because of the history that has brought us to this point. The question is still out there and it makes me feel unsettled. How many more times will we have to go through this?

● (1650)

Now we have a new bill, Bill C-30. Now we have another index. Now we are to believe that it will be an independent thing and never more will members of Parliament have to deal with this issue. What assurance and confidence is there that it will happen now that this has been undone again?

That bothers me and I know it bothers other members in our caucus. I have to agree with members from the Bloc Québécois and our member who spoke previously. There is a double standard.

We take all this time debating MP compensation when what we really need to be doing is focusing our time, resources and priorities on why the average wages of Canadians have fallen so far behind. One reason the index is so low is that people are not getting the pay increases that they need and deserve. Most people are working longer hours and more overtime but they have less take home pay now than they did a decade ago.

I invite members to come to my community in east Vancouver to see what it means for working families who are struggling to make ends meet and where both parents are working, sometimes at several jobs, and paying exorbitant child care costs. They are paying 40% or 50% of their income for housing costs. That is the debate we should be grappling with in the House.

Those are things that stick in one's craw when we are here again debating the salary of members of Parliament. It becomes a big controversial issue in the public about how much money we make and how it is decided, and we all get drawn into it.

For me it was the height of cynical and opportunistic politics in the way the Prime Minister dealt with this issue before we came back in the fall. I think that even members in the Liberal caucus were dismayed and rather shocked at how this was dealt with.

Government Orders

The government House leader was correct when he said that it will be the will of Parliament as to what we do. We are a minority Parliament, and yes, theoretically the opposition parties could get together and agree to vote down the bill, make a decision to do whatever in terms of MP compensation and it would carry. However that is not the point. I think we have to stick to the principle, which is that there has to be an independent process.

I have heard a lot of discussion today on what will happen to the Judges Act when it comes before us. As we know the previous increase that would have come forward was linked to the quadrennial report of a judge's increase. I think the feeling now is that if it is not good enough for the MPs why should it be good enough for the judges. Therefore there have been some remarks here today from the Conservative Party that it will not proceed in that manner.

I have to say that the NDP debated this very carefully in our caucus. As much as we do not want to, as much as we detest the politics that got us to this point today, we are prepared to deal with the bill on its merit in terms of the index that is before us. We will agree that it should go to committee.

However in terms of what takes place with another bill that comes forward on the Judges Act, we will deal with it on its merit. We will look at it at that time. We will decide, in terms of implementing those recommendations that the government has accepted on the quadrennial report, as it applies to an increase for judges. At this moment I think we would be further escalating the cynicism that is taking place and the political nature of what takes place if we said that we will just automatically turn down that increase at this point. We should wait until the bill comes forward and look at it on its own merit and on its own standing. That is what we intend to do in the NDP. That is how we will debate it.

The bill will likely go to committee very shortly and we will support that. We will look at the index that is being proposed and we will probably support it.

I think the way it has been handled smacks of the kind of politics that we have come to expect from the Prime Minister. He does not have the kind of backbone to stick with a decision that has been made. If we are talking about what is fair, then let us get to the essence of it.

• (1655)

Let us talk about what is fair for Canadians, particularly those who are struggling in our society because of government cutbacks, the cutbacks made by the Prime Minister when he was finance minister over the last decade. That should be the real politics of what is going on in this place, not MP compensation.

• (1700)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the chance to speak to Bill C-30. The bill would implement the long-standing position of the Conservative Party, which is that members of Parliament should not be determining their own salaries.

The last attempt to create an impartial mechanism for determining MPs' pay led it to be indexed to the salary of the chief justice of the Supreme Court whose salary is determined by the Judicial

Compensation and Benefits Commission. However, when the commission recently recommended an 11% pay increase for the chief justice, the controversy was reopened.

Clearly, it would be inappropriate for members of Parliament to accept an increase that is so far beyond what most Canadians receive, especially when we are already making a salary that most Canadians can only dream of.

In fact, many people would question whether judges need and deserve an 11% pay raise either. It would have been nice if this legislation could have been accompanied by measures to reform the way judges get paid as well. It is a different issue in some ways because the job description and hiring and firing process for judges is very different than for MPs. It also comes down to preventing people in positions of authority and trust from lining their own pockets at the expense of overburdened Canadian taxpayers.

An 11% pay raise for a backbench or opposition MP would mean a raise bigger than the total annual salary of some Canadians. In fact, Canadians whose entire annual salary is only two-thirds as much as the raise proposed for members of Parliament, would be paying taxes to fund those raises. That would be simply obscene. Of course partly that is because the Liberal government has refused to enact the Conservative policy of increasing the amount low income Canadians can make before they pay taxes. However an 11% raise is difficult to justify in any circumstances.

Members of Parliament do not need exorbitant compensation. Those of us who work hard, stay honest and do our level best on behalf of our constituents and all Canadians, are certainly not in it for the money. Some MPs have already had highly successful careers in the private sector. My hon. colleague from Newmarket—Aurora is a case in point. Although she has worked hard and performed admirably as international trade critic for the government in waiting, she has not accepted a dime from Canadian taxpayers. Instead, she has chosen to donate her salary to a charitable foundation. I applaud her for that.

The Conservative Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, the hon. Danny Williams, is a formidable leader and advocate of his province and has worked extremely hard on issues that are vital to Atlantic Canada, yet he too has decided to forgo his entire salary. He has taken the fight of ordinary Newfoundlanders to heart. He knows they face incredible financial burdens as a result of the high taxes, oppressive business climate and patronage driven, market distorting, reallocation schemes of the federal government, and has placed the interests of Newfoundlanders far above his own personal interests.

Of course not all of us are in the position to work free of charge, and I would not suggest that anyone should do so, but the examples set by our colleagues I have mentioned prove that the best legislators care more about their constituents than about their own compensation.

Government Orders

Canadians are our bosses and I do not think they believe that we need or deserve double digit raises. In fact many Canadians probably feel that they were hoodwinked when they hired certain candidates to represent them in this place.

Government members were hired because they said they would enact democratic reform, make the equalization system more conducive to economic growth and make the federal government more fiscally responsible. I think most Canadians would say that we as a Parliament have not yet fulfilled these basis elements of our job and we should not expect a raise until we live up to our commitments.

I support the bill because I am hopeful that it will create a reasonable and impartial mechanism for determining compensation for members of the House so we can finally stop debating our own pay and start debating the things that matter to Canadians.

● (1705)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have heard a few times this afternoon, here we go again. For those of us who have been here for more than one term, we have had this discussion before, and it has a ring of familiarity. I guess I am reminded of the statement by J.K. Chesterton that if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly. That is what seems to have happened with this issue.

In 2001 the government brought in Bill C-28. It said that it would solve this situation once and for all. We had a discussion on this issue. The government came forward with legislation that would tie the salaries of MPs to those of the judges, as has been said this afternoon.

I guess the government did not plan at the time that the commission, which reviews the salaries of judges, would come back with a recommendation that those salaries be raised somewhere between 11% and 16%. We heard the minister this afternoon say that it was closer to 16% than 11%. The government did not figure that into the equation.

I appreciated what my Bloc colleague had to say earlier. He said that when the Prime Minister heard the news that had been leaked to the media, he overreacted and said that he would separate himself from anything to do with it. He was one of the people who brought forth the legislation in the first place. We are back again today.

When Bill C-28 came out in 2001, the government was enthusiastic about it. The minister of state and leader of the government in the House at the time, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, issued a press release. It stated, “This bill implements the recommendations made in the report of the independent Commission...The bill makes parliamentary compensation more transparent”, which is ironic given what we have run into over the last couple of months in trying to deal this issue, “and brings it more into line with compensation for comparable groups.” He concluded by saying, “It is a fair and reasonable approach to parliamentary compensation and I invite all parliamentarians to support it”. It was supported, but it turned out that it was not a fair and reasonable package and approach to this situation. We are back dealing with it again.

In the House the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell said:

—parliamentary compensation would be based from here on in on the compensation of the supreme court chief justice. This is not a new idea. Officers of parliament, such as the information commissioner and the chief electoral officer, already receive the same compensation as a federal court judge, so the precedent is there for officers of the House. What we are proposing here is to do the same for parliamentarians.

He went on say that under Bill C-28 the prime minister would receive the same compensation as the chief justice of the Supreme Court, not \$1 more. I do not see him here today to defend the previous bill, which he was once so enthusiastic about.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. We have now switched the system for indexing parliamentarians' wages from tying it to the Supreme Court chief justice to using a different system. Rather than tie it to the chief justice of the Supreme Court, it will be tied to the index of the average percentage increase in base rate wages for the calendar year resulting from major settlements negotiated with bargaining units of 500 or more employees in the private sector of Canada.

Does he feel the government is competent enough that we will not be back again dealing with the issue in light of the fact that those settlements may at some point in the future be too extreme for the government to deal with as well? Is he comfortable with the government's approach now? Does he think this is a fair and reasonable way to do it?

● (1710)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I am not particularly comfortable with the way the current government is dealing with this issue.

Just a case in point, I was elected to the House only five months ago. When I came to this place, one of the first things that was discussed was whether I should get a 10% raise. I know of no other position that I could have aspired to where within months of getting the job I would automatically get a 10% raise. As I mentioned in my comments, some of the raises proposed in the legislation are obscene. To propose a raise that is more than what some people earn in a year is obscene. I am not particularly comfortable that our wages should be tied.

I am an average Canadian. I would like to think that the people who elected me to the House feel that I am doing a good job and am working hard. If I am satisfying their needs, I should get the same average increase as they would. A fair salary increase for all members would be what the average Canadian receives.

We are very well paid. As I mentioned in my speech, some of our members do not take a salary from the House. They do this because they believe in the cause. I think most members elected to the House are here not for the money but because they feel they can contribute to Canadian society, and that is why I am here.

Private Member's Business

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member made a statement a few seconds ago about the fact that members come here because they love the work. I believe that is probably true, but it is also a bit of a dilemma if our salaries do not represent a wage level that permits members of Parliament or people to run for Parliament who have normal expenses and who are not independently wealthy. I happen to be one of those. I was an instructor at a post-secondary institution for many years. It was becoming increasingly difficult to pay all the bills living on a single salary with a family. That is one reason why I became a politician.

When I came here, part of my motivation was to see what I could do to reduce government spending and reduce taxation. Compensation for members of Parliament ought to be very balanced. It should not be so little that only people who are independently wealthy can run. Nor should it be so much that those who have been elected somehow feel they have won a lottery. It ought to be somewhere in the middle.

Perhaps the hon. member could expand a little on his comment because of the things I have stated, namely that I do not believe we want only the elite, the rich, the independently wealthy to work as members of Parliament?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, the term he used about our salaries being balanced is a term with which I am very comfortable. What is most appropriate is that we have balanced compensation.

I agree with the hon. member that we should not be underpaid, but by the same token, we do not want to think that running for Parliament is the same as winning a lottery. Therefore, I am not suggesting that any of us should not be compensated. We should be fairly compensated. Our hours of work are extremely long and we should receive adequate compensation to reflect that. However, I do not think a 10% increase per year is appropriate in this case.

We should task the government with resolving this situation once and for all. We should come up with some kind of a formula that is appropriate to all concerned. As the member mentioned, let us quit government waste and maybe we can all be fairly compensated as a result.

•(1715)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The division stands deferred until tomorrow, at the end of government orders.

[*English*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed a bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1720)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ) moved that Bill C-278, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I now have a ruling to share with the House concerning Bill C-278.

The Chair has examined Bill C-278, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system) to determine whether its provisions would require a royal recommendation and thus prevent the Chair from putting the question at third reading.

The improvements to the employment insurance program envisioned by this bill include the required minimum number of hours worked in order to qualify, lengthening the period that one can receive benefits, and, as well, increasing those benefits.

Private Member's Business

It is clear that such changes to the employment insurance program would have the effect of authorizing increased expenditures of public revenue. Inasmuch as section 54 of the Constitution, 1867, and Standing Order 79 prohibit the adoption of any bill appropriating public revenues without a royal recommendation, the same must apply to bills authorizing increased spending of public revenues. Bills mandating new or additional public spending must be seen as the equivalent of bills effecting an appropriation.

Accordingly, I must require that Bill C-278 be accompanied by a royal recommendation. Therefore, in its present form, I will not put the question on third reading unless a royal recommendation is received for this bill.

Today, the debate on the motion for second reading will continue as scheduled, and the motion shall be put to a vote at the close of this second reading debate.

Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper. The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

SECOND READING

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, I learned about the difficulties experienced by the unemployed in my riding and throughout Quebec. Employment insurance is particularly inequitable for young people and women; for young people who must accumulate 910 hours before being eligible for their initial application, as well as for women returning to the labour force after more than two years' absence.

When we see that, in the early 1990s, no less than 52% of the unemployed aged 25 or under were receiving EI benefits and that now, only 16% are, we cannot help but want to change EI. That is why, today, I want to debate the bill I am introducing, the aim of which is to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system).

Employment insurance is no longer an assistance program, but a hidden tax. The current Prime Minister, as finance minister, raided the EI fund to balance the budget. The Auditor General's latest report, tabled November 23, 2004, states that the government continues to raid the EI fund, despite the efforts of parliamentarians.

Furthermore, the powers of the Employment Insurance Commission, which consists of individuals who are contributors, will apparently be suspended for yet another year. Even now, the Prime Minister is interfering in social affairs, by misappropriating the EI fund.

In May 2001, the Bloc Québécois adopted a unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on employment insurance reform and we continue to call for its implementation. The Bloc Québécois is against the fund being wasted and proposes the creation of an independent employment insurance commission and fund, the reimbursement by the government over a 10-year period of misused money, the setting of premium rates by the Employment Insurance Commission and the improvement of the system for the most vulnerable workers.

The Bloc Québécois has proposed special employment insurance measures for workers affected by the softwood lumber crisis. Consider this: the current employment insurance fund surplus of \$46 billion is roughly triple what the Chief Actuary at Human Resources Development Canada thought would be enough in 2001—some \$15 billion.

In 2000, an HRDC study showed that 35% of claimants reached their maximum weeks of benefit. The 2004 employee premium rate is \$1.98 for every \$100 of insurable employment. The equilibrium premium rate for 2004 is estimated by HRDC to be \$1.81. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in January 2004 was 7.4% across Canada and 9.1% in Quebec. The average regular benefits in dollars a week is \$289.54.

Accordingly, in the summary of this bill to correct a few of the problems, we find several amendments made to the Employment Insurance Act.

First, it reduces the minimum qualifying period to 360 hours of work regardless of the regional rate of unemployment. It also increases the benefit period by five weeks. It increases the rate of weekly benefits from 55% to 60%, and it repeals the waiting period. It eliminates the distinctions between a new entrant and a re-entrant to the labour force. It also eliminates the presumption that persons related to each other do not deal with each other at arm's length. In addition, it increases the maximum yearly insurable earnings from \$39,000 to \$41,500 and introduces an indexing formula. It requires the Canada Employment Insurance Commission to pay out, as workforce support measures, at least 0.8% of the insurable earnings—as estimated by the Commission—of all insured persons. Finally, it provides that, if a person has insurable earnings of not more than \$3,000 a year the Minister of Human Resources Development must refund all deductions made from those earnings.

• (1725)

Taking it point by point, first we have the reduction of the minimum qualifying period to 360 hours. We know that on May 3, 2004, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development held public hearings in connection with the updating of its 2001 report. The major unions presented a unanimous proposal to modify the EI eligibility rules.

The current system provides that eligibility for EI benefits begins in a range of 420 to 910 hours of work, depending on the place of residence and whether the person is a new entrant or a re-entrant to the labour force.

Unanimously, these same unions asked that eligibility for employment insurance begin at 360 hours of work, regardless of residence. This rule would provide more satisfactory coverage for workers in seasonal businesses and also for all workers in insecure jobs.

Private Member's Business

As things stand now, the threshold for eligibility for benefits varies between 420 and 700 hours. It is 420 hours in regions with an unemployment rate over 13% and 700 hours in regions where the unemployment rate is 6% or less. The bill before us today would reduce the minimum qualifying period to 360 hours of work for everyone, but the benefit period would vary with the region and the regional rate of unemployment.

In comparison to the current figures, the new system would represent an average increase of five weeks in the benefit period and an increase in the maximum benefit period from 45 to 50 weeks.

In regions with high unemployment—13% or more—it would provide between 30 and 50 weeks of benefits depending on the hours worked and the unemployment rate. For Quebec's high unemployment regions, it would substantially reduce what we call the spring gap or black hole.

For example, in Gaspé, where the unemployment rate as of December 4, 2004, was 20%, a person who worked 360 hours would be eligible for 36 weeks of benefits. If that person worked 420 hours, he or she would be eligible for 37 weeks, which is 5 more than at present. On the North Shore, where the unemployment rate is 12%, the maximum benefit after 360 hours of work would be 26 weeks and after 420 hours, 27 weeks.

The CSN appeared before the Subcommittee on the Employment Insurance Funds on November 15, and stated that their main demands still concern the same things: to improve the eligibility rules by requiring only a minimum of 360 hours so that 70 to 80 percent of those who lose their jobs can receive employment insurance benefits. The main reason for this is that 39% of the work force only works 35 hours a week.

The Canadian Labour Congress, through its representative, Hassan Yussef, said the following:

We've submitted a full brief, and more recommendations for training and of course 360 hours for qualifying for unemployment insurance. The CLC recommends scrapping the current patchwork of qualifying hours in favour of 360 hours for all EI entitlements, unemployment benefits, as well as pregnancy, parental leave, sickness, and compassionate leave benefits

Quebec is increasingly interested in the principle of reconciling work and family life, and therefore views this 35 hours yardstick as a significant obstacle to developing such a policy. It needs to be revised without delay.

Let us look now at extending the duration of benefits. In this bill we are suggesting an increase of 5 weeks, from 45 to 50. As you are aware, there are many workers in industries with seasonal fluctuations, including the fishery, agri-food, tourism, the hotel industry and so on.

Seasonal employment is common in the regions, but it also affects the major centres, particularly as far as tourism is concerned. Every year, many people are confronted with the seasonal gap, which can be as much as a dozen weeks long, between the time their EI benefits run out and their work starts back up. According to federal statistics, close to 35% of EI recipients use up all their benefit period.

The Bloc Québécois is calling upon the government to put an end to this seasonal gap by adding five weeks to the maximum benefit period, raising it from 45 weeks to 50.

I will now read an excerpt from the 2001 report of the Standing Committee on Human Resource Development.

• (1730)

The Committee recommends that the government consider readjusting Schedule I of the Employment Insurance Act so as to provide a maximum benefit entitlement of 50 weeks like that afforded combined maternity/parental benefits.

Compared to the existing schedule 1, consideration should be given to augmenting benefit entitlement beyond the minimum hourly qualification requirement, so as to provide an additional incentive to work for a longer period of time than the minimum number of hours required to qualify for benefits. The new schedule 1 should provide no more than a maximum increase of five additional weeks of benefits for any given combination of hours of insurable employment and regional unemployment rates. In addition, schedule 1 should be reconfigured, to the greatest extent possible, to ameliorate the "gapper" problem.

This is how, every year, seasonal workers go through the gap. Resource regions are particularly hard hit by that problem. It seems to us that action is urgently required.

With respect to the third element, increasing the rate of weekly benefits to 60%, we are asking that benefits be increased from 55% to 60%. This can be illustrated by saying that, in Quebec, minimum wage is \$7.45. For an employee working 35 hours a week, this means \$260.75 gross, which would entitle this person to employment benefits of less than \$287, before tax, every two weeks, or \$574 per month.

In 2002, 192,000 Quebeckers were earning minimum wage, of which 66.6% were women. The 55% benefits rate affects in particular low-income workers, two-thirds of whom are women. Hon. members will understand that, as critic for the status of women, I am very sensitive to this problem facing poor women in Canada, who are raising children in poverty, in addition.

On May 4, François Vaudreuil, the president of the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques, told the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, "We also believe it is urgently necessary to increase to 60% the replacement rate of the benefits".

At that same committee, many witnesses called for an increase in the rate of benefits. Some were suggesting it be set between 60% and 66%. It is nonetheless important, they reminded the committee, to find a balance between meeting the needs of eligible unemployed workers and reinforcing the incentive to work.

The committee heard the testimony of the the acting director general, labour market policy directorate, at Human Resources Development Canada. Her name is Wilma Vreejwijk, and she told us:

These are important questions in terms of ensuring that there is the income adequacy. Certainly, when looking at the issue of the benefit rate, we need to strike a balance between ensuring that there is sufficient support provided to those people that need it. At the same time as ensuring that we have the work incentives right. So that is why we have the family supplement, and the family supplement has, as you pointed out, gone up each and every year quite recently. This supplement has gone up because the families need it.

Another change is to repeal the waiting period, which penalizes workers who have lost their jobs. There is also another change. There is the elimination of the distinction between a new entrant and a re-entrant to the labour force.

There is also the elimination of the link between persons related to each other. This is a question of members of the same family being entitled to employment insurance.

Accordingly, the Bloc Québécois bill wants to make a change and shift the burden to the commission to prove that there is a link of dependence between the employer and employee.

Note that the Employment Insurance Commission would be required to pay out, as workforce support measures, 0.8% of the insurable earnings—as estimated by the Commission—of all insured persons.

Since my time is running out I will just say that this is an important measure to ensure that it is no longer unemployment insurance we are talking about, but employment insurance and that we understand the need for training for all workers.

• (1735)

In conclusion, this bill to amend the Employment Insurance Act proposes eliminating some of the irritants and inequities in the employment insurance program. I hope that all the hon. members in this House will support it for the good of our society, which needs more of our attention.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Trois-Rivières on her speech, which was very precise and clear, but most of all, respectful of the commitments that the Bloc Québécois made in the election campaign.

The same cannot be said of the Liberal Party of Canada, which forms the government. We had the best proof of that this week. It decided to reduce the employment insurance premiums by 3¢. That means 3¢ per \$100 of earnings. For people earning \$500 a week, it would mean 15¢ more in their pockets as workers. At the end of a year in which they worked 40 weeks, it would mean \$6.

My question for the member from Trois-Rivières is the following. Would it not have been more relevant and worthwhile, instead of reducing employment insurance premiums by 3¢, to evaluate the increased amount and to redistribute it and broaden eligibility to the employment insurance plan? Would this not be comparable? Would this not have been preferable?

Basically, I do not think that there is a single member of this House who went around during the election campaign telling people that, if his party were elected, it would reduce employment insurance premiums by 3¢, saying that he was proposing a benefit. This is not what we understood. We understood the Liberal Party to say that there would be real reform. I was here when the report was adopted unanimously three years ago. I was our human resources critic at the time. Today, we are seeing the same behaviour of the Liberal majority.

I would therefore like to know from my colleague whether it would not actually have been much better to reduce the eligibility requirements to 360 hours, as she proposes? In this way, we would

have a much fairer system for people who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs and who need an income between jobs.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is all the more interesting because yesterday we were able to obtain more information at the Subcommittee on the Employment Insurance Funds. Mr. Malcom Brown, assistant deputy minister of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, stated that reducing the qualifying period for the employment insurance program to 360 hours for everyone would cost only \$390 million, the same cost as a reduction of 3¢ in premiums. It is a choice that should have been made.

With all the workers in our constituencies coping with the gap, with the growing poverty that we see, we all know that this money would have been well used to meet essential needs if it had been put back into our regional economies.

That would have made it possible to reduce the required number of hours to 360. It would have opened access to employment insurance for another 90,000 people. It would have been wonderful for workers and it would have given a big boost to our economy.

• (1740)

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on the bill that she has just introduced. It is even more significant because in those regions that are far from the big centres the change from unemployment insurance to employment insurance has led to a loss of income. In just one region, Abitibi—Baie-James and Abitibi—Témiscamingue, the loss amounts to \$66 million. That is a lot of money for the regional economy. We know that many remote areas of Quebec are in real difficulty.

I ask my colleague if this measure would really allow low income workers and seasonal workers to achieve a more decent standard of living.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that increasing the benefit period by five weeks would help the regional economy and workers. For many of them, employment insurance is not a choice but a last resort. In this type of economy, most workers cannot wait for something else to come along. There is nothing else.

It is important to know that the government does not put one cent into the employment insurance fund. It is insurance, plain and simple. People expect, when making a claim, to receive their fair share from what employees and employers have paid. This is only normal.

If I insure my home, and something bad happens, or there is a fire or what have you, I expect to be paid for the damages incurred. I would think that the same principle should apply to employment insurance.

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in this debate on Bill C-278, which proposes changes to employment insurance.

Private Member's Business

This is a particularly important debate, because EI plays a key role in providing temporary income support for people coping with job loss and for employed people who cannot work for reasons of sickness, childbirth, parental responsibilities, or the need to care for a dying family member. Also, for those Canadians who have lost a job, EI provides skills development opportunities, that is, training so that they can return to work quickly.

To illustrate the importance of EI, let me outline how it helped Canadians during the period 2002-03. During that time, Canadians filed 1.87 million new EI claims and \$12.3 billion was paid out in benefits. In addition, 638,000 people participated in active re-employment measures, an investment of \$2.1 billion in training and in the labour market success of the people concerned.

Clearly EI is there for people when they need it most, but this was not always the case. Before the introduction of EI in 1996, aspects of the old unemployment insurance system caused some to question the very sustainability of this vital program, a program which is vital for social reasons, for reasons of humanity and, by the way, for reasons of keeping our economy going. Those features included the encouragement of people to become dependent on program benefits, and it emphasized unemployment rather than employment, in some cases actually acting as a disincentive to work.

Unfortunately, this bill threatens to return us to the situation that confronted us in the past. Let us take, for instance, the bill's proposal to relax entrance requirements.

Four successive monitoring and assessment reports, the reports which review the program regularly, have stated that overall access to EI benefits is strong: 88% of employees would be potentially eligible for EI if they lost their jobs. Among those working full time, 96% would be potentially eligible for EI if they lost their jobs. Among part time employees, 57% of women and 41% of men would be potentially eligible for EI if they lost their jobs.

Bill C-278 would also increase the benefit duration, which could have the effect of making unemployment more attractive than work. Such a suggestion contradicts successive EI monitoring and assessment reports which have said that the current duration of benefits is in fact appropriate.

For example, on average, regular beneficiaries receive benefits for less than two-thirds of the weeks for which they are eligible, which means that the benefit duration is already more than enough for most clients. Even people living in areas of high unemployment typically do not use more than 70% of their entitlement. Add to this the fact that benefit exhaustion rates have steadily declined since EI's introduction, from approximately 37% in 1995-96 to about 31% in 2001-02. All of this suggests that the benefit duration is appropriate.

What about the bill's call for the government to raise the replacement rate and maximum insurable earnings? In my opinion, this also is unwise given that the current 55% replacement rate serves as a balance between income adequacy and ensuring that work incentives are maintained. In addition, individuals in low income families with children can get additional support through the family supplement, which allows these individuals to receive as much as 80% of their insured earnings.

I might add that at the time of EI reform concerns were raised about the fact that the level of maximum insurable earnings at that time was substantially higher than the average industrial wage and so was acting as a disincentive to work. To address this, the level was reduced to \$39,000 a year with the understanding that it would be reviewed at some later date when the average industrial wage increased to the equivalent of that level.

Such a review has not occurred because the maximum insurable earnings figure is still 10% higher than the average industrial wage. It is important to note that 70% of all paid employees have earnings below the \$39,000 level, which means that the majority of claimants have their employment income fully insured by the EI program at its current level. This level seems to be set properly as well.

• (1745)

Finally, there is the proposal to increase the premium refund threshold from \$2,000 to \$3,000, while also lowering entrance requirements to 360 hours. This recommendation is also ill-advised since it would effectively result in some workers being in a position to qualify for and receive EI benefits without having paid premiums, something none of us would wish to see happen.

It is clear that the bill contains a number of serious flaws. That brings me to the heart of the matter, namely, that given the vital importance that EI plays in our social safety net, it is critically important that any changes we make to it be well thought out in advance to avoid unintended negative consequences that could damage the whole program and its ability to help workers.

Of course, this is not to say that EI is cast in stone, never to change. Some fine tuning is required from time to time, and when evidence indicates that such changes are necessary, the government has acted. For example, this happened when we removed the intensity rule, when we adjusted the clawback, and when we made the small weeks provision a permanent and national element of the program and subsequently increased the threshold.

We have also commenced a pilot project to test labour market impacts in areas of high unemployment by adding five weeks of entitlement to address the needs of those who go without income for a period of time prior to the resumption of their work.

However, rather than make rash, badly thought out changes as this bill would have us do, we instead need to pursue a balanced approach that takes into account larger issues such as the likely impact of changes on the labour market as a whole, on the financial sustainability of EI in the future and on the EI program as a whole. Because EI is such a complex program, involving employed as well as unemployed people, that impacts many aspects of our economy and the lives of millions of workers and their families, we need to get it right for their sake and for the sake of future generations who will need to call on this program for assistance. It is for this reason that I cannot support the bill.

That being said, I do want to commend the member for her commitment to helping workers cope with job losses and the difficult task of balancing workplace and family demands, a commitment which I share and which the government shares. I particularly share her concern about balancing work and family and particularly about the return of women to the workplace. Those are two areas in which I personally would be glad to work with her to maximize the benefits of this program.

I would urge her and other members to work with the government as it seeks to pursue a balanced and thoughtful approach to fine tuning the EI program so it can continue to help Canadian workers for generations to come. It is only by getting the full range of ideas and insights, such as some of those the member has put forward this evening, that we can make this important program even better than it is.

I regret to say that I cannot support the bill.

• (1750)

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about unemployment and the employment insurance program, it is important to remember that the most important priority has to be the creation of jobs so that people do not have to claim employment insurance and that they do not have to stay on employment insurance for a long time. I am not sure that the bill in front of us addresses that; in fact, I believe it may have the opposite effect of hurting it.

The real problem in the employment insurance system for basically over a decade has been an overtaxation of the workers who are paying employment insurance premiums and an overtaxation of the employers who pay matching contributions, in fact a larger proportion of it. Over the past decade that has produced a surplus of some \$46 billion.

That is \$46 billion more that has been taken in by the system than has been paid out. It is far in excess of anything that would be possibly required to sustain a system. What it constitutes is a theft under the guise of employment insurance of tax dollars in order to help the government with its general revenue issues. That is where the money has been diverted. It is a theft from the workers and employers under the guise of employment insurance.

The worst part about it is for the people for whom the impact is greatest, the people from whom it takes the most. It is unlike income tax which is quite progressive, and unlike the goods and services tax which is related to spending and has a progressive element. This is the most regressive. In fact, after a person's income tops a certain level, the person stops paying employment insurance premiums. The

Private Member's Business

overtaxation and the surplus hits most of all the people who earn the least. That is the real problem.

We have to stop adding to the \$46 billion surplus. We have to return that money to the people who paid it. If we look at that money, \$46 billion in 10 years has been taken from employers and employees. That money could have been used to create more jobs. That money, had it been in businesses, might have kept many of them from going bankrupt. In the hands of individuals, that \$46 billion could have been used to pay mortgages, to buy skates for their kids and to live better lives.

Simply put, the premiums have been too high for the past decade, far in excess of what was necessary to pay the system. We need to change it to solve that. I am not sure this bill does it.

In fact there was an announcement recently by the minister about a drop in the rate. Employees have been paying \$1.98 on \$100 of earnings. That is going to drop to \$1.95. Under those numbers, based on the performance we have seen in the past, the employment insurance system shall again generate a significant surplus. That is demonstrated based on the performance year after year.

In making that decision, obviously the government has decided to continue this process of overtaxation of workers and employers. Through that overtaxation it will continue to generate a surplus and turn it over to general revenues. It will continue that process which is a very regressive and unfair taxation that hurts workers.

There is only one other alternative if that is not the case. The numbers show clearly in black and white, and we do not have to be sophisticated accountants to understand, that it would have taken \$1.88 or \$1.82 in premiums, depending on to whom we listen, to be balanced in the past year. Therefore, \$1.95 is going to be too much and will continue to produce a surplus.

What is the only other option? It is that the government is expecting a massive economic downturn, that it is expecting job losses to grow significantly. If that is the policy position of the government, if that is the pronouncement, and I believe that is the projection of the minister in making that declaration, I think that is something that is very grim. I hope the people of Canada will take note of the pessimistic view held by the government toward the future job environment.

The real answer and the real priority is to stop the theft of those dollars from the system, to make employment insurance work as a real fund so it does not generate excessive surpluses that are turned over to general revenues. The bill, however, does not represent a solution to that problem.

In fact, what we expect would happen with this bill would be a huge increase in the cost of the employment insurance program and as a result, a huge increase in the required premiums. That would mean huge tax increases for ordinary workers and employers who are trying to create jobs. In the end, all that happens when we put taxes on job creation, and that is what employment insurance premiums are to some extent, and when we increase them, it becomes more punitive. We would be limiting the job creation that occurs and taking money out of the pockets of workers.

Private Member's Business

There are significant problems. Let us take one example only from this particular proposal. That is the proposal to increase the maximum insurable earnings to \$41,500 a year. If we did that, the net impact under the current rate of employment insurance would be more money would be taken out of the pockets of employers and employees than would actually be returned to workers through the benefits that result from the increased allowable annual earnings.

• (1755)

Essentially, the proposal from the Bloc would result in a grab of taxes from workers that would then produce a surplus that would be turned over to general revenues. That does not solve the problem. It makes the problem that we have right now even worse. It effectively is an increase in taxation on workers again. Why that is being proposed in this legislation I do not understand.

As well, when one looks at the problems in the system, the private member's bill does not address in any balanced way the nature of the problem. All it speaks to is one side of the equation.

In fact, employers have been very hard done by under the current operation of the employment insurance system. A principle has been established for some time that 58% of the premiums was paid for by employers and 42% by employees, a 1.4:1 ratio, whatever the rate is set at every year. The principle was that employers had some greater measure of control over whether an employee kept or lost a job. That was the justification for it.

Since that principle was established, the employment insurance system has been changed dramatically. No longer is it simply straightforward insurance for those who lose their jobs, but there is a significant social component that has been added. Compassionate care leave has been added, and extended maternity leave has been added, all funded through employment insurance.

In the normal case, there is very little that an employer has to do with an employee's decision on whether or not to have a child. Effectively, that justification for the higher burden on the employers has altered significantly over time as the program has been expanded. Fairness would dictate that the burden should also be shifted to a more even balance, perhaps fifty-fifty sharing. That principle is not established here.

In addition, we have a problem with overpayments. Many people who work multiple jobs or who go from one job to another and change jobs within a year pay into employment insurance in one job and then in another and the employee ends up having an overpayment. When it comes time for those people to file their tax returns, because they have paid too much into the system, more than their insurable earnings allowed, they get a rebate for an overpayment into the system.

Millions and millions of dollars are returned every year to employees, but the employers who made the matching contributions do not have the benefit of that return. They do not get the same compensation. That is unfair and it is an imbalance. We do not see any element to address that in this legislation.

I would suggest that the bill before us is one which is unfair to workers and to the taxpayers who are funding the system, the employees who are trying to make better lives for themselves. It is a system that results in huge increases to them without, in many cases,

any perceptible benefit. It is going to kill job creation. It is going to have a drag on the economy. It is not a positive result. For that reason, I find it difficult to support the bill before us.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Trois-Rivières for having introduced this bill in the House of Commons. I am flattered because there are a number of similarities with the bill I introduced before the election. In computer lingo, this virtually called cut and paste. It could be said that the NDP and the Bloc Québécois have much in common when it comes to the needs of workers in regions providing seasonal employment.

Some Liberals also agree with us that changes are needed. There have been past examples of this. I remember our colleague in the House of Commons, Georges Farrah, from Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok. I think he lost the election just over employment insurance.

This shows the hardships that people can experience in certain regions. We just need to consider the hon. member for Beauséjour, who is in favour of the EI reform. His experience representing people in the region of Cap-Pelé and Bouctouche, people working in the fish plants, has made him understand the importance of EI to seasonal workers.

Not so long ago, I met with the people of Cap-Pelé. The mayor asked if anyone was coming to recruit people working in fish plants to take them to Moncton. He said that he was happy for Moncton. He congratulated the city of Moncton on its unemployment rate, which is 5% or 5.6%. But if everyone from his region goes to work in Moncton, it means that the Cap-Pelé region might as well shut down. As the mayor of Cap-Pelé, he is not happy with the way things are going.

I was surprised to see my colleague from Peterborough shift and say that he cannot support such a bill. He was a member of the committee created after Bill C-2. The recommendations were along the lines of this bill. He has changed since he sat on that committee but, back then, he strongly supported the bill.

I remember too that the people of the Cape Breton region strongly supported it. When there is an election, people want to be part of the government so they can ensure that changes are made to EI because it needs changing. People are starting to realize that there have been a number of elections in which they say they want to sit on the government benches in order to change EI but it does not change.

This week I thought it shameful that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development had the gall—excuse me for saying so—to lower the employment insurance premiums. I thought this was a bit rude of him, especially since the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development is currently considering changes to employment insurance.

Instead, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development is listening to the Conservatives. That is why I say there is no difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals. The only thing the Conservatives ever ask for is lower employment insurance contributions, because they think the employers are being over taxed.

I do not know how many times I have said, here in the House of Commons, that no employer has ever called me to say that he was going to lose his business because he could not afford to pay the employment insurance premiums and that he needed them lowered. I hope my phone starts ringing tomorrow morning. I have not received those types of calls.

However, I have seen people demonstrating in the street to say that the employment insurance system does not cover seasonal employment adequately. That is what I have heard.

When I went to the Forestville area before the election, I was talking to people in the streets, including Forestville's young priest and the former priest, who is now retired. I remember what the priest told me. He said it was not a political story, but a human story. The cuts made to employment insurance by the Liberals in 1996 had a direct impact on families and children. That is where they are hitting.

● (1805)

There are 1.4 million children going hungry in Canada and it is the Liberals' fault.

During the election campaign, I remember hearing varying opinions from the Conservatives. In 2000, the Conservative leader said, in the West, "We must not change employment insurance. We must make some cuts in it". In the east, he said, "We are going to change employment insurance for you." He did not know that the *Globe and Mail* is sold all over Canada and that people read both messages.

The shameful thing is that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development listened to him and is reducing EI benefits to such a point that there will not be any money left in the EI fund to pay for what people need.

It may be a little comical, but as I have often said, you do not catch lobsters on St. Catherine Street in Montreal. The lobsters are in our waters, in Chaleur Bay and off Cape Breton. The lobsters are in the Bay of Fundy. People in Peterborough love our lobsters.

These people have seasonal jobs in regions like ours, in the Gaspé and Chaleur Bay, where everything freezes up in the winter. In fact, you cannot catch lobster in the winter. And besides that, we have to work within the quotas set for us by the government.

The people of Cap Pelé—and not just them, because this happens all over Canada—have found it necessary to cheat the system to accumulate hours, to do what some call "banking" their hours. They are breaking the law. In Cap Pelé, where the member of Parliament is a Liberal, 1,500 people were caught banking hours. The government told them, "We will not do anything to you. We will make the employer pay \$5 million."

At the same time, in my riding, 11 people were also banking hours. They had to repay the government \$10,000 and \$11,000. It is

Private Member's Business

shameful that in a national program the government treats people represented by a Liberal member on way and the people represented by a member from another political party another—in a democracy like ours.

This is the biggest theft the government has committed in Canada: it has stolen \$46 billion from the pockets of the workers and employers who have paid premiums into the employment insurance fund, and they took it to balance the budget and get to that zero deficit. It was all done on the backs of the workers who have lost their jobs and the children who have nothing to eat. It is shameful. That is what the Liberal federal government has done. Today it boasts that it has lowered premiums every year, and it does that to please the Conservatives.

I would like the people back home to know that the Conservatives are opposed to changing employment insurance. They think that slashing EI will send people back to work. I regret to say that my dear friends do not know their Canada. They do not know that some Canadians are in seasonal jobs and need employment insurance to get by. Punishing them and their families is not the way to help them get by.

I congratulate the member for Trois-Rivières on making recommendations, which I support 150%. I am not likely to ever need EI, but I see the hardships the Liberals have caused in my area.

When Doug Young lost his job here in Parliament, it was because he thrust the people of my area into abject poverty. I have women calling my riding office and talking of taking their own lives, because there is nothing left in the house. I have fathers calling and talking of suicide, because they are not able to support their families. The Liberal government is responsible for their desperate situation, with the help of the Conservatives.

know that I have said all this before. That is because the problem is still the same. There are Liberals who agree with me on this. I hope that this time they will be capable, in a minority government position, to do something about it. The same goes for the member for Beauséjour who has finally said—and it made the papers—that he hoped that, with a minority government, Parliament would be able to bring about the changes required to restore to workers what they are entitled to, and what has been taken from them.

The communities would be delighted to hear that. Workers are not the only ones hit by this. The Liberals are punishing the communities too. We are not all in Toronto, where there are jobs for the taking. In our area the situation is different, our workers are lured away to take employment elsewhere. Our regions are emptied. It is a kind of legal deportation. That is what is happening. The government is sticking it to the people in need.

Is this our Canada? Sometimes, we have to ask ourselves that question. We are not all as lucky as Alberta. If we had oil wells at home and if we no longer needed to fish, things would be different. I can assure the House that people back home are hard workers. When they move to Alberta, they are the first ones to get jobs, because they are hard workers. Contrary to what Doug Young once said in Hamilton, they are not lazy. That was written in the *Globe and Mail*.

Private Member's Business

• (1810)

In conclusion, I hope that hon. members will support this bill, that Liberals who are still not convinced will soon be and will do the right thing. It is not up to the Liberals to take that money and use it to reduce the debt and achieve a zero deficit. That money is there to help the needy, the families, the 800,000 people who do not qualify for employment insurance benefits.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to tell hon. members what I think and what seasonal workers in our region think.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst for his colourful speech, which was a great motivation to me.

The purpose of Bill C-278, before us today, is to make a number of efficient and necessary amendments to the Employment Insurance Act.

As the hon. members know, employment insurance is a reality for thousands of people on the labour market in Quebec. With any luck, you will never have to collect benefits in your life. But that is not true for all workers.

This bill, introduced by my hon. colleague from Trois-Rivières, is geared toward those workers who currently need or will need employment insurance. These workers contribute to the plan and, as such, should be able to use it when necessary. This bill contributes to that, by making it easier to have access to employment insurance for those who really need it. I will explain in a moment why this bill is good for all workers.

First, this bill reduces the minimum qualifying period to 360 hours of work, regardless of the regional rate of unemployment. At present, the qualifying period for employment insurance benefits varies between 420 and 910 hours of work, depending on the place of residence and whether the claimant is a new entrant or re-entrant.

We are asking that this period be reduced to 360 hours, regardless of where the claimant lives. This rules, unanimously approved by the central labour bodies in Quebec, would provide more appropriate coverage for workers in seasonal businesses, and also for all workers in unstable jobs.

Currently, the benefit period is determined based on the regional rate of unemployment. To qualify for employment insurance, a worker must have worked 420 hours in regions with an unemployment rate over 13%, and 700 hours in regions where the unemployment rate is 6% or less.

We can understand that such measures may not be appropriate for seasonal workers in a region where the unemployment rate is low. They are also not appropriate for workers in marginal areas. The same is true for workers in cities where the rate of employment is different from the regional rate.

I want to point out that, while this bill sets the eligibility threshold at 360 hours, regardless of where the workers live, the benefit period will continue to vary from region to region.

Speaking of the benefit period, the cut-off point is now set at 45 weeks. In 2000, a study by Human Resources Development Canada showed that 35% of EI recipients use up their entire benefit period.

Many of them were victims of the infamous seasonal gap. In other words, for a period of several weeks, sometimes up to 10 weeks, unemployed people had no income. This gap would be compensated for by the proposal in this bill to raise the benefit period from 45 weeks to 50. Adding those five weeks would, depending on the number of hours worked and the regional unemployment rate, entitle a contributor to receive between 30 and 50 weeks of benefits.

Another change contained in this bill is the increase in the weekly contribution rate, from its present 55% to 60% of insurable income.

In Quebec, the minimum wage is \$7.45. So a person working a 35-hour week has a net weekly income of \$260.75. This entitles an unemployed worker to an EI cheque of \$287 every two weeks, before taxes, or \$574 a month.

This is about what it would cost to rent a small apartment in many cities in Quebec, what we call a “four-and-a-half” —oh, but I forget that EI recipients also have to eat and clothe themselves. Where will they get the money for that, if most of their cheque goes to keep a roof over their head?

Statistics show that in Quebec low wage earners are the ones who make use of EI most often. They are earning the minimum wage, as I have already mentioned. In 2002, 66.6% of the 192,000 workers earning minimum wage in Quebec were women, and women also made up two-thirds of low wage earners.

• (1815)

Instead of lowering premiums in a ridiculous way—such as the government's announcement this week that it would save every worker 3¢ a week—the Liberal government should instead look closely at what is in this bill. Increasing the rate of weekly EI benefits from 55% to 60% is a practical measure that would make it possible to give better support to people who really need it.

I would like to go back now to the minimum qualifying period in hours making workers eligible for employment insurance benefits. This time, I would like to point out the ridiculous distinction between people who enter the labour force and those who re-enter it. Fortunately, the bill before us proposes to put an end to this distinction.

At present, a person who enters the work force, or comes back after two years of absence from the work force, must accumulate 910 hours of work to be eligible for EI benefits. For other workers, as I mentioned earlier, the number of hours ranges from 420 to 700. The primary victims of this discrimination are, once again, women and younger workers.

With regard to women, the distinction can be clearly seen when they leave the labour market to start a family. If they prefer to look after their own children, the EI system penalizes them when they return to work.

As for young people, we are aware that first jobs are often seasonal, short-term or part-time. But when that job is over, if the young worker does not have 910 hours, there is no income. This discrimination toward those who enter or re-enter the labour force must be eliminated.

I would like to address another point. This bill will—at last—require the Canada Employment Insurance Commission to pay out, as workforce support measures, at least 0.8% of the insurable earnings—as estimated by the Commission—of all insured persons. In concrete terms, that amount would be used to help the unemployed upgrade their skills, learn new ones, or become self-employed.

I hope that the hon. members from all parties will support this bill and, finally, improve the employment insurance system for the people who are its real stakeholders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to expand on intergovernmental affairs and, more particularly, on so-called “asymmetrical federalism”.

First, I think that the notion of “asymmetrical federalism”, which lately has been used a great deal by federalists, seems instead a kind of asymmetrical interference.

There are numerous examples, in fact, where the federal government interferes in areas of jurisdiction belonging to Quebec and the provinces.

This is especially true with regard to health. The increase in federal transfer payments for health constitutes a victory of the first federal-provincial first ministers conference this fall, but it has been darkened by the resounding failure of the conference on equalization. This increase is accompanied by federal government oversight and control over these matters.

By establishing action plans, common, well-defined objectives, performance indicators or even so-called national standards, the federal government ensures that it can continue to invade areas of provincial responsibility.

In addition to health, look at municipal affairs or even day care. In terms of intergovernmental affairs, the main strategy of this government is to offer Quebec and the provinces money while it simultaneously imposes its own conditions.

With the arrogance it is known for, this government has even created a federal department of regional development, whose investments will be used to duplicate programs already administered by Quebec.

Adjournment Proceedings

Regional development is not a federal responsibility, since the Constitution confers upon Quebec and the provinces responsibility for most issues in this sector: natural resources, education and training, municipal affairs, and so forth.

No, the problem that is slowing down regional development is the same one that faces all the other sectors in which the federal government does its best to interfere, the fiscal strangulation of Quebec and the provinces.

The fiscal imbalance, that only our Liberal colleagues refer to as financial pressure, is the key to understanding the intrinsic dynamic of this so-called asymmetrical federalism.

The fiscal imbalance financially weakens Quebec and the provinces and allows the federal government to free up huge budgetary surpluses, which it gladly uses to burst into provincial jurisdictions and to give itself the noble task of solving problems it created in the first place. In passing, it uses its “providential” intervention to dictate the conditions for funding, thereby ensuring it has the visibility it so desperately seeks.

If we can recognize this underhanded strategy called nation-building, then we will have a better understanding of why the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is celebrating the virtues of “asymmetrical federalism”, since, in doing so, she is also celebrating the federal government's desire for centralization.

And yet, the minister has tried to explain that asymmetrical federalism was not written into the throne speech because that would have been entirely superfluous, and that this concept is the new way the federal government operates in its relations with Quebec and the provinces.

Still, it is pretty obvious. Even though this concept enables the government to hide its hopelessly centralizing aims, asymmetrical federalism has been exposed as a formula that, even on the surface, is much too favourable to Quebec for all the Liberal dinosaurs with ideas from the Trudeau era.

That is why the Speech from the Throne said not one word about this concept that has been introduced as the new method of intergovernmental cooperation. It only took one federal-provincial conference for this ghost ship to crash on the sharp reefs of equalization. Like a mirage that dissolves as we approach it, asymmetrical federalism will fizzle out.

This government will not be able to boast of practising real asymmetrical federalism until it allows Quebec and the provinces to intervene in its own exclusive jurisdictions.

• (1825)

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be taking part in the discussion on the question raised by the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes on October 6.

During the exchange with the Minister of Intergovernmental affairs, this hon. member chose to deplore the fact that the Speech from the Throne was silent on the notion of asymmetrical federalism. He complained that the speech could have stated:

Adjournment Proceedings

—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.

In reply, the minister responded that the government has been promoting and practising this very type of federalism ever since it came to power. The Speech from the Throne specifically highlights cooperation among the partners in the federation, namely, the provinces and territories. In fact, this seems so obvious that many of us are left wondering whether he actually read the Speech from the Throne.

Specifically, the throne speech centres on such principles as respect for diversity and a consensus driven approach for reaching national objectives. This implies an asymmetrical approach that corresponds to a flexible federalism that respects differences.

Regarding the health agreement, which was raised just a few moments ago, Quebec premier Jean Charest stated on September 17, “Today we are marking a very important step in Canada's history. We have blazed a new trail in Canadian federalism through the recognition of asymmetry by all partners of the federation”. The Prime Minister echoed these very sentiments in his response to the Speech from the Throne on October 6. He said:

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...We see the importance of national will in the health deal.

In the wake of the health agreement, with which all of Canada was delighted, but which the leader of the Bloc Québécois described as “the very least”, it will be possible to resolve other questions while fully respecting those differences. That flexibility will help us pursue common objectives for the well-being of all Canadians and this includes Quebecers. All will benefit from a consensus driven solution approach.

Similarly, the Speech from the Throne contains other key commitments of our government: the commitment to early learning and child care. It states:

The Government will put the foundations in place with its provincial and territorial partners—

It also states:

Within this national framework, the provinces and territories will have the flexibility to address their own particular needs and circumstances.

What more can one ask for in terms of flexibility and asymmetrical federalism?

Given the hon. member's great interest in the formula, I invite him now to reread the speech delivered in the House by the intergovernmental affairs minister on this very topic on October 7.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, as I believe I have shown, the Liberal government is using asymmetrical federalism as a camouflage for constitutional interference. When you realize this, it becomes easier to understand the scope of the statement, made in October, by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and I quote:

I do not believe Canadians are interested in reopening constitutional talks.

These words truly reveal her vision of things. This government wants to avoid talking about the constitution, since every day it is fully engaged in asymmetrical meddling. I ask you, why would it bother to restart constitutional talks?

It is disturbing to hear a minister of intergovernmental affairs, worse yet, one representing a riding in Quebec, allege that having a constitutional debate is no longer of interest to anyone. This attitude is all the more troubling given that Quebec did not sign the Constitution Act, 1982.

For Quebec, asymmetrical federalism can lead only to a constitutional step backward, since it and federal interference are one and the same. The only way to put an end to federal interference for good is for Quebec to become a sovereign nation.

• (1830)

[English]

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, there we have it. I have to admit that I find the Bloc Québécois attitude a little curious. It is a sovereigntist party but of course it remains active on the federal scene. It sits in the Canadian Parliament, not, it says, to promote its sovereigntist ambitions, but to promote Quebec's higher interests.

How then can it be so honestly enamoured of asymmetrical federalism when it does not believe in this very system to begin with, which it feels will bring insufficient gains to Quebec?

In election campaigns, it consistently hides its true intentions and presents itself to Quebecers as an unwavering defender of their cause. What is that primary cause? The answer should be quite simple. After all, the majority of Quebecers want their governments to work together.

This is something that even the Bloc Québécois has embodied in this debate by the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes and he cannot ignore this. The Bloc will not fool anyone by its true intentions. While it claims to defend the notion of asymmetrical federalism, the political logic of the Bloc is just not on the straight and narrow and it is in fact rather disconcerting. This debate provides us with yet another excellent example of that very fact.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and ask another question further to an issue I raised on November 5. There is quite a controversy between the fishermen in New Brunswick and P.E.I. in particular about the herring fishery between the two jurisdictions in the Northumberland Strait.

At the time, I asked if the minister would acknowledge that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans failed to correct a very obvious error in the description of a fishing zone off Prince Edward Island. The minister responded to me and he did acknowledge that it was a very hot issue between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. He said it was important that we act in a responsible way.

Adjournment Proceedings

He then went on to say that the fact is the herring stocks are very healthy, so healthy that according to the department's science the total allowable catch was increased to 10,000 tonnes. However, I was talking to some very knowledgeable fishermen today, people in the fishing industry in P.E.I., who tell me that there is a problem with the fisheries department science.

Although the scientists are saying it is the biggest biomass in a long time, there was hardly any spring herring fishery off P.E.I., the mid-season was very weak, the inshore did not catch their allowable catch, and the seiners did not catch their total allowable catch either. It hardly matters that they increased the total allowable catch if the fish are not there and they are not catching them.

Basically what I was told today by this very knowledgeable person in the P.E.I. fishing industry is that the people in the fishing industry do not have confidence in this DFO science that is saying the herring fishery is the best it has been in decades. They would like DFO to enlist the services of independent science and independent scientists to analyze this and give an independent assessment of the biomass for the herring. This was a concern of theirs.

They still do not have their answer as to why the correction was not made in the herring fishing zone off P.E.I. originally, but now the answer from the minister indicates that there is all of this herring there and the fishermen say they are not there.

Just between us, Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of faith in the opinion of the fishermen because they have turned out to be right every time.

I would like to ask the very distinguished parliamentary secretary who is going to answer the question why they have not corrected that obvious error they made when they changed the coordinates of the 25-fathom line off P.E.I. It was so obvious. There was one description in English and one description in French.

Instead of having a rectangle off P.E.I. that was a protected area, it was a triangle. It made absolutely no sense and anybody with any common sense would have known that it was not right. Even the parliamentary secretary would know it was not right if he looked at this, so I wonder if he could explain why it was not corrected, and then could he answer to the fishermen of P.E.I. about their request to have independent scientists rather than just DFO scientists?

• (1835)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know this is a great day of jubilation and celebration in the member's riding of Cumberland—Colchester because yesterday three calves were born to a single cow, which rarely happens. I read about it in the paper and I know the member will be celebrating that all week.

On behalf of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House this evening to say a few words in this important debate about the herring fishery in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

I appreciate the question from the member about the proximity of the exclusion line to Prince Edward Island and the perceived damage that this causes the fishery.

Let me begin by saying that while I understand that the P.E.I. inshore fishers are concerned about the potential impact of the seiner

fishery, current scientific information indicates that there are no major conservation issues with the seiner fishery and seine gear.

However, in the interest of addressing their concerns, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced last month that a three year scientific fishery will be undertaken on the northeast coast of P.E.I., thereby answering one of the member's questions.

This fishery will be monitored independently and will allow detailed sampling to determine the size of the catch, by-catch and any bottom encounters with the gear.

DFO will use these results to determine if further changes need to be made to the exclusion zone. I am pleased that both the herring seiners and the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association have agreed to accept the results of this additional scientific work.

I would like to remind everyone that the state of the herring fishery in 1983, to which my hon. colleague referred, was very different from what it is today.

In the 1980s, more than 80% of the total allowable catch was landed by the large herring seiners, with 20% being landed by the inshore fishers. In recent years, seiners have been allocated only about 20% of the total allowable catch.

Two decades ago there were 65 seiners active in this fishery and now there are only 5 such vessels. That is why the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and I strongly believe that it makes sense today to find a solution that works in the current situation, rather than returning to a closure line that existed in the past under very different circumstances.

DFO will continue to work with the herring industry to develop a more comprehensive approach to managing the herring fishery, including enhanced reporting, analysis and verification of total removals of herring by all fishing sectors.

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health for telling everybody about the three calves born to a single cow. I suppose if one is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, one would follow these issues very closely.

Again, I am pleased to hear that the three year scientific fishery will be done by an independent organization. If the parliamentary secretary has that information, could he tell us what independent organization will be monitoring this fishery?

Even though the parliamentary secretary says that he does not want to go back, would he go back to the fisheries regulation or designation that was there before on the 25 fathom line and at least acknowledge that DFO did make a mistake and then did not fix it right, which is what caused this rift between P.E.I. and New Brunswick? I am not saying that is the entire issue now, but by not correcting that problem when it happened, it created hard feelings and raised the level of antagonism between the fishermen of P.E.I. and New Brunswick to a high level. Could he just address those two issues for me?

Adjournment Proceedings

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I regret that I do not have the name of the organization or the scientists who will be doing the independent analysis, but I can tell the hon. member that in similar fisheries, like the Bay of Fundy fisheries, the data is collected by the industry and given to an independent third party that does the collation, puts it together and gives it to both the Department of Fisheries, as well as the fishers.

As far as the line, having known the discussions that a former minister of fisheries would have had on such issues, I can say that sometimes we have the same argument from both sides from the same group. McLeod's Ledge had a similar line. It was an antiquated line but it was put there for another reason. The minister at the time was asked to remove it and asked to be permitted to fish outside that line. At the same time they asked that former great minister of fisheries that he re-add a line that had been removed, for whatever reason, but no longer had any purpose to be re-established.

What I should tell the member, which very few people recognize, is that the then minister of fisheries, who is an honourable gentleman and great Canadian, in his discussions with the fishermen and the Governments of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, came to the line as it is now, as it was imposed last year, with the agreement

of all and with congratulatory notes being sent by that organization. However it then created political difficulties in Prince Edward Island because it was such a contentious issue. The difficulty that these fleets had in catching their herring made it worse and made the thing more political.

I think the current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has done a great job, in working with both organizations, on this independent analysis and a three year test fisheries program that should give the information needed by all to come to a friendly resolution of this matter.

● (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The hon. member for Simcoe—Grey not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice had been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:40 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, December 8, 2004

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Canada Economic Development

Ms. Boivin 2447

Natural Resources

Mr. Doyle 2447

Orléans - St. Vincent de Paul

Mr. Godbout 2447

Education

Ms. Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques) 2448

Shaar Shalom Synagogue

Mrs. Kadis 2448

Sable Island

Mr. Duncan 2448

Global Positioning System

Mr. Rota 2448

Marie-Hélène Prémont

Mr. Guimond 2448

Peacekeeping Service Medal

Ms. Minna 2449

The Senate

Mr. Epp 2449

Foreign Credential Recognition

Mr. Malhi 2449

Health

Ms. McDonough 2449

Euthanasia

Mr. Kenney 2449

Hanukkah

Mr. Marceau 2450

Hanukkah

Mr. Reid 2450

Agriculture

Mr. Adams 2450

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Harper 2450

Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 2450

Mr. Harper 2450

Ms. Sgro 2451

Mr. Harper 2451

Ms. McLellan 2451

Air Transportation Security

Mr. MacKay 2451

Mr. Lapierre (Outremont) 2451

Mr. MacKay 2451

Mr. Lapierre (Outremont) 2451

Mirabel Airport

Mr. Duceppe 2451

Mr. Lapierre (Outremont) 2451

Mr. Duceppe 2451

Mr. Lapierre (Outremont) 2452

Ms. St-Hilaire 2452

Mr. Lapierre (Outremont) 2452

Ms. St-Hilaire 2452

Mr. Lapierre (Outremont) 2452

The Environment

Mr. Layton 2452

Mr. Dion 2452

Fisheries and Oceans

Mr. Layton 2452

Mr. Regan 2452

Citizenship and Immigration

Mrs. Ablonczy 2452

Ms. Sgro 2453

Mrs. Ablonczy 2453

Ms. Sgro 2453

Ms. Guergis 2453

Ms. Sgro 2453

Ms. Guergis 2453

Ms. Sgro 2453

Employment Insurance

Mr. Lessard 2453

Mr. Volpe 2453

Mr. Lessard 2453

Mr. Volpe 2453

The Environment

Mr. Bigras 2453

Mr. Dion 2454

Mr. Bigras 2454

Mr. Dion 2454

Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Kenney 2454

Ms. Sgro 2454

Mr. Kenney 2454

Ms. Sgro 2454

Health

Mr. Fletcher 2454

Mr. Dosanjh 2454

Mr. Fletcher 2454

Mr. Dosanjh 2454

Veterans Affairs

Mr. St. Amand 2454

Ms. Guarnieri 2455

Justice	
Mr. Siksay	2455
Mr. Cotler	2455
Mr. Siksay	2455
Mr. Cotler	2455

Ukraine	
Mr. Goldring	2455
Ms. Carroll	2455
Mr. Menzies	2455
Ms. Carroll	2455

Broadcasting Industry	
Ms. Oda	2455
Ms. Frulla	2455
Mr. Jaffer	2455
Ms. Frulla	2456

Faculté de médecine vétérinaire de Saint-Hyacinthe	
Mr. Loubier	2456
Mr. Mitchell	2456
Mr. Loubier	2456
Mr. Mitchell	2456

Royal Canadian Mounted Police	
Mr. Trost	2456
Ms. McLellan	2456

Whistleblower Protection	
Mr. Preston	2456
Mr. Alcock	2456

Research and Development	
Mr. Silva	2457
Mr. Emerson	2457

Sable Island	
Mr. Casey	2457
Mr. Regan	2457

Employment Insurance	
Mr. Crête	2457
Mr. Volpe	2457

HIV-AIDS	
Ms. Dhalla	2457
Mr. Dosanjh	2457

Business of Supply	
The Speaker	2457

Points of Order	
Oral Question Period	
Ms. Bakopanos	2458

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Budget Implementation Act, 2004, No. 2	
Mr. Goodale	2458
Bill C-33. Introduction and first reading	2458
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2458

Petitions	
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Lauzon	2458

Agriculture	
Mr. Lauzon	2458

Canadian Forces Housing	
Mr. Hill	2458

Child Adoption Expenses	
Mr. Hill	2459

Freedom of Religion	
Mr. Hill	2459

Fisheries	
Mr. Cummins	2459

Age of Consent	
Mr. MacAulay	2459

Counterfeit Currency	
Mr. MacKay	2459

Marriage	
Mr. Simard (Saint Boniface)	2459

Questions Passed as Orders for Returns	
Mr. LeBlanc	2459
Mr. Cummins	2460

Motions for Papers	
Mr. LeBlanc	2461

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Parliament of Canada Act	
Mr. Valeri	2461
Bill C-30. Second reading	2461

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House	
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. LeBlanc	2463
Motion	2463
(Motion agreed to)	2463
Mr. LeBlanc	2463
(Motion agreed to)	2463

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Parliament of Canada Act	
Bill C-30. Second reading	2463
Mr. Hill	2463
Mr. Gauthier	2464
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	2465
Mr. Reynolds	2465
Mr. Kilgour	2466
Mr. Gauthier	2466
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	2467
Mr. Prentice	2467
Mr. LeBlanc	2468
Mr. Kilgour	2469
Mr. Gauthier	2469
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	2471
Mr. Prentice	2472
Ms. Davies	2473
Mr. Lauzon	2474
Mr. Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	2475

Mr. Epp.....	2476
Division on motion deferred	2476
Message from the Senate	
The Acting Speaker (Mr. Proulx).....	2476

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Employment Insurance Act	
Ms. Brunelle.....	2476
Bill C-278. Second Reading	2476
Speaker's Ruling	
The Acting Speaker (Mr. Proulx).....	2476
Second reading	
Ms. Brunelle.....	2477
Mr. Crête	2479

Mr. Lévesque.....	2479
Mr. Adams	2479
Mr. Van Loan.....	2481
Mr. Godin	2482
Ms. Bonsant.....	2484

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Intergovernmental Affairs	
Mr. Bergeron	2485
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte).....	2485
Fisheries and Oceans	
Mr. Casey	2486
Mr. Thibault (West Nova).....	2487

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Publishing and Depository Services

PWGSC, Ottawa, ON K1A 0S5

Internet: <http://publications.gc.ca>

1-800-635-7943 or Local 613-941-5995

En cas de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :

Les Éditions et Services de dépôt

TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Internet: <http://publications.gc.ca>

1-800-635-7943 ou appel local (613) 941-5995

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:

Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services, PWGSC, Ottawa, ON K1A 0S5

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt, TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

**On peut obtenir la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5**