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(HANSARD)

Monday, April 4, 2005

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Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 4, 2005

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from December 8 consideration of the motion 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.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this House today in order to debate Bill C-278. This bill is the initiative of my colleague from Trois-Rivières, who has made a timely presentation illustrating the need to pass this bill quickly.

What is the urgency? People are deeply hurt, on a personal level, by the fact that they are being denied the employment insurance benefits to which they have contributed for their entire lives and to which they are entitled.

• (1105)

It is also a welcome initiative because we know that the federal government definitely intends to maintain the status quo and continue to dip into the EI fund, which is totally unacceptable.

There is the occasional serendipity or somewhat disturbing coincidences. Today, April 4, is the 70th anniversary of the relief camp workers' strike in British Columbia. These workers went on strike to demand a number of working conditions and measures that would provide them with income if they lost their jobs. This happened on April 4, 1935, and the strike began at 11 a.m., just as my speech this morning was scheduled for 11 a.m.

In a fortuitous and also very unusual coincidence, at 11 this morning, an initiative by the Mouvement des sans-emploi called "En marche" was launched in Montreal and other places throughout the province. It calls upon the government to substantially improve employment insurance. Coincidence? Perhaps, but it is certainly a nice reminder to this government that the Bennett government was defeated in the 1935 election, after adopting a position and measures

quite similar to those adopted by the current government on the unemployed and people facing employment difficulties.

This government could very well meet the same fate. Currently, the problem for people in Canada—but which does not exist in Quebec—is that there is no viable political alternative with which to replace this government. That is the only thing missing. Otherwise, this government would have been defeated in the last election on June 28.

• (1110)

There must be a viable political alternative even with regard to employment insurance. I invite the Conservatives, today, if they want to improve their image, to vote in favour of Bill C-278; otherwise they will be tarnished with the same brush as the Liberals.

Obviously, the unemployed are the ones affected, but so are their families and their children. We know that, in Canada, the quality of life of children has deteriorated, because children have gotten poorer. And children are getting poorer because parents are poor. One factor contributing to family and child poverty is denying the unemployed what they are owed, despite the fact that they have an insurance fund guaranteeing them benefits should they have the misfortune of losing their job. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has used this insurance fund for other purposes.

• (1115)

This is the same Liberal government that tightened up EI eligibility criteria in order to finance or to balance its budget on the backs of the workers. The Bloc's position is to start by creating an independent fund and an independent commission so that the government can no longer get its hands on it.

In ten days or so, we will be looking at Bill C-280. The government needs to pay back, over ten years, the money it has got its hands on, and that is what is in our Bill C-278, along with having the commission set the contribution rates. The commission must have a balanced representation of employers and workers because they are the ones who contribute to it. As well, the entire employment insurance system needs to be improved.

Private Members' Business

The position of the present government, the public needs to be reminded, is devious and dishonest. Why so? Because, having pillaged the fund, the Liberal Party made the commitment in the 2000 election campaign to fix what it had destroyed. It did not do so. In 2001, Liberal Party representatives on the Standing Committee on Human Resources and Skills Development, which was addressing the situation with EI, voted unanimously in favour of correcting the situation. Not only was that not done, but as well the Liberals have continued to betray the public by dipping into the fund for other purposes.

Speaking of devious and dishonest, in the last election, barely a year ago, the Liberal government again made a commitment to remedy the situation. Not only did it not do so, but this House, on the initiative of the Bloc Québécois last November, recognized unanimously that the employment insurance fund must not be used in future for any other purpose than unemployment, because it is contributed to by workers and employers and no one else. One might then have expected the fund to be left untouched. But no, the government continues to help itself to money for other purposes. Even the Auditor General pointed this out in her report last November. Liberals on the Human Resources and Skills Development Committee voted unanimously to remedy the situation, based on the set of measures set out in Bill C-278. Since then, the Liberal government has again been doing everything it can to get around these recommendations and enact measures that are contrary to that recommendation.

I want to go back very briefly to the measures proposed in Bill C-278. We have to ask ourselves if we have the money to implement these measures. We do and that money is in the fund. As I said earlier, what needs to be done to restore sustainability, not for the fund but for families, is first to give special status to seasonal workers by setting a single minimum qualifying period of 360 hours for all those who contribute to the fund. We must remove the existing discrimination caused by the disparity in the number of hours required, eliminate the gap by extending by five weeks, from 45 weeks to 50 weeks, the maximum benefit period, and provide special benefits for older workers under POWA, which is a program to help older workers who lose their jobs.

●(1120)

We should also amend the Employment Insurance Act so that persons related to each other are no longer treated as if they had cheated—if somebody cheated, it is definitely not workers. We should also increase the training fund to 0.8% of all insurable earnings; abolish the 910 hour rule for those who become part of the labour force or who rejoin it; increase from \$2,000 to \$3,000 the threshold of insurable earnings to qualify for benefits; increase the rate of benefits from 55% to 60%; and increase the maximum yearly insurable earnings to \$41,500.

In conclusion, all these measures could easily be implemented with the surpluses that the fund will generate again this year, which are in excess of \$3 billion, while the proposed measures would only cost \$1.8 billion.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to participate for a few minutes in the debate on Bill C-278.

First off, the hon. member talked of this fund—as he called it—as if it was an independent employment insurance fund with an accumulated surplus or something like that. Of course, that is quite ridiculous. There is no separate fund. There has not been one since 1986, following a report by the auditor general of the time, who called for the abolition of the independent fund and its replacement by a system under which amounts paid in would equal amounts paid out each year, essentially. As we know, there were lean years under the Conservatives, when there was a deficit. As we all know, too, there were other, better years—after our party took office.

There were the occasional surpluses, of course, from that time on, but, significantly, there were also sizeable reductions in the amount of contributions by employees and employers as well. Initially, contributions were about \$3.30—or at least that is what was announced. They have been reduced to under \$2. Since we have been in office, we have cut contributions by a third. I am not talking about contributions to the fund, because there is no separate fund, as the hon. member knows. After 19 years, it is a little late to claim that the fund still exists. In fact, almost a generation has passed since this approach was abolished by a Conservative government and not a Liberal government.

Now that I have set things straight, I would like to speak to Bill C-278 a little more.

[English]

Let me begin by saying that all parties of this House continue to recognize the employment insurance system in Canada as being very important in the lives of Canadians and they recognize its vital role in Canada's labour market. No one is advocating abolishing the system or anything like that. We all recognize what the system does and we recognize the necessity of having a regime like the one we have.

●(1125)

Our citizens know that they can count on EI to be there for them in the event of a job loss or an illness that prevents them from working. This component of having employment insurance available during illness or in other periods of time is something that is newer in the system; it has made the EI system much better over the last number of years, just like the pregnancy leave provisions and so on. Of course they were not part of the original employment insurance system; they are additions and they have made it better. Canadians can also count on this program when they need time off for a critically ill family member as well as the care of a newborn child, as I have indicated.

Our current EI system flows from the reform measures that our government implemented close to 10 years ago. That time, they were the Liberal government's improvements.

When considering what is being proposed in Bill C-278 to change the employment insurance system, it is instructive to first look back at the earlier efforts we undertook as well as those we are continuing to implement today. Let me remind the House that in 1996 we introduced the Employment Insurance Act, the most comprehensive reform in 25 years of Canada's system of support for unemployed workers, so it is not as if this private member's bill is the only change to the system offered in recent times.

The reforms that were introduced in 1996 made the system much fairer. They reduced dependency and provided help to claimants in low income families with children. No one is talking about that any more. We all take it for granted. The reforms brought about measures to help Canadians prepare for and get back to work. That is the training component and how useful that has been in the constituency that I represent and elsewhere.

Those were important changes. They were not easy to implement but they were necessary. Now many Canadians are reaping the rewards.

Let me talk a little bit about the legacy of the Liberal government reforms. Over the past 10 years the Canadian labour market has improved significantly. We rebounded from a jobless recovery to a period of strong employment growth. Over the weekend I listened to the news about the difference between Canada and the United States. Last month the United States was hoping for some growth at last in terms of employment. Again, unfortunately for the United States, and perhaps for us too in a way, that improvement was not forthcoming.

In our own country, although the growth was slower, it was still by our standards considerable growth in terms of employment in the month of March, which, traditionally, is one of the lowest months of the year for employment. This is just as we are ending the winter and people are not yet back to work on the summer construction and all those other jobs that come on stream once the weather improves.

Our labour market is the envy among G-7 countries. Over 2 million jobs have been created since 1993. This is the net increase. It is not 2 million jobs to replace other jobs that were lost. It is a net gain of 2 million jobs since 1993.

There has been a remarkable increase in the pace of job creation this year alone, more than 25% higher than in the previous 14 months. This information was contained in a speech given by the Minister of Finance in November 2004. Canadians have seen 10 consecutive reductions in EI premiums.

The Conservative Party across the way, which is just starting to heckle here, should be very careful heckling EI premium reductions. Need I remind the House that when the Conservatives were in power EI premiums were always increasing, unemployed Canadians were increasing, the deficit was increasing and the accumulation of national debt increased. We all remember those terrible Conservative years, much unlike the years of prosperity that we are enjoying under the very successful Liberal government.

Canada's unemployment level of 7.1% in 2004 has not been this low in 30 years. This is the kind of successful administration that our party has been giving to this country. Our labour force participation rate, particularly for women, is at an historic high.

I know all this good news is a little hard to take for the Conservatives across the way, particularly those who were around when the Conservatives were in power. I think that given the case I need to recite a few more of them with the indulgence of the House.

It was reported that the labour force participation rate for women of 67.4% in 2004 and the productivity performance has improved significantly in recent years. From an average annual growth of 1.1% between 1980 and 1996, it has nearly doubled every year since 1997.

Private Members' Business

I have several pages of more good news about how the employment system has been improved under the Liberal government. Perhaps I could invite other colleagues to continue and share this news with the House for the benefit of hon. members, given that my time is about to expire.

● (1130)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to represent the NDP during the second reading debate on Bill C-278. I want to recognize and pay tribute to my colleague from Trois-Rivières for bringing the issue of employment insurance to the House of Commons where we can debate it. I would also like to recognize and acknowledge the contribution that my NDP colleague from Acadie—Bathurst has made in his tireless advocacy on behalf of an employment insurance system that works instead of an employment insurance system that clearly is broken, dysfunctional and fails to provide its core function, which is income maintenance on behalf of unemployed workers.

I am here to tell everybody here that the current employment insurance system does not work any more. It is not an insurance system at all. It is another tax on workers because they have to pay into the program but it is almost impossible to collect any benefits should they become unemployed.

The current employment insurance system is a cash cow for the Liberal government. It was designed that way and, believe it or not, and it is almost unbelievable to me the more I research it, it was yielding \$750 million a month more into the coffers of the Liberal government than in benefits being paid out. The Liberals could have fixed that but they chose not to because they were harvesting the money. They were reaping the money out of the employment insurance system and on the backs of unemployed people.

I want to point out that just in my own riding of Winnipeg Centre the cutbacks to eligibility caused \$20.8 million less per year in benefits going to people in my riding; \$20.8 million a year sucked right out of the heart of my riding. It has pushed more low income people into actual poverty because they have gone from unemployed wage earners to being cut off the insurance program that they paid into in good faith.

To deduct something from a worker's paycheque for a specific purpose, income maintenance if one is unemployed, and then to use it for something completely different, such as tax cuts for the wealthy, is, at the very best case scenario, a breach of trust and, in the worst case scenario, out and out fraud. That is what we have been faced with for the past decade of the current employment insurance program.

When the member for Trois-Rivières tries to bring some integrity into the employment insurance system, I am here to thank her, applaud her and celebrate that action.

I cannot believe the comments from the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell when he tries to sell this as an improved employment insurance program. Nobody qualifies any more. They take and take off people's paycheques but if people are unfortunate enough to become unemployed they will not be eligible for any benefits. What kind of an insurance scheme is that?

Private Members' Business

What would we think of a house insurance scheme that makes it mandatory to pay premiums but if our house burns down we would have less than a 40% chance of collecting any benefits? We would not call that an insurance program. We would call that a rip-off, a fraud and a lie.

The government has been harvesting money out of the employment insurance system for a decade and incrementally rationing little improvements back up to where it once was. It was once operating as an employment insurance system.

I am a carpenter by trade. I have been on EI probably 10 times because it was designed to help people who, because of the nature of their work or other reasons, were simply unlucky to find themselves unemployed. That is what it was for. Well, I wish everyone good luck in qualifying now. I will not even have time to go into the gender bias. It is completely unfair to women in that women are more likely to be in part time employment situations and the least likely to qualify. Does anyone know what the percentage is of women in part time jobs who are eligible for EI? It is 25%. If we factor in Canadian youth who are unemployed, it is 15%.

• (1135)

Who would design such a program? It is clearly not designed to provide income maintenance to unemployed people. It is designed to be a cash cow for the Liberal government so it can use it for its priorities, one of which has been tax cuts for the wealthy. Talk about a perverse form of Robin Hood; rob the poor to give tax cuts for the rich.

As members can tell, this program has infuriated me ever since 1996 when the government implemented these changes and gutted the UI system.

The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell pointed out that the government has to assume the responsibility if the fund goes into arrears and therefore it is justified to go into surplus. If we add up the total accumulated deficit ever since the program was implemented in 1948, it has been \$11 billion. It has fallen into arrears by \$1 billion, \$2 billion, \$5 billion now and then in times of high unemployment, for a total of \$11 billion to \$13 billion, depending on how we add it up, but the current surplus in the fund is \$50 billion. It is almost five times higher than it needs to be, which is what the Auditor General keeps pointing out. The government is stockpiling money like crazy, except it is not stockpiling it. It is spending it.

As the Prime Minister has pointed out when questioned on this, there is no EI fund, there is no pile of \$50 billion of our money waiting there. The government spent it. It was taken off our paycheques. The unemployed were promised income maintenance and then the government spent the money on something completely different. That is not fair to Canadians.

Let us point out again that this is not the government's money. In the 1980s the federal government stopped contributing to the EI fund. It used to be a tripartite venture: employer, employee and the government paying into it. It ceased to be that. Now it is just employee and employer. The government does not pay a penny into the EI fund other than to administer it. Therefore it is not even the government's money. It has no right to the money, except that it passed the prerequisite enabling legislation where it says that it has

the right to deduct that money off our cheques and use it for whatever it sees fit.

I have to mention one of the most galling changes the government made. As a carpenter I deal with carpenter apprentices in trade school. The government began assigning a waiting period for apprentices when they leave the job to go to trade school. They are not unemployed and they never had that problem before. Income maintenance for apprentices in trade school was one of the designated uses allowed under the old Unemployment Insurance Act but the government started applying a waiting period, so for the first two weeks of their trade school they do not get any benefit at all.

It is a lousy \$80 million a year savings when the government chose to do this but the calculated effect that it has had is that 11,000 apprentices have dropped out of trade school because they could not afford to be without income for that period of time.

The government is showing a surplus of \$750 a month by gutting the income maintenance for apprentices at trade school. It is saving \$80 million but 11,000 tradesmen are leaving the trade because of this incredibly flawed policy in dealing with employment insurance.

I am looking at Bill C-278 as an opportunity to restore some fairness back into the employment insurance system and get the qualifying period down to where people will actually be eligible and qualify for benefits, and to increase the benefits, not wildly but back to where they were which was at 60% of our income, which is what my hon. colleague from Trois-Rivières is proposing.

She is not proposing a grossly luxurious plan. She is proposing that the EI program be put back to where it was before the Liberals cut it back to 55%, to do away with the waiting period for apprentices when they are in trade school, and to deal with the incredible gender inequities and imbalance. If the government is supposed to have a gender screen or gender analysis to any legislation it puts forward, somehow this missed the analysis and the screen all together.

I will be voting in favour of Bill C-278 in the interest of fairness, in the interest of giving people what they paid for and in the interest of ending this travesty that the government calls the employment insurance system, but which has really been the biggest rip-off in recent Canadian history.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak this morning on Bill C-278, introduced by my hon. colleague from Trois-Rivières and so aptly defended earlier by my hon. colleague from Chambly—Borduas, the Bloc Québécois critic for human resources.

Private Members' Business

Before outlining the benefits of this bill for the workers, and the unemployed, I will take a moment to reply to the Liberal member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who said earlier that the Bloc Québécois should get up to date because there is no independent EI fund any more. I would just like to remind the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and all the Liberal members in this House that we are well aware of that. In fact, Bill C-280 will be introduced to restore the independent EI fund. We are well aware of the fact that it was abolished by the Conservatives.

The Liberal member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell neglected to say, however, that since 1996, the Liberal Party of Canada has been skimming off the surplus in the contributions paid by employees and employers to finance other initiatives. Since 1996, the Liberal government has skimmed off nearly \$54 billion from the program surplus to use this money for totally different purposes.

I do not wish to get too carried away this morning, but the Gomery commission is exposing some of the purposes for which the Liberal Party skimmed off the money. I can understand why the unemployed and the workers in Quebec as well as Canada are angry: since 1996, part of that money has been used to finance the sponsorship scandal. That is totally unacceptable.

That is what happens when people use money that does not belong to them. That is what the Liberal Party of Canada has done: it has taken money paid into the independent EI fund by the employees and employers and used it for other purposes. We can see the result. It has used this money that did not belong to it for all sorts of inappropriate purposes. Now, the Liberal Party will pay the price for that, as it did in the last election.

Why has the Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-278 in the House? It is so we can finally restore order to the entire employment insurance program. The name says it all: this is insurance for workers in the event they lose their jobs. That is the reality.

They are paying for insurance; however, since 1990, the federal government has not put a single dime into the fund. It is completely independent; in other words, even if it does not exist, the employers and employees contribute to it, so they can benefit from such a program.

All the Bloc Québécois wants to do is return control of the EI program to the workers. To ensure that it is truly insurance, my colleague from Trois-Rivières is proposing, seconded by my colleague from Chambly—Borduas, a series of measures that I will list for the House. It is worth reviewing them one by one.

The first measure reduces the minimum qualifying period to 360 hours of work regardless of the regional rate of unemployment. Currently, it depends entirely on the region in which workers live and on whether it is the first time they have contributed to EI. The threshold varies between 420 and 910 hours of work. A total of 910 hours of work represents over 20 weeks of work.

However, regions such as mine, Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, depend heavily on agriculture, tourism or forestry. These are seasonal industries. The workers are not seasonal, the jobs are. Given the local climate, agriculture, tourism and forestry are industries providing seasonal employment. It is not the fault of the men and women working in these industries; these are seasonal jobs.

When these workers pay for insurance, they deserve to be compensated during periods of unemployment.

The Bloc Québécois is proposing a single threshold of 360 hours of work. It is not complicated. This is one of the unanimous recommendations of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Second, Bill C-278 proposes increasing the benefit period by five weeks. With regard to the most disadvantaged regions with the highest unemployment rates, we are asking that this five-week increase be universally applicable.

● (1145)

So the system would continue to pay EI benefits for a variable number of weeks. There would be variations among regions, but there would be a five-week increase. In the most disadvantaged regions, where the rate of unemployment is at its highest, people were entitled to collect benefits for 45 weeks. This arrangement created a gap. The effect of the additional five weeks is to enable seasonal workers to fill the gap. Employees and seasonal workers, especially, have been asking us for this for a decade now.

Earlier, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell mentioned that the Liberal party had cut contributions. That was not what EI contributors were asking for. They wanted something in order to avoid having times of the year when they had to turn to social assistance in Quebec. Both employees and employers were calling for this. There was no call for a reduction in contributions.

Workers and employers called for a review of the plan. The Liberal party, however, decided to cut contributions with an eye to getting good press and some of the windfall produced by the plan. It has always talked of money, while the workers were talking about the conditions of the plan. This was established by two unanimous reports of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

The third measure involves increasing the rate of weekly benefits from 55% to 60%. Currently, benefits paid represent 55% of the previous salary. What we are saying is that the unemployed deserve indexing, and their benefits could be increased from 55% to 60% of the salary they were earning. That is what they would receive as EI.

Under the fourth measure, the waiting period would be repealed. This is probably the only insurance in the world with a two-week penalty period. That is what was done, and it was called a waiting period. Ultimately, though, everyone who lost their job faced a two-week penalty period. They were not entitled to remuneration in the first two weeks.

Private Members' Business

Considering that the program belongs to them, it is high time, as the hon. member for Trois-Rivières and the Bloc Québécois are proposing, that the two-week penalty period, the waiting period, be abolished.

The fifth measure seeks to eliminate the distinctions between a new entrant and a re-entrant to the labour force. Of course, this refers to the difference between 420 hours and 910 hours of work to qualify for employment insurance benefits. These people are workers. Whether it is their first, second or fifth job, they must work a minimum of 360 hours to qualify for employment insurance benefits.

As the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas said, the cost of all these measures was calculated and, given the contributions made to the fund by employees and employers, there is enough money to implement what the Bloc Québécois is proposing.

We are not exceeding any limits and, unlike the federal Liberal government, which used the money of employers and employees, we are not spending any additional government money. We are not doing that. The money that is in the fund would allow us to implement these standards and new conditions.

The sixth measure eliminates the presumption that persons related to each other do not deal with each other at arm's length. In other words, when persons working in a company hire people they know. If they work as an employee, they are entitled to employment insurance. In seasonal, agricultural, tourism, or forestry work, or any other sector that offers seasonal employment, the employer's close circle of friends or relatives should not be penalized just to create work for public servants.

The seventh measure increases the maximum yearly insurable earnings from \$39,000 to \$41,500 and introduces an indexing formula. The maximum insurable earnings are \$39,000, or currently 55%. We want the maximum to be increased to \$41,500 and for it to be indexed.

We need this more and more. Many plants have had to close because of globalization. We have talked about this in this House. The Bloc Québécois has always decried the Liberal government's policy on job losses in light of other global market economies. More and more people go from having good jobs with good pay to being unemployed. That is why we want to increase maximum insurable earnings from \$39,000 to \$41,500.

We also want to require the 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. We want to have a true workforce support policy. Like all the parties in this House, we want all Quebecers to have employment.

• (1150)

The problem is that because of Liberal policies, the unemployment rate in Quebec is still between 8% and 8.5%. It is the same in the rest of Canada. We have to be able to help those who need help the most and that is what my colleagues from Trois-Rivières and Chambly—Borduas are proposing on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

I hope that all my colleagues in this House will show a little respect for the unemployed and vote in favour of Bill C-278.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. I am not rising for a question. I believe there is time left to participate in the debate, is there not?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The hon. member will note that there is no question and comment period. The 10 minute period is for debate only.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I take part in this debate. I wish to commend my hon. colleague from Trois-Rivières for her work on this issue. I would like to limit myself to trying to convince the Liberals of something of which I will probably not be successful in convincing them. As members know, they can hardly show their faces these days. When they attempt to explain to the public, the workers who are denied a right, that all in all what they have done with the EI program was good, things get a little ugly.

I would like to invite the Liberal member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who spoke earlier, to come and travel across my region of Haute-Mauricie, where people have lost their money to the EI fund. I do not care whether the Liberals call it a fund or not. They must know how to write, because they wrote it somewhere. It is clear that they took money that did not belong to them. The member said they were kind because they reduced the premiums. Not one worker asked for lower premiums. What the workers wanted was to be able to rely on this insurance should they lose their job. The Liberals may laugh now, but they will not laugh when they face an election in the future.

Imagine someone taking out fire insurance on his house. It burns down with all his belongings in it, and the insurance company tells him that the bad news is that it will not be giving him any money. The good news, however, is that his premiums will be lower in future. Does that make any sense? That is the reform they are trying to sell people on, the reform they carried out in order, as my colleague has already said, to get their hands on as much money as possible. Soon we will be finding out even more about this government's dishonesty. I find it shocking that they are trying to put things over on people once again. I think they will take it just as far as they can go.

They have taken the money of about 38% of workers who contributed to EI in order to have some security. I keep hearing from people in my offices in La Tuque, Grand-Mère, Shawinigan and elsewhere in the riding “Mr. Gagnon, I have just lost my job and I am not entitled to benefits although I paid into it for years.” It is the same all over Quebec. Why? Because the Liberal Party took the money in order to do favours for its little friends. They claim that not only have they paid down the debt, but they have acted as good administrators because they have reduced it by \$65 billion. Of that amount, \$54 billion came from workers, and \$3 billion from seniors. As many palms as possible were greased, and now they are boasting about paying the debt down by \$65 billion. It pains me to see that they are capable of defending such things.

It is no surprise that, in raising such issues—and I know we are not allowed to comment on who is or is not present in the House—I will certainly not get any ovations on my speech from the people across the way. I am quite sure of that. The public has had enough. A couple of weeks ago, a mother asked me whether I could possibly go around to the schools to tell people it is still possible for politics to be honest. She found it depressing to hear our young people coming home from school talking about political scandals. I plan to do that, because a country survives because of politics, is administered by politics.

• (1155)

Since I am not allowed to use the word “lie” in the House, I will say that people are fed up with never being told the truth. Earlier, someone said that the government did everything to help workers, that it reduced premiums. Come on. This is not what workers want. They want their due. They do not want a reduction of their premiums. Whether they pay \$3 or \$2.95 is of little importance, but if they lose their job and cannot provide for their family even though they are insured, that changes everything.

The government is using nice rhetoric about poverty and how sensitive it is to child poverty. But can children be well-off when their family is poor? Can children enjoy what they are entitled to as children, including education and so on, when their working parents lose their jobs and do not qualify for benefits, even though they contributed to the employment insurance program?

Let us stop being hypocrites. Let us begin administering the fund like intelligent and honest people. The hon. member for Trois-Rivières is proposing an honest piece of legislation. Workers are asking for this legislation. Let us adopt it.

If the Liberals are opposed to it, I invite them to come to my riding and tell workers that they did their best to protect them. They will see the workers' reaction for themselves. The last election held in Quebec was quite telling. The next one, which may come sooner than some think, will show that we no longer want such corruption. We want to manage our own affairs in Quebec, we do not to be lied to anymore, and we will probably make the appropriate decision at the earliest opportunity.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to stand here today and support Bill C-278. It is an important bill and I would like to commend the member for Trois-Rivières for bringing this forward to the House of Commons.

This is an important issue not only for persons who have to collect employment insurance in times of need but also for those they support in their families, whether it be their sons, their daughters or other members of the family. They require a direct income in their households to provide food on the table, to ensure their kids go to school and that they will get the transitional support necessary to get back on their feet again because something has happened in the workplace that has dislodged them from an opportunity or from an employment situation that they had.

It is important to recognize at the outset that what we are talking about here are modest improvements to return the system back to what it was intended to do. It was intended to support workers and

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their families, and to ensure that we had a national strategy for people who are out of a job to get back on their feet and be productive again.

That is what it was about and those workers paid for that. They paid on a daily basis into a system for insurance, so that they could have the decency and integrity of chasing the Canadian dream to ensure that their families would be well taken care of and progress. They paid for that. It is not something that was handed to them on a plate. It is not a handout. It is something that people and workers paid into, and employers as well, because we all recognize the need to have the supports necessary when people lose their jobs, especially in this day and age when we have more transitional employment than ever before.

We have workers who are paying for upgrades at schools, putting out thousands of dollars in education because a lot of workplaces do not do it anymore. They have to pay that debt back at the same time that there are fewer opportunities to find employment that will be sustainable, consistent and support them in a decent lifestyle.

The government has stolen from them. It is as simple as that. People pay every single day that they work into a fund that should be there for them in a time of need. It is important to recognize the situation that happens when workers lose their employment and they end up having—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): May I suggest that the hon. member be very careful in the choice of words and expressions please.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the government has been a little bit reckless in its appropriation of funds related to workers.

I want to move the debate to the repercussions. It is very important to recognize the connection between employment insurance and child poverty. We know that women workers in our country face many difficulties. They often represent transitional employment. They often represent occupations that do not have full time employment and because of that, they often do not qualify for this system despite the fact they pay into it. At the end of the day, when it is supposed to be there for them, they do not benefit from it. That has to stop.

The fact of the matter is that less than 40% of women can actually collect from a system that they are forced to pay into. That is not acceptable and it has to change. This is a simple, modest, and practical way of dealing with that situation that is also going to assist child poverty. It will also assist communities because that money will be used to pay for groceries, rent, and the cost of heating homes. In Ontario, for example, our electricity rate is going up despite promises that it would not. The workers in my community of Windsor West have a higher unemployment rate because of the transitional employment there. They could benefit from this modest improvement.

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It is really important to recognize that this country does not have a national employment strategy. When workers lose their jobs, they are left on their own. They have very little support any more in terms of having the practical assistance to ensure that we move to new types of technology and training. The government is not involved in that. It has left it up to people to do that. It requires money to go back to school. It requires maybe a mortgage to be paid or helping kids go to school. These are modest improvements to ensure that integrity is going to be there for them.

It is amazing that at the peak of this program, there was a \$750 million per month surplus that the government was raking in off the backs of workers. Once again, this is not the government's money. This comes from people's paycheques, so that they can have something if they lose their job. Workers do not mind paying even if they never collect as long as they know it is going to be there.

Imagine our house or car insurance where we would only get a rate of return of 40% after paying into it, that there would be only a 40% chance if we had an accident or our house burned down. It is unacceptable. This type of fraud has to stop. The money is there. In the budget, the government just passed another \$5 billion corporate tax cut. It comes off the backs of working people and it is not going back to the workers where it should be.

I invite all hon. members to answer their constituents on this and explain why corporations, when they have record profits and earnings, need an additional \$5 billion in corporate tax cuts. Ordinary Canadians should be receiving the same benefits they have had in the past with a decent and modest improvement to our system.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in introducing Bill C-278, I have simply borne witness to the problems suffered by the working men and women in my riding and many other ridings all over Quebec and Canada, and to the present need for a discussion of social justice and equity.

As we know, there is no justice in the employment insurance system at this time. There are many workers who, having paid EI premiums all their lives, cannot draw EI benefits. That is unacceptable. We are seeing that the social fabric is wearing thin and poverty is everywhere. We have problems with health and there are costs associated with that. We are laying the foundation for a very difficult future. It is a very short-sighted policy not to provide even such minimal protection to the working people. The people, therefore, have asked for help in getting the government to recognize their rights.

All our lives, we work hard to pay for life insurance so that our families will not have money worries when we die. I do not see why, then, when we die, anyone would refuse them the right to collect those benefits. How can it be that only 38% of workers are able to collect benefits?

From another point of view, the government has handled its transfers from big business to small and medium businesses so badly that, in my riding among others, we have seen a dramatic rise in unemployment rates, because of the closing of the textile mills and the problems in the paper mills due to the still unsettled softwood lumber dispute.

As a consequence, on one hand, the economy is being allowed to wither away, and on the other, no support is being provided to the working population.

We have also seen, in the Canadian Labour Congress's economic analysis, that under existing rules, women and new entrants to the labour force are the ones affected. We know that women heading single-parent families are the poorest in our society. Thus, Canadian children are poor and malnourished, and that is a very difficult problem.

Coverage for young people is also truly discouraging. We know that from 1990 to 2001, it dropped from 52% to 16%. Therefore, it is really necessary to help our young people. That is why this bill has five major principles.

The first principle, obviously, is to protect the workers, so that all can benefit from coverage.

The second principle consists in making eligibility criteria more flexible, so that people can qualify for employment insurance after 360 hours. That is really reasonable. It would solve the problem women workers have when they return to work after a pregnancy. It would also solve the problem of young people starting out in the work force. What kind of a society are we preparing for them? They need to be integrated as part of our work force.

The third principle is extension of benefits so that workers in seasonal industries—suffering from what my colleagues have referred to as the seasonal gap—and workers with precarious employment can have proper coverage. It is a matter of adding five weeks on to the period to which people are entitled to benefits.

The fourth principle is more generous benefits. This is relatively minor. Going from 55% to 60% is not any great generosity, when these people are the ones who paid into it. Why then can they not get benefits back? This is a real injustice.

The fifth principle is helping new entrants. It is a matter of helping make it possible for everyone to live in a society where there is inequality between the rich, the big businesses, which will also be saving on contributions, and the poor. Equality between them is needed.

I therefore call upon all of my colleagues in this House to vote in favour of improved employment insurance. This bill is nothing more than a reflection of reality, of what the people in our ridings are asking for. It will be a change for the better from all points of view. Particularly where politics are involved, people very much need to see that the administrators here share their concerns and are at last helping the least advantaged members of our society.

• (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The time allocated for debate has expired.

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): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 6, 2005, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

The House resumed from March 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-38, an act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the issue at stake, there are several reasons why I, as the member of Parliament for Haldimand—Norfolk, will be voting against extending marriage to same sex couples.

First, I believe that the traditional definition of marriage is important to maintain the very clear distinction between opposite sex conjugal relationships and same sex ones. The traditional definition of marriage affirms the distinct nature of heterosexual bonding and its potential to sustain life and assure the continued existence of society as we know it.

To suggest that heterosexual marriage and same sex marriage are the same, runs roughshod over any distinction between homosexual and heterosexual bonding in an effort to create a one shoe fits all sizes category. It demolishes any meaningful recognition of the difference between same sex relationships and opposite sex relationships.

Different relationships have different words to describe them. Why? Because each is very distinctive. Parental relationships are distinctive from sibling relationships. Platonic relationships are distinctive from romantic relationships. Social relationships are distinctive from professional relationships. That is why we have different words to describe different distinctive relationships. That is another reason why same sex relationships should have a different definition from heterosexual relationships.

In light of the reasons I have mentioned, I believe our leader has taken not only a reasonable compromise position, but the only true middle ground position in this debate. This position opts to retain the

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traditional definition of marriage, while affirming legal recognition for same sex partnerships with equivalent rights and benefits. It is my view that this position is in accord with the views of the vast majority of Canadians.

The Conservative Party intends to amend the government's legislation to present this reasonable compromise position to preserve the traditional definition, while maintaining legal rights and privileges for same sex partnerships and explicitly protecting religious freedoms.

Protecting religious freedom is something with which the government likes to pretend it is concerned. It promises that freedom of religion will be protected in Bill C-38. These promises are cold comfort though and ring completely hollow to those concerned with protecting the rights of religious individuals and organizations. Why? Because these promises come from the same individuals who promised not only to defend and uphold the traditional definition of marriage, but to take all necessary means to ensure that the traditional definition was upheld.

How can religious officials and organizations believe that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister will protect religious freedoms when they are acting contrary to their own votes of just a few years ago? Both promised to defend the traditional definition of marriage. They now are doing the exact opposite. I guess this is just another case of Liberal promise made, promise broken.

Not only is the Liberal government turning its back on defending the traditional definition of marriage, but it is going one step further. It is usurping the rights of religious individuals and organizations by failing to do what it said it would; that is protecting the rights and freedoms of religious organizations and individuals. This is not just my personal opinion, it is the opinion of the highest court in the land.

In its advisory opinion, the Supreme Court recently ruled that the clause of a draft bill that was designed to protect religious freedom was unconstitutional. This clause, as drafted in the proposed legislation, deals with the solemnization of marriage which falls under provincial jurisdiction. Furthermore, the Liberal government has provided no specific statutory protection of religious freedoms in areas of its own jurisdiction. As a result, Bill C-38 offers no protection to public officials who for religious reasons refuse to fulfil a state imposed job requirement that might conflict with their personal conscience or religious beliefs.

For example, in B.C., Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland marriage commissioners have already lost their jobs for standing up for their religious beliefs. This lack of protection for both religious and civic officials, individuals and organizations is reason enough to defeat this legislation.

●(1215)

Our leader has said that he intends to legislate the traditional definition of marriage while protecting the equal rights, benefits and privileges of same sex couples and giving concrete assurances of religious freedom. That is his commitment now and it will remain his commitment when he becomes Prime Minister.

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In closing, I believe that the traditional definition of marriage must remain as it has always been, that is, between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. The majority of Canadians firmly believe in equal rights, but they also want to see the traditional definition of marriage protected, and that is how I will be voting.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to stand in the House today to support Bill C-38, the marriage for civil purposes act.

There is no doubt that if we were to ask 100 Canadians for their opinion on the definition of marriage we would be responded to with a wide variety of opinions and rationale. I appreciate the fact that the issue of same sex unions evokes strong emotions from both those who agree with it and those who disagree, but I support the need for respect to be exercised by all parties on both sides of the issue.

The marriage for civil purposes act proposes to extend the right to marry for civil purposes to same sex couples while ensuring that religious freedoms are protected. Today, same sex marriage is legal in many parts of Canada, including my home province of Ontario. Thousands of same sex couples have married. The legislation tabled by the federal government will simply extend this right to all Canadians.

The proposed legislation is consistent with the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on same sex marriage. It is important to remember that civil marriage of same sex couples is about civil marriage, not religious marriage.

The Supreme Court was very clear that religious freedom is already constitutionally protected under the charter. The court went on to state that religious officials cannot be compelled to perform same sex marriages that are contrary to their belief system. To do so would be a violation of the charter.

No church, synagogue, mosque or temple can be forced to perform a marriage that goes against its religious beliefs.

The government's bill affirms its commitment to upholding religious freedom by including a clause that reflects the freedom of conscience and religion under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The bottom line is that religious freedoms for all Canadians are protected under the charter and the government has reaffirmed that protection in this piece of legislation.

Extending the right of civil marriage for same sex couples is an affirmation of Canada's commitment to protecting minority rights and guaranteeing equity for all.

As a member of Parliament, I am proud to respect and proud to defend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter is distinctly Canadian, embodying our values of equality, freedom and respect.

I am also well aware that this is a difficult issue for many, for either personal or religious reasons. I value my own faith and I look to my faith for guidance on many issues. As a legislator, I determine my decisions on policy after a great deal of thought and much reflection.

Recently I had the opportunity in the span of about 10 days to host a meeting on the Hill with Richard Fee, the moderator of my own church, the Presbyterian Church of Canada. While his opinion

differed from mine on supporting the legislation, he too called for respectful debate around this issue.

Later on I had the opportunity to attend a meeting with the Right Reverend Dr. Peter Short, who is the moderator of the United Church of Canada. In a letter of invitation to the meeting that I attended, Peter Short wrote:

I write to you in the hope that you will resist the assumption that anyone who speaks from Christian faith, tradition and values must be against equal marriage. Some are, some aren't. This is true within the United Church, just as it is true within Canadian society as a whole.

He went on to say:

I want to put before you now a Christian perspective on faith, tradition and values....I am aware of your responsibilities toward a multicultural and multi-faith society, so what follows is not intended to be normative for all...In the end, faith, tradition, and values do not decide for us. They equip us to take up the responsible and difficult task of deciding for ourselves. This deciding is itself is an act of faith.

He then went on to say that he hopes there will be a day when all God's children are accepted equally.

The development of public policy must reflect the priorities of a wide variety of Canadians. I believe the legislation we are discussing today succeeds in protecting both the rights of minorities and the rights of religious institutions.

• (1220)

We are talking about expanding one of the central and long-standing institutions of our society. Throughout Canada's history we find examples that demonstrate our ability to successfully address fundamental societal issues with respect to the rights of Canadians to equality.

For example, in 1929 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on the Persons case that women were persons for the purposes of Senate appointments. In another example, in 1992 in the Schachter case, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that fathers had a right to paternity leave under the Employment Insurance Act to stay home and give care to their children.

This is an issue of equal rights for Canadians, for all Canadians, and we need a national solution. The Government of Canada agrees with the courts that denying legal recognition for same sex unions does not meet the equality provisions of the charter.

As a member of Parliament, I have seen how diversity, inclusion and equality make us stronger as a nation. It is with this in mind that I am proud to support the federal government's legislation to extend the right to marry for civil purposes to same sex couples.

• (1225)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to start my speech today by saying how proud I am to be chosen as the representative of the famous seat of Prince Albert in Saskatchewan. I also want to acknowledge my mother, because I think without either one of them I would not be here today. I just want to make that observation. My mother is 89, lives in Assiniboia and is still in fairly good health. I know she is very proud to have a son who has the opportunity to represent people in this institution.

We live in a representative democracy. I used to teach school, where I emphasized to students the fact that we live in a system of government of representative democracy.

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Even prior to the opening of this new session of Parliament, I received thousands upon thousands of e-mails, correspondence and telephone calls on this particular issue. Since the opening of the House in February I have received 1,400 more pieces of mail on this issue. We have tabulated them.

Over 90% of the people want me to defend the traditional definition of marriage. They have made it very clear to me. They see this as a powerful and important social institution in our society that must be preserved and protected.

That is the message I have received. It is not really a question of what I think on the topic. I was elected by my constituents to be their voice in Ottawa. I am in Ottawa today and I am representing their point of view.

I am appalled and I am embarrassed that there are leaders of other parties in the House of Commons who will not let their individual members of Parliament do the same thing as my party and my leader permit me to do: to represent my constituents on a matter of conscience and the heritages and traditions of this country. It appalls me.

In the last election less than 50% of the people voted in some seats. I would say that people are getting the message that leaders of parties are undermining representative democracy by compelling their members to vote the way the leader wants them to rather than the way their constituents want. This is a very serious problem in our democracy. If we do not fix it we are going to find this institution in need of serious repair.

I also would like to speak on a couple of what might be unrelated topics, but in a way they are related. The first is the concept of separation of church and state. Members opposite, including members of the NDP, have often made reference to this being Canada where we have separation of church and state. What they really mean by that commentary is that religious people should keep their mouths shut and have no business speaking out on the matters of the day. I find that appalling, because many people in this country came here to get away from religious persecution and prosecution so they would have freedom of religion, and it happened in the United States as well.

My understanding of separation of church and state is that we live in a country in which our government protects freedom of religion and one's right to speak. Section 2 of the charter says that it is a "fundamental freedom" and the party opposite has the audacity to accuse other parties of somehow being against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I find this an amazing argument.

Let us look at the great reforms that have happened over the last couple of hundred years: the elimination of slavery, the end of child labour in Great Britain, public education reforms, and the end of racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. Who led those causes? They were not politicians. They were people of religious conviction who saw very sinful or outrageous practices that were immoral and contrary to their religious values, and they fought very hard to end those institutions. They were successful and that led to great reforms.

What a travesty of history there would have been had we had lived in a society in which the government told those people to shut up,

that they had no right to speak out. Would we have made the social progress that we have today?

• (1230)

To my friends in the NDP who also spout the same point of view, most of the people who founded the CCF movement were people of devout Christian beliefs. They believed in the social gospel. One of the most powerful people in that movement was Tommy Douglas. I am from Saskatchewan. I know what his election campaigns were about. He said to the people of Saskatchewan, "Vote for me and through government, I will create a new Jerusalem in Saskatchewan. We will eliminate poverty. We will bring in free health care". That was his social gospel. The same people today are saying that there has to be a separation of church and state and that the religious people have to shut up.

I say to a lot of educated people on the opposite side, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice, that they must have gone through a different school system than I did. I would throw out a few names to them: Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Garrison, Lincoln, Woodsworth, Ernest Manning, T.C. Douglas, Bishop Tutu, Malcolm X and William Wilberforce. They were people who were motivated by their religious beliefs and were successful in leading great reforms in their societies. Members opposite are saying that this is wrong, but I think they are wrong.

I want to make another observation. I have also been told by members opposite that somehow majority governments and votes, and so on in a democratic system are a threat to our individual freedoms and rights. That argument is very difficult to comprehend. When the charter was instituted in 1982, we did not invent the ideas that went into the charter. Those ideas already existed. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the democratic principles, the criminal justice principles, equality under and before the law had existed already. Where did they come from? They came from our mother country, England. They had been developed hundreds of years before we put them in a written constitution in Canada.

How did they come about in England? England does not have a written constitution. Britain does not have a constitution that has a bill of rights written out saying that certain things exist for every citizen. It has an unwritten constitution which is very short. It says that the democratically elected Parliament is supreme. It is out of that environment of electing majority governments over hundreds of years that we got things like freedom of religion, freedom of speech, criminal justice principles, democratic principles, great reforms that became part of our society in Canada.

The ultimate minority right is that one is innocent until proven guilty. Guilt must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. There are a whole lot of concepts that are minority rights.

Parliament in Great Britain has been very good at identifying and protecting minority rights. It shows an appalling lack of understanding of where we are today for members opposite to say that democracy and Parliament are the enemies of rights, principles and freedoms. They should go back to school or to the institutions that they attended and examine some of the papers that they wrote because that is not my understanding of where we got these very important principles. I do not see democracy and Parliament as threats to our fundamental freedoms and values.

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I want to make one final observation. I prize my personal freedom and liberty very much. I accept that I have to surrender some of my freedom for the public good and that is through the democratic process. If I am going to give up my personal freedom and liberty, I would much rather submit to the will of the majority than the will of a minority. If we do not understand that concept in 2005 and if our government does not understand that concept, the institutions of Parliament and democracy are in trouble.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as you may have noticed, the debate on this bill to change the definition of marriage is having a polarizing effect.

Such is often the case when an ethical issue is at the heart of a process of reflecting.

I use the expression “process of reflecting” intentionally because I presume that no one, not in this House nor in the general public, has taken a position on this major social issue without giving it a great deal of thought.

This is an ethical issue because it has meaning for everyone. It is an ethical issue because it concerns the collective meaning and values that drive us all as humans.

Those who support changing the definition of marriage and those who wish to uphold the traditional definition of marriage have wasted no time presenting arguments that have polarized opinions, indeed speaking in terms that are moralizing, to say the least.

This often has the perverse effect of making some appear open, progressive, advanced, defenders of rights and others bigoted, reactionary, backward, not to say obtuse and almost half-witted.

This might be because many people turn this into an emotional debate, when they focus on the notion of discrimination by asking, for example, if love between same sex partners is not equal to love between opposite sex partners, or by talking about the real suffering of same sex couples who are victims of discrimination and homophobic behaviour.

As a result, the groups are put into opposing camps, and the attempt was made early on to show that there are only two possible options with regard to such discrimination: if we agree with the bill, we oppose discrimination; if we oppose the bill, we support such discrimination. However, there is a third option, which is to oppose the bill and discrimination.

I decided to use a Cartesian approach to analyze the redefinition of marriage. I have discussed this issue with colleagues, former parliamentarians, voters and experts in law, ethics and education. I want to take this opportunity to thank these people for their frank discussions with me.

This bill aims to redefine marriage; in other words, to change or amend the definition of marriage and, consequently, to change a social reality.

The definition of the social institution is central to this issue. So we must question what we are defining and, logically, ask ourselves

some questions. Here are a few of them. What is marriage? What are the goals of marriage? What is the purpose behind this social institution? What, therefore, is its ultimate purpose?

To answer these questions by saying the ultimate purpose of marriage is solely to give expression to the love and commitment of two individuals, without involving procreation implicitly, is very different than to answer that marriage is a genealogical institution.

When defined as a genealogical institution, marriage is a social reality that defines family and, among other things, enables children born from such a marriage to know their biological parents.

If we eliminate the notion of generational renewal and the survival of the human race as the implicit goal of marriage, we are giving precedence to individual rights and changing a societal norm.

The definition of marriage under natural law as the union between a man and a woman is not the result of a moral or ethical value imposed by mankind, but simply a biological fact that only a man and a woman may procreate and perpetuate life.

• (1240)

The traditional definition of marriage does not discriminate, it reflects a biological reality. Neither assisted reproduction nor adoption changes that natural rule.

We all know that there are people who get married but do not wish to have children, and that there are couples who cannot have children for a number of reasons. There is no doubt that their love and commitment are just as noble and deep as those of couples that start a family. As far as I am concerned, that is not the issue. There are always exceptions. There are exceptions to every rule.

The issue for me is whether we are discriminating when we view differently realities and goals that are different. It is perfectly legitimate for same sex couples to wish to formalize their union and enjoy related social benefits. However, it seems to me that this wish can hardly be reconciled with the genealogical nature of marriage.

Another issue is the protection of religious freedom. A number of people are concerned by the protection of religious freedom in the context of the celebration of marriage and given the fact that the Supreme Court used caution in its response to the reference's third question. First, as regards question No. 1, the Supreme Court said the following:

Although the right to same-sex marriage conferred by the proposed legislation may potentially conflict with the right to freedom of religion if the legislation becomes law, conflicts of rights do not imply conflict with the Charter—

As regards question No. 3, the Court said:

—the Court is of the opinion that, absent unique circumstances with respect to which we will not speculate, the guarantee of religious freedom in s. 2(a) of the Charter is broad enough to protect religious officials—

The Court showed caution. Therefore, it is legitimate that some people would be concerned. These people are expressing a serious doubt and wondering if, following the redefinition of marriage as proposed in the bill, the next request by same sex couples might be to ask for equal rights regarding religion in the context of this new definition.

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As a member of Parliament and legislator, I will have to vote on this bill. It will be a free vote and I will vote freely. I will do so according to my conscience, after careful consideration. My conscience reflects my own views and also those of other individuals, because it takes into consideration the best interests not only of today's society, but of tomorrow's.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with great anticipation that I have awaited this opportunity to speak to Bill C-38. Like members on all sides of the House, I know my constituents in Prince George—Peace River not only expect, they deserve to have their member of Parliament stand in this chamber and clearly state not only my position but their position on the definition of marriage.

Most of my constituents, as well as many Canadians, are already aware that I do not support Bill C-38. I do support the traditional definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. I vehemently oppose the discrimination of same sex couples and homosexual Canadians. I am disappointed by the misleading assertion made by the government that opposition to same sex marriage equates to discrimination. It does not.

Of utmost importance to this debate is that both sides of the issue maintain respectful and responsible arguments. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has shown a preference to dismiss opposing views in the debate by dismissing those who disagree with it as proponents of discrimination. Sadly, that means millions of Canadians who oppose this legislation for legitimate reasons are being ignored by their federal government.

We also have a responsibility to maintain accurate arguments throughout the debate. Anything less is a disservice to Canadians. Let me clarify one of the most significant inaccuracies in the government's justification for extending the definition of marriage to include same sex couples. It is the springboard of the Liberal government's argument for introducing the legislation, which has been, "the Supreme Court made us do it".

The Supreme Court of Canada did not rule against maintaining the traditional definition of marriage. The Supreme Court told Canada's Parliament that deciding whether to include same sex couples under marriage legislation was our job as the people's democratic representatives. In fact, the Supreme Court refused to even rule on whether the traditional definition of marriage was a violation of the equality provision under the charter of rights and freedoms.

We in this Parliament were told in no uncertain terms that we had to do the job we were elected to do, and make a decision on this important social policy matter. If it is the decision of the Liberal government to turn away from the traditional definition of marriage, it should come clean and stop hiding behind the Supreme Court.

The Conservative Party of Canada and our leader have made it clear that same sex relationships should be entitled to the same legal rights, privileges and benefits as marriage. However, marriage for many reasons, some of which I will outline, should be reserved solely as the institution between a man and a woman. I support other legal means for recognizing relationships, whether they include heterosexual or homosexual couples or whether they are called civil unions or partnerships. What is important is that those couples, that

all couples, are provided full recognition and possess equivalent rights and privileges under the law.

By choosing the path advocated by the Conservative Party, the government could ensure the rights of its citizens while recognizing the fundamental importance of traditional marriage to our society. If we proceed as a nation down the path that the federal Liberal government has chosen, the consequences are unforeseen and far-reaching. We do not know what erasing the traditional definition of marriage will mean for our society 50 or 100 years from now. Yet how do we correct the damage after the ideal of a loving mother and father raising their children has been erased from our social psyche?

I believe it should remain the ideal. This would not result in discrimination against other relationships, including same sex couples. This does not mean marriages without children, or common law relationships or civil unions are any less deserving of our due respect and appreciation. It means we must recognize that society requires ideals or standards by which to set our ethical compass. Without these ideals, we have no guidelines to mark our way. To my mind, and in the minds of millions of other Canadians, marriage between a man and a woman with the ultimate goal of procreation is the ideal relationship.

So much of the legislation and issues that I have advocated in my eleven and a half years as a member of Parliament have boiled down to one main theme: children and doing what is in their best interest. Bill C-38 is no different for me. In my view, marriage is about children.

● (1245)

McGill University medical and legal ethicist Margaret Somerville has raised the excellent question, "Should marriage be primarily a child-centred institution or an adult-centred one?"

Is it about what kids need and deserve or is it about what two adults want? I believe we must reserve this one institution, the institution of marriage, as being about the best interests of a child.

The ideal is that whenever possible children have a right to be raised by both a mother and a father, preferably their own biological parents. Fortunately, we have wonderful alternatives when this is not possible, particularly adoption which provides a valuable contribution to our society in providing a loving home to children who would otherwise be left without one.

Divorce is a fact of life in our society and it is something that many parents and children continue to struggle through. There are many types of families in the 21st century and we must do everything we can to protect and nurture the children within them. However, to actually change the definition of marriage to include same sex couples and to legitimize same sex marriage as a perfectly acceptable option means abolishing the norm or the ideal of a child being raised by their biological mother and father.

I would again like to refer to Dr. Somerville's arguments as she successfully explains how marriage and civil unions or partnerships can co-exist as two distinct institutions without being discriminatory. She states:

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—there's a difference between separate-but-equal and different-but-equal. Separate-but-equal means that two entities are inherently the same, but are treated as separate. That's discrimination...Different-but-equal means that two entities are not inherently the same, but are treated equally. That's the antithesis of discrimination.

Same sex relationships and traditional marriage are not the same. The first is based upon individuals' commitment to each other and public recognition of that commitment. In other words, what adults want. The second is based upon the societal ideal of a man and a woman and procreation. It is about children.

I firmly believe we should recognize same sex relationships and legally protect them and any children involved, but that does not require expanding the definition of marriage to include same sex couples.

I have already stated on several occasions that my constituents have indicated overwhelmingly to me that they oppose Bill C-38 and have demanded that the traditional definition of marriage be maintained. Throughout this debate I have sought to gauge their views and opinions on this very important social issue through informal surveys and mailouts in my riding. I aggressively requested feedback and input on this matter. I did not have to try too hard.

In the past several months I have received literally thousands of letters, e-mails, faxes and phone calls from my constituents asking me to oppose any legislation that would alter the traditional definition of marriage. Those letters as well as my own questionnaires made it evident where most of my constituents stood. However, I felt it was my responsibility to seek all the facts, leaving no room for doubt on how my constituents wished me to vote on this important legislation. Therefore, two weeks ago, I commissioned a scientific poll in my riding, conducted by a reputable independent polling firm. The poll surveyed 500 residents of Prince George—Peace River.

When asked the question if they supported or opposed allowing Canadians to marry people of the same sex, 48% of the respondents said they were opposed to same sex marriage, 36% said they supported it and 16% were either undecided or had no opinion.

When asked if they supported or opposed allowing Canadians to enter into a civil union with people of the same sex if the relationship was not called "a marriage", 45% of those polled said they would support that, 38% said they were opposed and 18% offered no opinion.

When asked if they supported or opposed allowing same sex couples the equivalent rights and benefits as heterosexual couples, 45% said they supported it, 41% said they were opposed and 14% were undecided.

● (1250)

I believe it is no small coincidence that the response to those three questions mirrors the amendments put forward by the leader of the official opposition, the amendments which we will soon be called upon to vote on, the amendments which I believe not only reflect the opinion of the majority of my constituents in Prince George—Peace River but the views of the majority of Canadians as well. That is why I will support the amendments, and I will remain opposed to Bill C-38.

● (1255)

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, recently I had an opportunity to give a tour of this place to a group of visiting constituents. They marvelled at the architecture and the history in the surrounding area. What is truly amazing is how the historical character is so well integrated with new technology.

Over the years we have amended the Standings Orders to improve the efficiency of our procedures, while retaining the traditions that form the basis of our democracy. We have preserved and strengthened our foundation, while keeping pace with 21st century developments.

Marriage is also a time honoured institution that has stood the test of time and is one of the key foundations on which our society is built. For thousands of years marriage has been recognized as the union of one man and one woman.

Since Confederation, marriage in Canadian law has been defined as "the voluntary union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others". I believe this definition of marriage has served society well and should be retained.

Since I was first elected here in 1993, Parliament has passed legislation to provide benefits formerly available only to heterosexual married spouses, to common law partnerships and same sex couples. These initiatives were designed to bring equality into the system and we were assured time and again by the Liberal government that these changes would not affect the definition of marriage.

Canadian Alliance MPs were concerned our constituents wanted assurances, so in June 1999 we proposed a motion that said:

That, in the opinion of this House, it is necessary, in light of public debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain a union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.

Liberal MP after Liberal MP, cabinet minister after cabinet minister, including the former prime minister Jean Chrétien and the current Prime Minister, the former justice minister and current Deputy Prime Minister, voted to reaffirm the traditional definition of marriage.

Here is what the Deputy Prime Minister said on that day:

Let me state again for the record that the government has no intention of changing the definition of marriage or of legislating same sex marriages.

She also went on to say:

I support the motion for maintaining the clear legal definition of marriage in Canada as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

She also said:

I fundamentally do not believe that it is necessary to change the definition of marriage in order to accommodate the equality issues around same sex partners which now face us as Canadians.

With the full support of the current Prime Minister and key players on the government frontbench, I am pleased to say that the motion passed 215 to 55, and there I thought the issue would end.

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In September 2003, however, we proposed a motion to reaffirm that marriage was and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. This time the Liberals did an about face and the Prime Minister and his deputy voted against reaffirming the traditional definition of marriage.

It appears that when the Prime Minister and his Deputy Prime Minister are not dithering, that they are flip-flopping. If Canadians cannot trust the Prime Minister's word on this, I submit that they have every right to be unable to trust him on anything.

Conservatives believe that the vast majority of Canadians believe that marriage is a fundamental distinct institution, but that same sex couples can have equivalent rights or benefits. The leader of the official opposition has tabled reasonable and thoughtful amendments to the bill.

We believe that the law should continue to recognize the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. At the same time, we would propose that other forms of union, however structured, by appropriate provincial legislation, whether called registered partnerships, domestic partnerships, civil unions or whatever, should be entitled to the same legal rights, privileges and obligations as marriage.

Where there are issues affecting rights and benefits within the federal domain, our party would ensure that for all federal purposes these Canadians living in other forms of unions would be recognized as having equal rights and benefits under federal law as well.

• (1300)

We believe that is what most Canadians want.

Recent public opinion polls, and apparently even Liberal polls, show that nationally two out of every three Canadians is opposed to changing the definition of marriage.

The issue of same sex marriage has divided many Canadians but not in my constituency where there is overwhelming support for the traditional definition of marriage. The following is what some of them have had to say in the hundreds of letters that I have received on this subject.

One resident from the town of Lacombe, who was concerned that "our nation was being steered in the wrong direction", said:

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman. This definition was not created by the courts or by Parliament. The union of a man and woman has served as the foundation of societies throughout time.

From Wetaskiwin, another constituent writes:

Same sex marriage has been represented by the government and the media as a human rights issue. It is not a matter of rights; it is a matter of definition and the important purposes marriage serves in society. Marriage is the union of one man and one woman.

A husband and wife from Gwynne wrote:

Marriage between a man and a woman is a unique relationship that simply cannot be replicated by any other relationship.

In an open letter to the Prime Minister, a Winfield man wrote:

Like those in the trenches of old, we do not find it becomes us to build a nation by appealing to our rights. We are instead instructed by the common good. We confess to being "born" with tendencies and primal urges that would put individual above order. But it is character not legislation that helps us rise above them.

This legislation is not just the assertion of a new right. It is potentially the reduction of an older one.

It is troubling that this Liberal bill provides little in the way of assurances that religious freedoms will be protected if the legal definition of marriage is changed.

The Liberals keep talking about how they are protecting religious freedoms but the reality is that the solemnization of marriage is a provincial responsibility, so Bill C-38 does not do what they say it will do. What they do not want Canadians to know, apparently, is that the government cannot adequately protect religious freedoms in federal legislation.

There is only one clause in the bill that states that religious officials will not be forced to solemnize same sex marriages. The problem is that the Supreme Court has already ruled that this clause is beyond the federal government's authority because provinces are responsible for performing marriage ceremonies. It has not provided any specific statutory protection of religious freedoms in the areas of its own jurisdiction.

Our party believes that religious institutions need to be explicitly protected in such areas as charitable tax status. In addition, public officials who, for religious reasons, feel they cannot perform same sex marriages must also be explicitly protected from reprisal if they refuse to perform such marriages.

I recently came across a leaflet prepared by the Catholic Organization for Life and the Family. I think it has pretty much been summed up in their leaflet, which states:

As an institution, marriage has enormous significance, and has existed for thousands of years. The word we use for this institution—marriage—is full of history, meaning and symbolism, and should be kept for this unique reality.

I could not agree more, which is why I have always been a strong supporter of the traditional definition of marriage. I will continue to vote against any legislation to change it, including Bill C-38 as it now stands.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to add my thoughts to this important debate. At the outset I would like to thank all the sources I may quote in these remarks, since time will not permit full attribution.

Marriage is the most fundamental social institution, which is why the outcome of this debate will have a profound impact on Canadians and on our country. Those who say that what the Liberal government is proposing will have no significant consequences are very much mistaken.

Until recently, most Canadians considered it unthinkable that any government would seriously propose that marriage would mean anything other than the union of one man and one woman, yet the unthinkable is now happening, overriding the wishes of a majority of Canadians. That is why an amendment was moved by the hon. member for Calgary Southwest, the leader of the official opposition, and we are debating that amendment today.

I will be voting in support of this amendment for five reasons.

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First, marriage by definition has always been between one man and one woman. The fundamental meaning of the term marriage has always been understood to embody the concept of an opposite sex couple. The institution is universal across time, culture and religion. It is not merely the passing whim of a majority, but derives its legitimacy from biological reality, the way nature works.

This being so, same sex couples cannot be given the right to marriage without redefining the term. Changing its definition would inevitably change the effectiveness of marriage as the fundamental foundational underpinning of society that it has been over the ages. Redefining marriage would hollow out its meaning and cultural significance.

It is an historical fact that all civilizations throughout history have given marriage a special status because of its inherent relationship to procreation. Since same sex couples cannot procreate without going outside the relationship, calling same sex unions marriages implies that procreation is no longer regarded as an intrinsic aspect of marriage. There then is no longer a legitimate reason to limit the relationship to two unrelated persons as is currently the case.

Margaret Somerville, an ethicist in the faculties of law and medicine at McGill, writes:

Marriage, as it stands, is a societal institution that represents, symbolizes, and protects the inherently reproductive human relationship for the sake of children born of such relationships. Society needs such an institution and marriage is unique in this regard; there is no other alternative.

Second, the preservation of marriage is in the best interest of children. It is of paramount interest to the state whether children are born and grow up within or without the marital bounds because children that live in alternative family structures may incur multifarious disadvantages economically, socially, emotionally and physically. Even though many children raised in such alternative families do well, psychological and sociological studies indicate that children generally do best when raised by their biological parents in a stable marriage.

Children require more than love from their parents. Every child raised in a same sex home is raised in a home without either a father or a mother and therefore misses out on experiencing the inherent differences, unique sexual relationship and bonding of men and women that are at the heart of the institution of marriage as a cornerstone of a stable society. It is unacceptable that Bill C-38 intentionally causes this situation.

The evidence that children do best when raised by both their married biological parents provides a compelling interest for the state to continue recognizing marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Marriage for life is still the family model that 88% of Canadian youths aspire to for their futures.

Third, this amendment is the only way to ensure protection of the charter right to freedom of religion, thought and belief. The Liberal government protests that no religious institution will be forced to perform same sex marriages but changing the definition of marriage would inevitably create a regime that will trump any protection of religious freedom.

● (1305)

This is because the meaning of marriage is not dependent upon what any religion says it is, but has been established for thousands of years in a universal cultural context much broader than that of any religious faith. In fact, a relationship is not a legal marriage unless it complies with civil law and, once it does, it cannot be invalidated for religious reasons.

In addition, religious belief is not recognized as a valid reason for disrespecting the law of the land. This being so, Bill C-38 would, unquestionably, have significant impact on those who refuse to recognize same sex partnerships as marriages for religious reasons.

In order to get around the valid concerns, some suggest there can be a difference between civil and religious marriages, but that is demonstrably false. In the long term, no religious community would be able to withstand the charge of violating human rights by refusing to solemnize same sex marriages.

Human rights tribunals and the courts will inevitably be filled with related grievances resulting in claims for damages and injunctions against discrimination. In fact, even though Bill C-38 has yet to be passed, cases are already multiplying against those who demonstrate disapproval of same sex marriages. Attempts to muzzle a respected religious leader like Bishop Henry are a case in point.

Should we believe government promises that its bill fully protects charter rights respecting freedom of religion? Not for a moment. The same government pledged only a short time ago that it had no intention of changing the definition of marriage. The record shows that the government's word cannot be trusted.

Fourth, the argument that marriage is a fundamental right is not valid. A fundamental characteristic of a human right is that it is something of which no one may be deprived without a grave affront to justice. Same sex marriage has not been recognized as a fundamental human right anywhere in the world, even though two countries have legislated it as a political decision.

With respect to equality before the law, marriage as it stands is not based on discrimination against homosexuals, but instead recognizes the inherent and natural differences between men and women, and confers on both the same benefits and restrictions in the context of marriage. Likewise, all Canadians are treated the same when it comes to marriage laws.

The question of whether same sex partnerships ought to be called marriage is clearly not one of human rights at all. No one ought to be fooled into thinking that it is. It is simply a public policy choice of the Liberal government to change and age old and proven societal institution. It is a policy choice imposed on a majority of Canadians who would prefer to retain the status of marriage as it has been throughout history.

While most Canadians support equality of economic rights for same sex partners, they would prefer that it be achieved through another form of union, not marriage.

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The Prime Minister's claim that equality rights in the charter must be protected without exception is nonsensical. All government policies are forms of redistributive justice through which, for the common good, the state discriminates in favour of some people and some relationships and not others.

Same sex partnerships will always be different from heterosexual marriages because they do not contain the inherent connection to procreation. Calling them marriage does not give them equal significance but instead diminishes the importance of marriage as more than simply a love commitment between two people.

Fifth, one can hold a genuine respect for and acceptance of homosexual friends and family members while also supporting and preserving marriage in our society.

As others have emphasized, opposition to the bill is not because of any desire to prevent gay people from loving each other and living together in a committed relationship recognized by the state. The only question is whether this should be done by making marriage into something radically different.

• (1310)

Affirming various loving relationships is far different from deciding to refer to all of them as marriages. Fundamental characteristics necessarily define, differentiate and order our world, especially the institutions of our society. Those who support loving, committed relationships between homosexual couples can, at the same time, affirm that the institution of marriage does not exist just to promote individual interest.

• (1315)

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-38, a bill of extreme gravity, a bill which only a few years ago would have been difficult for most Canadians to fathom, and a bill which launches two major attacks on cherished Canadian traditions.

First, the bill is a direct attack on the basic institution of marriage, the heart of family. Second, it is completely clear that a secondary purpose of the legislation is to malign the religious freedoms of millions of Canadians.

How does a simple piece of legislation do this? To understand my reasoning, let me first briefly lay out my political philosophy, so that all who hear or read these words may fully understand the context of my statements.

I believe and emphatically advocate the form freedom system of government. This is the philosophy from which we derive the basic forms of western governance. Whether it is in the form of a constitutional monarchy, as in most of the Commonwealth, or in the form of a republic, as with our neighbours to the south, it is the basic principle that has historically forged our system of governance.

This is a system which allows for liberty without anarchy and freedom without chaos. This is a system which promotes the rule of law and yet has permitted representative and responsible government. It is a view which is antithetical to libertarianism, the Marxism of the right, and socialism, the Marxism of the left. It argues emphatically for inalienable rights, but only grants these rights with inalienable responsibility.

How does this relate to marriage? How do these grand principles that have served our society apply to the situation at hand? Specifically, the rights of marriage can and must be given only with the responsibilities of marriage. To give one element of the equation without the other only invites chaos for civil society. With responsibility and no rights, there is no motivation to enter into marriage, but for the rights of marriage to be granted without responsibility would deprive society of the benefits of the institution. It would be an open invitation to societal chaos. If society derives no benefit from marriage, why should society seek to promote and protect marriage? In effect, marriage would diminish to the point of irrelevance.

What are the fundamental responsibilities of marriage? What are the incumbent rights? The advocates for the legislation argue that marriage is the expression of intimacy for two adults. They say that the legislation is necessary because of the need for acceptance of homosexual unions, and the need for public expression of intimacy. However, acceptance cannot be achieved through coercive powers of the state. Acceptance can only be given through free will, and if the public expression of adult intimacy is the basis of marriage, then marriage has become so trivial a matter that no basis for it is necessary in law. For if marriage is already defined for the purpose of acceptance and dignity as an intimate, adult, publicly acknowledged relationship, we no longer have marriage in the historic sense.

The underlying presumptives of acceptance and intimacy form the basis for the "rights" argument promulgated by the advocates of the legislation. They lay the groundwork for the spurious and circular reasoning of the bill. The argument is made that we must redefine marriage to protect rights, but redefinition of marriage is argued as the basis of these rights. What we have is a perfect tautology, a talented bit of sophistry by the advocates of the legislation. There is no true logic to support the legislation. The basis of the legislation is pure subjective emotionalism.

So in the positive sense, what are the fundamental responsibilities of marriage? What new accountability is acquired by entering into the state of matrimony?

The first attendant responsibility of marriage is children. No amount of social engineering will change the biological fact that heterosexual marriage can and often does produce children. It is the exceptions which prove the rule.

In fact, one of the central purposes of marriage is to procreate future generations, in a safe environment. This is something that should be emphasized. It is a responsibility of marriage to be a child centered institution. It is through marriage that we connect children with their biological parents, provide for future generations, and build society in a responsible and organized fashion.

• (1320)

Repeated academic studies have noted that where marriage has been redefined in the way this legislation proposes, or even under the guise of civil unions, the entire society understands the message. Marriage is for adults only.

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In our sound bite area we would say that marriage then becomes about “recreation, not procreation”, much to the detriment of all society. Procreation is of course not the only reason why society supports marriage. A detailed explanation of even this specific reason would more than use up my allotted time.

There are other reasons why marriage is a necessary good for society and possibly, if I have the ability to re-enter the debate on Bill C-38, I will be able to elaborate on these reasons. I will say however that many other members of the House have delivered many good and similar reasons why marriage must be retained.

I believe I have made my general point. All of these reasons are for the good of society and all relate to the uniquely heterosexual nature of marriage. There is however a secondary purpose to this legislation, a purpose which has been alluded to by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the government's deputy House leader. That purpose is to attack religious freedom in Canada.

The government has insisted that this is a matter of human rights, thus it is implying that everyone who does not agree with it is a bigot. This is a powerful weapon because it implies that the state will later on use its coercive force to crack down on the dissenters who do not share its view of rights. Why is the government taking such a drastic approach? It is for one basic reason: the faith communities of the country have been the government's most effective critics of the bill. If the government can intimidate the churches of the country into silence, it will.

While I deliberately chose not to use religious arguments in this debate, the theological arguments against same sex unions are powerful and legitimate arguments. We must not exclude religion from our public dialogue. Do we forget that this is what has motivated great societal change? It was the religious convictions of British parliamentarian William Wilberforce which drove him to lead the fight against slavery. What better argument against slavery is there than that all mankind is created in the image of God?

It was a theological impetus that caused the 14th century English priest, John Wycliffe, who long before Abraham Lincoln, wrote in his Bible, “This book shall make possible a government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. The arguments and explanations of William Blackstone, Henry de Bracton and other great legal commentaries on English common law reiterate this point.

In our modern era, the struggle against apartheid only further illustrates what I already stated. While I firmly disagreed with both their theology and politics, most of the leaders of the CCF also used their faith as a primary basis to call for political and social change.

I am not saying that theological arguments are innately moral or even superior to other lines of reasoning. My point is just this. By calling them illegitimate and implying that they are bigoted, the government is seeking to suppress one of the most important and positive forces in the history of western civilization. The government is attempting to suppress dissent, an action which no democratic government should engage in.

In summary, let me restate the two basic issues that I have raised in regard to the bill. It is clear that the rights of marriage should only be granted with the responsibilities of marriage. It is a simple point

but one that the bill has seen fit to miss. It is clear that communities and arguments based on theology have contributed much good to Canadian society, yet the government is determined to target them.

There is great irony in the debate. The government calls for its actions to promote rights. Marriage however is really the voluntary revocation of rights. When two become as one they yield their rights to each other.

I for one will choose to stand for what is right for all Canadians. I will vote against the bill. I will vote with and for the people of Saskatoon—Humboldt. Here I stand; I can do no other.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today to Bill C-38 on behalf of my constituents in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. To say that this debate has garnered a lot of attention would be an understatement. It is contentious and divisive on both sides of the House, as well as within society and even within families.

My office has processed thousands of e-mails, letters, faxes and phone calls from across my riding. I commend my constituents for making their voices heard. More than 95% of the people I have heard from are united in their message and in their convictions. Traditional marriage must be preserved and protected. I will be speaking to that more specifically today.

While I am pleased that the decision has been placed in the hands of parliamentarians, many people across my riding have displayed their displeasure at this issue even coming forth at this time. I agree with my constituents when they continue to tell me that there are many more important issues we should be spending our time on such as health care and the high taxes Canadians are forced to pay.

Having said that, I do not believe a decision such as this should be made by a handful of hand-picked, biased, and backroom Supreme Court justices. We were elected by the people and we are here to represent them. This is not a debate about human rights. This is a debate about fundamental social values. In my opinion, there are two issues that have to be addressed in any bill on same sex. The rights of gays as determined by the courts must be adhered to including their right to unite in some form and traditional marriage defined as one man and one woman must be enshrined. That can be done very simply by allowing civil unions or similar and suitable terminology.

I have met with a number from the gay community and with parents who have gay children to discuss the issues surrounding the legislation. Most of the people I met with were in favour of my views and my stance. As I said, most told me that as long as their rights are protected as stated in the courts, and they are able to be with their partners, they agree that calling it a civil union is acceptable.

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We have been forced to address the subject, but while I realize there is no perfect answer that will satisfy everyone, I believe we can offer a compromise that would win the support of the vast majority of Canadians who are looking for some middle ground. On the one hand, there are people who believe the equality of rights of gays and lesbians should rule over rights to religious free faith, religious expression or multicultural diversity. On the other hand, there are people who think that marriage is a fundamental institution, but that same sex couples can have equivalent rights and benefits, and should be protected.

My position is not unlike that of my colleagues and our leader in that it is based on a very solid foundation and time tested values. We believe that if the government presented the option of preserving marriage while recognizing equal rights of same sex couples through civil unions or other means, this is the option that the vast majority of Canadians would choose and would probably garner overwhelming support in Parliament. But then again, the government does not care about the majority of Canadians.

Marriage and the family based on marriage are the basic institutions of society. We should not change these kinds of fundamental institutions lightly or easily. I do not believe that the government has demonstrated that there are compelling reasons to alter this central social institution.

At least one of the major purposes of marriage historically has been to provide a stable environment for the procreation and raising of children. This does not mean that other kinds of relationships are not loving and valuable. Nor does it mean that heterosexual married couples who cannot or do not have children are any less married than anyone else. What it does mean is that marriage as a social institution has as one of its goals the nurturing of children in the care of a mother and a father.

If we change the definition of marriage to end the opposite sex requirement, we will be saying that this goal of marriage is no longer important. Those of us who support traditional marriage have been told that to amend the bill to reflect traditional definition of marriage would be a violation of human rights and an unconstitutional violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This is nothing more than an attempt by the government to shift the grounds of this debate. If the rights of gays and lesbians are adhered to as I stated earlier, this debate is not about human rights. It becomes simply a political, social policy decision, and should be treated as such.

There are those who would deceptively suggest that Stephen Harper will use the notwithstanding clause. However, this again is also an irrelevant distraction to the debate because Mr. Harper has made it very clear that he will not—

• (1325)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Excuse me. The member is well aware that the names of members cannot be used. Please refer to his title or his riding.

• (1330)

Mr. Larry Miller: My apologies, Madam Speaker.

There is no reason to discuss the use of the notwithstanding clause in the absence of a Supreme Court decision which indicates that the

traditional definition of marriage is unconstitutional. The Supreme Court has not done so.

I would like to thank my leader for allowing our party, including the members of the shadow cabinet, to have a free vote. On this side of the House a free vote means everyone, not just backbenchers, can vote the way their constituents want them to.

The Prime Minister has said that his backbenchers can vote their conscience, but cabinet ministers have to vote with the government. Does this mean that cabinet ministers do not have a conscience? I say to those cabinet ministers who do not vote according to the wishes of their constituents or who do not listen to their own conscience that they are a disgrace to the profession of a parliamentarian.

I ask the Prime Minister to make this important issue a free vote for all his MPs, including his cabinet ministers. If this is not a purely free vote, Canadians will never be truly satisfied that the democratic process has prevailed.

While I am on the topic of the Liberal government, it is funny but not surprising that in 1999 the then justice minister said:

Let me state again for the record that the government has no intention of changing the definition of marriage or of legislating same sex marriages.

What a difference six years makes. This is just another in a long line of Liberal deceptions.

I believe that the legislation the government has introduced will increase intolerance in our society. Examples of this have already occurred in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

In Manitoba 11 commissioners have been told that they will no longer be welcome to work as marriage commissioners if they refuse to also marry same sex couples. Two more commissioners have refused to quit and are taking the issue to the Human Rights Commission to defend their freedoms and their rights from being imposed upon by the state. They were sent a letter on September 16 last year telling them to either perform same sex marriages or to turn in their licences.

In Bill C-38 only clergy from religious institutions are recognized as requiring religious freedom protection. While I agree that churches should have the right to that choice, I also believe that this will be challenged in court and that clergy will be forced to perform same sex marriages.

There is a clear solution that would guarantee all individuals freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The solution is for the government to continue to allow these individuals to have government licences to perform marriages that do not violate their conscience or religious faith. At the same time, the government could licence more of those who are willing to perform same sex civil unions. This would be the tolerant approach.

The government has taken a very narrow view of the freedoms of conscience and religion and is allowing individual freedoms to be trampled upon.

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In closing, making my decision to stand up for traditional marriage goes back to my being raised with Christian values and to my dedication to family values. I am not ashamed to stand up for these values. I owe it to my country, to my wife of almost 30 years, to my children, and to my first granddaughter who is less than two weeks old.

I believe that marriage should continue to be what it has always been, between a man and a woman, and an institution which is by nature heterosexual and has as one of its main purposes the procreation and nurturing of children in the care of a mother and a father.

I encourage all members of Parliament to support the amendment proposed by the leader of the official opposition.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Newton—North Delta to participate in the debate on Bill C-38, the civil marriage act.

In my eight years as a member of Parliament, there has never been an issue that has so inflamed and divided Canadians as the current debate over same sex marriage.

Unlike the Prime Minister and other members of his party, I have been consistent on this issue from day one. I oppose changing the definition of marriage and will vote against Bill C-38.

In 1999 I spoke in favour of reaffirming the traditional definition of marriage. In fact I led off the debate on the Reform Party motion which passed on a vote of 216 to 55. In 2003 I rose in this chamber to speak in support of another opposition motion seeking to preserve traditional marriage. By that time however, government members, including the current Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, who had voted to support the traditional definition of marriage had backed down from their commitment to marriage and traditional Canadian family values.

I have consulted widely with my constituents on the issue of marriage. I have had several well-attended town hall meetings on the issue and have conducted surveys. I have heard from more than 14,000 people through letters, e-mails, phone calls and meetings.

During the 2004 election, voters knew exactly where I stood on the same sex marriage issue.

I think most Canadians would agree that gays and lesbians should be free to pursue whatever type of relationship they wish. I see no problem in legally recognizing homosexual relationships, but this should not be done by changing marriage. In 1999 homosexual couples were given pension, property and other rights by changing 68 federal statutes through Bill C-23. If there are any pending rights, they should be allowed.

Marriage is something more than a public recognition of a couple's mutual love and commitment. It is intimately connected to procreation. The procreative potential of marriage is a basic element of what marriage is, just as swimming is a basic element of being a lifeguard, and playing music is a basic element of being a musician.

Marriage provides the structure which protects the procreation and nurturing of children in our society. That is why it is self-evident to most people in history that marriage is a relationship between a man

and a woman. A homosexual couple does not meet the qualifications for the title of "married".

Abraham Lincoln, when debating an individual, sought to resolve the issue with a question, "Sir, if you call a tail a leg, how many legs does a dog have?" "Five", responded the gentleman. Lincoln corrected the man, "Four, sir. Just because you call a tail a leg doesn't make it so".

The Liberals are committing the same folly. Just because one calls it a marriage does not make it so. It is an exercise in self-deceit, a denial of reality.

During my years in elected office I have been involved in a number of debates involving measures that deal with discrimination. I have supported legislation in this House and have spoken repeatedly to prohibit inappropriately unequal treatment of individuals based on race, religion, gender, disability and sexual orientation. I have been outspoken on the need to protect the human rights of all people, whether they be Falun Gong practitioners in China, Muslims in Gambia, South Asians living in Canada, or people in labour camps in Tibet. I have spoken with Chinese officials on their human rights record. I have been an advocate of the Human Rights Commission in B.C.

The Liberals are attempting to frame the issue of same sex marriage in the context of justice and human rights. In doing so they are insulting all those people in the world who suffer from human rights abuses on a daily basis.

How could the Liberals equate the denial of marriage to homosexuals to unlawful imprisonment, abuse, torture, denying voting rights or freedom of speech?

● (1335)

The Prime Minister is playing crass politics when he paints gay marriage as a human rights issue. He knows that Canadians will not accept same sex marriage on its own merits, so he is attempting to tie it to human rights and charter issues dear to the hearts of Canadians. While this may be politically opportunistic, manipulative and beneficial, morally it is dishonest.

In fact, no national or international court or human rights tribunal at the national or international level has ever ruled that same sex marriage is a human rights issue. After New Zealand's court of appeal ruled in 1997 that the opposite sex definition of marriage was not discriminatory and that it did not violate the country's bill of rights, the plaintiffs took their case to the UN Commission on Human Rights. The commission rejected the complaint in 2002.

The Prime Minister and his justice minister claim that the Supreme Court has forced their hand knowing full well it did nothing of the sort. The Supreme Court delivered its opinion on the non-binding marriage reference on December 9. The court refused to answer the fourth question, whether the Charter of Rights and Freedoms requires that marriage be redefined. While the Supreme Court has said that Parliament may redefine marriage, it has not said that it must redefine marriage to include same sex couples.

Government Orders

It is not unjust nor a limitation of anyone's legitimate rights and freedoms to insist that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. The definition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others does not discriminate against homosexuals any more than someone getting the child tax credit discriminates against people who do not have kids. The Prime Minister and his colleagues knew this in 1999. To suggest now that opponents of gay marriage are un-Canadian bigots is disingenuous to the extreme.

This legislation has many Canadians in an uproar, including those in ethnic communities who have moral, cultural and religious beliefs that lead them to oppose same sex marriage. The Liberals argue that those people must abandon their deeply held beliefs so they can be considered Canadians. Linking same sex marriage to what it means to be a Canadian by Liberals is dishonest and shameful.

The Sikh community is struggling with the same sex issue thanks largely to the Liberal government. Our religion does not recognize same sex unions, yet the Canadian government wants us to give up something that is very traditional and very religious. Most Sikhs, like other immigrant groups, are supportive of the Charter of Rights because it helps to protect from discrimination. However, that does not mean they support every Liberal policy put forward in the name of the charter.

It strikes me as inevitable that one day soon churches, temples and synagogues in the country will be compelled to sanctify same sex unions. Soon the protections given to religious officials will be challenged. It will probably begin with the removal of tax exemptions for religious organizations that refuse to solemnize same sex marriages.

There are already divisions within protestant denominations over same sex marriage. The United Church of Canada sanctifies gay marriage, as do some Anglican churches in Canada.

It is a losing battle. Already the morality of homosexuality is a discussion controlled by political correctness. People who say anything in the negative are automatically labelled as homophobic and their arguments are dismissed without further consideration.

The government has assured Canadians that this legislation will have no bearing on the conduct of marriages in churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and gurdwaras, but the Supreme Court has already ruled that this issue falls beyond the jurisdiction of the federal government.

In conclusion, the Liberals have brought forward anti-family policies since 1993. They fail to realize that the family is the foundation of our society. The government should not dare to engineer society. Its flip-flop since 1999 indicates that the government has a hidden agenda.

Same sex partners should be permitted to legally register their relationships if they wish to do so, but as a civil union and not as a marriage. This is a practical solution that would satisfy the vast majority of Canadians. The same privileges and laws would apply to both types of formal relationships. This is a middle way on this issue.

● (1340)

Bill C-38 is bad for Canada. If passed it would undermine the family and strike against a cornerstone of our society. Therefore, I will oppose this bill.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise to speak in the House today on the subject of the definition of marriage. I care very deeply about family, my family as well as others' families, and I am very concerned that the direction the government is taking on this important matter is the wrong one.

My dad's parents were married for 66 years. My wife's parents were married for 62 years, ending when my beloved father-in-law passed away. My parents were married for 67 and a half years, again ending with the passing away of my dear father just over two years ago. My wife Betty and I will have been married for 44 years this summer. We expect that this marriage, too, will last until death do us part.

All of the families I have mentioned are near and dear to me and they all saw the benefits of a caring mother and father and the enjoyment of children, parents and grandparents with each other. How privileged and blessed I have been to have been surrounded by families with integrity, trust, fidelity and deep and caring love.

There are so many important facets to this debate that I could speak for several hours to cover them all. I think of issues like the democratic process, the assumptions that are made about the nature of homosexuality, the ways in which a man and a woman complement each other, the so-called rights or equality issue, the implications for children, the religious freedom aspect, the history of marriage, and more. I will just barely get started in the 10 minutes allotted to me.

Let us start with the issue of democracy. It is no wonder to me that Canadians have become cynical and disillusioned about government, democracy and elections. That is because this Liberal government does not listen to the people and it does not even feel embarrassed about breaking promises.

On June 8, 1999—and this has been mentioned a number of times but I have it in my speech and it needs to be repeated over and over again—recognizing that the institution of marriage was being attacked, our party put forward a supply day motion. It has been read before, but I want to repeat it:

That, in the opinion of this House, it is necessary, in light of public debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.

On that day the Deputy Prime Minister, then as minister of justice, spoke and voted in favour of that bill. The prime minister of the day, Mr. Chrétien, and the current Prime Minister also voted in favour.

My leader, in responding to this current legislation introduced a couple of weeks ago, quoted extensively from the Deputy Prime Minister's speech. I will not repeat all of it here. She was unequivocal, saying things like this:

Let me state again for the record that the government has no intention of changing the definition of marriage or of legislating same sex marriages.

That is a direct quote.

Government Orders

She said again:

I fundamentally do not believe that it is necessary to change the definition of marriage in order to accommodate the equality issues around same sex partners which now face us as Canadians.

She referred to the legal precedent for the traditional definition of marriage and said:

That case and that definition are considered clear law by ordinary Canadians, by academics, and by the courts. The courts have upheld the constitutionality of that definition...I support the motion for maintaining the clear, legal definition of marriage in Canada as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

That is a quote directly from our Deputy Prime Minister. All of this is in *Hansard*. I actually distributed her speech to a number of my constituents when they asked about this issue, but now we find that she and her colleagues in the Liberal government are untrustworthy. Their words meant nothing.

In my view, both the lower courts of this country and this Liberal government were in contempt of Parliament when they acted precisely opposite to the motion that was debated, voted on and passed in Parliament on June 8, 1999.

• (1345)

When the courts ruled that homosexuals had the right to marry, this spineless government did not even take the trouble to appeal the decision, notwithstanding the motion that had been passed: that Parliament would do everything necessary to preserve that definition. This lack of action was cited in this recent Supreme Court response in the reference case as a tacit approval of the government for what the lower courts did. Shame on the government

Let us add to that the spectacle we have in the House here day after day of members presenting petitions on retaining the present definition of marriage. Hundreds of petitions with thousands of names have been sent in. Are we just going to ignore the wishes of our constituents, the voters and the citizens of this country, and thereby make a total mockery of democracy?

No wonder Canadians are turned off and are staying away from the polls on voting day. They are saying, with increasing validity, that it does not make any difference. Shame on this government for allowing this to happen.

In addition, all of us have had many personal contacts, letters, emails, faxes and phone calls from constituents who are opposed to changing the definition of marriage. In my case, about 95% of these communications are urging me to vote against this bill. I am going to do that. I am going to stand for the definition of family as we have known it for millennia, for moms and dads and their mutual complementary caring for their children.

On another topic, I take strong exception to the use the government is making of the apparent religious freedom guaranteed by this bill. This is nothing more than deception. How can we trust the government to guarantee religious freedoms when we have numerous cases already where human rights tribunals have trumped religious freedoms in favour of so-called homosexual rights?

We even have no religious freedom from the government side in this debate, with cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries being told to vote against their conscience and against their religious

beliefs or lose their positions. Marriage commissioners in B.C. and Saskatchewan were given notice to agree to marry same sex partners or lose their credentials.

The Supreme Court in its reference response said explicitly that this guarantee was not in the federal government's realm to grant, yet the government has included it in the legislation anyway even though it has already been ruled *ultra vires*. Why? Why did the government do it?

I think the answer is clear. The government wants to use this as an argument to justify its flawed legislation and hopefully put to sleep those who realize the danger that we are getting into. The Liberals want people to believe that their religious freedoms are being protected when in fact they are not. They want people and members of Parliament to support this bill based on this empty promise.

Let me briefly comment on the equality issue. I find it curious that the government is using the equality argument so forcefully when in fact there is still no equality. According to this government, these new rights and equalities are accorded to those living in a conjugal relationship.

Where is the equality for those who are not engaging in some sort of sexual activity?

I think of two sisters I know who never married. They lived with their mother, their father having passed away when they were young. All three of them mutually looked after each other. Eventually their mother got old and died. The two sisters still live together. Why can they not name each other as beneficiaries for CPP or health care coverage? It is because they are not conjugating. What sense does that make? Since when do we base eligibility for government programs on sexual activity?

Many years ago when I first became involved in politics, I read a statement that has always stayed with me. That statement said in effect that politics is the art of reconciling competing interests.

In my view, this Prime Minister, the justice minister and the government have done an exceptionally poor job of that in this case. Instead of reconciling the various sides of this debate, the government has chosen to pit Canadian against Canadian and to divide families, co-workers and neighbours.

Why did the government not search for and find a solution to this dilemma along the lines suggested by the Deputy Prime Minister in 1999? Why could the government not have found a way of making sure that rights were protected on both sides?

The Conservative proposal is the compromise that is needed and that Canadians support. The traditional definition of marriage between one woman and one man is upheld and the rights of others are supported. Religious freedoms are upheld.

• (1350)

My time has expired. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important bill. I urge all members of the House, whether under the Prime Minister's heavy hand or not, to be true to their conscience, to the will of the people in their riding, to Canadians from coast to coast, and to our future generations, and support the amendment supported by our party. Let us work together on behalf of all Canadians—

Tributes

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill C-38, perhaps the most contentious piece of legislation that I have debated since coming to this House in 2000.

Debates on moral issues are always contentious and intense because arguments for or against these issues are based on values. It is extremely difficult, and rightfully so, for most people to abandon their values, especially if those values have been ingrained and nurtured over many years within the home, school and the church.

The most important aspect of today's debate, in my opinion, will be respecting the views and values of those on either side of this issue, respecting that regardless of what others say, many Canadians will refuse to accept the fact that marriage is anything but the union of one man and one woman.

That refusal is based on long held values that no one can or should deny. That refusal is based on the principal premise that the union of one man and one woman is a very unique and sacred relationship and that it is at the root of all humanity.

As Justice La Forest pointed out in *Egan v. Canada* in 1995:

Marriage has from time immemorial been firmly grounded in our legal tradition, one that is itself a reflection of long-standing philosophical and religious traditions, but its ultimate *raison d'être* transcends all of these and is firmly anchored in the biological...realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate....

As John H. Redecop, professor emeritus of political science, wrote on March 5, 2005:

—[La Forest's] perspective has been affirmed, since time immemorial, by all societies, all major cultures and all major religions. The state did not invent the institution of marriage and our government, which has the constitutional responsibility to regulate it, should not fundamentally redefine it.

Like many other academics, this professor also reinforces a point that has been raised numerous times in the House during the debate on Bill C-38, which is that same sex marriage is not essentially a rights issue and that not every rights claim is a valid claim. Need I remind the House that article 1 of the charter states:

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

I would strongly suggest, especially in recognition of Justice La Forest's learned remarks, that marriage is by nature heterosexual and that limiting marriage to the union of one man and one woman is a reasonable limit. To emphasize this point, I refer to observations made in a letter to me:

It must be stressed that homosexuals need to be treated fairly and homophobia must be rejected vigorously. But a commitment to fairness and justice does not require the government or private citizens to mete out identical treatment. Not all differentiation is unwarranted or evil. Nor is every restriction of perceived rights a denial of justice. The crucial issue is whether any given restriction is reasonable... Good public policy must incorporate the making of informed and reasonable distinctions. Further, an insistence to call different entities by the same name is itself an inconsistency; it creates confusion and weakens credibility.

What is being said here, a sentiment I strongly agree with, is that the procreative or unique relationship that exists only between a man and a woman should be recognized and it should be recognized by allowing only this relationship to be defined by the word "marriage". This is not to say that same sex couples should not enjoy the same

benefits and protection under the law and be legally recognized couples within civil unions.

I will oppose this legislation and I will do so with the overwhelming support of the people of my riding of Crowfoot.

Unlike some of those opposite, I am speaking on behalf of my constituents. Based on the numerous town hall meetings I have hosted and on thousands of letters, emails, faxes and telephone calls, I am honestly and accurately reflecting the majority opinion within my constituency.

I ask how many on the opposite side can say the same. If the most recent poll, which shows that 66% of Canadians support the traditional definition of marriage, is any indication, then the answer is that not very many on the other side are representing their constituents.

● (1355)

I stand in the House to oppose Bill C-38, with the support of the leader of the Conservative Party. Unlike the Liberal leader, our leader believes in free votes. He believes that members of Parliament must vote according to the majority views in their riding. The Conservative Party believes in democracy.

The Liberal government has, and I quote from the February 3 *National Post*, "spent the last two months trying to convince Canadians that the Supreme Court said something it didn't: that the current definition of marriage in unconstitutional".

Appealing to the vague emotional attachments many Canadians have to the charter, the Prime Minister and the justice minister have falsely declared that implementing gay marriage is necessary to protect the document and suggests that—

● (1400)

The Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but he will have four and a half minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks when debate resumes. As he knows, the rules require that the Speaker interrupt at 2 o'clock.

I understand there have been discussions among the parties in the House and there has been agreement that a representative of each of the parties will make a short statement with respect to the recent death of Pope John Paul II.

[*Translation*]

The right hon. Prime Minister.

* * *

[*English*]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Pope John Paul II not only embodied and served a religious ideal, he transcended it. He broke barriers. He built bridges. He reached out to all who walk on this earth. He stood up for people regardless of age, of race or faith. He was a beacon of spiritual guidance and a champion of human freedom. During the course of his 26 years as head of the Roman Catholic Church, he was a tireless and influential apostle of peace.

Tributes

[*Translation*]

His wide-ranging travels, despite ill health, were an expression of his determination to use every opportunity to promote international reconciliation and respect for democratic values and human rights.

History will also record that John Paul II made a vital contribution to the democratic transformation of central and eastern Europe, and to the end of the cold war.

[*English*]

The Pope's global vision included Canada. His empathy with the aspirations of aboriginal Canadians, symbolized by his special trip to the north in 1987 to meet aboriginal communities, was particularly noteworthy and indelible.

Unforgettable were his visits throughout our country as well as his participation in World Youth Day in Toronto in July 2002 during which he inspired hundreds of thousands of young people with the strength and the clarity of his moral vision.

For Catholics and indeed for all the people of the world, it was truly moving to bear witness to the grace, the courage and the dignity that the Pope displayed during his life of service and during his final days among us.

[*Translation*]

Today, in churches and in coffee shops, around the dinner table and around the world, we mourn the death of John Paul II. We celebrate his achievements. We marvel at a single human life that touched so many of us, guided so many of us, and inspired and comforted so many of us.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join with the Prime Minister. Since Saturday, the world has witnessed and has, indeed, felt an outpouring of affection and respect for a world figure as has rarely been seen in history.

John Paul II was both a man of God and a man of the people. His teachings and his examples touched all humanity around the world for more than a quarter century. His life was extraordinarily full and was dedicated to truth, faith and moral principles.

Canadians in particular will never forget his three pilgrimages to this country. We will remember with special gratitude and affection his decision to come back to visit the aboriginal communities in the Canadian north, which he had been unable to reach during his first visit.

A whole new generation was also touched profoundly when he gave special meaning and radiance to World Youth Day in Toronto.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

Pope John Paul II was one of the most revered Roman Catholic leaders of the modern era, bringing powerful direction and a clear vision to the Catholic Church, and spreading his message of love, truth and hope around the world.

Since his ascension to the papacy in 1978, Pope John Paul II made over 100 foreign trips, and endeared himself to millions with his courage, charisma, warmth and integrity. In our country, he

unforgettably touched the lives of thousands of people with his direct and warm style and with his luminous faith.

[*English*]

Pope John Paul II has left a mark in history that will not diminish. He was an unwavering defender of human rights everywhere and of all peoples. He challenged the two great evils that threatened civilization in the 20th century. He denounced the anti-Semitism that underlay fascism and he played a key role in the fall of communism with his unwavering moral support for the Solidarity movement in his native Poland.

No matter the political ideology, John Paul II brought leaders and common men and women together with his strength of spirit, even in his final, difficult days, days in which his infirmities and suffering were witness to the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of all human life, which was so central to his message.

[*Translation*]

When celebrating his 20th anniversary in 1998, he asked for prayers to fulfill his mission "until the end". Looking back on the legacy of Pope John Paul II, I would say those prayers were answered. Today, it is the wish of all people of goodwill that John Paul II rest in peace for eternity and that his message of peace, love and fraternity continue to illuminate the world.

[*English*]

On behalf of the official opposition, the Conservative Party of Canada, I do wish to join with the Prime Minister, with all members of the House and with all Canadians to extend our condolences to the Vatican, to Catholics and to people the world over whose lives were touched by John Paul II's remarkable papacy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the death of John Paul II, we have seen the outpouring of goodwill for this Pope.

The members of the Bloc Québécois and I want to offer our condolences to the Roman Catholic Church and all Catholics in Quebec, Canada and throughout the world. We also offer condolences to the people of Poland and all those touched in one way or another by this man.

The message of peace he delivered throughout his life is a universal one, which transcended conflicts, religious or otherwise, between peoples.

Karol Wojtyla embodied strong values, such as resistance to tyranny. He played a key role the modern history of Poland and the countries of Eastern Europe, which not so long ago were still suffering under totalitarian regimes.

Solely on the strength of his convictions and promotion of peace, he made a notable contribution to transforming, in concrete terms, the lives of millions of women and men. Early in his pontificate, he contributed to the downfall of these Communist dictatorships, which were based on fear, with his famous "Be not afraid".

Karol Wojtyla also demanded greater social justice in the world. During his many travels to every continent, he never stopped encouraging greater solidarity and sharing. He worked tirelessly for peace and open dialogue among faiths and countries. In these difficult times marked by war and terrorism, this message must live on, because it is more relevant now than ever.

John Paul II was also known for his simplicity and his generosity. He sowed the seeds of peace. His legacy will live for many years to come. We owe him a great deal. Today, we salute him one last time.

Thank you, Karol Wojtyla. *i dowidzenia!*

● (1410)

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with abiding sadness that I join with all members of the House in expressing the sense of loss that is felt by Canadian Catholics, the faithful everywhere and by all people touched by the extraordinary life of His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

[Translation]

Pope John Paul II led an inspirational life. He was a soaring figure with an incredible common touch.

During his three visits to Canada, he was met by huge crowds from all walks of life and from many faiths.

[English]

During his three visits he was met by huge crowds from all walks of life and from many faiths. I had the honour to meet with His Holiness, and the memory of those moments, of his hand on mine, of his smile and of his immense spiritual presence will always remain with me and with so many Canadians.

It is fitting that his last trip to Canada was to attend World Youth Day in Toronto. The Pontiff seemed most alive when he was with the young. He drew a renewed vitality from the world's youth who seemed to inspire him right to the end.

[Translation]

Pope John Paul II was a man of peace. From his earliest days, he advocated the peaceful resolution of conflict above all other means. He was a vocal opponent of the wars in Iraq.

In his homeland of Poland, Pope John Paul II bravely defended the shipyard workers in Gdansk during their 1980 strike. He challenged the dictators of Eastern Europe with his powerful words, "Be Not Afraid".

[English]

His commitment to bolster the Solidarity struggle has been credited with beginning the process of democratization of eastern Europe and precipitating the end of the cold war.

In the year 2000 his historic apology for the past misdeeds of the Catholic church was an important and powerful step forward. Though today he lay in state, the enduring image in our memories is that of a strong, healthy Pontiff who bounded off planes and knelt to kiss the Canadian soil.

S. O. 31

[Translation]

In Canada and the world over, we have seen an outpouring of emotion for a man who reached beyond the scope of religion, and touched so many. The New Democratic Party of Canada joins with them in mourning his passing.

The Speaker: I invite all members to rise for a moment of silence.

[The House stood in silence]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

HUGUETTE BURROUGHS

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 31, a great Franco-Ontarian journalist has left us.

Huguette Burroughs was born in L'Orignal, in my riding, in 1950. While still very young, she developed a passion for journalism writing for the Hawkesbury *Le Carillon*.

But she made her name at the *Journal de Cornwall* during her 30 years there as a municipal affairs reporter. What made her exceptional is her refusal to be held back by the loss of her sight at the age of 32.

In addition to her career in journalism, she was a staunch defender of rights, those of francophones and women, among others. She inspired a number of journalists in my region and will definitely continue to be felt.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a psychopath charged with 164 crimes, convicted of 34, one for shooting a policeman in the back of the head, was released by the judiciary into the public.

This psychopath subhumanly brutalized 64 year old Dougald Miller of Edmonton, rendering him incapable of ever caring for himself again. The trial cost \$1 million, including the testimony of 12 doctors, all to be certain that the psychopath's rights were respected.

In a lengthy judgment now being appealed, every avenue was explored on the criminal's behalf before declaring him a dangerous offender.

Meanwhile, Dougald's wife, Lesley, pays \$1,500 per month for therapy not covered by health care. Dougald still has mind and eye movement that could be helped by new technology to allow him to speak again.

We have much to learn from the experiences of Dougald but first we must help him with the \$25,000 cost to enable his eyes to speak for him again.

S. O. 31

CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is Cancer Awareness Month.

Every year cancer kills millions of people worldwide and over 65,000 people here in Canada. It is estimated that a third of Canadians will develop cancer at some point in their lives. The disease has many faces, causes and is a challenge to treat and control. Therefore it is critical that cancer research continues.

Health Canada joins the Canadian Cancer Society in kick-starting this month with daffodil days. This is a time for Canadians to display our spirit of generosity.

I encourage people to give of their time and money in order to fund the fight against this deadly adversary. Money raised from this initiative will go toward cancer awareness, research, treatment and support for those affected.

I applaud all the volunteers and donors who strive to make a difference.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FRANÇOIS GÉRIN

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were greatly saddened to hear of the death yesterday of François Gérin.

After making a name for himself throughout Quebec as a criminal lawyer, he came upon the federal political scene in 1984 under the Progressive Conservative banner, as the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead.

On May 18, 1990, with the Meech Lake agreement's failure looming, he made the announcement in this House that he had decided to sit as an independent.

Realizing sovereignty was the only possibility for the future of Quebec, he joined with Lucien Bouchard in founding the Bloc Québécois.

This ardent defender of funding by the people, this man of conviction and principle, was also a man of flexibility, one who respected his adversaries and was respected by them.

His deeds will forever remain part of Quebec's history and the progress of its people toward full sovereignty.

The Bloc Québécois wishes to extend its sincere condolences to the family and friends of François Gérin.

* * *

[*English*]

PETERBOROUGH

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last summer, Peterborough and surrounding municipalities were hit by disastrous floods. Thousands of homes, businesses and not for profit groups were devastated.

The community's response to this disaster was extraordinary. Neighbours helped neighbours. The county-city emergency measures organization, led by Mayor Sylvia Sutherland, swung into

action in a remarkable fashion. It coordinated the work of volunteers and professionals, of firefighters, police and a variety of other local groups.

The national emergency measures protocol, through which first the province and then the federal government back up municipalities, worked well and is still working.

I thank the Government of Ontario, the federal emergency measures organization, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and others who helped us. I thank all the volunteers who came to help us. I thank the federal departments, notably HRSDC, Industry Canada and the national museums, which gave us aid outside of the disaster protocol.

Our community is still recovering from this tragedy but I am proud to say that we have grown as a result of it and we are fully open for business.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now that we have the first person account of Zahra Kazemi's murder from the very doctor who examined her remains, Canadians have proof positive of the inhumane treatment of a Canadian citizen.

It is time for Canada to get tough with the odious Iranian regime that stole the revolution in Iran. The Liberal soft diplomacy approach is simply no longer acceptable.

Canada has one of Iran's largest expat communities in the world. Two hundred and fifty thousand former Iranians reside here and they are asking Canada to defend their interests and that of their families.

It is time Canada reaches out to Iran's dissident community worldwide, finding ways to promote democracy and offering real assistance to communicate Canadian values.

The government should get past babbling about how horrified we are over the Kazemi case and get moving on positive fronts to support those Canadians now working for democracy in Iran. On this count, Canada should lead the world rather than follow.

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● (1420)

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the passing of Pope John Paul II, the world has lost a religious leader who earned the respect of many people of all faiths. He was an inspiration and a man of extraordinary faith, strength and courage. He never wavered in the struggle for what he thought was good and right.

In January 2004, the Pope said that “government cannot be an arbiter in any religious matter. Governments should respect the dignity of the human person whose right to adhere, practice and propagate his religion is fundamental”.

He was not afraid to say what was on his mind and to speak out in support of global peace.

He will be remembered with profound respect and admiration by millions of people across the globe.

On behalf of the Sikh community across Canada and my constituents, I extend my deepest sympathy to the Catholic people of Canada and around the world on the death of a remarkable man, Pope John Paul II.

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[Translation]

ZAHRA KAZEMI

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, Dr. Shahram Azam eloquently and courageously revealed the details of the brutal rape and torture that Zahra Kazemi endured.

Despite this information, it seems that the Iranian government has no intention of getting to the bottom of this case. It is time for the Canadian government to put its words into action in order for justice to be served in this important matter, by taking this case to the International Court of Justice. Furthermore, Canada must do everything in its power to ensure nothing like this ever happens again. This tragic story must also prompt the government to develop better means of protecting individuals with dual citizenship. Words are not enough, and the government must take concrete action so that Zahra Kazemi's death does not remain unpunished.

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[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey recently stood in the House to comment on the government's investment in infrastructure and municipalities.

Her sudden interest in cities was quite surprising. Perhaps she is not aware that her party campaigned on scrapping three of the four infrastructure funds that communities rely upon. Maybe she missed the Conservative policy convention where they voted against sharing the gas tax with municipalities.

The truth is that while the Conservatives would do nothing, this government cares about Canada's communities. That is why we have invested \$12 billion in their infrastructure since 1993, and that is why we have provided \$5 billion from the gas tax for municipalities.

We promised to invest in Canada's cities and communities and we are keeping that promise.

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LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the last month I have been making notes of the responses from ministers and I have concluded that dithering is contagious. The dithering disease is spreading from the Prime Minister to his cabinet.

Here are just a few of the dithering phrases used by Liberal ministers as they explain their inaction to questioners, "This is an issue that requires further discussion". "We are currently studying the matter". "The Kyoto plan will evolve over time". "The answer

S. O. 31

will come in the fullness of time". "We will do what is right at the time of our choosing".

Liberals are dithering on the softwood lumber dispute, dithering on a Kyoto plan, dithering on Senate reform, dithering on western alienation and dithering on real solutions to the crisis in agriculture.

It is not just the Prime Minister who is dithering. It is the whole rickety cabinet.

The Liberals have no agenda and no vision whatsoever for the country so they dither and fiddle while Rome—I mean our tax dollars—burn.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if our farmers needed any more proof that the Liberal Party defends their interests, they received it on March 29. That is the day our government announced \$1 billion in aid under the Farm Income Payment Program in order to ease cashflow pressures on farmers in Canada.

This new measure is in addition to the federal, provincial and territorial programs currently in place to help the agriculture sector, which paid out a record \$4.9 billion in aid to our farmers last year. In addition, our government has addressed farmers directly through national consultations to discuss ways of developing the sector and improving sales revenue.

Our government has been helping Canadian farmers for over 10 years when there have been income crises and it will continue to support them in the short, medium and long terms.

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● (1425)

[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like many Canadians, residents in my Sault Ste. Marie riding this weekend mourned the death and celebrated the life of Pope John Paul II.

This Pope was an extraordinary man of faith, intellect and prayer. He inspired so many of us in working tirelessly for social justice and for peace throughout the world.

I will remember particularly his solidarity with workers as he spoke up for just, social and economic conditions in the workplace.

He was a voice for genuine fellowship with other world religions.

Pope John Paul II is credited with helping to begin the process of democratization of in eastern Europe.

I know Pope John Paul II holds a special place in the hearts of Canadians.

As a Catholic, I was moved by his personal example of reconciliation in forgiving the man who tried to kill him and by his historic apology in 2000 for past misdeeds of the church.

Oral Questions

I want to express my deepest condolences to Catholic Canadians, the faithful around the world and to people everywhere who have been touched by the exceptional life of Pope John Paul II.

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VOLLEYBALL

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Red Deer, I rise today to congratulate the Red Deer College Kings for winning their sixth consecutive national volleyball championship. They did so by downing the Capilano College Blues from North Vancouver 25-18, 25-21, 25-21 in the final Canadian Colleges Athletic Association men's volleyball championship on Saturday, March 12.

The Red Deer College Kings' win tied Limoilou College of Quebec City for the longest win streak in CCAA history and gave the Kings eight titles in eleven years, leaving them just one back of Limoilou for the overall record. The Kings have now won 38 straight matches in provincial and national competition.

On behalf of my constituents, I wish to congratulate the Kings for their brilliant record and their perseverance for achieving what has now become a volleyball dynasty in Red Deer.

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[Translation]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Pope John Paul II, this great messenger and apostle of peace, is no more.

He entered the clandestine seminary of Krakow in 1942. He witnessed the Nazi and communist dictatorships. From the day he was elected Pope in 1978 until his death on Saturday, Karol Wojtyla was a man of prayer and action, a man of word and thought.

True to the teachings of Jesus Christ, John Paul II was a staunch protector of peace and human rights. He expressed his dignified acceptance of suffering in these terms, in 1994:

Dear brothers and sisters who suffer in body and in spirit, it is my wish that all of you will be able to recognize and accept God's call for you to be workers of peace through the offering of your pain. It is not easy to respond to such a demanding call.

John Paul II was the embodiment of this extraordinary hope.

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[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we mourn the passing of one of our great moral leaders, we must also celebrate the life of Pope John Paul II.

His Holiness was a remarkable leader whose passion for the advancement of truth, liberty and human dignity made him one of the giants of history.

He was an advocate of the oppressed and the poor, a champion of freedom in a time of totalitarianism, an unwavering defender of the Catholic faith, yet he was accessible to all, Catholics and non-Catholics, believers and non-believers, willing to embrace the interfaith relations to an extent once considered unimaginable.

He was, above all, a beacon of courage.

Aristotle said, "Courage is the first of the virtues because it makes all others possible".

Pope John Paul II defined his life through courage, the courage to forgive and ask forgiveness, the courage to profess his faith in an age of tyranny and, in the end, the courage to bravely suffer.

As we mourn today, we must also celebrate his life and his message of "be not afraid".

This great spirit of hope will echo throughout the ages.

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like many others in the House, I rise today to pay tribute to the life and career of Karol Jozef Wojtyla, better known to the world as Pope John Paul II, who passed away on Saturday.

The entire world will feel the loss of Pope John Paul II. His influence and vision extended far beyond the Roman Catholic Church. He was not only a source of spiritual guidance but also a leader in world peace, democracy and human rights.

When one reviews his lengthy career, it is only then that one can appreciate the enormity of his accomplishments: from living under the Nazi occupation of Poland, then under Communist rule, to the fall of the cold war, urging the advent of democracy in eastern European countries, reaching out to other faiths and forever fighting for human rights, social justice and peace. I submit that he has changed the very fabric of society.

In addition to being the leader of the world's Catholics, he influenced the world like few others, and maybe it could be suggested like no other. He was, throughout his career, a man of extraordinary faith, dignity and courage.

As his worldly journey is now over, may he rest in eternal peace.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

● (1430)

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Liberal spin doctors and Liberal lawyers actually have the gall to try to depict the Liberal Party as the victim of the sponsorship scandal. Caught as it is, will the government at least have the decency to simply admit that the only victim is the Canadian taxpayer whose money was stolen?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party consists of thousands of men and women in Quebec and right across this country who are dedicated to the Liberal Party and to their country. They work day in and day out for the benefit of Canadians. Those members of the Liberal Party should not have to bear the rumours or the burden of the activities of a very small few who may have colluded against the party and against the well-being of Canadians.

Oral Questions

We will defend those Liberals. These are Canadians who have given their all for their country.

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IRAN

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the judge, the police and Canadians will be the judges of how involved the Liberal Party has been.

On another subject, last week Canadians finally learned the details of the brutal torture and murder of journalist Zahra Kazemi in Iran. It turns out that for months the Prime Minister knew the true extent of the brutality inflicted upon Ms. Kazemi. Instead of taking a firm stand against Iran, he sent our ambassador back to that oppressive regime.

What kind of callous, spineless government re-establishes normal diplomatic relations with that kind of regime?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me respond first to the preamble. The fact is that Canadians do merit having the facts and should have the facts. That is why I called for the Gomery commission. That is why this government put that commission in place. It is precisely to have those facts. That is why there should not be an election until Justice Gomery has reported, because Canadians deserve to know the facts.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Now if I may respond to the hon. member's question over the baying on the other side—

The Speaker: I am afraid the right hon. Prime Minister has used up the time responding to the preamble, but I suspect there might be a supplementary question from the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me just say that was a perfect example of what is wrong with the government. He should have used the opportunity to defend a Canadian citizen, not the Liberal Party.

[*Translation*]

A Canadian citizen was tortured and murdered by the Iranian government. While the family was looking for answers, the government hid the facts, and the Prime Minister kept silent.

What can we call a government that lets its citizens be murdered?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): If the Leader of the Opposition wants answers to his questions, he should not mix questions fundamental to Canadians with partisan questions, accusations and allegations.

Canada has the intention and has already shown clearly that we will defend Canadians and that the position of the Iranian government is unacceptable. We do not accept it. Iran is in the wrong. It was murder. This is why we brought Dr. Azam here. We want to show the facts clearly.

• (1435)

[*English*]

We have protected the life of Dr. Azam. We have brought him here in order to demonstrate to the world the murder in which—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that doctor was safe in Sweden five months ago when this information was revealed. Last week while we were not in session, the Liberals, red-faced and humiliated, admitted that a Canadian woman was brutally tortured and murdered. They found this out in early November and what was their response? In late November they sent our ambassador back to Iran.

This response was absolutely devoid of principle and absolutely disrespectful of the most precious human rights. Why? Why did the Liberals respond this way?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have facilitated Dr. Azam's coming to this country precisely because we wanted to say to the face of the planet exactly what took place in Iran. Dr. Azam's troubling elements, this very troubling demonstration, is something that we can absolutely put to every other country. We have been working hard with the international community to maintain pressure on Iran. We have been doing it at the United Nations commission in Geneva. We have done it in New York. We will continue until justice is rendered.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): They are so troubled, Mr. Speaker, all they can do is dither.

[*Translation*]

It is incredible. This government did nothing, while it knew that outrageous violations of human rights were being committed against a Canadian. Worse yet, how could the government release this information five months later without ever rebuking the Iranian government?

It is high time this government did something. When is it going to get around to sending a clear message of indignation to the government of Iran, recalling the Canadian ambassador to Tehran and demanding that the government of Iran give—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member has been. For two years, this government has said in this House to all Canadians that what happened in Iran is murder. The member is saying we should state it strongly and clearly for once. For two years, we have been saying what Dr. Azam has just stated.

We helped him come to Canada precisely to show the world that Canada, in its crusade against Iran, with its lack of respect for human rights, deserves the support of the international community. It is by working as a team and with the other members of the international community that we will see justice done in Iran.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone is waiting for the Liberals to implement the Kyoto protocol. Industry wants a comprehensive plan so it knows what to expect. The environmentalists are worried, because one and a half months after the protocol's coming into force, the government still does not have a complete and improved plan, despite the commitment made by the Minister of the Environment. Worse yet, the government is divided.

Will the Prime Minister take advantage of today's cabinet meeting to stop dithering, to finally make a decision, and ensure that his government makes its implementation plan for the Kyoto protocol public this week?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of the Environment has already said, it is our intention to submit a plan that will enable us to take a position of leadership, not only in Canada but in the world.

I must say that what is important is not only our plan for Kyoto, but also the international leadership we will demonstrate in Montreal at the United Nations meetings. Canada, in the person of the Minister of the Environment, will chair that convention.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): That is not very reassuring, Mr. Speaker.

The Prime Minister's dithering will end up costing Quebec and Canadian taxpayers and businesses very dearly. The cost of green credits is rising swiftly and polluting businesses are hesitant to purchase them because they do not know what to expect from the government. That is the reality.

Will the Prime Minister finally make a decision so that the comprehensive plan for the implementation of the Kyoto protocol can be made public by Friday? There must be no further delays, since Canada's ability to reach its goals is already compromised. When can we expect the plan to be announced?

• (1440)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the plan will be made public very soon. It will be an excellent plan that takes into account Canada's strengths in all fields, in all forms of energy, in all the kinds of skills we have in Quebec and all the other provinces.

Here at home, Canada will be in a good position to do its part for the planet, not only by reaching the Kyoto target, but also by playing a leadership role in the world, as the Prime Minister said.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is under heavy criticism from environmentalists for its months of delay in tabling its action plan for implementation of the Kyoto protocol.

Instead of dithering, as the key environmental groups accuse him of doing, what is keeping the Prime Minister from putting an end to the squabble between the ministers of environment and natural resources and at last tabling a plan in favour of the Kyoto protocol without further delay?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to reply, "Same question, same answer".

The only thing I would add, however, is that when we target the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, we are also ensuring that the Canadian economy will be more competitive because of the energy savings. We will select leading edge technologies and, as a result, will be in a position to be far more competitive as far as a sustainable economy is concerned.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the environmental groups claim the ball is definitely in the government's court and in favour of the Kyoto protocol.

Can we ask the Prime Minister to show a modicum of leadership and put his environment minister in his place by asking him to table a plan for application of the Kyoto protocol in Canada without further delay?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, same question, same answer. This does, however, afford me the opportunity to state that the plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Canada will, perhaps, be an opportunity to undertake major projects in this country that will do a great deal toward bolstering its economy and quality of life.

We are thinking for instance—and a number of provinces have called for this—of an east-west hydro-electric transmission line linking Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland. That would be a very large undertaking.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we were very touched moments ago by the very public shedding of crocodile tears by the Prime Minister for the Liberal Party. We can only hope that the Liberal promises to pay back the dirty money are promises that are kept a little better than their promises to clean up the dirty air in this country.

Eight leading environmental groups say that they do not support the games being played with the budget and the amendments to CEPA. They criticize the Liberal failure to stand up for mandatory fuel efficiency in cars. They are asking, where is the Kyoto plan? That is my question.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Kyoto plan is going to be revealed.

What really amazes me is that the leader of the NDP does not seem to understand the actions that have already been taken in this country by the government. He does not understand that progress has been made. He does not seem to understand the thesis that has been put forth by the Minister of the Environment in which he said that we will clean up the environment and at the same time develop the kinds of technologies that will boost our economy and enable other countries such as China, India and Russia to clean up their economies.

I would suggest to the hon. member that he ought to get out of this House occasionally and go across the country. He might want to go to Saskatchewan where he would—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

*Oral Questions***IMMIGRATION**

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. We have been hearing those kinds of comments from the Prime Minister for 16 years since he began promising to clean up the air for Canadians and instead we have worse pollution than ever. He makes Neville Chamberlain look like a stalwart in standing up to a crisis.

Smog is sending people to emergency wards at unprecedented levels. The prairies are drying up. We have forest fires like we have never had before. All we get are promises of plans to be brought forward some day. Will he bring forward a plan, yes or no?

● (1445)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the leader of the NDP is just jealous because elsewhere in this federation never has an NDP government delivered a plan as green as the one delivered by the Minister of Finance a couple of weeks ago.

About the Kyoto plan, we are all on board. We all agree. When it comes I am sure the NDP will say it is a great plan.

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AIR-INDIA

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want closure to the sad story of the Air-India bombing. We must have final and clear answers to the issues surrounding this tragedy, including what went wrong in the investigative process.

A public inquiry would ensure this gross injustice never happened again. This case has been an absolute farce from the beginning with the judicial system and the families of the victims the clear losers.

When will the government allow justice to be served? When will it call a public inquiry into the Air-India fiasco?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the next step in the process on behalf of the government is me sitting down with family members and representatives of the families. I want to talk to the families about the questions they would like to see answered and what process we are able to pursue together to provide those answers.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a public inquiry is needed to answer the serious questions raised about the investigation into the Air-India bombing. After the worst Canadian terrorist disaster, 20 years later and \$120 million, Canadians deserve more than a shrug of the shoulders and a claim that things have changed.

There is no justice in what the Liberals are offering. What more will it take to convince the Deputy Prime Minister that a public inquiry is needed into the whole fiasco?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the next step in the process is that senior government officials representing CSIS, the RCMP and myself will sit down with family members and representatives of the families. We will determine, based on my conversations with them, what questions can usefully be answered and how we might be able to provide those answers.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's false promises hide a dark underbelly of unsavoury activities. The Prime Minister promised to establish a new climate in which whistleblowers would be welcomed. Just last week the immigration minister tore a strip off a whistleblower. He actually told a Sikh audience that the person who exposed abuse of temporary resident permits should be ashamed.

What exactly is the minister so anxious to hide?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess what I should have done is I should have repeated what I said in the House to a colleague of her party as well, that those who cast aspersions and make allegations without foundation should be embarrassed by the kind of damage that they bring onto people.

She will probably recall also that I gave an indication that there were some 16 people in question and not a single one of them was found to be in contravention of the permit that he had received. I said those who would make damage by casting aspersions on them ought to be embarrassed.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, then why was a Liberal MP under criminal investigation in the matter? Instead of welcoming whistleblowers as the Prime Minister promised, the immigration minister slammed a whistleblower for airing dirty laundry and warned ominously of risk to the community.

The minister clearly has warned a respected cultural community that it cannot raise concerns about abuses of the immigration system. Why is the minister trying to pressure and intimidate Sikh Canadians into hiding wrongdoing?

● (1450)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to read the rest of that article. Nobody was pressured into anything. No information was being suppressed. On the question of disseminating falsehoods, maybe the member would like to explain to the House, even outside, who the member is that is under criminal investigation. You should be ashamed of yourself for actually suggesting that it happens.

The Speaker: Hon. members will, of course, always want to address the Chair.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

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ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today the Bloc Québécois launched a broad consultation on the future of the St. Lawrence and its preservation, use and development. In the past, the federal government's decisions have not reflected much interest in the protection and enhancement of the St. Lawrence.

Oral Questions

For example, how does the federal government explain that, in the last budget, it allocated \$40 million to protecting the Great Lakes and nothing for most of the St. Lawrence?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member is unaware but the Great Lakes flow into the St. Lawrence. In any event, they share the same ecosystem, and this \$40 million will be used to develop a strategy applicable from the Great Lakes to the gulf. Some 19 million Canadians live around this giant ecosystem, which we are determined to better protect, in collaboration with the provinces and our neighbour, the United States.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Great Lakes have needs but so does the St. Lawrence.

The abandonment of the shoreline stabilization program and maintenance of numerous wharfs, the contamination of Lac St Pierre with Canadian forces munitions, excessive fees for ice-breaking and aids to navigation, and the collaboration with the Americans on the study to widen and deepen the seaway are all signs of the federal government's lack of interest in the St. Lawrence.

How can the federal government deny the fact that all its most recent decisions are negative and compromise the future of the St. Lawrence?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the good news about the quality of water in the St. Lawrence—improvements were made—there are also fears that must be put to rest.

As for deepening the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Government of Canada opposes this idea, and it is out of the question.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, groups concerned with defending the unemployed launched an “En marche” campaign to pressure the federal government to make significant improvements to the employment insurance system.

Considering the repeated demands of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Mouvement d'action-chômage, the sans-chemise, and the labour unions, including the Canadian Labour Congress, what is the Minister waiting for to make the real improvements to the employment insurance system called for by all key stakeholders?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all the stakeholders are working first and foremost on creating jobs in our society.

Judging by the statistics across the country, we can take pride in the great decrease in unemployment rates.

That said, the employment insurance system is there to help our workers cope with crises that arise in a particular area. That is

precisely what the system does. That is why, year after year, we have made improvements to better assist employers and employees.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): That is the problem, Mr. Speaker. The minister does not know the true purpose of the employment insurance system.

Today we concluded the second hour of debate on Bill C-278 for improving the employment insurance system. This bill reflects the demands made by advocates for the unemployed. This morning the government voted against it.

How could the government oppose this bill to make the necessary improvements to the EI system that all the stakeholders have been asking for?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, our government did, in fact, make improvements to the EI program, especially in regions where, unfortunately, the unemployment rate is over 10%.

We introduced five different measures, including one to make it easier to enter the EI system, one increasing allowable earnings while receiving benefits, and a measure to have benefits calculated on the best 14 weeks of 52. These are all improvements to help employees.

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● (1455)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me try the question again and maybe we will get an answer. We were promised the Kyoto plan first for February 16, the day that Kyoto came into force, then March 23, budget day, then it would be the next week. Now we understand that cabinet is meeting, approving the plan today and releasing it tomorrow.

Will the government be releasing it tomorrow or will there be more dithering and delay?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know who promised these dates, these deadlines to my colleague. We have never said that the plan would be released on a specific day and afterwards postponed it. It is completely untrue.

We have said that the plan will be released. It will be a great plan. It will strengthen the Canadian economy and it will very good everywhere in the country, including in the province of my hon. colleague.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been waiting eight years for that plan since we first signed on to Kyoto.

Project Green recommends that 102 million tonnes of foreign credits will have to be purchased every year. At today's price, that would mean \$2.7 billion per year in foreign credits, increasing daily. None of this would help to reduce emissions in Canada.

Could the minister tell the House how much money he plans to spend on foreign credits each year to get to our Kyoto target?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each of these credits will be greening credits. It will help decrease greenhouse gas emissions everywhere in the world because it will have the same impact everywhere in the world. It is a global problem.

Also, the numbers my colleague mentioned are completely untrue. He is using the numbers of the European Union allowance market, which is a closed market. Canadian companies do not have access to it.

The clean development mechanism market is \$38 Canadian a tonne. It is very affordable. Canada will be part of this market and we will learn to be champions in the carbon markets

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HEALTH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House will soon debate the health committee's report telling the government for a second time to follow the Krever inquiries recommendation and compensate all those who contracted hepatitis C from tainted blood.

The government has had years to solve the problem. The health committee calls for compassion. The majority of the House will soon vote to support the health committee's recommendation.

Will the health minister follow the wishes of the committee and the House of Commons and compensate these victims immediately?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the minister has indicated in the House on many occasions, he agrees with what the committee has reported. The committee voted unanimously.

The question becomes who, how much, what are the needs and where do we do it. Discussions are going on now. With the representatives of the pre-1986 and post-1990, discussions are ongoing with a view to providing compensation.

These things take a little time, but the minister is acting immediately, has started the process and will see it through.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members on the committee voted against this motion.

The minister fails to realize that while he offers weak excuses victims continue to die. Legal justification may help him sleep at night, but to those who are already affected by this tragedy such excuses are a slap in the face. People need our help now. End the cruel suspense, end the financial uncertainty.

Will the minister act immediately to help those who desperately need the government's help or will the minister let more people die while he dithers?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members of the committee voted unanimously to extend compensation. The minister agreed to that and began the process.

Oral Questions

The member asking the question, in partisan political fashion, brought a motion to the committee that Liberals could not support for two reasons. First, the work was already begun to provide compensation forthwith as quickly as possible. Second, the motion is flawed where it speaks of a federal compensation fund.

The compensation is not federal. It belongs to the people suffering from hepatitis C and is entrusted to them through the courts.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The livestock industry has been devastated since the discovery of BSE in Canada in May 2003 when many countries around the world closed their borders to the Canadian beef and other ruminant industry.

Could the Minister of Agriculture today tell the House what progress he may have made when he was in Cuba last week?

• (1500)

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that we were successful in entering into an agreement with Cuba, one based on science that will allow its borders to be reopened to live Canadian cattle, sheep and goats as well as to a range of beef products from cattle of any age.

This builds on success in many other countries and is part of our repositioning strategy for the cattle and beef industry so it can increase its capacity on one side and have additional markets on the other side, ensuring that it can be profitable with or without the U.S. border opening.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Young Liberals of Canada forgot to send one of their pithy "It's the Charter, stupid" buttons to the justice minister because his department is continuing its wrong-headed fight against George Hislop's charter rights for pension equality for Canada's lesbian and gay community.

It is so typical of these Liberals. They say one thing and do another; promise made, promise broken.

Will the Prime Minister today say that this senseless and costly legal fight will end today?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this case is not about same sex marriage. It is not even about the issue of gay rights. The appeal is in order to seek clarification from the Supreme Court with respect to the impact on all programs and benefits of federal legislation and what is the time line with respect to when those benefits run.

Oral Questions

I would think that the opposition member would also want to have a clarification of these matters in the interest of programs and benefits for all Canadians.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES'

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned that the federal government approved the importation of 680 foreign trades people to work at Ledcor Industries in Alberta.

It is hard to believe that the government approved such demand when we have over 1,000 trade workers unemployed in New Brunswick, not counting the rest of the Atlantic provinces and the other provinces of the country, who are ready to go to work in Alberta.

It is clear that this company only wants to bring cheap labour into Canada under the approval of the minister.

My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. How can the government justify the approval of foreign workers for the oil sands when many skilled Canadians are unemployed and ready to go to work anywhere in the country?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the foreign worker program was established in Canada after it was demonstrated that employers were not able to find Canadian manpower. The NDP member is getting worked up for no reason. No request relating to this issue was received by my department.

* * *

[English]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Paul Cochrane defrauded Canadians of millions of dollars which he diverted to the Virginia Fontaine Treatment Centre in exchange for bribes, gifts for family and friends, and dozens of lavish free trips.

Aline Dirks, who was his assistant and constant travelling companion, was fired by Health Canada for her role in the funding fiasco.

Now we have learned that she has spent the past seven months working for Elections Canada.

Would the government explain why it would hire someone who has been charged with fraud by the RCMP?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter deals with Elections Canada. It will be brought forward to Elections Canada for a report to the member in due course.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is wilful incompetence and that illustrates it.

Aline Dirks was complicit in Paul Cochrane's scheme to steal money from the treatment of addicted aboriginal children, yet after

the Virginia Fontaine spending scandal was national news, she was hired by Public Works and Government Services which claimed it was unaware of her charges. And, even after the RCMP laid charges of fraud, she was hired by Elections Canada, which also claimed it was unaware.

Since there are so many charges being laid these days, will the government ask future job applicants if they are currently before the courts?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the matter of Elections Canada, the members opposite know that Elections Canada is managed by an agent of Parliament who reports to the House through a committee of the House.

Having said that, the matter will be brought to the attention of the Chief Electoral Officer for a report to the House at the appropriate committee.

* * *

• (1505)

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's failure to effectively manage Canada's relationship with the U.S. was clearly demonstrated at the recent summit meeting with President Bush.

The Prime Minister made absolutely no progress toward resolving the softwood lumber dispute. It is not even clear the issue was raised.

The Prime Minister says he raised the issue, yet the industry minister said that it was not really discussed. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade (Emerging Markets), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to commend the Prime Minister, President Fox and President Bush on a very successful meeting at the Crawford ranch.

We must commend those leaders for not only working on the security of North America but also on its prosperity. We are in a North American zone and we have to work on economics and prosperity. I commend the Prime Minister on a job well done.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the softwood dispute should have been a top priority at the summit meeting and clearly it was not. The Prime Minister only pretends it was. The industry minister knows it was not and the industry knows it was not.

Why will the Prime Minister not be straight with Canadians and admit that he did not push the softwood file in Texas?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before the hon. member asks questions he ought to do a certain amount of basic research.

Not only was softwood lumber raised with the president at the morning meeting, it was also raised at lunch and in the afternoon. The fact is I raised it in the press conference following the morning meeting when everyone who was interested in the subject, including I would have hoped the hon. member, was listening.

What is fundamental is that softwood lumber is a priority. We do not have to wait for a meeting in Waco, Texas. Every single time I have met or have spoken with the President of the United States I have raised the issue.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced a \$1 billion plan to help farmers.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean.

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, Liberal MPs and ministers from Quebec should not have risen to applaud this initiative, because out of this \$1 billion, there is not a penny for cull cow producers in Quebec. That is the reality.

How can the minister and the government agree to invest \$1 billion in agriculture, but not give one penny to Quebec producers, who are confronted with the cull cow issue? Answer the question.

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely and totally inaccurate. Those producers in Quebec are receiving funds. Dairy producers do receive funds for part of the per head payment. In addition to that, he totally overlooked the fact that grains and oilseed producers in Quebec were in great need of a liquidity injection. This government understood that and this government delivered.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of December, an agreement was reached in Quebec between the provincial government, producers and associations representing producers to buy a slaughterhouse and to set a floor price of 42¢.

Why did the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who did not include one penny in the assistance plan for them, provide nothing to help Quebec producers? This is what we are asking him. He had a duty to help them, but he did not.

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely ridiculous. As part of the billion dollars, substantial dollars are flowing to Quebec. As we said, specifically in terms of that plant, if it has plans to increase capacity we have programming that can assist in that respect.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: You're just lying.

Oral Questions

● (1510)

TRANSPORT

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems the transport minister's proximity to the Prime Minister has resulted in the minister catching a contagious condition, the dithering disease.

The Oshawa harbour requires environmental remediation. Last fall the minister told me that he would have an answer on the harbour soon. In December he told me that he would make a decision by Christmas. Last month he told me that he would get back to me within days.

Why has the minister not come clean with his decision on the Oshawa harbour?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is because I am not alone in deciding. We happen to be in discussions with the City of Oshawa and with the port authority. We want to make sure the decision is fair for everybody. We are consulting and at the end we will make the right decision. We do not have to be in a rush. We will make the right decision.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Oshawa has been without its harbour for two years. I can tell from the minister's answer that he has a bad case of the dithering disease.

Oshawa's harbour problem is a real environmental problem requiring real solutions. Belleville recently received \$10 million for environmental cleanup.

I will ask my question again. When will Oshawa get a decision on its harbour?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member should realize that Oshawa has a harbour and it is working very well. As a matter of fact, it is making a profit right now. He should not tell the House untrue things.

The reality is that we will be making a decision on property that is not being used at this time. We will do it as soon as possible but with the municipal authorities, and they are not easy to get along with.

* * *

MARRIAGE

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in June 2003, the work of the justice committee on marriage was totally pre-empted when the Government of Canada refused to appeal the ruling of the Ontario Court of Appeal which incredibly and instantly redefined marriage in Ontario.

Will the Minister of Justice ask the recently formed legislative committee on Bill C-38 to hold meaningful public hearings to receive important input by Canadian organizations and individuals?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would expect that the legislative committee will consider Bill C-38 in a serious way, as do legislative and House committees when they consider bills before them. As to the nature and scope of that consideration, that is a determination of the committee and its chairman.

*Oral Questions***THE SENATE**

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the unmitigated gall of the democratic deficit Prime Minister. Imagine appointing senators from his list while totally ignoring those chosen by Albertans in a free and open election.

I do not want any of this piecemeal argument from the henchmen back there. I want the Prime Minister to answer. I challenge him to stand and try to explain why his list is better than the people's list. Let him stop being such a chicken and do it.

The Speaker: I think hon. members might refrain from using analogies with other animals or birds or, indeed, fish. It is not helpful or orderly in the House and the Speaker appreciates help from all hon. members, including the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is perfectly aware of the importance of the other place in the bicameral Parliament. The Prime Minister has proceeded with filling some of the vacancies so the other place can function properly, as it has, in our system. We will continue to do so to ensure its capacity to function.

As far as the reform, the member opposite knows quite well that the government is prepared to consider that but a consensus has to emerge from the provinces in order for us to attempt to do that.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another Liberal cover-up has surfaced.

Health Canada just completed a marijuana educational program. The program includes a web page that demonstrates the harmful health effects caused by marijuana use. The problem is that this program is being covered up because it will hurt the Prime Minister's plan to decriminalize marijuana.

Who ordered the cover-up? Was it the justice minister or the Prime Minister?

• (1515)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure members that there is no such cover-up. Health Canada is always interested in ensuring that people know of the risks of using any narcotics, not prescribed and not for medical reasons. It is important for us that our youth and adults know this information and do not abuse narcotics. We will continue to do that in a responsible fashion.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, three years ago this House voted to implement the refugee appeal division. Now, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration wants to abandon the concept. Refugees currently have no means of appeal, except to

the Federal Court, where only 10% of rejected cases are heard. Moreover, the Committee against Torture of the United Nations human rights tribunal has recognized that the Federal Court was not truly a court in which remedy could be sought.

Is the minister aware that by setting up the Federal Court as the only instance for refugee appeals, not only is it imposing a long and costly process on the refugees, but in addition, it is refusing them a proper right of appeal?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am aware that the United Nations has indicated that Canada is a world leader in its treatment of refugees.

I am also aware of the fact that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration has said that it would look into whether or not this appeal system has had an impact. The committee has said that it would propose an alternate solution in six months, and that time is not yet up.

* * *

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Farm incomes across the country have dropped considerably for farmers over the last few years because of a number of factors: BSE; a strong Canadian dollar; high energy costs; et cetera. Farmers across all sectors are hurting.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food expand on what he has done to help address this issue?

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as was mentioned earlier in this House, the government last week announced a \$1 billion package for Canadian producers.

Although this is a widespread program, impacting many producers, there is an emphasis in the cattle and beef sector, in the grains and oilseed sector and in the other ruminant sector. This needs to be built upon, the need to move toward transformative change, as we have done in the cattle industry with our repositioning strategy, where I was last week in international negotiations to create a level playing field through our WTO negotiations and through the parliamentary secretary making sure our producers get more out of the marketplace.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Arturas Paulauskas, Chairman of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege arising out of question period from the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

PRIVILEGE

[English]

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have given you notification of this point of privilege, as well as to the hon. member about whom I am going to speak now.

A little earlier in the House, one member during question period alleged that a Liberal MP was under criminal investigation. She did not name the MP and therefore has cast a net on every single one of us on this side of the House of Commons.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Don Boudria: Respect for the institution has just been alluded to very strongly by the comments across the way.

If there is a criminal investigation against anyone, it is not a matter of public record, as we all know. Once the charges are laid, however, the sub justice convention is then triggered and you will know from citation 506 of Beauchesne's that this is applied consistently in criminal cases where it occurs.

You will further know from Marleau and Montpetit, at page 428, that it has been the case and that Speaker Parent, your predecessor, gave a 1995 ruling to discourage all comments on sub justice matters rather than to allow members to experiment within the limits of the convention, and to test the Speaker's discretion given this speculation to determine how a comment might influence a matter before the court.

Clearly, when the matter of charges has been made, it is clearly inappropriate to raise it here. If someone is suggesting that criminal investigations are made and no charges have been laid, and without naming the MP, not only has she named everyone on this side of the House but even the occupant of the chair.

This is inappropriate. These comments have to be withdrawn. Anyone who was elected as a Liberal MP or a Conservative MP, or anyone else, deserves the respect of the House because they were elected by their constituents. Accusations of this nature, if they are to be made, should include names. They should be made outside the House of Commons and people should have the intestinal fortitude to live with what they say.

• (1520)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly understand the member opposite's bogus outrage about this. There is some real sensitivity and rightly so in the Liberal ranks about constant allegations of wrongdoing and evidence of wrongdoing as well. However, if the member is curious as to the origin of my remarks, I refer him to a *Globe and Mail* article dated March 31, 2005. It stated:

The RCMP also investigated allegations in the spring of 2003 that Liberal MP—

If the member is curious, he can get the report. I am sure he has already seen it in fact and knows the name very well because he has the same access to the media as every other member of Parliament. It goes on:

—had requested favours and financial support for [the Prime Minister's] leadership campaign in exchange for helping Indian nationals to obtain permits to come to Canada.

Routine Proceedings

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I would want to assure you unequivocally that I was not in any way impugning your integrity with my remarks.

One must ask oneself, why did the member not show the same outrage for the fact that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration actually went to a cultural community and chastized it for bringing up concerns about this abuse of the system? I do not see his outrage there. He is simply outraged that a Liberal member might have been named or his integrity impugned in this. Rightly so, Mr. Speaker, if this is happening and it rightly was investigated.

The Speaker: The Chair did note the remarks during question period. I am looking for a precedent that involved a similar problem some years ago of which I am vaguely aware. When I have the material at hand, I will review the comments that were made and the point of privilege raised by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, and the remarks in response made by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill. I will get back to the House on this matter in due course.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to your attention that the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie during question period, frankly across the way and you may not have heard him as you were looking after the House, asked me to ask him to stand, so that he could retract a statement he made during question period. He said a number of times “you're lying, you're lying”.

I know that the member knows that it is unparliamentary language and I would ask, through you, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member retract that statement.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to tell my colleague that he can raise a matter of privilege if he wishes. Thus, I must retract the words that are unacceptable here, namely, that I said he had lied. I will not do it here because it is forbidden. But I will say it outside the House.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1525)

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2004 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal annual report.

* * *

NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to table two important items that relate to our country's national security.

Routine Proceedings

First, the report of the Interim Committee of Parliamentarians on National Security. I would like to acknowledge and thank all members from all parties in this Parliament, both in the House of Commons and the other place, for their work on this important report.

In addition, I am tabling for the consideration of the House our proposed model for a national security committee of parliamentarians.

* * *

[Translation]

BROADCASTING

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, in both official languages, the government's second response to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage's report entitled, "Our Cultural Sovereignty: The Second Century of Canadian Broadcasting".

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[English]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), I am tabling a certificate of nomination with respect to the Law Commission of Canada. This certificate would stand referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

I am also tabling, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), a certificate of nomination with respect to the Standards Council of Canada. This certificate would be referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table today the government's response to 59 petitions.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if you would seek unanimous consent to have more than one seconder to my bill that you may be introducing momentarily, a list of which has been submitted to you and the other parties in this House.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia have the unanimous consent of the House to have a number of seconds for the bill he is about to introduce?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

TAIWAN AFFAIRS ACT

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-357, an act to provide for an improved framework for economic, trade, cultural and other initiatives between the people of Canada and the people of Taiwan.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I had secured the approval of the following members to second the bill: the member for Vancouver Island North; the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, who is noted; the member for Halifax; the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges; the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell; the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont; the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country; and the member for Newton—North Delta.

This bill may be cited as the Taiwan affairs act. It provides the statutory framework for economic, cultural and other initiatives between the people of Canada and the people of Taiwan in the circumstances that followed Canada's recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1970. The bill is about 35 years overdue.

I note the bill has seconds from members of Parliament from all parties in the House. Today as then we take note of the People's Republic of China as the sole and lawful government of China. However, from cabinet minutes in 1969, it is specific and clear that the Canadian government intended to maintain a de facto relationship with Taiwan.

The purposes of the bill are to continue the good relationship with the People's Republic of China while building a legal framework to guide and forge better mutually beneficial relations with the people of Taiwan.

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

* * *

● (1530)

NATIONAL OVARIAN CANCER MONTH ACT

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-358, an act to designate the month of September as National Ovarian Cancer Month.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of thousands of Canadian women who have or will find out they have ovarian cancer. The bill would designate September as national ovarian cancer month, similar to those in other countries.

Each year 2,600 women are diagnosed with this cancer and one in 70 will get this cancer in their lifetime. The good news is that when detected early and treated, the survival rate is as high as 90%.

We need to fund research, testing and awareness. I sincerely hope my colleagues support this initiative.

Routine Proceedings

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Health, presented on Tuesday, October 22, 2004, be concurred in.

The Speaker: I would like to remind hon. members that the provisional changes to the Standing Orders which came into effect on March 7, 2005 alter the procedures related to motions for concurrence in committee reports.

[*Translation*]

Such motions shall now receive not more than three hours of consideration, after which time the Speaker shall interrupt and put all questions necessary to dispose of the motion.

[*English*]

For today's debate, members speaking to the motion will have a 20 minute period for debate followed by a 10 minute period for questions and comments.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Cambridge.

The report calls on the government to extend compensation as recommended by the Krever inquiry to all those who contracted hepatitis C from tainted blood.

A few minutes ago in question period I asked the minister if the government would support the health committee's recommendation. The response from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health was that this motion was passed unanimously by the committee. In fact, this is not the case. The Liberal members on the health committee voted against the report which is being presented today. I am very disappointed that the member would imply that the Liberals supported it when they did not. However, I welcome the Liberals' support when the report comes up for a vote.

This is surely not the first time legislators have gathered in the House to debate this issue. Last fall members debated a motion prompted by a similar health committee report only to have it withdrawn by the government before a vote could be held. This will not happen again. Thanks to new procedural rules adopted less than a month ago, the House will vote on this motion when the debate ends.

The reasons the report is needed are well known to all in the House but they bear repeating. In 1998 the government refused to accept responsibility for anyone infected with hepatitis C from tainted blood and instead created a privately administered compensation fund for only those who were infected between 1986 and 1990.

At the time the government claimed that it was not liable for mistakes and mismanagement outside that time period but since then, new evidence has revealed this claim to be false. Testing was

available as far back as 1981, yet documents show authorities knowingly ignored this information. The RCMP has laid charges against individuals involved in this matter prior to 1986.

Furthermore the government stated at the time that there were simply too many victims to compensate. The Prime Minister warned that full compensation would "bankrupt medicare". We know that this was false as well. There are far fewer victims than previously claimed. The government overestimated the numbers to justify its decision.

For the purpose of clarity, I would like to define the parameters of the upcoming debate. For too long the government has purposely confused two separate issues: one, the fund and any potential surplus it may contain; and two, fair compensation for all victims of tainted blood.

As a result, compensation for forgotten victims has usually been spoken of in terms of the existing hepatitis C compensation fund. The minister himself has suggested that some form of compensation may be forthcoming but any moneys depend on the result of an actuarial audit of the fund due in June of this year. The government's position is clear: Compensation depends entirely on the money in the fund; if there is no surplus, compensation will not be extended.

I would like to state for the record today and for the benefit of the members who will rise after me that in regard to this issue to be debated, the fund and any surplus are not as relevant as the government may lead us to believe. I will state again that the hepatitis C compensation fund and any surplus it may hold are irrelevant to the issue being debated at this time. The fair and just treatment of the forgotten victims is most prominent. The moneys must be found, fund or no fund.

We are here today to encourage the government to finally, at long last, offer a helping hand to those who have been callously neglected for so many years. We are here today to respectfully request that the government recognize that compassion demands compensation regardless of the money in the current fund. Whether or not there is an actuarial surplus matters little when people are suffering, especially as a result of erroneous mistakes made by those entrusted to help them.

• (1535)

What matters is not how the victims are compensated, but that they are compensated immediately. Victims should not be made to wait while the government dithers over what to do. The cruel suspense and financial uncertainty under which uncompensated victims have lived must end.

The government would have Canadians believe that it has already helped forgotten victims. It has deceived the public into believing that help had been provided to forgotten victims through the care not cash program.

Some 300 million federal dollars were committed to the provinces so that they could provide drugs, immunization, nursing care and other services to infected victims not covered by the fund. The sad reality is that not a cent of that money ever reached those it was intended to help. Instead, the money was absorbed into the general health care revenues of each province.

Routine Proceedings

Victims unable to work due to their illness are rendered destitute trying to pay massive drug bills they cannot afford. Yet the government has repeatedly declared the care not cash program as evidence that it cares about the forgotten victims.

Agreeing to re-examine the fund is a tacit admission by the government that it bears responsibility for all victims, including those left out of compensation. Until last year, the government had stated emphatically that it bore no responsibility for anyone outside the 1986-90 timeframe. It washed its hands of the whole affair by declaring the issue to be a matter for the courts.

Last fall the Minister of Health announced a shift in government policy citing changing circumstances, but the circumstances have not really changed. They are still the same. Victims infected with hepatitis C continue to suffer financial hardship and health problems. People are still dying.

The health minister stated last fall that what motivates his government is the desire to help those who need help. If it were truly motivated by this desire, if it were truly a compassionate government, compensation would be extended to those victims immediately and unequivocally.

There is a chance there will not be any surplus or a surplus large enough to cover all the forgotten victims. If the minister is true to his word, he will not crush the hopes of these victims come June by denying them compensation, but will instead offer a helping hand regardless of the surplus size. However, if this is his intent, then why wait until June? Why delay compassion if he is truly motivated to help those in need?

There are two ways to compensate all victims which would guarantee the efficiency of the fund. One is to pay victims out of the consolidated revenue fund. Any surplus in the fund could later be transferred back into the consolidated revenue fund. The other is to compensate victims now from the fund and address the surplus issue later. If the audit shows later that no surplus exists, then the government can top up the fund.

Regardless of the method of payment, all victims should be treated equally. The 1986-90 window is an arbitrary time period created to limit the government's liability. It is hard to justify why a victim infected in December 1985 should be treated differently from one infected in January 1986. In creating this arbitrary window, the government has pitted victim against victim in an effort to limit opposition. This tactic must end. All victims must be given fair and equitable treatment.

My motion has the support of all opposition parties. I hope it will garner the support of those on the other side of the House as well. The last time a vote on this issue took place in the House, many government members rose against their conscience to support the government's position. Some rose with tears streaming down their cheeks, aware of the cruelty they were endorsing. Today those members are unable to hide behind a vote of confidence, but now can freely vote as their conscience dictates. I sincerely hope that they will do so, for no one with a conscience can vote against this motion.

It would be wonderful if an apology to those who have struggled for seven years were forthcoming from across the aisle. Several of

these individuals who have led the fight are in the House today. I wish to acknowledge their perseverance in the face of such adversity.

The Conservative Party has long fought this battle. I would like to acknowledge two individuals in particular, Dr. Grant Hill and the member for Yellowhead, for their tireless work on behalf of the forgotten victims.

● (1540)

Canadians have waited too long for the government to admit its mistake, accept responsibility and acknowledge that compassion is the only answer for those suffering. The suffering must end. Compensation must be provided.

I respectfully request that this government do the right thing at last and compensate all victims. Let us not wait until June. Compassion is needed now. Please compensate these victims immediately, I say. It is the right thing to do. It is the will of the committee and it will be the will of the House. I ask that the government not show contempt for the House and that it show compassion for the victims, support the motion and compensate these people immediately.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not mean to interrupt the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, but there are a number of questions on the order paper that are in fact due today. The government was prepared to immediately table answers to those questions. Perhaps you might seek unanimous consent to allow me to table the questions on the order paper. We were going to get to them in routine proceedings, but because of this important issue we may not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

● (1545)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank you and my colleagues for allowing me to go ahead. The following questions will be answered today: Nos. 10, 81 and 82.

[Text]

Question No. 10—**Mr. Brian Pallister:**

With regard to hospitality expenditures by the president and chief executive officer of Canada Post from 1999 until 2003, including an itemized list of each expenditure: (a) what was the amount of each expenditure; (b) who was present when each expenditure was incurred; (c) exactly what good(s) and/or services(s) were included in each expenditure; (d) where was each expense incurred; and (e) what was the purpose of the meeting during which the expense was incurred?

*Routine Proceedings***Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, as reported in the Deloitte and Touche Report of the Examination of Management Practices of Canada Post Corporation dated July 23, 2004, during the period 1999 to 2003, the former president was authorized to self-approve expenses in accordance with the Canada Post Corporation delegation of authority instrument. In March 1999, the former president initiated a process whereby a summary of his total annual expenses, based on the fiscal year, was presented to the audit committee for review and approval. In October 2001, on the recommendation of the corporate governance committee of the board of directors, the board formalized this process through a resolution, that the president provides a summary of his travel and hospitality expenses to the audit committee for review. The audit committee reviewed and approved the summary of expenses. The Deloitte and Touche report states that there is no record of the amounts reported by the president in the minutes of the audit committee.

The following summarizes the information that was gathered by Deloitte and Touche from available Canada Post information regarding the travel and hospitality expenses of the president for the period requested, 1999 to 2003.

Expenses by Calendar Year

Year	Travel & Hospitality Expenses
2003	\$ 335,789.79
2002	\$ 327,063.97
2001	\$ 188,322.89
2000	\$ 268,144.14
1999	\$ 317,173.60

Deloitte and Touche did not have access to the documents supporting the president's expenses. Canada Post's board of directors has requested documentation from the Honourable André Ouellet supporting the amounts paid. Presently, Canada Post does not have the necessary documentation required to respond to this question in further detail.

Question No. 81—Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:

With regard to the e-mail sent to all Members of Parliament on December 6, 2004, by the Honourable Roy Cullen, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, in which he stated: "Moreover, about 6,000 firearms have been traced in gun-crime and firearm-trafficking cases within Canada and internationally.": (a) how many of the 6,000 firearms traced were actually found in the old Restricted Weapon Registration System; (b) how many of the 6,000 firearms traced were found in the new Canadian Firearms Registry; (c) how many of the 6,000 traces led police investigators to the registered owner of the firearm; (d) how many of the registered owners identified were charged with the original crime in which their registered firearm was involved; and (e) how many of the registered owners identified were charged with providing their registered firearm to the criminal or criminals involved in the original crime being investigated?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the response has been formulated assuming the question is related to the calendar year 2004 as no specific year is mentioned in the question, nor in the original message, which is dated December 2004.

a) In 2004, information was provided on 1,211 firearms still registered in RWRS. This total does not include any firearms that

were not traceable for various reasons such as too old to trace, insufficient information, traced to the US or traced through Interpol.

b) In 2004, information was provided on 3,827 firearms currently registered in the Canadian Firearms Registry, CFR. This total does not include any firearms that were not traceable for various reasons such as too old to trace, insufficient information, traced to the US or traced through Interpol.

c) The RCMP is unable to respond to this question as we do not maintain statistics on the outcome of a trace. It is up to the client if they wish to do so. The Firearms Tracing Unit is responsible only for tracing a firearm for clients, both RCMP and non-RCMP, within Canada, the United States, and where possible, internationally. Once the trace results are provided to the client, it is the client's responsibility to pursue the investigation and lay charges if applicable.

d) The RCMP is unable to respond to this question as we do not maintain statistics on the outcome of a trace. It is up to the client if they wish to do so. The Firearms Tracing Unit is responsible only for tracing a firearm for clients, both RCMP and non-RCMP, within Canada, the United States, and where possible, internationally. Once the trace results are provided to the client, it is the client's responsibility to pursue the investigation and lay charges if applicable.

e) The RCMP is unable to respond to this question as we do not maintain statistics on the outcome of a trace. It is up to the client if they wish to do so. The Firearms Tracing Unit is responsible only for tracing a firearm for clients, both RCMP and non-RCMP, within Canada, the United States, and where possible, internationally. Once the trace results are provided to the client, it is the client's responsibility to pursue the investigation and lay charges if applicable.

Question No. 82—Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:

With regard to the e-mail sent to all Members of Parliament on December 6, 2004, by the Honourable Roy Cullen, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, in which he stated: "So far in 2004, the Canada Firearms Centre (CAFC) has already produced more than 1100 affidavits to support the prosecution of firearms related crime. A further 1152 affidavits were prepared in 2003 building on 381 affidavits produced in 2002.": (a) how many and what types of "firearms related crimes" were being investigated that prompted the need for these affidavits to be requested and issued; (b) how many individuals were charged, what charges were laid and how many convictions were obtained as a direct result of these affidavits; (c) what other Criminal Code offences were these persons charged with in addition to their "firearms related crimes"; and (d) how many people were charged just because they had failed to obtain the proper licence or registration certificates required by the Firearms Act and not because they had committed any violent crime?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prior to preparing affidavits, the Canada Firearms Centre, CAFC, ensures that the information is required in the course of a lawful investigation. It confirms the necessity to provide the information and keeps a log of submitted requests for which an affidavit was provided. However, no inventory or summary of specifics is maintained.

Full information relating to charges laid and to the outcome of any court proceedings would be in the hands of police services and prosecutors.

Routine Proceedings

The CAFC prepares these affidavits to support the prosecution of firearm-related offences. In 2004, the Canadian Firearms Registry produced 2,265 affidavits to support the prosecution of firearm-related crime. A further 1,152 affidavits were prepared in 2003 building on 381 affidavits produced in 2002.

* * *

[English]

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. 61, 79, 83, 84, 88 and 89 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 61—Mr. John Cummins:

With respect to spending in Fisheries and Oceans Canada in the Pacific Region in each year for the 1990 to 2003 period: (a) what was the total amount spent by the Pacific Region in each year; (b) how much of the Pacific Region budget was spent in regions outside of the Pacific Region but was allocated to the Pacific Region budget; (c) on an office by office basis in the Pacific Region how much was spent at each office; (d) what was the total annual budget for each Branch in the Pacific Region, such as the Conservation and Protection Branch, the Communications Branch, the Aboriginal Affairs Branch and the other branches within the Pacific Region; (e) how much was spent on travel within Canada; (f) how much was spent on international travel; (g) how much was spent on the Operations and Maintenance aspect of the Conservation and Protection program; (h) how much was spent on salaries and benefits for Fishery Officers; (i) how much was spent on salaries and benefits for all DFO officials on an office by office basis within the Pacific Region; (j) how much was spent on the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy; (k) how much was spent on the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy by persons or organizations outside of Fisheries and Oceans Canada; (l) how much was spent on the management of the public commercial salmon fishery in BC; (m) how much was spent on the management of public recreational salmon fishery in BC; (n) how much was spent on the management of the aboriginal salmon fishery in BC; and (o) what is the total expenditure related to aboriginal fisheries in the Pacific Region by category, for example grants and contributions to Indian bands and aboriginal organizations, enforcement, and administration?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 79—Mr. Werner Schmidt:

Since October 23, 1993, did Bombardier (and any of its subsidiaries), Nortel (and any of its subsidiaries) and Pratt and Whitney (and any of its subsidiaries) receive any: (a) grants, contributions or loan guarantees and, if so, (i) what was the source, value, date made and reasons for providing the funding in each case, (ii) what is their present status, whether paid, repaid, or unpaid, including the value of the repayment, (iii) what was the total amount each company received; and (b) contracts and, if so, (i) were the contracts fulfilled, (ii) what were their source, value, date made, reasons for providing the funding, (iii) were these contracts tendered and if the tendering was limited what would be the reason for the limitation, (iv) what was the total amount of contracts each company obtained, and what was the total amount of all the funds provided to these companies?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 83—Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:

What amounts, if any, were allocated to the "Internationaux du sport de Montréal" by the government, for each department and agency, in the fiscal years from 1998-1999 to 2004-2005, and what amounts, if any, are planned in the years to come?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 84—Mr. James Bezan:

With regard to the Devil's Lake diversion in North Dakota, will the government commission a scientific analysis and environmental impact review of the water from Devil's Lake and the impact it will have on the Hudson's Bay water basin, including Lake Winnipeg, and the Red River watershed before any water from Devil's Lake is drained into the Red River, and will the government use this study to determine: (a) the water quality and chemical composition in contrast to Lake Winnipeg and the Red River; (b) the bacteria levels of Devil's Lake in contrast to Lake Winnipeg and the Red River; (c) the difference in marine species and the ecological impact they will have on Lake Winnipeg and the Red River; (d) pH levels of Devil's Lake in contrast to Lake Winnipeg and the Red River; and (e) what risk this drainage project poses to Canadian waters?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 88—Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:

With regard to the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Canadian Firearms Registration System (CFRS) Alternate Services Delivery (ASD) contract that was eventually awarded to Team Centra (a consortium of CGI Group and BDP Business Data Services Limited) in 2002: (a) were bidders required to agree to pay a penalty of \$30,000 per day for every day their system was not implemented after the Service Effective Date (SED) to defray costs of paying two vendors, E.D.S. of Canada Ltd. (EDS) and Team Centra, at the same time and, if so, was this clause or a similar penalty clause carried forward into the contractual agreement between Team Centra and the Crown; (b) what was the official Contract Notification Date (CND) as required by the RFP; (c) what was the exact contracted SED; (d) in accordance with the RFP requirement, how much has Team Centra paid to the Crown based on the contracted SED; (e) how much has the Crown paid to EDS, Team Centra, CGI Group and BDP since the original SED of the ASD contract with Team Centra; (f) what deliverables were provided by EDS in return for these payments; (g) what deliverables were provided by Team Centra in return for these payments; (h) is the anticipated overlap of the two systems (CFRS I and CFRS II) still in accordance with the requirement in the RFP; (i) was the intent of the RFP to ensure no payment was made to the "Systems Integrator" until the system was delivered and, if so, when was the system delivered and what was the ongoing monthly charge to the Crown from Team Centra, CGI Group and BDP and what was the purpose of these charges; (j) has the user acceptance testing taken place on the Team Centra Application Code; (k) what was the value of the EDS Change Request to incorporate Bill C-10A amendments into the CFRS I system and why was this request needed; (l) what is the estimated dollar value and revised end date for the contracts currently under review with Team Centra, CGI Group and EDS; (m) why was the interface with the Canadian Firearms Registry On-Line (CFRO) considered a change request to the original Team Centra contract if it was expressly stated as a mandatory requirement for all bidders; (n) what was the value of the contract amendment, if any, of the Team Centra solution to the CFRO interface; (o) what is the contracted cost and actual cost paid to Team Centra for the ongoing maintenance and support for the CFRS II system; and (p) what is the contracted cost and actual cost paid to EDS for the ongoing maintenance and support for the CFRS I system, excluding change requests?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 89—Mr. Rob Merrifield:

With regard to the Canadian Cervid Council and the Canadian Deer and Elk Farmers Association: (a) broken down by recipient and, in each case, specifying any amount disbursed and any government department involved, what, if any, grants and contributions has the government made to these organizations since fiscal year 1999-2000; and (b) what audits has the government done that examine payments to these organizations?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his comments and clarify two things and give him an opportunity to respond.

First, I certainly hope I was clear in my answer to him during question period on behalf of the Minister of Health. When I suggested that there was a unanimous vote of the committee, I was not speaking of this motion. I was speaking of the original motion of the committee asking the government to compensate people pre-1986 and post-1990, which was unanimously adopted and of course was accepted by the minister.

He immediately began discussions. He ordered his officials to begin the negotiations and the discussions, which began immediately and are ongoing with the representatives of those groups. Those meetings and those discussions are of course confidential, as they should be, to encourage resolution in this matter.

The second question he raised was that the government would be limited to the question of the surplus. I do not know where he got that belief.

The motion originally presented by the health committee, which I supported, as did all members of the committee from all parties, stated in light of an eventual surplus or of a surplus; of course the surplus comes into play because it is a surplus that is in the hands of the ailing people, the people who had contracted hepatitis C between 1986 and 1990, in a trust controlled by the court. The discussions and the negotiations are with them. The actuaries, as they should be and as is foreseen in the trust agreement, are doing the consideration as to whether or not there is a surplus, and if there is an actuarial surplus, what its extent is.

That would be one of the options, because the minister indicated that those discussions or negotiations would consider all options for compensating, not limited to or excluding any but all options.

I think the member will be pleased to have clarification of those facts. I know it is difficult to comprehend, because we have explained this to him in the House and in committee dozens and dozens of times but he continues to have difficulty. Some might think that he is making petty partisan assertions by pretending not to understand, but I know, having known this member for quite a few months now, that he probably truly does not understand.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, what is hard to comprehend is the callous and uncaring position the Liberal Party is taking. The member is right: I do not understand how elected officials can treat victims so terribly.

The member raises important points. He is right that last fall all the members, including the Liberal members, supported a Conservative motion to compensate victims. Just two weeks ago, the same Liberal members voted against a very similar motion. Why would they have done that?

Routine Proceedings

The difference is that for one motion, the one in the fall, they prevented it from going to a vote in the House of Commons. They knew that they would not be held accountable in the larger forum.

This time, there is no hiding from the fact that this is going to come to a vote. I believe that is why the Liberals voted against it. They know that they are going to be caught red-handed in their own hypocrisy. They will have no way to get out of it. It will expose to Canadians once again the fact that the Liberals are uncaring, that they are not compassionate and that they are using these victims as a political tool.

Why will the Liberals not support the motion? I think it may have to do more with internal Liberal politics. They do not want to be shown up for demonstrating their incompetence in dealing with issues of state.

Quite frankly, I think the member should be ashamed of himself for supporting the Liberals. I am sure that anyone with compassion, anyone caring, will support this motion when it comes up for debate. I am sure glad that I am in the party that fights for the rights of victims and is caring and compassionate. I am really glad that we will soon form the government.

* * *

● (1550)

PETITIONS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Before we continue, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) to inform the House that the matter of the failure of the ministry to respond to Petitions Nos. 381-0241 to 381-0244, presented by the hon. member for Vancouver East, is deemed referred to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to faithful Catholics, particularly those in my riding of Cambridge-North Dumfries, on the heartbreaking loss of Pope Jean Paul. He was a man who worked hard to thread our world together. He was a man of our times, a faithful man of God.

I would like members to imagine going into a hospital and coming out even sicker than when they went in and I would like them to imagine that something could have been done about it. This is what happened to thousands of Canadians who received tainted blood.

These people went to a hospital seeking treatment but were unwittingly poisoned by a system they trusted. People of all ages from all walks of life were poisoned by a system they trusted, a system that let them down. Then, as if that was not ghastly enough, they were let down again by the regulators of that system, their federal government.

Routine Proceedings

On April 28, 1998, the Liberal government, many of whose members are still here today, voted against an opposition motion that would have extended compensation to all victims of tainted blood, not just those who were infected between this mythical window of 1986 to 1990.

First I would like to debunk the legal reasons for limiting compensation to only those infected between 1986 and 1990 and then I want to explain the reasons why all victims of tainted blood must be treated equally.

In 1998 when the Liberal government voted against extending compensation to victims outside this artificial window, the nation was told that doing so would bankrupt the system. Canadians were told that there were 22,000 victims in this artificial window and an additional 60,000 outside that window. That information was completely incorrect.

In 1998, when the minister of health at the time was told that people were being infected in the early 1980s and as early as 1980, that health minister rose and stated that “there was no possible way, no way at all, that science could have discovered what contaminants were in that blood”. That, too, was completely false.

Let us discuss these false numbers and these false statements. As a doctor of chiropractic, I am trained to make decisions based on real fact. Today I want to share with the House and the people of Canada some of the real facts about the Liberals' numbers and their incorrect statements .

The original settlement was to compensate 22,000 victims. Those were Liberal numbers. Those numbers, thank God, never materialized. They were exaggerated.

As a matter of fact, as of exactly one month ago, March 4, 2005, there have been only 4,535 victims of primarily infected tainted blood. Those are the claims: not 22,000 but less than 5,000.

What about the other number, the victims outside this artificial window, those outside the 1986 to 1990 group? The number claimed by the Liberals seven years ago was 60,000. That also is completely incorrect. There are only 5,071 claims, which is a far cry from the numbers used to scare Canadians about compensating all victims.

The original settlement of \$1.1 billion was supposed to properly compensate 22,000 victims within this window. Now we know that the total number of victims inside and outside that window is only half that false number.

Here are more astonishing and yet distressing facts. Besides legal fees of some \$58 million and despite administration fees of approximately a quarter of a million dollars per month, the fund still made \$60 million more than it paid out. Despite all the payouts—and the fund is still massive at well over \$1 billion and growing—people are dying.

The money is there. The numbers were exaggerated. Doing the right thing in compensating all victims of tainted blood will not bankrupt the system.

●(1555)

On to my second point about the false and misleading statements that nothing could have been done to make blood systems safer in Canada prior to 1986.

On May 1, 1998, the Hon. Allan Rock stated in the House:

—governments should pay cash compensation when they have caused damages and when those responsible for the system could and should have acted.

There are certainly not many things that I would agree with coming from that side of the House, but I agree with that statement. The words “when those responsible could have and should have acted” really resonate with me. Could things have been done differently? Let us examine the facts.

During the 1950s, before I was born, the presence of certain enzymes above normal levels were used to assess liver function. It was thought that they could also be used to diagnose hepatitis. As early as 1954, also before I was born, it was suggested in medical literature that post-transfusion hepatitis might be reduced by using tests for those enzymes to screen prospective blood donors.

By the late 1950s, probably around the time I was born, simple methods had been developed for measuring the level of alanine amino transferase, or ALT, in the serum.

The preliminary results in 1978 suggested an association between ALT levels in donors and the occurrence of non-A and non-B hepatitis, which we now call hepatitis C in recipients. The final results of that study were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1981, confirming that there was an association between higher levels of ALT in the donor and those of gaining hepatitis in the recipient. That was in 1981.

On January 14, 1981, the American Red Cross stated, “Blood services providers should prepare to test all units collected and to avoid transfusion of units with elevated ALT values”.

In 1982 the New York Blood Center adopted a policy of ALT testing. This blood centre is the largest in the United States and it deals with approximately the same number of transfusions as we do in all of Canada. It estimated that testing would prevent up to 10,000 infections annually, an interesting figure. In 1982 the largest blood centre in the United States could have and did act. France started testing in 1985. All prior to this 1986 window.

Dr. Patrick Moore, director of the National Reference Library of the Red Cross and one of Canada's foremost experts on hepatitis, called for the immediate implementation of ALT testing in Canada. That was in May 1981. His recommendation was rejected by his superiors and regrettably, federal regulators chose not to make testing mandatory.

On May 22, 1981, right in Ottawa, a memo from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario asked Health and Welfare Canada to, “screen approximately 20 donors for the presence of any of the viral contaminants which may contribute to post-transfusion hepatitis and for which you have the appropriate testing methods”.

Routine Proceedings

Health Canada had the appropriate testing methods in 1981, and therein lies the crux of the problem. When is the definitive date that the government could have or should have done something? Was it 1981, 1975 or 1954? We are not sure. What we do know as fact it was before this funny window of 1986.

On May 5, 1998 the right hon. Jean Chrétien said in the House, "when there is negligence there is responsibility". The Liberal government shirked its responsibility seven years ago when it refused to treat all victims of tainted blood. The only question left is this. Will the Liberals continue to shirk that responsibility?

In his final report on the tragedy, Judge Krever noted that we could tell a lot about a society by how it dealt with people such as those with tainted blood. He said:

The compassion of a society can be judged by the measure it takes to reduce the impact of tragedy that is on its members.

● (1600)

A young man whom I have come to know very well said it best. To the prime minister of the day, he said:

Can you tell me the difference between someone infected with tainted blood on December 31, 1985 and January 1, 1986?

The prime minister of the time could not answer that question and it cannot be answered today.

Young Joe Haché went on to say that tainted blood victims were all infected the same and they should all be treated the same. I could not agree more. I believe that the hon. members in this House will do the right thing this time and join me in supporting this motion to compensate all victims of tainted blood.

There comes a time when enough is enough. For hepatitis C victims, all of them, that time is now.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his comments and for the research that he has done. Obviously he is very knowledgeable on the subject.

I do not think there is disagreement on the question of compensation. I think we have all agreed to that. We understand that the process has started and that is very important. The process was started immediately after the unanimous motion of the health committee and good debate in this House. We saw where the support was for the compensation. The process to lead to that is ongoing.

I want to help the member with a couple of facts that he said at the beginning. It is not that he misled the House in any way or stated anything that was incorrect. His comment was to the number of people for compensation, the number of people who would meet the criteria of the trust.

It is true that the actual number is a lot less than what was forecast. Where the member may have been misled is in the question of how those forecasts were achieved. Those forecasts were not derived by the federal government. Those numbers were provided by the plaintiffs. That was part of the negotiation process. That was the number of people who they estimated at the day who would qualify and who would suffer from the ailment.

Many things have happened since then. Treatments have changed. Better treatments are available for them, so sometimes the level of

suffering or the level of disability might be less than what had been forecast. Therefore, the amount of funds withdrawn from the fund in the early years might be less than what could have been anticipated at the day. The actuaries and the trustees of the fund will have to consider that these individuals can go on collecting for some 70 years before all the people who have access or rights to that fund live their lives, and their level of requirements might change. Those are some of the considerations that will have to be taken by the actuaries.

I understand it is difficult to have all the facts all the time for a speech. I know the members opposite are accustomed to having their speeches vetted. We certainly would welcome vetting such a speech for a correction of the facts in the future.

● (1605)

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I can say that no one vetted my speech. The day that a Liberal vets my speech will never come unless the moon turns blue and falls out of the sky.

The issue here is that there is \$1.1 billion in that fund. Based on the average payout today of \$42,000 per victim, there is more than enough money in that fund to pay out. What the issue comes down to is that \$58 million has been paid to lawyers to examine this fund, and it has been thrown back for an examination. That is \$58 million or 1,400 victims and the government chose to put it back into an assessment strategy.

The issue is not how much money is in there. The issue is that every government has a responsibility, admitted by the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party, and the government is not living up to that responsibility or promise. The government voted for the motion. The Liberal Party voted against extending the compensation to all victims. That is shameful.

The government should have voted for it. All the opposition parties voted for the motion. The money is there. The numbers are cut in half, regardless of what excuses the Liberal Party wants to come up with for its failure to research this problem adequately or for its mistakes to come up with accurate figures. I might say that my figures are completely accurate.

There is more than enough money in this fund to compensate all victims. It is the right thing to do. It is the responsible thing to do. It should have been done before.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate to concur in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Health concerning the issue of hepatitis C compensation. I recognize and appreciate the interests of the Standing Committee on Health on the issue of compensation.

It was the Standing Committee on Health that raised the issue in the fall with the unanimous motion voted by all sides. Liberal members supported that motion. Members of this committee have played a leading role in debates we have had on this issue in the House. I am a member of the committee. I know my fellow members have great concerns about this issue, and I share the view that we would like to see these discussions regarding options for compensation come to a satisfactory conclusion as quickly as possible.

Routine Proceedings

The government agrees with the spirit of the motion before us today. We understand that among all members of the House there is a genuine concern for individuals and families affected by this terrible disease. We share that concern and we also want to address the needs of those affected as quickly as possible. However, it is with respect to the committee that I say the motion is badly worded and contains significant flaws.

First, the government is taking the necessary steps to address the issue of compensation to those infected by hepatitis C through the blood supplied before 1986 and post-1990. The government took immediate action to enter into discussions about options for compensation. It is my view that we should let these discussions take place rather than play politics with such a difficult issue.

Second, the motion implies that the federal government can decide to use the settlement fund to provide immediate compensation. This is not the case. The report of the committee refers to the "federal hepatitis C compensation fund". This fund is not under the control of the federal government. As the Minister of Health has explained in the House before, the settlement fund is under the control of the courts and only the courts can decide if there is a surplus and how that surplus can be used. The timing for these decisions is also under the control of the courts. It is not something the federal government can unilaterally and immediately decide as the committee's report implies.

The factual error about the fund in this motion is an important issue that members of the House must consider. On November 22, 2004, the Minister of Health announced that the Government of Canada was giving a mandate to its negotiators to discuss all available options for financial compensation for those infected through blood before 1986 and after 1990. The discussions started immediately following the announcement, and are continuing to this day.

As members of the House know, these discussions must involve many parties and the issues are very complex. That is why the minister said at the time of the announcement that we could expect these discussions to take several months. It is my understanding that the federal negotiators in his team last met with counsel for the pre-1986-1990 class on March 10 in Vancouver and the next meeting is planned for this month in Ottawa.

Both parties are working together to gather the information required to shape and support any potential agreement in front of the courts. For example, the counsel for those infected by blood before January 1986 and after 1990 are contacting their class to gather information about how many people are in the class and how well or ill they are given current improved treatments for hepatitis C. Both sides are working hard toward an agreement.

Of course, all members of the House will understand that we will not get into particular issues at hand in these discussions. The parties involved have agreed to keep the substance of these discussions between them at this time. I think we can all agree that this is the most effective way to move forward.

As I mentioned earlier, the report from the Standing Committee on Health says that the federal government should move ahead with immediate compensation given the "large surplus in the federal hepatitis C compensation fund".

● (1610)

As I mentioned earlier, and with all respect to the committee's report, this motion is not consistent with facts about the settlement fund. The fund does not belong to the Government of Canada, nor can the Government of Canada make decisions about how the fund is used. The fund is controlled by the courts and it is the courts that will decide if there is a surplus and how any surplus should be allocated.

In order to work toward the option of the 1986-90 settlement fund, there is information that is absolutely necessary for the courts to make a decision. This includes information about the disease progression of the class members.

The necessary information is to be produced by other parties, in this case the joint committee of council for the 1986-90 class. The reports containing this critical information have not yet been produced and it is our understanding that these reports have in fact been delayed.

The Government of Canada does not control the timing. These are decisions of the courts based upon the availability of the information required to make decisions. While the courts have not yet issued an order outlining dates for the sufficiency hearing, in the interest of transparency the House should know that the joint committee's delayed medical model report will substantially delay the timing of the sufficiency hearing. The Government of Canada will continue to ask that the hearings proceed as quickly as possible.

Representatives of the pre-1986/ post-1990 class have asked us to explore options for compensation. The Government of Canada agreed and, as the Minister of Health indicated, entering into discussions about options for compensation was the right and responsible thing to do.

After the minister's announcement, discussions began immediately and have proceeded since then. We are working with all parties involved. We are actively participating in discussions and moving them forward as quickly as possible. We require necessary information to be provided by other parties.

These discussions are complex and involve many parties. At the same time, I agree with the spirit of the motion, which is to move forward as quickly as possible. We understand that there are individuals and families involved who are waiting for an outcome. However we must address the fact that there are flaws in the committee's report and in the motion that make it impossible or difficult to support as it is worded now.

It is the right and responsible thing to let the discussions continue to proceed as quickly as possible while following the process needed to reach a fair and acceptable agreement to all parties.

Routine Proceedings

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

In this kind of debate, it is incumbent upon us to reassure the Canadian public about the safety of Canada's blood supply. In Canada, the collection of whole blood and the manufacturing of blood components for transfusion are governed by provisions of the Food and Drug Act. Enforcement of this act helps ensure blood safety by setting out strict conditions for its collection and distribution.

In his 1997 report on the blood supply system, Justice Krever stated that the blood and blood products used in Canada were as safe as those used in other countries but that their safety could be improved. The commission's final report directed 17 of its 50 recommendations to the federal government, as the blood supply system regulatory body. The government acted on each of the final recommendations and is continuing to take steps beyond what was recommended by Justice Krever to improve the safety of blood supply system. In recent years, the government has enhanced its blood regulation activities, by putting in place new measures to ensure blood safety, increasing its disease surveillance, inspection and certification activities, and issuing directives on good blood component manufacturing practices.

An expert advisory committee on blood regulation was established in 1995, to provide the government with timely advice on emerging issues and federal responsibilities within the national blood system. Despite Canada's numerous blood safety standards, developed by agencies such as the Canadian Society for Transfusion Medicine, the government recognized the need to develop a national standard applicable to various activities, from blood sampling to blood transfusions and blood components. The government established an independent group of experts to develop overall safety standards for blood and blood components for transfusion.

Then, the government mandated the Canadian Standards Association to transform these standards into Canadian national standards following extensive public consultations. The final version of the standards published last September includes various specific requirements to ensure the overall safety and effectiveness of blood and blood components, as well as requirements concerning sampling, handling, conservation, packaging, labelling, storage, quarantine, record keeping, distribution, monitoring and adverse reaction reporting as well as blood and blood component recalls. These standards are in addition to existing regulations to make the blood supply system even safer.

The government has also worked hard and has succeeded in becoming a proactive regulatory body by responding to emerging threats to our blood supply system, before any such problems might occur.

Around the world, Canada is known for its leadership in aggressively implementing exclusion criteria, so as to reduce the risk of transmitting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

The same proactive approach was used to respond to the emerging threat of West Nile Virus to the blood supply system. In January 2003 and February 2004, Health Canada organized and sponsored a series of international consultative workshops on West Nile. They were attended by over 240 federal, provincial, and territorial

representatives, members of the public, industry stakeholders, health professionals and internationally renowned scientists studying West Nile Virus.

•(1620)

The government worked closely with the industry, Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec to implement West Nile screening tests for donors.

I am confident that, as new threats to our blood supply emerge, the system will be able to respond in a proactive and timely manner.

[*English*]

We must seriously consider this motion. I do not think anyone argues with the intent of the motion. The motion is to provide, as quickly as possible, compensation to those affected with this dreadful disease prior to 1986 and post-1990.

What bothers me about this motion is two points. One is the fact that the motion is inaccurate, and it is difficult to vote for a motion that is not factual.

The other point is that we are doing the moves pursuant to the requests and the original report of the committee. The minister has taken the steps necessary to do those compensations.

What are we left with? We are left with a Parliament that has many serious things to consider but we end up having a three hour debate today on an issue that we decided on some time ago and that we are moving toward.

Perhaps it is partisan politics or petty politics. Perhaps it is appealing or taking advantage of those who are the worst affected, those who are suffering. I know many people will be calling after we take this vote and asking where their money is with an expectation that things will move faster, but they will have to understand that this is a discussion between a class, a group, and that group, their legal representatives, their negotiators are collecting the data necessary so that we can conclude this discussion. Unfortunately, that takes some time. I wish it could be done faster but to say that we should pay immediately, we first need to know who to send the cheque to, the amount of the cheque, where the information is that we need and where the discussion is.

The discussion and the questions are ongoing. There is no miracle solution to these things.

It is unfortunate that we are doing this again. I think this is the fourth or fifth time that this question has been debated in the House even though we all agree. We are moving forward because we agree that there should be compensation. The committee has unanimously said that and the minister has taken the necessary action.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and I have to say that I am really quite taken aback.

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Instead of congratulating the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, I have rarely heard a member of this House be more condescending in chastizing someone and making what seemed to me very close to accusations about his trying to mislead the House and actually accusing him of motives, which I thought were in fact extra parliamentary, not acceptable in parliamentary terms.

However, let me go the question that I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to address.

I am sure he has read carefully the motion that has come from the committee. Let me remind him that it is not only urging the government to extend compensation to all those who contracted hepatitis C from tainted blood but that the government do so immediately “in recognition of the recommendation of the Krevier Inquiry and the large surplus in the federal Hepatitis C compensation fund”.

How can the parliamentary secretary so conveniently ignore the urging of the committee, including the Liberal members, that the government move immediately to commit to compensating all hepatitis C victims prior to 1986 and following 1990, and instead turn this into one of the most grotesquely partisan attacks on a member who is simply reflecting the unanimous will of the health committee that brought this motion forward?

• (1625)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I invite the member for Halifax to refer to the blues and see what the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia's speech indicated to see if there was any partisanship in it. I would invite her to look at the reports of the committees and the dialogue from the health committee meetings to see if there was any partisanship there. I would also invite her to read the reports of debate of previous discussions on this and see if there was any partisanship in the speeches made by the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

If she still feels that I was wrong to suggest that there was partisanship and that I was wrong in those accusations, then I will re-read all those same documents. If it warrants, I will certainly retract, but until that is done, it is very difficult.

She makes the point that the committee has suggested unanimously, including my vote at the committee, that compensation be made for those people suffering from hepatitis C previous to 1986 and post 1990. The minister has agreed with that. The minister has tasked his officials to enter into discussions and to look at all available options for compensation.

Then we come back with another resolution and it is in light of the large surplus in the federal hepatitis C compensation fund. But there is no federal hepatitis C compensation fund. That does not exist. There is a trust that the federal government contributed to that is owned by the people who contracted hepatitis C between 1986 and 1990. There is good potential that there is a surplus, but we have to know what the actuarial surplus is and then we have to follow the regulations within that trust to see how those funds could be used.

That was a suggestion of the committee originally in light of that surplus, but the minister went beyond that and said we would look at

all available options, not including any or excluding any but look at all available options for compensation.

We agree with the committee. We want the compensation to be made as quickly as possible, but when the term “immediately” is used, what does that mean? Does that mean that we just send a cheque to everybody or do we develop criteria? Do we find out how many people there are and the level to which they are affected?

If we look at the 1986 to 1990 group, there are criteria that are administered by the trustees regarding their levels of disabilities and how much they should receive. It is important that we have that information and the process has started. As I mentioned, they are meeting this month. The discussions and negotiations are ongoing. That is the right and reasonable way to approach these things otherwise we risk making grievous mistakes by not doing it with the proper information.

The member opposite clearly raised a good point, that the last time we set up a fund we did not have the right numbers. We used the numbers that were provided by the plaintiffs. The plaintiffs did not, I am sure, intend to mislead. They had the best numbers that they could calculate with the information that they had at the time. It came to light that happily the number of sufferers so far have been a lot less than predicted. But that was unknown to the plaintiffs or to the governments in those negotiations at that time, so now we are in the similar situation with this group. The discussions are underway to discover the available options and how the compensation should happen. We are committed to see that through.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, frankly I find the member's conduct and indignation just frightening. I do not think that fighting for victims is petty at all. I can assure the House that the Conservative Party of Canada will come back to fight and fight again until what is right is done, regardless of how many stumbling blocks and concerns the member has about wording in a motion. It is appalling.

It seems convenient to me how the Liberals continue to funnel money into funds that are now outside the control of parliamentary decision making and the democratic process. How convenient.

The issue really is that enough money was set aside for 22,000 victims. There are 10,000. It does not matter if there is a surplus or not. The fact is that there is enough money for an apparent 22,000 victims. There are only 10,000.

We knew this problem existed in 1991, if not before. The government of the time took its time to discuss, review, have meetings and more discussions. As a result of that, there is a whole window of people who were infected which could have been prevented had the government acted fast. Now we are sitting in a situation where the democratic rule of the House said to pay the victims immediately. The member says no, let us wait, let us look at it, and let us ask some more questions while 1,400 victims could have been funded at the expense of the legal fees. Another five victims every month are piddled away on administration fees.

Does the member see any logic in ignoring the wishes of the House? -I guess if we wait long enough there will be no victims. What is the logic in waiting at all?

Routine Proceedings

•(1630)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the member is clearly in left field, or right field, or the very far right field or in the outfield, or not in the game at all. He is suggesting that the federal government will be putting the funds out of arm's reach and sheltering these funds.

These were funds that were paid out in settlement of a class action lawsuit. Those funds no longer belonged to the federal government the minute that the settlement was reached.

The provincial governments also contributed to those funds, as did others. Those funds are in a trusteeship. The courts of three provinces heard and settled the agreement. Part of the terms of that agreement were that this year there would be an evaluation of the fund to see if there was an actuarial surplus or not. Should there be one, there are special dispositions on what could be applied and considered for the use of those funds.

In light of the eventual surplus the committee suggested that we use those funds to compensate. The minister agreed to that and went further. He said we would look at all available options. That is what is ongoing now.

The minister started that immediately. The process is ongoing. It is a negotiated process. We are not imposing our will on those people who will be compensated. We are negotiating with them. I think that is the fair and right thing to do.

The member would send out the cheques immediately. He would decide who gets some money and how much. I do not think we can do that. I think we negotiate that.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): 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 Palliser, National Defence; the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, Environment.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I speak to the motion, let me extend, on behalf of all of us, my best wishes for a happy birthday to the member for Témiscamingue, whose age I will keep a secret.

The motion today is extremely important. It was considered extensively in the Standing Committee on Health. It was introduced by our colleague, the Conservative health critic. Concerning the debate on hepatitis C and the victims who contracted this illness as a result of blood transfusions in public institutions—hospitals—it is true that the parliamentary secretary is quite right in inviting us not to be partisan on an issue such as this. However, it is too easy for the government to say that it is now in favour of this cause and that it is bound by a number of technical details that we will be able to discuss in a moment.

We cannot help, however, but to point out that, back in 1997, when Justice Krever presented his report, the Bloc Québécois critic for health was the hon. member for Drummond. In 1997, the government should have followed up on the first recommendation from Justice Krever, who is not a parliamentarian and, therefore, is not partisan and who took a scientific look at series of data. Hon. members will also remember that the provincial health ministers

were subpoenaed as Crown witnesses. There was a serious, scientific investigation process. After two years of investigation, the Krever commission called for compensation, no fault compensation, to be paid.

Those of my hon. colleagues who were here at the time—I know that the hon. member for Québec was here—and myself will not soon forget the following scene: a former Liberal member who had changed allegiance at the time when the first Liberal budget was brought down because the government had failed to abolish the GST crossed the floor and laid a flower on the desk of Allan Rock, the then health minister, inviting him to increase the compensation. Had there been a will to resolve this debate in 1997, the government had the means to implement its policies.

Granted, this is a unique issue. We are not talking about taxation, social housing, the war on poverty or sports, but about human lives. As time goes by, week after week, month after month, the number of victims increases and we can assess the magnitude of the government's mistake.

Earlier, I heard the parliamentary secretary say that they did not have the relevant information concerning the actual number of victims. I am sorry, but I remember perfectly well the debate we had in this House, and it was not about the number of victims. The argument put forward by Mr. Rock, who was the health minister at the time, which was also the argument of the member for Sudbury and every Liberal health minister from 1993 to 2004, was that screening technologies were available during the period to which they did not want to extend the compensation.

It had nothing to do with determining the number of victims, but it had everything to do with the government arguing that the screening technologies were available and that public health agencies and agencies responsible for the blood supply system should have used them. From an historical point of view, we must keep this argument in mind. It is our duty, as parliamentarians, to be extremely vigilant with regard to this issue. I am grateful to our Conservative colleague for that, and I think the Bloc Québécois has also always been extremely vigilant in matters such as this one.

The purpose of the motion in the parliamentary committee is to bring the government to right an historical wrong. Personally, I think that the government should apologize to the victims.

•(1635)

The Minister of Health should have seized the opportunity provided by today's motion to make a statement.

Today, for example, I spoke with someone from the Canadian Hemophilia Society. This is not just any organization; it has an official role to play as a representative in this matter. It so happens that the Canadian Hemophilia Society was not even aware of the nature of the discussions between the lawyers representing the victims infected before 1986 and those representing the victims infected between 1986 and 1990.

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I understand that the legal process in which we are engaged imposes certain limits on the government. However, it is totally unacceptable that an organization such as the Canadian Hemophilia Society, which is authorized to speak on behalf of victims of tainted blood, is not kept informed of what is happening with regard to this issue.

I understand that the funds totalling slightly more than \$1 billion that were put in trust no longer belong to the Government of Canada for administrative purposes. The managers of this trust act independently.

It is true that when these issues were debated in the House, we wanted such a mechanism to be put in place to prevent any form of political interference.

This does not, however, mean that it is not within the mandate of the Minister of Health to assess the situation from time to time and provide the lawyers involved in these negotiations with some very specific directions. I do not, moreover, believe that a number of the members here are any more informed.

It is one thing to have an independently administered program, as we have been calling for wholeheartedly, but it is quite another to keep parliamentarians out of the loop as far as progress is concerned.

I remember the take note debate we had just before the holidays. The Bloc Québécois, through its leader, the hon. member for Roberval, a man who very rarely descends to political partisanship, proposed to the other parliamentary leaders that a take note debate be held.

At that time, I asked the minister if he could provide us with guarantees that this matter would be settled by June. He was confident that it could. Even this past week, I asked the parliamentary secretary whether a cabinet memorandum had been submitted on this and what the status was.

Now it is April and I have learned that things are barely moving. Even if lawyers are not the fastest and most zealous members of our society, the situation is still this: here we are in April and the negotiations have scarcely begun.

What comfort can we find, then, in the commitments made during the take note debate held before the Christmas break? The wish had been expressed that this matter be settled before the summer adjournment in June. Yet the lawyers have barely begun their discussions.

This is where Parliament can bring some pressure to bear. The minister must give the lawyers a very clear mandate including performance obligations—we know what that means in legal language—so that, by June, official conclusions will be reached and the fund made accessible to the pre-1986 and post-July 1990 victims. This would remedy an historic wrong that has gone on far too long.

The Prime Minister should have risen in the House today to apologize to the victims on behalf of his government. Naturally, the Minister of Health was not present in the House. He is new, a young recruit. He was elected in the most recent election, in 2004. Of course, he was not here before, but, in the name of ministerial

solidarity, he should have risen in this House. He would have brought greater credit to his office had he apologized to the House.

• (1640)

It would not be the first time. Brian Mulroney apologized to the Japanese community for the suffering it endured in the second world war. I repeat, quick follow-up was required, but Allan Rock gave an exceedingly technocratic speech. It was devoid of any hint of sympathy for the victims infected before 1986 and after 1990.

Again, I recall clearly an hon. member, whose name escapes me, who was a member of the rat pack when the Liberals were in opposition. Former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien excluded this member from caucus. This member had wanted to follow through and have the Liberals act on their promise to abolish the GST, which the journalists interpreted as “Give Sheila Time”. We have not forgotten that the former Canadian Heritage minister went public with a statement that, if the Liberals did not abolish the GST, she would resign. In politics, making commitments means keeping them.

In conclusion, today is an important day for the victims. The opposition has done its job. I do not doubt that there is compassion among the Liberals, on the government side. I am thinking about my committee chair, the hon. member for Oakville, and other members of the Standing Committee on Health who agree that what is needed in terms of historical redress is to broaden compensation.

The government made a historic error in the form of a terrible insensitivity. The Minister of Health allowed himself to be guided by terribly technocratic considerations. Nonetheless, I do not doubt that among the Liberals there are some people who want to redress this historic error.

The best thing the Minister of Health can do—and he is said to represent the left in the Liberal Party—is to give urgent information and directives to his lawyers to ensure that by summer adjournment, roughly the second week of June, the lawyers have sealed an agreement. We have to be able to tell the victims that we are finally going to make good on recommendation number one of the Krever inquiry and that all hepatitis C victims will receive compensation regardless of when they contracted the disease. In this situation we certainly cannot accuse people of being the authors of their own misfortune.

When you go to the hospital it is reasonable to expect the blood supply system to be safe. I must add, for historical purposes, that at the time, the Red Cross was in charge of the blood supply. The Red Cross had a very good international reputation. We all felt secure in the fact that this was the agency in charge. We were comforted by the fact that the Red Cross was in charge of these operations.

You know what happened next. Unfortunately, the supply was tainted. However, once again, the government was simply far too slow in acting on recommendation number one in the report of the Krever inquiry.

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Today, we would have expected the Minister of Health to stand up, apologize to the victims and make a clear commitment on the mandates given to the lawyers. I am sure that all the members in this House will continue to follow this case and pressure the government as long as we do not receive a guarantee that money will be available for all hepatitis C victims.

• (1645)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was so absorbed by the speech made by my colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve that I had forgotten to return to my seat.

I want to congratulate my colleague for his perseverance in this matter. He has shown us again today his great sensitivity with regard to the whole issue of tainted blood and the Krever report. We all know that he has been a great champion of this cause.

I would like to ask my colleague to explain to us, if we were to compensate victims infected before 1986 and after 1990, what impact that would have, on a daily basis, on the quality of life of those victims of tainted blood. How would this decision improve their quality of life? I remember seeing them saddened by the minister's response, when he turned them down. To them, it would have been a step toward a better quality of life.

I would like my colleague to comment on that so we can better understand this issue which, even after several years, is still being debated today.

Mr. Réal Ménard: I thank my colleague for her question. I am glad to some extent that I have enthralled her and that I have, deep down, made my first female conquest.

More seriously, I say to her that, if the number of victims who are entitled to compensation were increased, this would mean in reality that care and financial support for these people would be extended. Hepatitis C has different levels. Victims are not all in the same phase in the illness and, depending on the phase considered and the progress of this terrible illness, of course, care is different, as the annual and monthly payments should be.

I believe that the important thing is to have common solidarity. No one asked to receive tainted blood; this was within the government's responsibility for public health. For this reason, I think that this is an issue of historic redress.

I know that all members of the Bloc Québécois have followed with great compassion and interest an issue that we did not imagine we would face a few years ago. I know that the former health minister, Thérèse Lavoie-Roux, Pierre-Marc Johnson and other ministers were summoned to appear. Because of certain legal realities, they were unable to testify on this issue, but the fact remains that this historic mistake must be corrected.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this debate.

I regret what seems to be the slightly contradictory position taken by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health. On the one hand he insists that the government is doing precisely the right thing and asks what the problem is. On the other hand, despite the

announcement by the health minister as far back as November that there would be an opening of the window for hep C victims who were excluded from the original compensation package which covered only those who were infected between the arbitrary dates of 1986 and 1990, he was forced to acknowledge that not one penny has flowed from that announcement by the minister that there would be serious consideration of compensation for the previously excluded victims.

We got very confusing messages from the parliamentary secretary. He was absolutely indignant at any suggestion in this debate that there was not yet a clear, firm commitment from the government to act on the stated intention of the health minister to at least look at this issue. On the other hand it sounded as though he was washing the government's hands of the whole matter by reminding people that we are talking about a trust fund that has been set up at arm's length, that we need to find out how much of a surplus there is going to be in the fund before we decide what we can do.

I do not understand what prevents the government from doing exactly what the health committee recommended, which is to state clearly without equivocation and without further delay that the other victims who were infected outside of the 1986-90 window will be compensated. Then the details can be worked out.

There was no sense at all that the parliamentary secretary was prepared to respond to the sense of urgency in the health committee recommendation. The committee used the word urgent to get on with this, yet we saw none of that from the minister.

I want to state clearly the New Democratic Party's support for the recommendations that have come from the health committee. Our party also supports the spirit in which all opposition members came to the House this afternoon to speak in support of the health committee's recommendations.

I want to use the few minutes that are available to me to plead the case of another group of people who have been largely excluded from any fair level of compensation in relation to the blood contaminated conditions they are suffering. I raised this matter on United Nations Day which was dedicated to women and children suffering from HIV-AIDS. I know that time is short, so I will quickly set out the case of a group that has not been fairly and adequately compensated within this fund which specifically identifies that group as being eligible. It specifically identifies that group's circumstances as also being considered within the fund that we are discussing.

That group is largely women and children, a group of Canadians who have been secondarily infected with HIV. This group was specifically identified; it was clearly recognized and included in the terms of reference for the fund that we are discussing, that money should also go toward compensating those secondarily infected with HIV from blood.

• (1655)

At this point, it is relevant for us to keep in mind what Justice Krever stated:

The needs of those who have been harmed are the same, regardless of their cause, and whether or not fault can be proved.

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The secondarily infected spouses and children with HIV are a group of approximately 100 people who received a much inferior compensation package under this fund which was specifically established for those spouses and children who became secondarily infected with HIV from blood contamination, namely the wives and children of those who received tainted blood. The compensation that was afforded these women and children was only slightly above the amount given for the level six damages for pain and suffering for hep C. The hep C compensation for loss of income, cost of care and medication was not provided to the secondarily infected. The result is that the compensation for this group of approximately 100 people, primarily women and children, is somewhere between one-quarter and one-third the level of compensation that has been provided to the hep C victims in the 1986 to 1990 window.

Clearly it is appropriate to bring forward the plight of these people. The unfair and discriminatory treatment of this group of 100 Canadians should be brought forward in a very open way. It must be acknowledged that they too have been excluded from full and fair compensation, although not totally. They have not been absolutely excluded, as the pre-1986 and post-1990 hep C victims have been totally excluded, but they have been very seriously undercompensated. One cannot fail to recognize that there has been discrimination in their not receiving a level of compensation that comes anywhere close to helping them deal with the horrific situation in which they find themselves.

Let me quickly give a little history as to the circumstances of these people, not exclusively women and children, but mostly women and children. It is not a pretty story. It is not a story understandably that those women or their children want to tell before the microphones in the public eye. They do not want to do press conferences to say, "Look at us. Look at what victims we are. Please hear our case".

We are talking about women who were encouraged to continue their usual sexual practices with their HIV positive husbands. Some of them were actually told once the hazards became more clearly understood that they were being unsupportive of their husbands if they used condoms. Others were told that hemophiliacs were not passing the disease on to their wives. Health officials, regulators and health policy people utterly failed to recognize and at least inform these women about the risks to their health. No one really warned them as to what could happen.

For the most part we are talking about women who cared for their husbands while they were too ill from HIV-AIDS. The compensation that their husbands had received died with them. When these women die of the HIV that they have contracted, their children will be orphaned.

It becomes very serious for us to recognize that their financial needs have not been fully taken into account. The people in this group were in fact intended to be included in a fair and full compensation package, but they were given a far less adequate compensation package than those others who have received compensation in that 1986 to 1990 hep C window.

• (1700)

Some might say that is not what we are talking about today. What we are talking about is that this package has been opened further for consideration to cover excluded categories. We know that negotia-

tions are going on. The Minister of Health made it clear that there are negotiations going on to determine the extent of unmet needs for those who have not been adequately covered or not covered at all.

These women in taking care of their children are not asking for some kind of special treatment. They are simply asking for the opportunity, which has not yet been granted to them, to be at the table for the negotiations about opening the fund further to those who have been previously excluded or not adequately compensated. They are simply asking for equal consideration and equal opportunity to have their case examined and their plight considered.

When the health minister stated that he was prepared to open the window to further compensate those who had been excluded or not adequately compensated previously, he stated that this was not a matter of legalities, that this was not a matter of politics, that it was a matter of doing the right thing. It is a matter of doing the fair thing. I would plead the case of the people in this group who have been excluded from fair and adequate compensation on exactly that principle.

If the health minister meant it when he said that it is not about legalities, the first package excluded a lot of people. The argument could be made by some that legally they are excluded, so why are we looking at opening up the fund to include those who were not included. We are doing so because it is the right thing to do and we congratulated the health minister when he said so.

Surely the case can be made that it is also the right thing to do. I would say it is imperative if we are going to do the right thing, that we look at the reality of some 100 people, women and primarily children, who through absolutely no fault of their own became infected with HIV. Sadly they are not just dealing with an ongoing illness, but effectively they have received a sentence of death. That is what we are talking about. Those women, themselves ill, are dealing with the incredible struggle of trying to provide for their children who will eventually become orphaned. For some of them it will be sooner rather than later.

There is no time to be lost. This is the time for equal and fair consideration to be given to the plight of these 100 or so Canadians. They should have a place at the table. Their circumstances should be recognized so that they have an opportunity to put their case. They are not asking that there be some guarantee given in advance. They are asking for equal consideration.

I hope that as we address the absolute unfairness of the exclusion of those who contracted hepatitis C before 1986 and after 1990 by bringing them in for consideration now, given the surplus of these funds and the unfairness of their previous exclusion that we give them the recognition. I pay credit to the health minister. I have differences of opinion with the current health minister on a lot of matters, but on this one I applauded him, my party applauded him and a lot of Canadians applauded him when he said that the wrong thing was done when those infected prior to 1986 and after 1990 were excluded and that we are now going to do the right thing, we are going to create a process of negotiation and review.

Routine Proceedings

• (1705)

I am simply pleading the case, in the same spirit expressed by the minister toward those thousands who have been arbitrarily excluded with respect to hepatitis C, that these 100 or so Canadians will finally be recognized as having been woefully and inadequately compensated given their circumstances and their needs. We must also respect and act on the spirit of Judge Krever who made it very clear that, regardless of the cost, the need is the same for those who have been identified for compensation and that we should accord them equal treatment in bringing them to the table in discussions and creating the opportunity for them to receive their fair compensation.

A compensation package of somewhere between one-third and one-quarter of what was granted to the hepatitis C victims between 1986 and 1990 is simply not adequate, nor would it be adequate as we now move to do the right thing to extend the coverage to those victims prior to 1986 or after 1990.

Let us not have it said that we are not addressing this situation because they are not a large enough lobby group or that they are not as effective because they are not represented in the same way. I say that with nothing but total respect. I want to express appreciation and respect for the incredible work done by the Canadian Hemophilia Society and by other community based health advocacy groups that have worked together with the victims of hepatitis C to put their case forward.

However let it not be said that because this small group of 100 women and children principally do not have the same kind of lobbying clout, that their plight has been ignored and that we have failed to take the opportunity to ensure they receive fair and equal treatment as this whole package of compensation is being broadened to include all those who should be compensated fairly for the blood contamination that has resulted in their ill health and, in most cases, an untimely death in the not too distant future.

There is no time to be lost. I plead for the support of all members of the House in stating that this matter needs to be addressed.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this debate has already noted, the settlement agreement that was negotiated in 1998 and 1999 between lawyers representing hepatitis C victims, the federal government and the governments of the provinces and territories had a specific focus. It only covered Canadians who were infected with hepatitis C through the blood system between January 1, 1986 and July 1, 1990 and persons with hemophilia and thalassemia who received blood products during that period.

On November 22, 2004, the Minister of Health announced the government's intention to explore all available options to provide compensation to those infected by hepatitis C through the blood supply before 1986 and after 1990. Discussions started immediately following that announcement and are continuing.

However a process needs to be followed in order to ensure that a fair and appropriate resolution is reached. This involves many parties, including the courts that oversaw the 1986-90 agreement.

I am pleased that the government undertook to launch these discussions, and I trust it will reach a resolution as soon as possible.

It is also important to note the other measures that have been taken to provide support for those infected with hepatitis C through the blood supply.

The federal government invested \$50 million into its hepatitis C prevention, support and research program. This program is supporting efforts that contribute to the prevention of hepatitis C infection. It is promoting the development and availability of tools and mechanisms in support of persons infected with or infected by hepatitis C. It is expanding hepatitis C-related research. Finally, it has been funding actions to increase Canadians' awareness about hepatitis C.

I am pleased to remind the House that this program was extended for two additional years through 2004 and 2005 federal budgets with funding of \$10.6 million per annum. In fiscal year 2006-07, hepatitis C program activities will be considered within an integrated infectious disease strategy that is being developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. This support is important of course but we all realize that people with hepatitis C infections can face needs that have to be dealt with through the health care system.

With that in mind, in 1998 the minister of health of the day announced a \$300 million transfer to the provinces and territories. The idea was to provide funding to the governments of the provinces and territories over 20 years for appropriate treatment and care for people infected with hepatitis C through the blood system before January 1986 and after July 1, 1990. To date, \$200.6 million has already been transferred to provincial and territorial governments to assist them with the provision of hepatitis C health care benefits to people who are dealing with the impact of hepatitis C on their lives.

In keeping with jurisdictional realities, provinces and territories have been deciding the service mix that is best suited to the needs of their populations.

The federal transfer payments for health care services are indicated for the treatment of hepatitis C infection and medical conditions directly related to it, such as immunization, nursing care, new and emerging anti-viral drug therapies and other relevant drug therapies.

We are beginning to get a clear sense of precisely what the money is doing. For example, the Yukon government has used these funds for nursing staff, to help cover the costs related to visiting infectious disease specialists and for medications.

Ontario, which has by far the largest number of people with hepatitis C, recently conducted an audit of its hepatitis C health care expenditures. It found that the special federal transfer payments worth \$66.3 million had covered most of its overall expenditures of \$82.5 million. Those expenditures were for things such as laboratory costs, drugs, hospital, physician, home care and public health services.

British Columbia has drawn attention to its funding of liver transplants that people with severe conditions that are rooted in hepatitis C can require. Alberta is supporting state of the art laboratory testing and drug therapy among other initiatives.

Many provinces, such as Manitoba, have reported that they are using funds to help support the provision of the new combination therapy that is proving to be a success for many hepatitis C patients.

Routine Proceedings

● (1710)

In such places as Nunavut and New Brunswick, some funds are enabling the transfer of hepatitis C patients to provinces where highly specialized services of liver specialists, including transplants, are possible.

Another aspect of the funding allocated to meeting the needs of hepatitis C victims was the recently completed lookback/traceback initiative. Under lookback/traceback, our government committed to paying half the costs of provincial and territorial initiatives that helped identify the donors and the recipients of hepatitis C infected blood.

This was a complex process that involved a review of all hospital medical records available and the identification of people who had donated infected blood.

One of the reasons this work was so important is that many people with hepatitis C infections do not even realize they are infected. For many years they have had no noticeable symptoms and no barriers to a typical life and are therefore not likely to take advantage of the treatments that have already been available and are doing so much to improve the prospects for people with hepatitis C.

The federal government's share of the lookback/traceback activities amounted to approximately \$50 million by the time the initiative came to a successful end on March 31, 2004.

Finally, it is important to note that all Canadians are benefiting from the \$125 million invested by the federal government in improving blood regulations and blood safety surveillance. This is far from the whole range of actions that our government has funded, of course. However I have been able to comment on the major elements of our work to date.

While no one would say the work is done, I believe it is fair to state that our government is taking sensible steps in conjunction with our partners to provide the care that people living with hepatitis C need.

Moreover, the government has taken the step forward to explore options for compensation for those infected with hepatitis C from the blood supply before 1986 and after 1990. We should let these discussions take place and follow the required process so that an effective settlement can be reached for all parties.

● (1715)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to the Liberal member's comments and I have a very specific question to put.

After hearing the member say that the negotiation process was in place and that we should take a hands off position and let it take its course, I wonder if it is his view that those who have been excluded from the hepatitis C compensation package to date, namely those infected before 1986 or after 1990, should under any and all circumstances receive compensation.

In other words, is it his view that they should receive compensation as of entitlement in the same manner as those who have now been recognized for compensation who were infected between 1986 and 1990, or is it his view that whether they are

included or at what level of support they are included should depend upon what is found to be left over in the fund as a surplus?

In other words, should they be compensated because it is the fair and right thing to do and on the basis of evident need, or is it his view, as seems to be the view of the parliamentary secretary, that it will depend on how much money is left over? Could the member please clarify which is the case?

Mr. Roger Valley: Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Health stated on November 22, his intention is to explore all available options and provide compensation to those infected.

We have a process in place and that process needs to be worked out so people can receive compensation.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the member again. He simply did not answer the question. I know he has the right not to answer the question, but I wonder if he could please address the question.

He chose to reiterate what the minister has said, which is to explore options for compensation, but that is not my question. My question is about whether he now holds the view, as has clearly been the position of the Krever inquiry and as has clearly been the view of the health committee in bringing forward this recommendation for the second time, that those who have been excluded in the pre-1986 period and post-1990 period should in fact be compensated equally in regard to the compensation provided for those from 1986 to 1990.

He did not address the question of whether he holds the view that yes, he supports the recommendation of the health committee in that regard. The minister did not make this clear. Or is he taking the view that it will depend upon whether there is enough money in the fund? Because of course it is our responsibility as parliamentarians to ensure that the funds are forthcoming, and one would think that on the government side there would be even more responsibility felt and undertaken.

If there are insufficient funds in the existing compensation fund that has been set up in a trust to ensure adequate compensation for those in the pre-1986 and post-1990 period, then it is our responsibility to find the funds and ensure that they are available. Is it his view that they should be compensated equally to the others if there is enough money? Or is it his view that they should be compensated equally to the others and if there is not sufficient money in the fund we need to figure out how to access the funds and ensure that they are available?

● (1720)

Mr. Roger Valley: Madam Speaker, I did have the pleasure of hearing the member speak earlier and I heard the credit that she was giving the Minister of Health. I think on a couple of occasions she credited him with this action. I think it is an action that the House respects and I think it is something we have to let play out. We will not know the results of it until the process is over. I think that at that point we can deal with those other issues.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and speak on this important motion. It is not the first one of its kind that I have had the opportunity to speak on, because I do sit on the health committee and I dealt with this for some time there. In fact, I had the opportunity to bring forward the original motion this House debated earlier this fall with regard to compensating all the members of this group outside the window of 1986-90.

It is important for the House to understand this. At that time, the motion got 100% support at the health committee, from all sides of the House. The motion urged the minister to make sure that compensation was done appropriately. We waited for a considerable amount of time before voting another motion, one put forward by my colleague in committee in the same process. The difference between this motion and the one I put forward is that the government in power actually will not be able to hijack this one. The House will be forced to vote on this motion.

The last one should have come to a vote as well so that we would have clear direction on the motion for compensation of all victims outside of the window of 1986-90, but it did not. It was circumvented.

Now we are going to have an opportunity for the House to speak out loud and clear. The minister obviously is not getting the message. The minister thinks that he can just tinker around with the fund, the \$1.1 billion that is left in a compensation fund that started at \$1.2 billion, while victims continue to be victimized by this terrible disease because of a misuse of power, a miscommunication.

The Krever inquiry said that all victims inside and outside the window should be compensated. This government has simply failed these victims. I may be a little too close to the issue, a little closer than some of the others in the House. I am rather passionate about it. When we sit at the health committee and talk to a number of the witnesses who come forward, we get some compelling testimony, testimony that we can hear much more aggressively than that heard in the House. Perhaps I can share some of that testimony if I have enough time this afternoon, but what I do want to say is that we have to deal with this problem. We have the opportunity. We have the means to do it.

I listened attentively to my colleague on the other side with regard to the reasons and the rationale for not compensating. I have a very difficult time with that because obviously he has not listened to the Krever inquiry, which recommended treating everybody the same based on the essence of fairness, but I will just lay out the arguments that were presented here by the last speaker from the government side.

The first argument was that it is in the courts, that the courts have the money and it is at arm's length from the government. Regardless of that, there is \$1.1 billion of a \$1.2 billion fund that is still in the courts. What the actuarial report is going to find out in June is whether there is enough money. I do not think we need a report to find that out, not at all. We know exactly how much money is there. It is a very hollow argument.

The argument is that if the courts have enough money we are going to compensate. Really, the issue is not whether we have enough money to compensate. The issue should be whether

compensating is the right thing to do. That is a decision that has to be made by the government and the House and hopefully in approving this motion we will come clear with that one.

The idea of whether there is enough money is not the issue. We know how many victims there are now. We know that the number put forward at the beginning of this debate was supposedly 20,000. We know that number was false. We said so at the time. The number is actually closer to 5,000. There is no reason not to compensate.

When it comes to the second argument, he is saying that the government did the right thing because it compensated within the window of 1986-90. I believe that is not appropriate. It is certainly not appropriate because of what I just mentioned.

Madam Speaker, I forgot to mention that I will be splitting my time. I think you are aware of that, so I will just continue.

● (1725)

The third argument was that the government has given \$200.6 million to the provinces for the victims outside the window of 1986 to 1990. I believe that is what the speaker said. We have to understand that not \$1 of that went to any of the victims. In fact, I would suggest, and even in the words of my hon. colleague he suggested this, that the provinces used this for alternative delivery of health care because they are stretched for health care dollars. They used it to be able to buffer their health care systems. None of that money went to those victimized by tainted blood.

The other point is that they put \$1.25 million into the blood services, which needed to be shored up. That had nothing to do with the victims. It was just something that needed to be done to deliver a safe product to Canadians and to make sure that the health and safety issues were dealt with. It had nothing to do with those who are victims. To use that as an argument for not being able to compensate those who are outside the window makes absolutely no sense to me or to anyone in the House, I am sure.

What went on was absolutely shameful. The discrimination was not only against those who were outside the window of 1986 to 1990 and who were not compensated like those inside that window. There was also discrimination between diseases. Those inside the window were compensated for hepatitis C contracted from tainted blood. Those outside were victimized by tainted blood with hepatitis C as well HIV-AIDS, but HIV-AIDS did not have the restriction from 1986 to 1990. All of those infected through tainted blood who contracted HIV-AIDS from the same blood were compensated.

Not only was it discrimination between years but it was also a discrimination between diseases. It is an important thing not to lose sight of when we talk about fairness in the House. Here we are as members of Parliament representing the people of Canada, who expect fairness in all the decisions that we render in the House. If there is any decision that demands fairness, demands correctness and demands to be fixed at this time, it is this issue.

I have heard it talked about at committee. Members from the government side have said they were not here at that time, that they are new committee members from the Liberal Party. They say it was those who were in charge at the time. They say they were not here and so we should have an opportunity to fix it.

Routine Proceedings

I want to correct the record or make sure that the record is clear. The decision was made in 1996. The members who are still in the House are many. They include the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of State for Public Health and many of the cabinet ministers who are sitting in control of the decision making of the government and the country. They are sitting in the House in the same chairs now and are able to make a decision to correct the injustice. In fact, the current health minister, when he was the attorney general of British Columbia, called for compensation for all hepatitis C tainted blood victims.

There is absolutely no reason to delay a decision to do the right thing, to compensate those victims who are still being victimized by this terrible injustice.

As I said before, \$1.1 billion is left in the fund. In fact, last year while continuing to pay out of some of the costs, there was \$60 million more in income than there was in claimants. All of those from 1986 to 1990 who have applied are already compensated. The estimated numbers are now 5,000 from within the 1986 to 1990 period and 6,000 victims outside those dates, both post and pre. We know what numbers we are actually dealing with because many of the provinces went ahead and compensated through their funds as much as they possibly could. We actually know who will come forward. We know the numbers that are definitive. We know how much money we have spent. We know how much we have paid out.

When it comes to the amount that was paid out, I think it is worthy of note to understand that a good part of that money was not necessarily for the victims. A good part of that money went to the lawyers and for the administration of the funds. I believe my numbers are right. I think we are at around \$92 million for that alone.

● (1730)

The point I am trying to make is very clear. We did the wrong thing by compensating only a restrictive window from 1986 to 1990. The government knows it and every member of the House knows it. We have the opportunity to correct that and do the right thing. Victims continue to die. Many of the victims who should have been compensated are already gone.

We have the chance to do the right thing. It is not a matter of dollars. It is a matter of justice. We should get to work and make it happen now. No member has come up with a reason or a justifiable argument against it. The committee has recommended it to the House. The House must do the right thing at this time.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I am always pleased to rise to speak on behalf of my constituents, I am personally disappointed that I have to rise yet again today on this issue.

Nonetheless, I feel it is my obligation to rise and speak on behalf of those who cannot: Canada's hepatitis C victims.

Last October 15 in question period the Liberal government reiterated its desire to keep thousands of hepatitis C victims from receiving compensation. Why? Simply because they did not get infected on the right day. This policy was beyond simple discrimination. It was a blatant example of political indifference toward those often too sick to fight for themselves.

When members of the House voted against extending the compensation to all victims, some members of the Liberal Party shed tears in an attempt to show some sort of sympathy for the thousands of innocent victims. Instead, all they did was show how cold-hearted and spineless they were when it came to standing up for their constituents and their convictions.

Today my colleague from Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia along with others in the health committee have made another bold attempt to correct this wrong. The committee's report calls on the government to do what many reports have called on the government to do in the past. It is calling for the government to immediately provide compensation to hepatitis C victims without delay. That is what is right and that is what must take place.

There is no reason for delay. We know there is enough money in the original compensation fund to compensate all victims. Failure to do so before now is inexcusable. All the delay has done is deny compensation to thousands of victims who died before today. The government will likely take another few months to do the right thing and in the meantime more will die.

With the unanimous support of the health committee, a report was sent to the House for concurrence last year. The report requested that the government follow the Krever inquiry's recommendations and fully compensate all those infected with hepatitis C from tainted blood. The Liberals shamefully talked out the debate before the vote could be recorded.

Then on March 21 the committee passed another motion to request that the government immediately compensate all individuals infected with hepatitis C from tainted blood. This would sound like another trip around the same circus ring except for a new twist. Due to a new procedural rule in the House, any motion of concurrence of a committee report must be given three hours of debate and then voted on.

That is what we are doing here today. Clearly, we have not given up the fight for justice on this side of the House. The Liberals cannot talk this debate out and prevent a vote as they did last year. There will be no abdication of responsibility this time.

The Liberals know they failed to protect the national blood supply and that killed Canadians. Today, we have a much safer blood supply but a lack of vigilance to the safety of the system could cause us problems again. The government has shown a preference to protect itself before it protects the general public. One only needs to look at the multitude of inquiries in progress.

We in the Conservative Party have been calling for fairer, complete compensation for all innocent victims of the tainted blood scandal. We always have and we always will, so long as it is necessary. We have always said that those infected with hepatitis C unknowingly should not have to suffer any more than they have already.

We have heard the health minister say that he will discuss compensation for the excluded group of victims. Excuse us for being skeptical. Last time the lawyers got involved it cost a whopping \$60 million. I am sure this time it will not be much different.

Routine Proceedings

I hope the minister will ensure that victims get the compensation they deserve and that this does not become a financial boost for the legal community. If the minister can find a way to minimize legal costs and delays and get compensation to all those who deserve it, I will applaud his efforts. If he does not, I will not hesitate to tell every hepatitis C victim that the Liberals still care more about their party's survival than their survival.

• (1735)

The Liberal government likes to pretend that it treats all Canadians equally, but we know that is not the case and this issue only highlights this. We have two classes of victims and that is unacceptable. It was not the choice of the victim as to what day they became infected. If people get hepatitis C as a result of tainted blood, they are victims, period: no distinction, no second class.

This is a minority Parliament and I suspect this vote will pass. The only question now is the Prime Minister's willingness to act on his self-described democratic deficit. If the House votes in favour of this matter, it will be interesting to see what excuse the Prime Minister comes up with when ignoring the direction of the House. We know he ignored the committee and the appointment of Glen Murray to his patronage post. Ironically, it is my truly honourable colleague who won that riding instead of Mr. Murray. Given the actions of the Prime Minister and Glen Murray, I can only say for the constituents of Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia that they made the right decision on election day.

On a final note, I would like to thank my other Conservative colleagues and those from the other opposition parties for continuing to stand up for what is right. A special thanks goes to Dr. Grant Hill, a former member of this House, for his tireless crusades to see justice done. Also, my friend, Joe Haché, continues to be an inspiration on this file. It is a privilege to stand and speak in the House on his behalf.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Claude Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Rural Communities), Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the questions that is sometime raised in debates and questions on the whole issue of hepatitis C is the substance of the settlement agreement. Based on what we are hearing, there is huge fund in place, but those who need that money do not have access to it.

We hear statements to the effect that the federal government intends to get its hands on the huge surplus in that reserve. However, one should be careful with the opposition's comments. These allegations are often preposterous.

This is why I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the settlement agreement fund for people who were infected with hepatitis C between 1986 and the mid-nineties. I specifically want to comment on the false notion that the federal government will siphon off any surplus.

First, allow me to point out the basic facts concerning this fund under the settlement agreement.

In 1998, the federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed to provide financial assistance to Canadians who were infected with hepatitis C following a blood transfusion between January 1, 1986

and July 1, 1990, and to persons with hemophilia who received blood products during that period.

This led to negotiations involving the federal, provincial and territorial governments, as well as the lawyers representing the plaintiffs in class actions before the courts in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia.

These negotiations resulted in a settlement agreement, thus probably putting an end to legal battles that would have lasted a decade. All the parties to the dispute, and the courts, approved the settlement.

In so doing, they agreed to set eligibility criteria that are based on consultations with Canadian medical experts on hepatitis C.

Many stakeholders had the opportunity to review the settlement agreement and they provided information to the courts before the latter gave their approval, in December 1999.

The hepatitis C settlement for the 1986-1990 period totals \$1.118 billion. The federal government contributed \$875 million, or eight elevenths of the total amount.

The provinces and territories are putting the rest of the money in a trust fund set up for compensation and related monthly costs.

Once the settlement agreement was reached, it was widely made public. Announcements were published in Canada's newspapers in April 2000 and once again in January 2001, to tell people who might be eligible for compensation how to obtain the applications or to exclude themselves from the agreement.

Within the settlement agreement, an independent and non government administrator was appointed by the courts. This administrator was Crawford Expertises Inc./The Garden City Group. The administrator establishes the application process. It makes decisions on applications and determines the payments made to applicants according to established criteria.

Thus, people who are eligible for payments and who are the most sick receive the most money. Furthermore, applications may cover loss of income, care costs or other particular expenses.

The first payments were made to applicants on June 20, 2000. The most recent data available are from March 4, 2005. Consequently, at the beginning of that month, the fund had already paid more than \$427 million.

But what was the status of the fund and what about a surplus?

On the face of it, it is possible to see something in the applications for compensation. After all, when a report was made on the assessment of the trust fund on December 31, 2004, it indicated there was \$890 million left.

The funds must be invested to allow the trust to make payments to eligible people during what is expected to be the next 70 years, since it is easy to imagine that a child who contracted hepatitis C before birth—you understand that he can then have it later on—let us say in 1988, would live much longer and would be eligible for compensation at some point during his life.

Routine Proceedings

● (1740)

Second, we must understand that current levels of payment do not automatically guarantee future levels of payment. The conditions resulting from a hepatitis C infection can worsen or improve. Whatever the case may be, the fund must be able to provide adequate compensation. It must be able to provide compensation for lost income, until these individuals reach the age of 65.

Third, we do not know, currently, just how many people may be entitled to compensation. We continue to receive new applications, and this could continue until 2010.

That said, there is a process for examining the fund's financial status. For example, a group of lawyers representing the claimants, called the joint committee, is overseeing the settlement agreement. This committee is made up of lawyers representing Canadians with hepatitis C in the negotiations on the settlement agreement. This committee, under court supervision, oversees the administration of the agreement.

The joint committee is preparing to present an actuarial analysis of the fund based on the most recent data and experience acquired to date. It will provide the three courts that approved the settlement agreement with the information they need to determine whether or not the trust fund has a surplus.

The date for a hearing on this issue will be set considerably later than June 2005. A decision about scheduling will be made by the courts, but the Government of Canada will try to request that a hearing be held as soon as possible.

What will happen if the courts determine that there is a surplus? Could the federal government, as some seem to be suggesting, grab that money? The answer is simply no. The trust fund does not belong to the federal government. Its purpose is to respond to the needs of the beneficiaries of this trust, and it is up to the courts to determine how the surplus is to be divided.

The courts will make a decision based on a number of factors, one of the most important ones being the range of options included in the settlement agreement to deal with this type of possibility. Should there be a surplus, the courts might decide to allocate it to those covered by the trust fund or to measures that would benefit these beneficiaries the most, such as support for research on hepatitis. It will be up to the courts to decide.

Naturally, they could just leave the surplus in the fund. Whatever happens, it is clear that there is a special process to deal with any surpluses in the trust fund. The federal government is currently preparing for these hearings, in order to be able to put forward a reasonable and responsible position to the courts when the fund sufficiency hearings are held.

This motion is not appropriate, since the Minister of Health has already started to explore options to compensate those victims who contracted hepatitis C before 1986 and after 1990. And I am absolutely delighted by that.

● (1745)

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to pay a compliment to my colleague from Winnipeg, our health critic, who brought this motion forward.

This has been around the House, as members well know, a long time. In fact, it predates many of us in this place. It basically goes back to the 1980s when Canadians were subjected to plasma infected with hepatitis C from blood that was received from places like, for example, prisons in the United States and Canada, and developing countries where there are no safeguards. As a result of that, many Canadians were infected with that very debilitating and often fatal disease.

The government then appointed Justice Krever to look into how this could occur in a country like Canada. How could we have a tainted blood scandal, if you will? Justice Krever uncovered a pattern of gross negligence and criminality, not only involving the Red Cross but Ottawa itself in terms of the handling of our blood supply.

After a number of years of investigation hearings across the country, Justice Krever concluded that all victims of hepatitis C as a result of that tainted blood should be compensated. Most Canadians agreed with Justice Krever. Everyone on this side of the House agreed with Justice Krever and many people on the other side of the House, that is the government of the day, the Liberal government, agreed as well that all victims should be compensated.

Unfortunately, and this is really why we are still debating this after so many years, not all those victims are being compensated. Only victims between 1986 and 1990 are being compensated. That is simply an artificial time period that the government threw up for convenience because it simply did not want to spend the money to compensate innocent victims of a tainted blood scandal.

Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Langley.

The government had an opportunity back in 1997, when Krever reported, to do what was right, that every Canadian considered was the right thing to do: compensate these innocent victims. It did not. It only compensated those between 1986 and 1990. If a person's date of infection resulted outside of that time span, he or she was simply out of luck, according to the government.

On this side of the House, as health critic for our party at that time, I take a lot of pride in being the first to stand in the House and demand from the government that all victims should be compensated. I was part of that very strong debate coming from this side of the House and really putting the wood to the government on that issue with the help of a lot of my colleagues. At that time, as members well know, we did not have a united Conservative Party. My colleague from the Reform Party at that time, Dr. Grant Hill, was another member of the House who led the fight to do exactly what we are speaking of, and that is to compensate all victims.

What do we know about what the government has done? We know that it did agree on a \$1.2 billion package between federal and provincial governments to compensate those victims in the time-frame of which it speaks.

Routine Proceedings

The government at the time was exaggerating the number of claimants who would come forward. That is its excuse for not compensating all victims. This we do know, that since the fund was set up, the \$1.2 billion fund, there is still \$1.05 billion left in the fund. In other words, more than enough money to compensate all the victims, not just some but all the victims.

What is so sad about this story is that we do know that the government lawyers have received \$70 million out of the fund. They are the same people to whom the government is now listening. They are saying not to compensate all the victims.

● (1750)

My argument would be that the lawyers are looking after themselves very nicely, thanks very much. That is the same legal argument that the government always falls down on when it comes to defending its original position to compensate some, but not all. It is a bogus argument. It will not withstand scrutiny and close examination.

In fact, the Auditor General does not have the power nor the authority, nor does Parliament, to go in and peek behind the curtains in terms of how that fund is being administered. That is another example of how sad this regime is that the present government has set up. The government members all stood up in this House and voted for that, leaving people outside the package.

In fact, we have some members of cabinet presently in this room and listening to me speak who were forced by the Prime Minister of the day, Mr. Chrétien, to stand in their place and vote down compensation for all members. It was a motion that came from this side of the House, brought forward by Dr. Grant Hill, to do the very thing that Canadians are saying would be the fair thing to do.

The Liberals are running out of excuses. It is as simple as that. The clock is ticking. Some of these people will actually go to their graves without having received a nickel of compensation from the Government of Canada for a disease inflicted on them through no fault of their own. It does not get any worse than that. It is totally unacceptable.

I know families that are basically on the verge of bankruptcy because they were left outside of the artificial time limit that the Liberal government conveniently put in place. That is just fundamentally wrong, but that is how basic this argument is. It is about an artificial time line imposed by the Liberal Government of Canada on some unfortunate Canadians.

I often use this as an example. If a person were infected on December 31, 1985, that person would be outside the package. If the person were infected, for example, on January 1, 1986, that person would be inside. Does that make any sense? None at all and government members opposite know that.

What is annoying and what annoys a lot of Canadians is that they are forced to stand in their place by a Prime Minister to support the government position, knowing full well that they are doing the wrong thing. What does that say about this present Prime Minister and his battle to knock down the democratic deficit, or to do something about it to make this place democratic, so that members of his own government can stand in their place and do the right thing?

Nothing has changed. The present Prime Minister is no better than Mr. Chrétien who imposed the same set of rules on his members at the time. The same crowd, the same group of members on Wednesday evening when we vote on this, will stand in their place and deny the opportunity for these people to be treated fairly, the way that most Canadians would expect to be treated when there is a level of incompetence and, in fact, criminality taking place. Most of us would expect those people to be compensated by the government of the day.

That is what this motion demands. It has nothing to do with the arguments that we are hearing from the other side. Those are simply bogus arguments.

When we see Liberals standing up and pushing back on an issue like this, it tells us that there is something fundamentally wrong with them and in the way they deliver government to Canadians. It talks of their incompetence. It talks of their arrogance and it talks about their basic uncaring, when a government does that to its very members that were democratically elected to do the right thing in this place.

I suggest that all members in this House do the right thing on Wednesday night by standing up and demanding fair compensation for all the victims of hepatitis C. Do what Justice Krever said should be done. Let us follow Krever and do the right thing and compensate all victims. That is the challenge to the government.

● (1755)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech brought back to memory a situation that occurred in my own family.

The husband of one of my dad's sisters experienced difficulty with dizzy spells. He would sit down and forget where he was. Some analysis was he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. A decision was made to perform surgery. He had his surgery, the tumour was removed and he was right back to normal. However, he kept feeling sick and lo and behold several years later he died from hepatitis. During his operation, he received a transfusion of tainted blood.

He went to his grave without ever getting compensation because he was outside the envelope. I suppose nothing can be done now. He cannot be compensated now, but there might be some for his family.

The only reason I mention this as a comment is because I would like to urge all members of the House to vote in favour of the motion so at least those still living can get the compensation they need. Many of them are unable to work because of this. It is a direct financial and other loss to them. The government has an obligation to compensate them for their loss. I do not know why it continues to dither on this.

My appeal in this short intervention is simply to say let us vote in favour of the motion, adopt the report and ensure that compensation is actually in place. Let us stop dithering.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park. The argument comes down to exactly that. Let us do what is right and let us do it now.

Routine Proceedings

My colleague used the term dithering. The government has been dithering on this ever since the Krever report was tabled in the House of Commons. We have been debating it ever since.

There is more than enough money in the fund to do exactly that. One of the bogus arguments the government initially had was that too many victims would come forward, but the number was hugely exaggerated. The fund started out with \$1.2 billion, yet \$1.05 billion still is left.

It is interesting to note that last year the fund earned \$60 million more than what it paid out. I do not think that was invested in the market. I think it is in guaranteed interest bearing accounts. There is still a ton of money left in it.

The argument put forward by our health critic was so be it. If the Government of Canada has to spend additional moneys to compensate those innocent victims, then let it do it. It would be doing the right thing. If my math is correct and if the math of all the other actuaries to whom I have spoken is correct, the fund would more than compensate all victims.

Let us get on with the job and do it right. Let us do it on Wednesday night when we vote in the House.

• (1800)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week it seemed there was an orgy of spending going on across the country. We saw it when the Prime Minister visited B.C. in particular, throwing money around left, right and centre. We heard the agriculture minister announce spending for agriculture. It was a strange way to announce it because there was no plan behind it. A large amount of money was announced with very little plan or direction behind it. My colleague told me earlier he saw that in eastern Canada as well.

Could he comment on why he thinks the government finds it so easy to throw money around, almost as if it had no end to it, and yet when it comes to compensating these hepatitis C victims, it is difficult for the government to step forward and actually deliver the money to these innocent people?

Mr. Greg Thompson: Madam Speaker, that question is so fundamental to this debate and so straightforward that it is almost difficult to answer because there is no answer. I would ask the Prime Minister to give his head a shake. That is simply unacceptable.

Again, let the government do the right thing and stand up and vote for this compensation package. Let us get on with doing what is right and move in the direction in which most Canadians would like to see the government move.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish I could stand here today and say that I am happy that hepatitis C victims were being cared for and that they were receiving the compensation they needed. Unfortunately, we cannot.

The Liberal government has yet to do the right thing and Canadians continue to suffer. I am saddened that after all the effort the official opposition has put into getting compensation for hepatitis C victims, all we hear from the government is excuses. How long do Canadians have to wait for the care they need?

The human tragedy that has resulted from the hepatitis C crisis is truly a scandal. The Conservative Party believes that all hepatitis C victims deserve fair and timely compensation. Our members have continually addressed the unacceptable length of time that the government is taking to provide the compensation.

The federal government continues to ignore the health needs of hepatitis C victims who were infected outside of the 1986 to 1990 window. With over \$1 billion remaining in the compensation fund, funding is not the problem, so why the delays?

The government passed the bill onto the provinces to provide compensation to the victims. The Conservative Party challenges the Liberal government to clearly define federal and provincial jurisdiction for this health crisis. We believe there should be an established compensation formula for public health emergencies to avoid squabbles over the money while patients suffer.

The issue of hepatitis C compensation has nothing to do with parliamentarians debating the pros and cons in the House. It has everything to do with honouring and respecting the victims who contracted this disease through no fault of their own.

My speech today will focus on some of those victims in my riding of Langley who have shown courage and commitment to share their stories with the hope that someone in this House will listen and respond with compassion. This speech is about their stories.

Dawn Brown writes this:

As my Member of Parliament I need your help to act on behalf of Hep-C victims. My father, Robert Dennis survived an aortic aneurysm and subsequent open heart surgery in 1975 and required a blood transfusion in 1976. He acquired Hepatitis-C from that transfusion and was sent home after treatment where he managed an active lifestyle due to my mother's diligence. This was until 1996 when he developed advanced liver tumours which went into his back, on his vertebrae. A responsible blood supply system would have alerted him years ago to the dangers he faced and possibly done something to avert or delay his circumstances. My father, once an active grandfather of six, died a painful death from complications of liver cancer in 1998. We were robbed of our future with him by the irresponsible acts of a few, covered up by the many.

No amount of compensation will ever satisfy me for what has happened, but my father started this compensation campaign while he was still alive and my mother continued to call for action by the Red Cross after his death. Her marriage of 51 years ended with her acting as a caregiver and as a result she developed stress-related polyneuropathy and suffered until her death last November. My family and I are outraged and insulted to be excluded from the federal government's failure to compensate my father after he served his country in the Second World War and asked for nothing in return.

Please stand up for the rights of all these affected families and let me know you will support including all Hep-C victims in the existing compensation fund.

Carol Woloschuk wrote me a letter stating:

In January 1980, I was seriously burned when my clothing caught on fire during an incident in my home. During my three-month hospitalization and for approximately another ten years, I received transfusions of multiple blood products for ongoing skin grafting and correctional procedures. During this period of time, I was never warned that I might have been exposed to the Hepatitis-C virus from tainted blood. It was quite by accident that I found out of this exposure, when I myself tried to donate blood. To this day, I still have not been contacted in any official capacity of possible infection as a result of these contaminated blood products

• (1805)

Living with Hepatitis-C has many downsides, a few of which I will attempt to outline:

Routine Proceedings

1. A certain stigma, when relatives or health professionals learn of your condition, they fear contact with you.

2. Your health varies from day to day—often you are so fatigued you can barely walk from one room to another without complete exhaustion.

3. Inability to hold down a job due to this exhaustion and lack of stamina, which in our family has caused both emotional and financial stress, almost to the point of marital breakdown.

4. Due to a compromised immune system, what is a normal cold to an average person has put me in hospital with pneumonia.

She ends:

As a Canadian citizen I have always gone out to vote, but at this time I feel very let down by my federal government. I do hope that you and other MPs will fight on our behalf to see that we also are fairly compensated.

The last letter is from a constituent who wishes to have her identity confidential. She writes:

To give you a little glimpse into my life as someone living with Hepatitis-C: In 1981 I was a sleeping passenger in a single-vehicle crash on Highway One. The driver had fallen asleep at the wheel. I received life-long injuries that every day I am aware of. I had both my feet cut off and was trapped under a collapsed dashboard and passenger seat. My lower back was broken in three places. I also received tainted blood during the resulting surgery. From the time I was 17 to 28 years I could never get up in the morning, I was weak and never hungry, my hair fell out a lot and I could never understand what was wrong with me. I did not know about my contracting Hep-C until 2000. So many years have passed that I have lived with this thing damaging my body and my life. I am now 40-years old and suffer with health problems from this infection of bad blood. I read about other people my age dying from liver problems. That is very serious to me. My children would be devastated. I have three children, who also may have Hep-C, but I will not put them through the blood-taking process.

I have not been able to work since 1985 and my pension, should I live to age 65, will be \$12.00 per month. I really need to have compensation because we cannot afford to live on one income and I cannot work. Our debts are more than we can pay and our house floods and needs repairs. We have no savings or investments and have a negative amount in our bank account. Our life is a struggle because I suffer from this disease.

These people need our help: 5,000 victims receive the compensation, victims of 1986 to 1990, but 6,000 hepatitis C victims have not received the compensation they need. As of July 2004, the hepatitis C victim fund had declined from \$1.2 billion to \$1.05 billion. Last year that fund earned \$60 million more than it paid out. Since the fund was established, \$378 million has been paid out to around 5,000 victims. Offering compensation to surviving victims is a no-brainer. To not offer this compensation, instead to offer excuses, is nothing short of cruel.

As we debate this motion in the House today, people like Dawn and Carol and others do not want to hear excuses from the Liberal government. They want us together to solve this problem. They want us to bring common sense and compassion into this House. They want us to do the right thing today.

I ask every member in the House to join me in supporting the motion to immediately provide compensation to all those who have contracted hepatitis C through tainted blood.

•(1810)

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate from the outset that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

The motion really highlights the shameful way in which the federal government has handled or, in fact, not handled this file. It is not a legacy that I would be proud of if I were one of them.

In the 1997 report, Justice Horace Krever recommended financial compensation for all victims of tainted blood. He said:

Compensating some needy sufferers and not others cannot in my opinion be justified.

In a similar situation, when we were looking at compensation for HIV victims with tainted blood, the federal government, under pressure, finally did the right thing and compensated all people in terms of the issue of HIV victims.

However, when it comes to the hepatitis C file, the Liberals decided to narrow the compensation window to those infected between 1986 and 1990 and offered excuses why just those people were worthy of some kind of compensation. Thousands of Canadians have suffered and continue to suffer needlessly because of the Liberals trying to close the window and narrow the number of people who could benefit from some kind of compensation.

It is interesting to note there are some here in the House on the government side who voted against this the last time we had an opportunity in 1998 to address this wrong. The Prime Minister voted against it. At that time he said that we should forget the other victims and that we should keep it to this narrow group. The Deputy Minister voted to shut out thousands of victims. Today's Minister of Finance voted no at that time and allowed the victims to suffer. The Minister of State for Public Health did the same.

In an interesting bit of irony, the current health minister, while he was the Attorney General in the Government of British Columbia, was clamouring for this compensation for all those who were suffering. What happens in the brain pattern of an individual that just because they change a political stripe they can so change in what should be a principled position for helping victims? Magically, he changes his mind and says, no, that these people are not worthy of support.

We are obviously bringing out these inconsistencies because we want to see change. We want to see minds change. We want to see hearts change.

For those people on the list I have just read out, and for others, this is a great opportunity for them to actually change, to show that they are taking a more open approach to this, a more heart based and rational approach to this and not becoming politically blinded by how they have to vote on this issue.

There was a lot of encouragement last November when, because of some changes made in the ways in which committees are designed and how we can bring motions like this forward, we were able to bring this motion forward. At that time, the minister announced that the government would "revisit" the issue.

We do not want the issue just revisited. We want the right thing done.

Routine Proceedings

When the government said it would “revisit” it, which is a stalling tactic, as we all know, in politics, it said that it wanted to maybe look at compensation options. What is the option to being compensated? Is it a pat on the back? Is it to take two Aspirin and call me in the morning? What is the option the government is talking about? There is no option. There is simply one plan, and that is to do the right thing.

The government said that it wants to look at the actuarial report of the compensation fund so it is bringing this human need down to a matter of dollars and cents.

Now I am a person who is concerned about dollars and cents but dollars and cents should never trump doing what is right. As a matter of fact, in this case, the dollars and cents are not the issue. I want to quote from the 2003-04 annual report of the hepatitis C compensation fund. When the fund was set up, \$1.2 billion was assigned to deal with those in that narrow window, between 1986 and 1990.

• (1815)

The way the federal Liberals are talking, one would think the fund has been overdrawn. The government put \$1.2 billion into the fund. Do members know how much is left? The fund contains \$1.1 billion. Why would the federal government wait until June to look at the actuarial report? We have the report. This fund is in a gigantic surplus. Therefore practicality is not even an issue. Suffering, however, is an issue and the number of people who continue to die without being compensated is an issue.

I would never want to presume that a tactic would be delay so that more people die and less people have to be compensated. I am not going to presume that but the government runs the risk of being accused of that.

These victims and their families should be compensated immediately. We have heard from colleagues who have constituents with hepatitis C. We just heard a heartfelt presentation from a colleague whose own father was incredibly and horribly impacted by this situation.

I have quoted the dollar amounts of the fund itself but I do not want to bring it down to dollars. I just wanted to assure other members of the government who have been told not to support this that this is not a financial issue and that they can support it knowing the money is there.

Also of some concern, which is kind of a sidebar issue, is the fact that this compensation fund of \$1.2 billion, which has \$1.1 billion remaining in it, has not been subject to freedom of information searches or investigations by the Auditor General. We think that is wrong just from a fiscal point of view.

More important, two nights from now, on Wednesday night, government members will have the opportunity to right some wrongs. We will not jeer and sneer if they do the right thing and vote with the opposition on this. We will congratulate them for doing that. We will simply say that it was a mistake and that they did not realize it, but let us do the right thing Wednesday night.

Thousands of Canadians will be watching. Some people may think that Canadians have a life and they do not watch this type of thing unfolding. However those who are suffering and who will be

losing their lives will be watching. Their families will be watching. One by one, as every vote is counted and as each member stands, and I hope each member will have to stand, people will be watching to see who will do the right thing.

Let us do the right thing. Let us get the compensation to these Canadians who are so desperately in need.

• (1820)

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question that I do not think I or anyone else in the House can answer but it is a fundamental question that one of my colleagues asked me and I want the member's sense of where he thinks the government is on this whole issue.

In his opinion, what prevents the government from doing the right thing, knowing full well there is enough money in the fund to do it, that any actuary outside of that fund would say yes, there is enough money there as evidenced by the \$60 million in revenue that the fund generated last year, despite the fact that it paid moneys out? In other words, there is \$60 million more in it than there was a year ago.

I would like the member to respond to that in terms of where the government's head would be on this. Why would it not do the right thing? Is it political stubbornness? What would prevent the government from doing the right thing?

Mr. Stockwell Day: Madam Speaker, it is a compelling question and actually a fair question.

I have to admit that on this one I will join my colleague in saying that I am not sure why the government would continue to be so stubborn uncaring on this.

I think there could even be times where it could be argued that just because we care about something does not mean we should fund it, but that is not the issue in this case.

I cannot come to a conclusion on why the government continues to resist compensating people who are clearly suffering when the funds are there. If I were to start down that road, I would then presume things about the government that would be less than honourable, and I would never want to do that, or almost never.

It is a serious question and it bears a response. On Wednesday night I think the government members can answer my colleague's good question by standing and voting for it. They have to let it go. We will not jump all over them for the past mistake on this.

I will be listening very closely to the former attorney general in British Columbia, who is now the Minister of Health, who said a number of years ago that this was the right thing to do. I will be hoping he and his colleagues will continue to say that on Wednesday night.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, the motion today is to concur with the seventh report from the Standing Committee on Health on the subject of hepatitis C compensation. For the record, it reads:

That the Committee report to the House, that it not only continues to urge the government to extend compensation to all those who contracted Hepatitis C from tainted blood, but that it call on the government to do so immediately, in recognition of the First Report of this Committee, the recommendations of the Krever Inquiry and the large surplus in the federal Hepatitis C compensation fund.

Adjournment Proceedings

I also serve on that committee.

The Conservative Party and our legacy parties have been calling on the government for some time to address a wrong that has been perpetrated on victims of this disease who were tragically infected. I have had people in my own riding, as we have heard from other members today, who have been infected through no fault of their own, some of them through traffic accidents, who found themselves in need of either surgery or blood transfusions related to some hospital procedure. This disease has drastically affected their lives.

Tragically, while the government has continued to waffle on providing compensation, many of the victims have passed away. The longer we delay many more continue to be victimized without even the satisfaction of some measure of government compensation.

Members before me have mentioned the great fund that was established, some \$1.2 billion, to satisfy the needs of these people, which sounds very impressive. After all these years, of that \$1.2 billion, over \$1 billion remains in the fund.

Interestingly, in response to this we have affirmations from the government side that it would like to compensate but it needs to find out if there really is enough money to extend compensation to the victims. Tragically, it is apparent that most of the money that was originally promised is still there. It reminds me of so many other government programs that are created to create an illusion of action and yet the substance does not follow the great words. It is an illusion.

It reminds me of the gun registry which was purported to protect the public. After we spent a billion dollars, we find that really it is not about protecting the public. It is more about penalizing duck hunters and farmers who are not the criminals in the country. It has very little to do with public safety but has more to do with providing employment in Miramichi. No doubt they need employment there, but there is secondary gain to the government in other manner.

Military funding is another example. We just had a promise of great increases in military spending from the government, yet within a week we had an announcement of a \$186 million clawback out of the some \$800 million promised. Then in the following year, of \$600 million, there is a \$245 million clawback. While all the media is assembled, there is a great announcement. While all the media attention is focused, there is a great illusion created of action. In reality we find out that the substance does not bear witness to the intent.

We might also talk about sponsorship programs which are purported to promote Canadian unity, but we find in effect there is secondary gain to the party opposite in the millions of dollars that go into a program.

We might wonder why the government does not just do the right thing and advance compensation to those who have been waiting, those who have been disappointed and those who tragically have been so ill-treated by the government and suffered as a consequence. It is time for the government to do the right thing and provide compensation to all the victims who have been so tragically affected by this disease.

● (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): We have one minute left for questions and comments. The member for New Brunswick Southwest.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, the question is very fundamental, but given the fact that we have a surplus today in the fund, that the fund is still generating revenues and in fact there is \$60 million more in the fund this year than there was last year, why is the government so hesitant to do the right thing? Why does it not just simply compensate all victims, admit it was wrong, and carry on with doing what most Canadians would believe is the right thing to do?

● (1830)

Mr. James Lunney: Madam Speaker, there are so many government programs that result in illusions. I can only speculate as to why the government would not be keen to do the right thing, to jump in there. It has the opportunity. The money is in the bank. The government has been boasting about the great surpluses. If it turned out that there was a shortage, the government could easily top it off to meet the needs

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): It being 6:30 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings. There are two minutes remaining in the three hours provided to debate a concurrence motion on a committee report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 66 the debate will resume at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment on a day to be designated by the government after consultation with the House leaders of the other parties. This date must not be later than 10 sitting days after the interruption.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to revisit an important topic that concerns the safety of the brave men and women in the Canadian armed forces who put their lives on the line to defend our security and our safety in this country.

I have the honour of having CFB Moose Jaw located in the great constituency of Palliser. It is a base which not only houses the NATO training facility but it is home to Canada's own Snowbirds.

I would like to take this opportunity once again to say how honoured I am to represent the men and women of CFB Moose Jaw in the House of Commons, and how fortunate both I and the residents of Palliser are to have this symbol of Canadian excellence located in our own backyard.

Adjournment Proceedings

As the members of this House are well aware, Canada's Snowbirds and everyone at CFB Moose Jaw experienced a great tragedy last December, when the planes piloted by Captain Miles Selby and Captain Chuck Mallet crashed mid-air. That crash resulted in the death of Captain Selby and injury to Captain Mallet. The loss of Captain Selby was truly a national tragedy, as was evident by the outpouring of emotion and sympathy from Canadians across the country.

While we know that the military continues to take every precaution to ensure that such a tragedy will not happen again, we also have in place a 15 member emergency ground search and rescue team, or GSAR, whose job it is to rescue downed pilots in cases of emergencies.

The GSAR team on that fateful day last December responded quickly and professionally. They reached the crash site 72 kilometres away in 47 minutes, which is an incredible response time by truck. As the investigation into the crash confirmed, there was nothing that the members of the GSAR team could have done that day to save Captain Selby. Thankfully, Captain Mallet's injuries were not life threatening.

The question I have raised is: What can the government do in the future to ensure that we have the best possible emergency rescue system to support the pilots at 15-Wing Moose Jaw?

Cuts to the military authored by the Liberal government in the mid-1990s were responsible for the loss of three military helicopters at CFB Moose Jaw, three helicopters which used to be on standby for emergency rescue duties and ready to rescue downed pilots. It is imperative that in the event of an accident in the air that a rescue team have the capability to reach downed airmen as soon as humanly possible.

This government has a responsibility to reconsider its decision of a decade ago to eliminate the military helicopters at CFB Moose Jaw. Those helicopters were there for a reason and bases in Cold Lake and Bagotville have rescue helicopters.

The Minister of National Defence has told this House about the network of grid roads in Saskatchewan that rescuers can use. These same gravel roads existed in the mid-1990s. Many of these roads are virtually impassable in the snow and ice of our winter and the mud of spring. What if a downed airman parachutes into a coulee or into Old Wives Lake, as has happened?

The Minister of National Defence has indicated to me privately outside this chamber that he would take another look at this issue. I ask for a commitment in this House. Will the minister or his designate commit today to doing the right thing and take another look at providing funding for a helicopter at CFB Moose Jaw that would support the efforts of the ground search and rescue team?

• (1835)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Palliser for his comments and his question, which is extremely important given the tragic accident that occurred.

Over the years, the Snowbirds have embodied the bravery, professionalism and teamwork that is displayed by all of our military personnel here in Canada and throughout the world.

The Snowbirds are excellent ambassadors for Canada and the Canadian Forces. The discipline, skill and commitment to excellence that they demonstrate on a daily basis can be found in all of the men and women who serve in the Canadian Forces.

Millions of spectators across North America have seen the Snowbirds perform over their 35 years in existence and can attest to the inspirational qualities of this impressive unit.

However, the tragic accident that took the life of Captain Miles Selby on December 10, 2004, was a reminder of the risks that the men and women of the Canadian Forces face on behalf of their country, as the hon. member has pointed out to the House this evening.

I would like to again take this time to express to the family of Captain Selby the condolences of the Government of Canada, as well as the appreciation of all Canadians for Captain Selby's dedicated service. He was a fine young man. He had a great wife and it was a great opportunity for the two of us to meet. I also met with his family and shared with them their sadness at the funeral.

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Forces try to train their personnel as well as possible in order to minimize the risk of accident. The Canadian armed forces are, in fact, among the best trained in the world, and we can take pride in their performance in Canada and abroad.

The Canadian Forces also make every effort to maintain the highest search and rescue standards in order to keep loss of life to a minimum if there is an accident.

[*English*]

The most appropriate rescue response depends on a number of important factors, including terrain, weather and the quality of local infrastructure.

The hon. member has raised in the House and with me the appropriateness of the use of helicopters in these circumstances. I want to assure him that the force has looked at this option.

Helicopter rescue is not always the best option. For example, an ambulance can travel by road in weather that would ground a helicopter. Helicopters must also identify safe places to land while road vehicles can negotiate through rough terrain.

In southern Saskatchewan, local topography and northwest flows of cold Arctic air make winter flying conditions unreliable at the best of times. This is not to say that helicopters do not make good rescue vehicles, but rather that their use must be evaluated based on all of the factors involved.

In 1994 the air force wing in Moose Jaw conducted a thorough examination of its search and rescue requirements. It took into account factors such as the nature of flying being conducted, common types of accidents, the distance of most crashes from the base, common weather conditions and terrain. The study concluded that the wing did not require the support of a dedicated search and rescue helicopter fleet which explains to the hon. member for Palliser why that was discontinued.

This is an area of training that has very good road access as the member pointed out and civilian infrastructure, unlike other more remote training areas such as Cold Lake and Bagotville.

The study determined that within a 100 kilometre radius of the wing, there were more than 600 kilometres of provincial highway open for the entire year, and more than 6,000 kilometres of municipal roads that were designated as all-weather roads.

The decision to rely on ground search and rescue in Moose Jaw was validated by the fact that in this case civilian rescue responders arrived at the scene within minutes, well before medical assistance could have arrived by military transport either by air or by road.

We are satisfied with the search and rescue response to this incident. The crash site was accessible by road and the rescue team acted immediately. In fact, the commanding officer of the Snowbirds said the response was entirely appropriate and that he was extremely impressed with the reaction time.

As the hon. member mentioned, an investigation is presently going on. If any recommendations come out of that investigation, we will look at what additional measures should be taken on the base.

• (1840)

Mr. Dave Batters: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the minister's comments regarding the fact that the Snowbirds represent the excellence of our military. I too would like to again take this opportunity to express my deep condolences and those of my wife to Captain Selby's family.

The request that I put forward though is fairly simple. I have asked the minister to commit his government to reviewing whether or not a rescue helicopter is needed at CFB Moose Jaw. Will the government at least give those best equipped to make this decision the ability to make the decision?

Our men and women in uniform know all too well that there are finite resources available. I think all members would agree that they do a remarkable job for this country with the resources that they have been given. However, we cannot try to save money when it comes to issues of basic safety.

Given the vast expanse of land and some water over which planes from CFB Moose Jaw fly, and the circumstances which could be encountered in a search and rescue scenario, one could certainly make the argument that a helicopter is warranted. That was the conclusion reached at one time, a decision that was reversed with Liberal funding cuts to our military in the mid-1990s.

Now that the government has started to move toward restoring much needed funding, is it willing to revisit the decision to withdraw military helicopters from CFB Moose Jaw?

Hon. Bill Graham: Madam Speaker, the hon. member made the point that at one time there were helicopters there. I explained to the House that this was looked at, and in terms of the terrain, it was the logical reason to remove the helicopters. In fact, access by road made a much better solution to the problem. In this case, the response time, as the hon. member himself admitted and stated quite rightly, was excellent.

I have told him that, if the board of inquiry in the investigation of the accident reports something that would show us that we need to

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re-examine that decision, I will re-examine it. We should certainly wait for that accident investigation report. We should not act just because of speculation, but rather look at what has been planned well by our military to deal with this situation.

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, all over the world, courts and authorities are reacting to the various security certificate processes in place in their respective countries.

In Great Britain, New Zealand and even the United States, the conclusion has been reached that it is impossible to imprison an individual without laying charges against him. It has also been concluded that permanent residents have rights and that those rights are being trampled on by certain procedures such as security certificates.

The Bloc Québécois understands the importance of public security and understands that special measures need to be taken in special circumstances.

I would, however, like the minister to explain to us how he can go so far as to hold men in detention for years without any charges being laid, as he is doing at present.

Let me explain. The Bloc objects to the burden of proof, which requires the certificate to be maintained as long as there are reasonable grounds to believe the person is guilty. This belief in guilt is contrary to the concept of presumed innocence, which is one of the foundations of our legal system. We want to hear the minister's justification for contravening the very basis of our legal system in this way, even if it is in the name of public security.

The Bloc is also very concerned that the decision with respect to the reasonableness of the security certificate is left to the discretion of a single judge, without any possibility of appeal. The basic principles of law should apply to all refugees and all permanent residents.

Moreover, the Bloc condemns the double role of a judge who has to both decide the issue and act as defence counsel in hearings from which the accused and his or her lawyer are excluded. The Bloc asks that the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which allows foreign nationals and landed immigrants to be arrested without warrant, be amended.

It is requested that the definition of the rights of permanent resident be considered on its merit by a tribunal, and not by a member of the executive, given that, like a citizen, a permanent resident has the right to be treated fairly, without secret evidence or ex parte procedure, that is, without the presence of a witness.

The Bloc Québécois believes that the current provisions and standard of proof are excessive and discriminatory.

Like a citizen, the permanent resident has the right to be heard before an independent tribunal. He has the right to equality before the law. He has the right not to be exposed to arbitrary detention and the right to be released on bail. He has the right to appeal and to request a judicial review.

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We are therefore anxious to understand the minister's arguments supporting such a procedure depriving permanent residents of their most fundamental rights and to understand why he is denying them a fair and equitable trial like anybody else. Canada's credibility and transparency would be improved.

● (1845)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today in response to the request put to this House by my colleague, the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, as to whether the government intends to review the legislation governing the security certificate process.

To begin, allow me to clarify a few misconceptions regarding security certificates.

First, the security certificate process is pursuant to provisions in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and not the Anti-Terrorism Act. The use of security certificates predates the September 11 attacks. In fact, security certificates have existed in one form or another for over 20 years.

Second, the security certificate provides a means to ensure that Canada's immigration laws are not misused by the very few who would seek to undermine the security of Canadians and the multicultural society we have built together. Given the serious consequences of issuing such a certificate, it is only used on a limited basis in very serious cases for individuals who present the highest level of risk.

Third, the certificate process allows for the removal of permanent residents or foreign nationals who are inadmissible to Canada on grounds of security, violating human or international rights, serious criminality or organized criminality. A Canadian citizen cannot be the subject of a certificate.

Over the years, there have been several constitutional challenges to the security certificate process, yet Canadian courts have repeatedly upheld it. The Supreme Court of Canada, in fact, has validated the security certificate process, ruling that the process does not breach the principles of fundamental justice and that the process strikes an appropriate balance between the individual's right to procedural fairness and the interests of the state in national security.

[*English*]

While the courts have repeatedly upheld the security certificate process as constitutional, the government acknowledges the decision of the Subcommittee on Public Safety and National Security of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to undertake a review of the security certificate provisions. As such, we welcome its review and await its recommendations.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Madam Speaker, it is obvious that the current process lacks a framework. The security certificate process puts families in the terrible situation of seeing one of their members imprisoned and threatened with deportation, all as part of an unfair process that interferes with the balance between security and individual rights.

The current process involves serious violations of fundamental rights, particularly hearings held in the absence of the accused and the lack of an appeal procedure.

If there are fears of threats, let there be a trial. In fact, it is not true that we have the right to arbitrarily throw people into prison. If they are guilty, if there is evidence against them, let them be charged and not held improperly without charges. It is simply unreasonable and abusive.

Moreover, I am pleased to hear that the discussion here is not about the Anti-terrorism Act but the Immigration Act. That is the one I was referring to.

● (1850)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Madam Speaker, let me remind my honourable colleague that the government has a responsibility to ensure the public safety of all Canadians.

[*English*]

Canada has a legitimate and compelling interest in protecting national security. As we all know, in matters of national security the cost of failure can be high.

[*Translation*]

That being said, only 27 security certificates have been issued since 1991. As I have already stated, the security certificate process is undertaken in exceptional circumstances.

The Supreme Court of Canada has upheld this process and the government will continue to issue security certificates in those exceptional cases where it is deemed necessary to protect public safety.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to address an important issue for my constituents. Specifically I rise with respect to the offshore oil and gas moratorium that exists right now in the Hecate Strait off the Queen Charlotte Islands, sometimes known as the Haida Gwaii.

I chose to speak again on this issue, as I have raised it a number of times in question period and perhaps the rhetoric is too strong and the emotions too high for the minister to take the chance to offer me a direct and clear answer. I seek an answer again because there is much confusion and there are mixed signals coming from the government on this important issue.

Just recently I was talking to members of the Haida on the Queen Charlotte Islands, who are engaged in a battle over resources allocation, in this case timber supply. This issue also speaks to this control.

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Recently the government engaged in three processes to look at lifting the offshore oil and gas moratorium. Two of them have come back very conclusively letting the government know without a doubt that the people engaged in, first, the Priddle panel, and second, the first nations engagement process, are decisively against lifting the moratorium for offshore oil and gas exploration in Hecate Strait. Seventy-five per cent of the people engaged in the Priddle panel's investigation said not to lift the moratorium and 100% of the first nations consulted said not to do this.

This is about the ability of first nations and people in the northwest of British Columbia to have and maintain the right to control and make decisions about the resources that affect their lives and their futures.

The government said that there is a need for more and sound science, but I will quote from the report:

There was near consensus among participants that there are significant information gaps regarding biophysical [baseline] data and environmental and socio-economic impacts for the [Queen Charlotte Region]...

This is significantly important. One of the questions I hope the parliamentary secretary's notes address is how much the government will be investing in this baseline research, in this need to cover off the abhorrent lack of knowledge that we have of this region before any concept of seismic testing or any far-fetched notion of drilling could exist.

There is also a question of certainty. Industry and people who live in resource-based economies are often looking for some sort of certainty within legislation.

The government will say that it is endeavouring to set up a regulatory environment similar to the east coast's, which will provide certainty and safety. The recent oil spill off the east coast and many of the other spills that have existed in other regulatory environments that were claimed to be safe are disproving the ability of that assurance to make people feel safe about the ocean, the most important thing in that area of the world.

The last question I would put to the parliamentary secretary, and I am sure his notes will address this, is whether there is good faith existing on this file, whether there is good faith on the part of the government. Or is there a sincere effort to have negotiations with the province of British Columbia, which is rabid for this project, regardless of how inconsistent the proof is coming back and regardless of how little industry is actually interested?

Is the federal government engaged in this process of setting up a regulatory environment? If so, does that not speak against what I heard from the minister when I asked him about this in the House? It was on the day that the Kyoto accord came into effect, by the way, and he said the government will have full consultation with the government and with the industry stakeholders, until, it seems, it gets the conclusion it wants, which seems to my mind to be that it would like to lift the moratorium.

I would like the parliamentary secretary to clear the air on this, to provide certainty for people and to return the feeling and strong sentiment that people in the region are ultimately the ones who will control the risk associated with resource extraction.

●(1855)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member. I know this is a critical issue for his riding and that he is very thoughtful of the environment. I appreciate hearing his views on this topic.

It will take some time for the government to review all the information on this important issue. It is premature to speculate when exactly we will be making the decision. To answer now before giving due consideration to all the reports submitted to us would be irresponsible.

Three reports were completed under the federal review, one on science, one from the public review, and one on the first nations engagement. These will help the Government of Canada to assess whether or not to lift the moratorium and under what conditions. Additional information such as the report provided to the minister by the Nisga'a nation will also be considered. Impacts on the environment and mitigation measures will be important considerations in our assessment of the B.C. offshore moratorium.

The Royal Society of Canada's report released in February 2004 set out to identify scientific gaps that may need to be filled should activity be resumed offshore B.C. The report studied extensively the issue of potential environmental impacts. It is this type of thoughtful scientific input that will inform our deliberations on the B.C. moratorium.

One of the key drivers behind our examining the federal moratorium is the significant resource potential off the west coast. Relative to the east coast offshore resources in this area have scarcely been explored. Where there has been exploration and development of that potential off the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia in a span of less than five years of production the offshore industry has become a critical component of the economies of those provinces.

The government is committed to ensure that the development of our natural resources strikes a balance between our economic goals and our social and environmental obligations.

The public review panel provides four options for consideration by the Government of Canada. Concerns noted include the need to identify and address first nations issues, conduct socio-economic and biophysical studies, define the regulatory and fiscal regime, and define marine protected areas. It is better that we focus on looking at how to reply to those who raise concerns in a thoughtful and analytical way than put all our efforts into debating whether the panel's head count is the best way to take public policy decisions.

The first nations report indicated unanimous support for maintaining the moratorium at this time, but it also indicated that given more time and resources many first nations would be interested in continuing the discussion regarding offshore oil and gas. Here, too, the first nations raised similar concerns as to those raised by the public review panel which warrant further consideration. These include, as the member mentioned, filling in information on scientific gaps and capacity development.

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The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring the development of our natural resources strikes a balance between our economic goals and our social and environmental obligations. The B.C. offshore holds a potentially significant resource, as much as that identified in the Jeanne d'Arc Basin off Newfoundland and Labrador, but it is also home to some ecologically sensitive areas that will also need to be considered as we move forward in making our decision on the moratorium.

I would encourage anyone who has asked for a hasty decision on the west coast moratorium to sit down and give all the reports and other information a thorough read before jumping to any conclusions as to the best outcome.

The government will give thoughtful consideration to all this information before making any final decision.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, there was an obvious omission so I will ask the question again. With respect to this thoughtful consideration, is the government at this point involved in negotiations over the regulatory environment? That is important. What investment in the obvious research is required? There was a near consensus among participants that the information is missing. Because money is required for this, what is the amount of money needed to enable the first nations and also the communities up and down the coast to make the research happen that is required as the government says for this thoughtful process?

Lastly, there is an interesting irony that is constantly put forward that we need to lift the moratorium to understand how much oil is out there, because we do not know and at the same time there is always this indication that the resource is vast. We cannot have it

both ways. Either we do not know and it could be nothing, or we do know and we do not need to lift the moratorium.

Specifically, are we in negotiations to set up the regulatory environment? This is important. What amount of investment is the federal government making in filling in those crucial scientific and socio-economic gaps that have been identified time and time again as being imperative to any consideration on offshore oil and gas exploration?

● (1900)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Madam Speaker, as I said before, we have to deal with the massive amounts of information that we already have. The public review panel provided four options and included a number of things that need to be addressed, such as the first nations issues, the socio-economic and biophysical studies, the regulatory and fiscal regime, and the marine protected areas. We need to spend our time studying and analyzing all the information and reports.

The member asked me to speak from the heart. This is a very significant decision in terms of the environment of the area and the potential socio-economic impacts on the economy and on the lives of British Columbians. I would not want to be part of any government that did not significantly consider all the information that there is to date and explore any unanswered questions before making a final decision.

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

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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