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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-359, an act to amend the Criminal Code (personal identity theft).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill entitled an act to amend the Criminal Code (personal identity theft).

Personal identity theft is a serious problem throughout Canada, with thousands of victims each year. This bill seeks to clearly define identity theft in the Canadian Criminal Code. It would make it illegal for one to possess or transfer another person's identifying information without lawful excuse. The bill would also make it an offence to possess or transfer documentation of another person, such as a driver's licence or credit card, without lawful excuse.

In the high tech era in which we live, identity theft is quickly becoming a major problem. This law is designed to close the loophole being used by identity thieves. I hope the bill will earn support from all sides of the House.

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

* * *

• (1010)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, presented on Thursday, March 24, be concurred in.

I think that what has just happened in committee is worth bringing to the House. In fact, by a vote of seven to four, the committee recommended to the Prime Minister that his appointment for the environment round table not be agreed to. Most of us went in there with a very open mind. We said we would cross-examine this person

and find out if he in fact would be the best person to be the chair of the environment round table.

We did that largely because of things that the Prime Minister said. The Prime Minister said again and again and kept promising that he would end cronyism and he would end patronage. As he campaigned throughout the election, he said that he would in fact reduce the democratic deficit to empower standing committees to be able to exercise their will and review appointments and decide whether those persons were really qualified to do the job.

We did that in good faith. We believed what the Prime Minister said when he said he was concerned about that democratic deficit. He said:

No longer will the key to Ottawa be who do you know. We are going to condemn to history the practice and the politics of cronyism.

That is what the Prime Minister said during the election campaign. Of course, after the election we saw a number of examples of that same cronyism occurring. We saw Jim Walsh, the former Newfoundland Liberal MHA and co-chair of the Prime Minister's leadership campaign, appointed as a corrections investigator of Canada. We saw the revenue minister personally appointing a Royal Bank colleague, Gordon Feeney, to the Canada Post position.

Then there is Mr. Glen Murray, who was the mayor of Winnipeg. We saw Mr. Harvard put into the lieutenant governor's position and then saw this star candidate run as a Liberal candidate in Winnipeg. He was defeated, so then he was owed a job. That job then was as chair of the environment round table.

Obviously when we went into that meeting we wanted to find out what the qualifications of this gentleman were regarding the environment. Let me summarize what we found. We found that he had no academic or professional experience in global environmental or economic issues. We found that his only environmental concern was as consultant and owner of a firm called Envirofit Inc., which ultimately went into bankruptcy.

We found that Dr. Harvey Mead, Mr. Murray's predecessor in this position, brought 35 years of environmental experience to his appointment. Indeed, not only did he have previous experience as a member of the round table, but he had a number of very credible involvements in environmental issues. Anyone who seriously wanted to argue that Mr. Murray was even close to those kinds of qualifications would have had great difficulty.

Routine Proceedings

I want to go to a quote from the group that should know him best: the newspapers in his home city of Winnipeg. Let me quote what they said about this appointment. The headline is pretty telling. It states: "Let's Just Be Happy Glen Won't Be Back". The newspapers went on to state:

—he wasn't qualified for the job...But on the other [hand], as a selfish Winnipegger, I took some comfort in knowing that the appointment all but ensures Murray won't be returning to Manitoba...

Murray has no experience whatsoever in global environmental and economic issues and knows nothing about the complexities of carbon credits and emission trading markets.

● (1015)

Unlike many of the talented and very experienced people available for a job like this — educated folks with decades of experience in global economics and specialized environmental issues — all Murray's ever been is a Canada Post clerk, a community health clinic employee and a city councillor and mayor of a medium-sized Canadian city.

There's not much depth there.

He's never run a business, never been the head of a large private-sector corporation and has no experience in bilateral trade.

Murray's experience in environmental issues is limited to a debate on whether or not we should have a \$2-a-bag garbage fee in Winnipeg.

It's hardly the type of experience one needs to engage the United States on climate change issues (one of the mandates of the roundtable) and to integrate climate change objectives into Canadian foreign policy.

Obviously, if that is what the person's home town thinks of the him, we had a number of questions we needed to ask Mr. Murray when he appeared before the committee. I can honestly say that we all had a pretty open mind. By the end of the interview, which was a job interview, all parties, including some Liberals, were so shocked by what we heard we wondered why the appointment occurred.

Will we ever forget the picture of Mr. Murray standing with two pictures of the Prime Minister behind him? I could table that if anyone wants to see it. However we have Mr. Murray standing with pictures of the Prime Minister at the Liberal convention after just receiving the appointment as the chair of the environment round table.

This is a non-partisan appointment, an appointment to look at the environment problems. It is not a Liberal Party job to have. It is not a Liberal thing to hand out to its defeated candidates, its fundraisers or its patronage hacks. This is a job that is important to Canadians. Canadians care about the environment and they certainly do not expect this position to be used in a patronage way such as this one was.

Mr. Murray ultimately found out from Howard Wilson that this was not the place to be and therefore left the convention. If someone has that poor judgment in terms of where he should or should not be, his ability to do the job comes into question. This was just this last month.

We also wondered about what kind of a mayor Mr. Murray was. We found out that on his watch Lake Manitoba had the second largest release of sewage and he went on for five days without reporting to council and without taking action on it. He was not able to stickhandle the concept of a new deal with the provincial government. In fact, he had a failed rapid transit proposal.

In his campaign literature, not a single mention was made about the environment. We would think that if this person were qualified as

the chairman of the round table on environment that would at least be one of his key issues when running for election. A lot of people care about the environment and one would think that Mr. Murray would have at least mentioned it.

When the decision was made to bring this to the House in a concurrence motion, it was rather interesting that the former CEO of the environment round table voted to send it to this House, as did the parliamentary secretary for the environment. The vote was nine to two to send it to the House for debate and for a vote, hopefully this evening or tomorrow.

Things do not line up very well for Mr. Murray but this certainly is not a personal attack on him. We are just saying that this guy is not qualified.

The Prime Minister said that he would allow the parliamentary committees to examine the appointments, decide whether they were qualified and, if they were qualified, to recommend them to the Prime Minister. Something is obviously wrong here. Between the time the committee voted on this, in a seven to four vote, the Prime Minister announced the appointment. What is the Prime Minister trying to sidetrack? Why does he want this person there?

● (1020)

Let us look at what kind of a job we are talking about. We are talking about today's issues on the environment. Will this gentleman know what they are? By his own admission he said in committee, "I realize that I have huge inadequacies". He went so far as to say, "I'm just a manager. I don't understand the environment. I don't know much about the environment but I can do this job I am sure".

Yes, there are 24 other board members, but my understanding of a chairman is that a chairman shows leadership and takes the issue and says that we will examine the issue in-depth.

Let us look at what some of those issues might be. Let us look at the most current one, which is CEPA Toxic. If Mr. Murray had understood this issue I am sure he would have advised the government immediately that this was not the way to go. The government should not take an environment bill and sneak it in the back door under a budget and ultimately plan it to be a carbon tax. That is just not advisable. If the government had someone who understood the issue it would certainly have given that advice.

I asked Mr. Murray a few questions. I asked him what he thought about mapping our aquifers and how important he thought that was. I do not think he knew what aquifers were and I certainly do not think he had any answers as to what we would map. I also do not think he understood the 300 boil water warnings. I do not think he understood about the toxins that are seeping into our ground water. I do not think he understood any of that.

I thought I would give him an easier question. I asked him what he thought about CO₂ sequestering and whether he thought it had a future. If I were going to be the chair of the environment round table I sure as heck would know about the most important new technology coming around, the sequestering of CO₂, which is how we achieve our targets under Kyoto. That is how we deal with the problem of CO₂ and he did not know what I was talking about. He said that he did not understand that principle. I was shocked when I heard him say that.

Routine Proceedings

Since the environment round table is supposed to be advising the government on things like that, I would have thought that would have been one of the first things he would have said. The round table would say that we have to develop that technology and use it in Canada. It is being used in the U.S. and all through Europe and this guy did not even know what it was.

By the end of the set of questions, for which he knew no answers, he was literally close to tears because he had to have realized his inadequacies.

What did the Prime Minister not understand about those inadequacies to appoint him chair of the environment round table? This is one of the most abusive things I have ever seen in the House. So much for the democratic deficit.

Let us go on to look at some of the other problems, one being the whole Sumas issue and the air quality across our international boundary. Some of our members living on that border certainly know about that and understand that.

We now have a guy who I am sure does not understand even what pollution or smog is let alone understand the problems of a plant like Sumas and what that will do to the Fraser Valley, your home area, Mr. Speaker.

I want to come back to CEPA and to what we are doing with that, what we are doing with the Kyoto legislation and with the heavy emitter legislation. We have been promised this day after day, week after week. We have been told that it will be tomorrow, that it will be next week and on and on it goes. What we have done is we have given the industry four choices. We have said that we will have heavy emitter legislation to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that companies produce and the four choices we are giving them are they can modernize their plant or reduce production. Obviously the reduced production is not a choice and the modernization in many cases is not a choice.

●(1025)

Yesterday I met with a heavy emitter who said that his company was using 2005 technology. China is using 1940 technology but we cannot modernize that technology any more. The chairman of the environment round table should be pointing that out to the government but this guy does not understand anything about the environment, so how could he do that?

The second choice we give heavy emitters is that they can donate into a technology fund. We can call it whatever we want but all of us believe the answers to environmental problems will come through technology. What we are saying to them is that they pay into this fund but if they are already using modern technology, as most of our companies are, that is just a tax. Who pays for that tax? Obviously it is the consumer, the taxpayer, who pays for it.

The third choice we give them is to buy international credits. They can buy 102 million megatonnes of credits and that will solve their problem. Again, that is a tax on those people who buy electricity, who heat their homes and who drive cars. It is a tax on that head of lettuce because of the extra transportation costs. An environment chairman would tell the government not to go that way. It is a huge tax on the consumer for all of those goods.

The best of all is the fourth choice, which is that we will fine them \$200 a tonne of excess carbon. What that will accomplish is it will make all of our companies totally non-competitive and literally put us into a major recession.

We have quotes from various scientists who have told us that if we try to hit our targets it will mean a 100% increase in electricity and an increase in natural gas of 60% to 90%. What will that do to the senior citizen and to the young families? What will that do in fact we try to achieve those targets? This is where the chairman of the environment round table would call in economists, academics and experts and tell them that we need a full, open inquiry to tell Canadians exactly what living up to a 270-300 megatonne target would mean to them.

Many people do not understand all of the details of Kyoto but what they would understand is paying 12¢ a kilowatt hour instead of 6¢ or paying \$3 for a litre of gas instead of 90-whatever cents. They would understand when the cost for heating their homes went up 60% to 90%. The job of the environment chairman of the round table is to tell Canadians those things but this chairman does not even understand what CO₂ is all about or what can be done with it. He does not understand that Kyoto is about greenhouse gases and global warming. He thinks it is about pollution. This man is not qualified to be chair of the environment round table and we just cannot feel stronger about that.

If you had just been there, Mr. Speaker, and heard the inadequacies of this individual, you would have been shocked that he would even allow his name to stand. It had to be that if he would give up his job as mayor of Winnipeg, he would get elected, receive all the perks of a member of Parliament and he would live happily ever after. When that did not happen, wow, the Liberals had to find him a job. They asked him what he thought he could do? I do not know what he can do, but he sure cannot be chair of the environment round table.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify a couple of points. First, the committee originally voted seven to four to send its comments to the Prime Minister and to the Clerk of the Privy Council, and apparently that was the decision. The majority of members decided that they did not support Mr. Murray, and I believe the result was sent to the assistant clerk of the Privy Council.

After the break, members of the opposition came back and decided that they had made an error. They wanted to send it to the House and, as the hon. member said, the vote on that was nine to two. However, the key point is the item was disposed of because it was sent to the Prime Minister and the recommendations and comments of the committee were made.

Therefore, it is redundant to suggest now that we should deal with this in the House, given the fact that the committee already disposed of it by sending it after the first vote. Then two weeks later it decided it had better send it to the House.

Routine Proceedings

The hon. member suggested it was a job interview. We are talking about a chair of a national round table. We are not talking about the executive director who has to know every aspect of the environment. The member from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia showed up. He was the successful individual to run against Mr. Murray. However, he came to committee as not a part of the committee and in my view did a political hatchet job on Mr. Murray.

If it is was a job interview, then only those members of the committee should have been qualified to ask the questions. Unfortunately, an individual was brought in who had nothing to do with the committee but who obviously had a certain political history with the individual in question. He made a political diatribe against the individual in question. I would pose that to the member across the way.

I would also point out that the role of the chair of the national round table is that of chair. Obviously, Mr. Murray not only is a former mayor who dealt with a city council but he also chaired the big city mayor's caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, about which I have a lot of knowledge. The job is to be a conciliator.

I would ask the hon. member respond to the issue of the two votes, the issue of bringing in a member who was not a part of the committee and the issue of the role of a chair.

● (1030)

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, it is amazing how Liberals are able to spin things. They can spin themselves into becoming the victims all of a sudden. They are always the victims. Poor Liberals, I feel so sorry for them.

Let us now get the truth out. The vote in committee was seven to four, as the parliamentary secretary agreed. Then there was a break of a week. In the middle of that break the Prime Minister named the guy who the parliamentary committee had said was not qualified. Now what are we to do?

The first day the committee came back we put forward the motion to bring it to the House. What else could we do? We thought the Prime Minister would listen. He said that he would be accountable. He said that he would not make political appointments and that he would not go along with patronage. He broke his word, and when he did that we had to do what we had to do.

That is the answer to the issue so the member can stop using that feel sorry for me argument.

What about the chair? The chair has to show leadership. The chair has to have the ideas and put them forward. We are not run by a CEO. Maybe that is how government cabinet ministers work, where the bureaucrats tell them everything. I do not think so. We have to show some leadership. I hope that when we are government we will show leadership and that members of Parliament, the cabinet in fact, will stand up and be accountable for what they do. That is the second point.

The third point is about who knows someone best. It is the people from one's own community. I quoted from a newspaper from that community. I will repeat the title which said, "LET'S JUST BE HAPPY GLEN WON'T BE BACK". He will not be back because

he got a patronage appointment from the Liberal government. Who knows him better than the member who lives in the riding and who ran in that campaign? He is from his community, he understands him and there was an opportunity to point that out.

● (1035)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Red Deer for his impassioned defence of the environment and the concern that he has showed over this appointment. It is bad enough that Mr. Murray is a failed Liberal candidate and that he was unable to succeed at becoming an MP. Because of that, he is looking for something else.

However, the blame really needs to fall on the Liberal government. Once again, Mr. Murray is a pawn. It is true he is a Liberal and he has tried to run for the Liberal Party, but he has not been successful. However, the blame has to fall in the Prime Minister's Office.

I want to make a couple of comments and then ask the member for his reflections.

We see a history of manipulation from the government frontbench. We saw it last week with the Senate appointments, particularly Alberta Senate appointments. Elections have been held in Alberta to elect senators to come to Ottawa. The Prime Minister has blatantly spit in their faces by saying that he will not abide by that. He will not pay any attention to them.

We see a history of manipulation with the ongoing inquiry. We are going to see more shenanigans this afternoon with the federal government's attempt to derail the Gomery inquiry as the Liberals panic over the revelations that are taking place with their involvement in Quebec and the sponsorship scandal.

We have also seen a history of manipulation with the environment file, particularly with Kyoto. It has been very frustrating. We are how far into Kyoto now and we have no plan. We still have nothing announced. It just does not take place. The member talked about the cost of electricity and fuel going up if we were to implement the plan.

Earlier on the former environment minister left the impression that fuel would have to be in the range of \$1.40 to \$1.45 in order to change consumer activity enough so the government could implement a plan. That was bad enough at the time. Now it looks like it will be quite a bit higher than that.

We see manipulation on the issue of carbon sequestration where the government has stepped forward and said that it wants to take those carbon credits for itself.

I am from a rural area. Carbon sequestration is important to farmers and to agriculture. They were hoping they would have some opportunity to claim those carbon credits for their farms. It looks like the government has stepped in with its manipulation to try to take that away from the farmers as well.

We have seen the manipulation on this issue, particularly with the budget that has arisen in the last week. The government is trying to change the definition of toxicity in a sneaky way by sliding it into a budget bill so it can manipulate the Canadian people once again.

Routine Proceedings

Does the member think that the reason the Prime Minister has appointed such a weak candidate is so the government can continue this history of manipulation in the environmental file and so it can manipulate Mr. Murray in the ways it needs to go in order to achieve some of the dishonourable goals it has set for itself?

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, it really comes down to respect. I do not believe the Prime Minister has any respect for committees, for members of Parliament or for democracy. Basically, he will name patronage appointments. He will put in the people he wants probably so he can manipulate them, as the member suggests.

It has been eight years and there is no Kyoto plan. Day after day, we get promised we will have a plan. As long as we have patronage appointments running the show, I guess we will never have a plan, certainly not one that will be clear for Canadians.

Here is another area with which the chair of the environment round table could deal. In January the bureaucrats said that the price of carbon would never get above \$5.00. When it opened as a commodity in Europe on January 1, it was \$3.00. By the end of January, it was \$6.00. That is for a tonne of carbon. By the end of February, it was \$11. By the end of March, it was \$23. When I checked the figures yesterday, it was \$26. We have given a guarantee to the large final heavy emitters of a \$15 cap. Where do they think carbon is going? A few days ago it was \$50. Now they are talking about \$75. An economist reported that it could go to \$150.

Think about the government's liability. The chair of the environment round table should deal with that and with the costs to taxpayers. This person is not qualified to do that.

• (1040)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not prolong this too long because it is very clear what the motives are.

The hon. member has suggested that the original vote was sent to the Prime Minister and it was disposed of then. The Prime Minister made it very clear that members of the committee were to review the appointment, and members did. I would suggest that the review process and the questions raised, particularly by members who were not part of the committee, were more political than they were substantive.

The hon. member has the audacity to stand in the House and suggest to us that the individual who knows the member best is the individual who defeated him in his run to become a member of Parliament. That to me is questionable at best. What is also questionable is the fact that the party across the way also tried to have Mr. Murray run for it as did other parties in the House.

The member is suggesting that a former candidate for any political party should not be qualified to serve as chair. Audrey McLaughlin, the former leader of the New Democratic Party, was also appointed by the Prime Minister to the national round table, and I did not hear any objections to that. I did not hear any objections to the former premier of the Northwest Territories being appointed. Mr. Murray was selected by the Prime Minister and his appointment went to committee.

The hon. member across the way would suggest that the chair be an expert on the environment. The role of the chair is to be a

consensus builder. Mr. Murray indicated very clearly that he did not have all the answers, but I do not know anyone who does. However, he clearly was prepared to work with the committee, to work with others, and to work with the other members of the national round table.

If we are to suggest that people cannot serve in public life because they ran for a particular party, even though the party across the way also solicited the individual in question, then that is a very sad statement.

The purpose of the national round table is to provide advice. Twenty-four or twenty-five individuals will sit at the round table and they will provide advice to the Government of Canada.

Mr. Murray was a former mayor of the city of Winnipeg. In that role he chaired meetings. Anyone who has chaired meetings of a municipal council know that it is often not an easy job. He was chair of the big city mayors' caucus of the FCM.

Mr. Murray will join a distinguished group of individuals on the national round table. He has a great deal of experience to bring to the table, particularly in terms of the green plan which he authored. He has worked with groups like the Sierra Club in the city of Winnipeg to develop an integrated municipal green plan for the city. I suggest that would be helpful for members of the round table.

To suggest that the committee was doing a job interview is in itself questionable when members from the outside were brought to the committee whose only job was to do a political hatchet job on the witness, not ask the probing important questions for the role, but simply to go through political comments about the last election. That did not serve anyone very well.

Mr. Murray developed the green plan dealing with economic integration and revitalization of the downtown core of the city of Winnipeg. These are important elements with which not only the national round table but the standing committee and others deal.

Mr. Murray has a wealth of experience, particularly as a councillor for eight years and as mayor. In both my role as former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and as a member of Parliament, I have worked with Mr. Murray from time to time. The attributes which he will bring as chair will be important for the round table.

He was recognized by his colleagues in terms of the big city mayors' caucus and also as a leader in the creative cities movement. Jane Jacobs, urban theorist, also was very much involved in developing and working with the international conference of mayors.

• (1045)

These are very important aspects, which of course will help him in his role as chair of the national round table. The national round table is there to provide advice to the government. The member across the way would suggest somehow that Mr. Murray is going to be the sole arbiter and the sole repository of all knowledge. Clearly not: that is what the round table is for. He works with the round table members. I think that is important.

Routine Proceedings

He is a visiting scholar and urban policy coordinator at the University of Toronto. Clearly the University of Toronto must have felt that he had some value and some expertise to have him at the university as a research associate for the Centre for Urban and Community Studies. I do not think that is a small feat. Again, I think it is important that he is bringing this to the table as well.

The national round table is going to make recommendations. It is going to work with departments. It is going to work with ministers. It is going to work with members of Parliament. I think that is extremely important. Again, that is the role.

The members across the way may not like the choice of Mr. Murray. That fact is, what was the role of the committee? The committee was to hear from Mr. Murray and to get comments from Mr. Murray. In the end the committee made its views known in a very partisan way, obviously, in a seven to four vote, which went to the Prime Minister's Office. The fact is that it has been disposed of. The letter that was sent by the chair of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development said to him that in fact it was dealt with.

The fact that two weeks later the opposition members have decided that they want to now bring it to the House is immaterial, because it had already been dealt with. It had been disposed of. If they had sent it to the House originally, they might have an argument. They have no argument, in my view, because we sent it as a recommendation, which of course was not binding but obviously there were comments made.

Again, one of the things that members should really look at is what the role of the round table is. Obviously it does strategic work in terms of providing advice.

The member goes through a litany of issues with regard to the environment. There is no question that the round table will be dealing with those issues, but again, we are not talking about the executive director. We are not talking about one person making all the decisions.

I am quite confident that Mr. Murray's appointment will in fact be helpful for the round table. I think it will be helpful for members of Parliament. Had he been given a fair chance to make his comments known, in fact, I think all members would agree on what he is bringing to the role of the chair. Let us not forget what that role is. It is to be the chairman and to work with colleagues in developing a consensus to bring forward. That is certainly what he did as chair of the Big City Mayors' Caucus. That is very important.

The fact is that the government's commitment to appointing qualified people has been kept. The fact is that we are going to again see that kind of advice. Some members are laughing over there. Of course they do not know Mr. Murray. In fact, they do not know anything about the round table and I doubt that they really care, to be very frank. It is unfortunate.

I want to say very sincerely that the committee itself has worked in a very non-partisan way. One of the things I have been very pleased with is that we have not had this kind of nonsense. We have had it only on this particular appointment. We have had it on this particular appointment because Mr. Murray was courted by the party across the way. He was courted by another party in the House. To

me, the fact that he did not run for that party is now being held against him. I would suggest that whether he was successful or not, he has the qualifications to do the job as chair. Rather than prolong this, I will leave it at that.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think for the record we should point out that the vote in committee on the recommendation to the Prime Minister about Mr. Murray was seven to four. There were members from the three opposition parties; it was not only one opposition party. It was all committee members, those from the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party, who recommended that Mr. Murray not be appointed to this position and said that he was not qualified to do the job.

If the vote had been close, if it had been only one party, it would be different, but the vote was seven to four, unanimous from the opposition parties, and the fact is that the Prime Minister stated repeatedly during the election that he would end patronage and cronyism and deal with the democratic deficit.

The simple fact is that this was just a waste of time for the committee in regard to the Prime Minister actually sending this appointment for review by or recommendation of the committee. The Prime Minister received the recommendation not to appoint Mr. Murray and completely disregarded it. I think that fact has to be made clear.

The vote was seven to four that Mr. Murray not be appointed to this position. What is the Prime Minister's word worth? It is a fair question. When the Prime Minister makes these commitments throughout the election, does his word have any value or does he only say what he needs to say to get votes at the time and then once he is in power it does not matter?

We are seeing this pattern from one file to another. I have the same situation in my riding with respect to a tax matter. The Prime Minister made commitments throughout the election, but once he got here it did not matter.

I want to defend the committee. I am not a member of the committee. The committee members took the extraordinary step of bringing their recommendation to Parliament after reviewing this file in good faith. After making a recommendation that was completely disregarded, I think the committee was left with the only possible thing to do and that was to bring this matter before the House.

• (1050)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, the role of the committee was to provide comments. The committee members did that, they sent them to the Prime Minister's Office, and this was disposed of.

The fact is that the Prime Minister reviewed the comments, but again, as the hon. member points out, the three opposition parties did not support Mr. Murray. The fact is that the Prime Minister also appointed non-Liberals to the national round table, as he has done with other appointments.

In fact, to suggest that there is cronyism or patronage means that these words are bandied around with very little evidence or understanding of what they mean. The fact is that when Audrey McLaughlin was appointed there were no complaints. The fact is that we see appointments of people from all political parties and all political stripes.

Routine Proceedings

The member is right when he says that he is not a member of the committee. He did not see the nonsense that went on, in my view. He did not see what I would say is another member being brought in who clearly has a political vendetta given the fact that he defeated the individual in question and the fact that the comments were extremely partisan.

What I was interested in was this. Can Mr. Murray chair? Does he have past experience in chairing? Is he a consensus builder? Is he prepared to reach out? In my view, all of those questions were answered. Therefore, the arguments made across the way have no relevance.

The relevance that is important is the fact that the recommendation was sent to the Prime Minister and was reviewed. In fact, now we have another motion. Maybe those members were asleep at the switch. Now they say, "We have to send it to the House and we want to debate it in the House".

That is not our consideration or our concern. Our concern was that it was duly dealt with and it was disposed of. The fact is that this is what the chair said in his letter and I think that is what the members of the House need to be aware of.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a related question for the parliamentary secretary. What we are discussing here is whether this is cronyism and whether this is going against the Prime Minister's promise of fixing the democratic deficit.

We in B.C. have seen a number of failed Liberal candidates taking very highly placed positions within the government. To clear the air and to dispose of this, as the parliamentary secretary suggests, is it possible to derive a list, thinking only of British Columbia for the moment, of failed Liberal candidates and what positions, as appointed by the Prime Minister, they now hold within the government?

We hear rumours, which create an air of ill feeling and a perspective on the part of the voters of British Columbia about so many failed Liberal candidates. This is what we have here with Mr. Murray, a failed Liberal candidate. It is an important distinction from other people sitting on the committee. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary would derive this list from the party and find out what failed Liberal candidates now hold positions within the government.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Obviously not, Mr. Speaker. I am not aware of any list. I am not aware of failed candidates, either federal Liberal candidates or failed NDP candidates, or whether they worked for the previous provincial NDP government of British Columbia.

I think the point is that the Prime Minister and previous prime ministers have appointed people of all political stripes to various boards and commissions over the years. The hon. member does not say that Audrey McLaughlin should not be on the national round table. The Prime Minister appointed the individual in question. The fact is that it is a good appointment.

I do not have a list. I do not know why the member is suggesting this or maybe casting aspersions in suggesting that we have only appointed Liberals. The member is well aware that many non-Liberals, including New Democrats, have been appointed, both now and in the past.

● (1055)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on this issue. I am on the environment committee and have seen some of the nonsense. For example, I saw the hon. parliamentary secretary change his vote on a particular motion when it was decided that it was going to be a recorded vote. I have seen enough shenanigans from that side of the House.

My question is simple. We pursued this as a bit of a job interview. It is interesting to note that when I became a member of Parliament, I also became an employer. I had to hire staff. When we interview for a job we cast the net far and wide. We look at a number of possibilities and then conduct interviews and determine who the best one is.

Our committee was never afforded that. Interestingly enough, the process, as Mr. Murray testified before our committee, was that he just sort of got a phone call one day, asking, "Hey, are you available?" The next thing we knew, it was a phone call telling him to show up at the committee.

I would like to know from the hon. member opposite what other candidates were considered for this job and rejected. Was there any kind of process before it ever even came to us? I think it is fair to ask to understand that, because it is not much of a job interview when we get one candidate and all we get is a public relations exercise. We get to stand up in committee and ask a few questions, knowing that in the end the Prime Minister does not really even care about our comments. The recommendation was against, but the Prime Minister appointed him anyway against our advice. I would like to know what the process was before it ever got to us.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: First of all, Mr. Speaker, there was a recorded vote. I had no problem with a recorded vote. Obviously I supported the fact that it came here because it had already been disposed of, so I am not really sure why we are going through this other than for political theatre.

The hon. member knows the reality of the process, and if he does not, I do not know why the hon. member is even asking the question. The reality is that other people were appointed and the members did not ask for those people to be there.

The fact is that the Prime Minister has the authority to put forth a candidate. The Prime Minister put forth that candidate, with a CV. In fact, the hon. member reviewed the CV. If he had taken the time to actually look at it he would have known that there are two issues here.

First, what is the role of the chair? If members would take the time to read what the role of a chair is, which is not to be an expert on everything, they would know that Mr. Murray is clearly qualified.

Second, they can take a look at the CV and see what is in that CV which would support or not support the role of the chair. The fact is that this information was given, even though many on the other side were not listening at the time that it was presented to committee.

Routine Proceedings

The hon. member knows the answer. The hon. member should not suggest that somehow there was something trumped up. Clearly the information was provided. The chair was there. The committee members could have interviewed umpteen individuals for the national round table. They chose Mr. Murray, which was fine. Mr. Murray came to committee and he presented his credentials.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part in the debate on the motion introduced by our official opposition colleagues during routine proceedings.

I must say that the motion is somewhat important since, ultimately, it invites us to reflect on the role parliamentarians must play within civil society and, above all, on a particular way of proceeding.

I am speaking on behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues when I say that we are not calling into question the personal merits of Glen Murray, the former mayor of Winnipeg who doubtless served his constituents well. What we are questioning is the fact he has become the chair of a round table on the environment, when there is no indication that his professional experience or individual expertise has prepared him for such a position of leadership, consultation and consensus building.

This is in no way a personal attack; this is an attempt to call attention to the government's practice—unfortunately all too common—of giving positions of responsibility to individuals who ran for the government party during a federal election. We have two comments about this.

First, when he became leader of the Liberal Party, the Prime Minister called for a democratic renewal. He promised to enhance the role of Parliament. Clearly, such a commitment affects the work of the House as well as that of its committees. MPs spend a great deal of time in committee.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, our colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has become very knowledgeable about environmental issues. However, that committee did not support the appointment of Glen Murray. It informed the Prime Minister that, despite a personal appreciation of Glen Murray, certain individuals in civil society were more qualified in environmental issues than the former mayor of Winnipeg. Once again, this debate must not focus on personal issues, but rather on the level of expertise.

The Prime Minister cannot talk about enhancing the role of parliamentarians and then completely ignore the recommendation by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. That is, incidentally, one of the most dynamic committees of the House and has produced some very good reports in the past. All of its members, regardless of political background, are greatly concerned about the environment. Their concerns are shared by numerous Canadians. We know that the environment is one of the areas of concern that has grown considerably in importance in recent years.

My second comment relates to the government's propensity, its regrettable bad habit, of appointing former Liberal candidates. How many times have we had examples of that in our ridings, for instance

in relation to returning officer appointments. When I was a returning officer myself, I had two experiences of dealing with candidates who had of course not been elected in the general election because that was the wish of my fellow citizens.

We do not feel it is desirable to give preferential treatment to people who are closely associated with a political party. Everyone has a right to acquire some experience within a political party or even to openly identify with a particular party, but this must not be used as a springboard to accede to certain positions of responsibility.

If, for instance, Glen Murray had been a former head of Greenpeace, if all his career had been devoted to working on behalf of the environment, then there would not have been any problem.

I will give the example of the former leader of the NDP. When he was appointed director of the Canadian Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, there was a consensus in this House on his appointment. The former leader of the NDP, and now the member for Ottawa Centre, had in fact been involved in those issues all his life. It is understandable that people, even those with partisan affiliations, have made a name for themselves campaigning for something in the past.

● (1100)

With all due respect for Glen Murray, whose skills, merit and integrity I do not question, I am sorry to say that there is nothing in his career path to suggest that he should be in charge of coordinating environmental matters.

It is important to enhance the role of committees. When I was elected in 1993, I was a fiery thirtysomething. Lucien Bouchard, who was our leader at the time—one of the greatest premiers of Quebec, as everyone in this House knows—told us at our first caucus meeting that we would discover that it is in committees that MPs truly make their mark. There is no hiding in committees. Either you know your stuff or not. That is where we see how good parliamentarians are.

Parliamentarians spend a lot of time in committees. If I am not mistaken, the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development meets at least twice a week, if not three times. I have known my colleague to have five committee meetings in one week, when Charles Caccia was chair.

If the role of parliamentarians, who spend a lot of time in committee, is to be given its due, their recommendations have to be taken into account. It would be basic courtesy for a Prime Minister to accept the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in which the three opposition parties were not prepared to support the appointment of Glen Murray as the co-ordinator, the chair of the round table on the environment, considered to be of some importance in an advisory capacity.

I was an MP when Sheila Copps, who was Minister of the Environment, wrote all parliamentarians on the subject of this round table. It is regrettable, once again, that the role of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development has been given short shrift. We can only hope for an end to the overly incestuous relationship among Liberal allegiances, involvements in civil society and the link between the two.

Routine Proceedings

Individuals' ability is not an issue. If people are competent, we are happy to support their involvement and responsibilities at various levels. However, if their career path does not include performing certain duties, their candidacy for the Liberal Party is no reason for their appointment to positions of responsibility.

Again, it is nothing personal, but we cannot but hope that, in the future, a stop is put to this all too ready reflex, democratically unhealthy and offensive to Parliament, to appoint unsuccessful candidates to positions of responsibility, considering their responsibilities.

• (1105)

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the Bloc. I have listened to the NDP ask questions and I hear our side asking questions. I want to ask the member, would it not be a lot easier if the Liberal government came on side?

Why is the government being so persistent when almost all in the House agree that this should not be an appointment by the Prime Minister? So much time and energy has gone into discussing this appointment. We have already spent an hour of valuable House time. How much time has been spent at committee just on this issue? Would it not be a lot easier if the government would agree with us? It cannot be all about partisanship. There must be something else to this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question and I can understand her feeling a bit discouraged by what is happening today. Obviously it is ultimately the institution that is threatened.

We work in good faith in committee. We want to give it our best and help ensure that things go well.

It is distressing to see the government be so pathologically stubborn. I think that she is right to feel disappointed. We share her disappointment because the House's time could have been used for other purposes. At the same time, it is the opposition's role to act as a watchdog.

Once again, the government should have relied on the very able judgment of the committee, which had everything it needed to take an objective, informed look at this appointment.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the problems we have with the appointment is it appears again that the Prime Minister has gone back on his word. He has talked on many occasions and at great length about ending cronyism in government, ending the feeling of western alienation, ending political patronage appointments across the board. Yet with this appointment, regardless of how qualified Mr. Murray is, it appears that the Prime Minister has broken his word.

One of the things that most Canadians are concerned about is that politicians do not keep their word, that politicians, if we look at recent surveys, are among the lowest ranks of all occupations when it comes to things like integrity, honesty and reliability. This only

reinforces the misconception that most Canadians have about politicians.

Does my colleague from the Bloc not think that the perception of impartiality and the perception of fairness are as important as qualifications in making appointments such as this one?

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I agree with what our colleague just said. It is true that the Prime Minister has unfortunately broken the promises he made during the election campaign. It is true that it is the institution of Parliament that is tarnished as a result of partisan appointments. We must get back to basics, that is, to the role played by individual members. They show what they can do in parliamentary committees and here in the House.

Two more things could be done to enhance the role of members. The first would be to increase the amount of time spent on private members' business. As we know, the Standing Orders have been revised to put an end to the lottery system and make it possible for each member to introduce a private member's bill at least once every Parliament.

I wonder whether the time has not come to think of abolishing the Friday question period and spend the entire day studying private member's bills. That would be a way of increasing the amount of time spent on them.

There is an imbalance between the amount of time allotted to the government for House business and the amount allotted to ordinary members. If we could get the support of the Conservatives and government members, and if my good friends the neo-Bolsheviks agreed to consider the idea of increasing the amount of time for private members, we could deal on Fridays with three, four, five or six private member's bills.

The official opposition motion that we are discussing leads to questions about the role played by members of Parliament, respect for the institution, and respect for parliamentary committees, in this case the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member's comments on the position taken by the parliamentary secretary a little earlier. Consistently throughout his presentation and when he was trying to rebut the member for Red Deer, he said that the motion that was passed originally was passed with a vote of seven to four, that it went to the Prime Minister and in his words, it was then disposed of; it was dealt with; it was finished; it was done with, and he could not understand why it would come forward again.

A second motion came forward and actually resulted in the debate we are having today. That motion passed on a vote of nine to two. I understand that he and the member opposite, who happens to be related to the premier of Ontario, were the only ones on the committee who voted against that.

Routine Proceedings

I would like the member's comments about whether he felt that the first motion dealt adequately with this subject. Why would the parliamentary secretary say that it was disposed of when the Prime Minister completely ignored the recommendations of the committee and basically made a patronage appointment for a failed Liberal candidate? Does the member think that was an adequate way of dealing with it, or does he feel that bringing it here was the proper solution to the issue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, sometimes in the House, the parliamentary secretaries can be a little vague. This would not be the first time.

In my opinion, it is the role the official opposition, like that of all the opposition parties in the House, to be vigilant about the appointments made. I do not believe a definitive solution has been found just because it was dealt with in committee. It is the prerogative of the opposition parties to initiate a debate such as this. Not only is it the prerogative of the opposition parties, it is their duty.

I repeat that we must return to the crux of the debate. This is not a personal attack. I myself met with Glen Murray in Winnipeg. I know that he did a good job as mayor and that he is a responsible man. However, nothing in his professional background makes him an expert on environmental issues. As a result, we see a connection between his membership in the Liberal Party and the position he has been offered.

• (1115)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Red Deer for the opportunity to speak on this issue again. It seems that the government did not hear clearly enough from the committee, when we had this in front of us in committee, that we needed to bring the debate into the House for greater clarification on what essentially the problem was with this appointment.

A great deal of time has been spent on the qualifications of Mr. Murray and his ability to take this position. The story is getting somewhat lost, and the importance of the Prime Minister's role throughout this discussion and the credibility of the Prime Minister, the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's Office, and their ability to conduct their affairs in such a way that is in the best interests of Canadians, not in the best interests of failed Liberal candidates.

I would suggest that the difficulty they are having is that there are a large number of defeated Liberal candidates in the country who need to be taken care of. There are many candidates that we saw in British Columbia, for example, who are high profile people and wish to enter politics, enter an electoral race. They are taking a great risk.

For Mr. Murray, we saw a pattern, a consequence of his choosing to break his word, as it turned out to be, to the people of Winnipeg that he would fulfill his term as mayor. He made that commitment during the mayoral race. There was then an appointment made in his province to remove a sitting Liberal member to make space, essentially, for Mr. Murray. He then left the mayor's office, which then caused a mayoral race to occur and the consequence to the voters and the people of Winnipeg was detrimental.

Because of this pattern of appointments, of securing places for Liberals to ensure that if they take a chance, and it is becoming an increasingly risky chance to run for their party, they will be taken care of if it goes awry, which happened in the case of Mr. Murray's appointment.

However, I think the credibility question, the larger question, is around this Prime Minister's sincerity of fulfilling the promise made during the last election. We know that in the heat of the moment of a debate promises can be made and blown out of proportion. This promise was made over and over again in this House and across the country, as many times as this Prime Minister could make it. He would talk about fixing the democratic deficit and that the age of cronyism and who one knew in the PMO would be over. He said that would be fixed.

So Mr. Murray came in front of us. Now if this appointment had been about cities, if it had been about municipalities and infrastructure and grants, something that Mr. Murray is obviously very familiar with, I do not think we would be having this debate today because his credibility and his experience are well known throughout the country on that issue.

The second question is how serious is this Prime Minister about the environment outside of the rhetoric, but in the actual application of how this country is going to go ahead with some serious environment questions that have been ignored over the last 12 years by this Liberal government? Promises were made about the ability to reduce and the commitment to reduce pollution and make Canada an efficient and thriving part of the global economy and the global environmental picture.

We have seen year after year that this promise has been broken and that Canada continues to pollute more than is necessary and breaking the commitment that the Liberals have consistently made toward the environment.

If the environment were so important to this Prime Minister and to this Liberal Party, then clearly making a patronage appointment out of such an important position within the environmental framework would not have occurred to them.

There is a question about Mr. Murray's ability. I have some sympathy for Mr. Murray at this point. It is not a common experience for Canadians applying for a job to have three hours of dedicated time devoted to them in the House of Commons and have their record scrutinized. Unfortunately, he chose to accept this position which incurred a certain amount of risk and the risk of having parliamentarians view the appointment, and view the credibility of that appointment in the House as we are doing today.

He made a commitment to us. He said that he would not leave this appointment to jump down and run in some future federal election, and who knows when that will be. I asked him about his commitment to the people of Winnipeg when he was in front of committee because he had made a similar commitment that he would not leave that position, which was by coincidence also a mandate of similar length. He responded by saying:

Would I have preferred that the election was at the end of the second term? Absolutely, but you know sometimes you change your mind. That's not breaking trust, and there is a difference.

Routine Proceedings

• (1120)

I would suggest that credibility does not fill me with a great sense of trust of his commitment toward filling this position where simply breaking one's promise is not breaking one's promise. It is not something about trust. It is just simply changing one's mind.

I suspect that if given another opportunity to run, although perhaps not after this particular round of discussions about his abilities, Mr. Murray would then perhaps have another change of mind, thereby setting the environmental agenda back again another number of months, if not years.

It has been suggested by the parliamentary secretary a number of times that this is simply a matter of sour grapes, that two of the opposition parties had sought Mr. Murray as a candidate and clearly, because we did not get him, we are frustrated and want to take out our vengeance. That is absolutely far from the truth.

The parliamentary secretary particularly points to the New Democratic Party saying that Alexa McDonough has been put on this committee. The important distinction for Canadians to understand is that Ms. McDonough, having retired from politics and now is choosing a life to be on the committee—

The Deputy Speaker: I hate to interrupt the member in the middle of his speech, but I think he has been referring to Ms. McLaughlin I believe and not to a sitting member of Parliament.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I was just having a conversation with someone from Halifax.

Ms. McLaughlin is the woman to whom I am referring. The important distinction for Canadians to understand is the difference between a failed candidate and someone who has chosen to leave the life of politics. Earlier it was pointed out that the New Democratic member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre has great knowledge of a certain topic, that being democratic reform. If he retired from politics again, would anybody in the House have a problem with his being appointed to a position to look at democratic reform in this country? Clearly not, because the member has great experience. It is not precipitated by his failed candidacy. That is what we have here, someone who attempted to get into political life at the federal level, failed, and was then appointed.

I asked the parliamentary secretary if he was aware of just Liberal candidates in B.C. who had been appointed and given so-called soft landings. There is an immediate lack of knowledge and awareness of such a thing ever occurring, yet we know that candidate after candidate across the country, not just from British Columbia, not just from Manitoba, are given a gentle handshake on the way out the door of a failed candidacy for the Liberal Party. This ensures that high profile and powerful candidates can consistently be attracted, thereby continuing the machine of the Liberal Party, which leads to bad decisions and the wrong people being in the wrong positions.

I would direct the member's attention toward the Gomery inquiry to see what happens when people are appointed to the wrong positions for reasons other than their qualifications, their one qualification being their connection to the Liberal Party, or their ability to raise funds, or to run as a candidate.

The role of the chair has been raised a number of times as to whether it is important or not. It was striking to me as a former professional facilitator who chaired a great diversity of meetings, how dismissive Mr. Murray was about the importance of this position and the importance of the role of the chair in any committee. The parliamentary secretary said that this candidate could not have all the answers. The role of the chair is not to have all the answers, of course not. The role of the chair is to have the right questions to pose to the committee, to bring forward the right witnesses, to bring forward the right people to address and comment on the direction and advice needed to be given to the government.

The role of the chair is pivotal in the direction of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. With Mr. Murray's dismissiveness of the importance of that role and the dismissiveness I have seen in the House of the importance of that role, it is clear to me that there is a lack of understanding of the position, a lack of understanding of its importance. This speaks to the Prime Minister's lack of commitment to the environment as an issue by appointing people who have no clear perspective of what the job actually is.

A number of times during the committee discussion I asked Mr. Murray if he would be willing to criticize the government. I have had some frustrations with previous national round table reports and their lack of effectiveness in changing the bad course of the government when it came to greenhouse gases, the use of the taxation system to improve our environmental standing. He avoided the question numerous times. He found his way around it and would not answer me directly. Another member of the committee, a Liberal, entered into the debate and clarified the fact that the role of the chair of the national round table is not to criticize the government, that it is not part of the job description and not something that it does. Mr. Murray did not even have knowledge of that fact.

A number of times the candidate also pointed out that he was willing to work. He said that he was willing to let his hair down, which was the expression he used over and over again, to roll up his sleeves was referred to a few times, and work with the members of the environment committee. This is also not the role of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. It is meant to be an advisory body to the Prime Minister. It is also meant to present to the Prime Minister the harsh realities of how we are doing on the environment. Over the last 12 years, that harsh reality has been very discouraging.

To see somebody who was hand picked, who did not go through a nomination race, someone with clear connections to the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's office and the Privy Council being simply appointed thereby incurs a certain amount of loyalty to those people. That person would be unwilling to present that harsh reality to the Prime Minister and to his cabinet about the tough decisions that must be made when it comes to the environment. The progressive action that has been lacking is needed if Canada is going to meet any of its international commitments, if it is going to start to reverse the trend that we have and the pollution that we see in our country, to clean our air and clean our water.

Routine Proceedings

● (1125)

The candidate obviously lacked the fortitude and knowledge to fulfill that position properly. Again it speaks to the lack of importance that the Prime Minister has given to the environment.

There will be a recorded vote in the House to which I am very much looking forward. Therein lies an opportunity for the Liberal Party, the Prime Minister and the government to dispel the myths that the democratic deficit dialogue was simply optics, that the Liberals were simply looking for an opportunity to gain a few more votes and some key seats. When the House votes on this, it will be an opportunity for the Prime Minister to say he values the opinion of parliamentarians who represent the opinions of Canadians and who looked at the issue with all thoroughness. It has been impugned and suggested that the motivations are purely partisan.

I said in committee and I will say it again here in the House, my intention in looking at Mr. Murray's candidacy, as was the intention of many of the committee members around the table, was to look at his appointment with objectivity and to arrive at a sound decision in the best interests not of Mr. Murray's CV or in the Liberal Party's ability to attract high profile candidates, but in the interests of the environment and the country. We came away with a recommendation to say no, this was not an appropriate appointment, that the Prime Minister had to back down.

The tragedy in Alberta of the RCMP officers being killed occurred during the week that the committee was to look at the motion that is now before the House. I have a deep cynicism and suspicion that in that week when our committee meeting was cancelled, and appropriately so in order that members could attend the funerals of the fallen RCMP officers, the opportunity was taken cynically by the government to rush ahead with the appointment and make sure that the committee could not look at the motion that would come before the House. I do not make that allegation lightly.

When this comes for a vote in the House, the government will have the opportunity to seriously look at the democratic deficit, to take a serious stand and say that the voices of parliamentarians who represent the voices of Canadians matter, that the environment truly matters. The government will have the opportunity to say that it will commit to make an appointment that makes sense, that will be good for the environment, an appointment that will have the trust of parliamentarians and thereby the credibility and trust of Canadians. The government will have the opportunity to vote in support of the motion, which the New Democratic Party will be doing with some pride.

My last point is to dispel the myth of partisanship. The chair of the environment committee who is doing a very able job of chairing another committee, invited committee members to dinner to talk with the new ambassador for the environment who was appointed by the Prime Minister. There was a striking difference in the tone. Unfortunately the Liberal members, except for the chair, were unable to attend the dinner and to meet the ambassador, but the other parties were well represented at the table. The tone and nature of the conversation on the appointment of the ambassador was respectful, engaging and important.

Ms. Sloan has an extraordinary amount of credibility within the House and the country for her perspective on the environment. I and the New Democratic Party are looking forward to working with the ambassador on the important issues on the environment. Is she a New Democratic member or Conservative member? No, she is not. She is a former Liberal member of the House but her credibility is in good standing. She is not a failed candidate who has been dropped in on a soft landing. She has the ability to look at the issues. She has the knowledge to represent the country well when it comes to the environment. She knows the issues.

The New Democratic Party looks forward to engaging with her, even though she is not a New Democrat, even though she is not a Conservative or a Bloc. She is a Liberal. Do we have a problem with the appointment? Of course not. There was no media outcry. There was no need to bring the motion forward in the House to reject her appointment. Why? It was a sound appointment. It made sense. If brought before the committee we would have a fruitful and fulsome debate, as the Liberals like to call it. In the case of Mr. Murray it is the opposite. We have a failed candidate who is unqualified for the job and is unwilling to even know what the job specifically entails.

● (1130)

A Prime Minister whose arrogance in ignoring the will of the committee will be seen when there is a standing vote on this motion in the House. It will be seen when he rejects the opportunity to fulfill the promise of fixing the democratic deficit. This is an opportunity to fulfill the promise to reject the culture of cronyism that has existed for far too long within the Liberal Party, much to the detriment of a number of issues and in this particular case the environment.

The government should take the high road. It should take the opportunity to address the issues that parliamentarians have brought forward. Serious concerns have been brought forward in committee and again during this debate. The government should fulfill the promise of truly looking at the democratic deficit.

Unfortunately, I have a lack of faith with this perspective. I do not think the courage is there. The pattern of cronyism will continue because the Prime Minister has not yet seen the way. The Liberal Party of Canada has not yet seen its way, despite all the evidence of the need to undermine this pattern of soft landings for high profile candidates. The Liberals have to stand with courage in the House with the opposition parties when we vote on this issue and say that the appointment was a bad decision.

I feel a certain amount of sympathy for Mr. Murray in his having to go through this procedure. He accepted an appointment on which he was ill equipped for any sort of scrutiny and which has now happened. Now his career is such as it is. I encourage the government to reconsider its position. This is important to Canadians. We look forward to the support of the government on this motion.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the member's expertise and background as a professional facilitator, if this appointment goes ahead and the Prime Minister ignores the House and the members of the committee, how effective would the round table be based upon the level of knowledge and expertise that Mr. Murray exhibited during his questioning? How would other members on the round table react to his lack of expertise and knowledge? Would Mr. Murray be effective if his appointment were to go ahead?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the role of the facilitator in establishing the agenda of any committee or group is pivotal. The setting of the agenda determines the type of conclusions that a committee or any decision making body will make.

With respect to the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, a huge amount of expertise is brought to bear on any given issue. This is at a great cost to the taxpayers of \$6 million or so a year in order to provide sound information to the Prime Minister in making decisions regarding the environment.

In the past when recommendations have been made by the national round table they have not been forceful enough to change the course of the government. Do I have any hope that this committee under the leadership of Mr. Murray will be presenting the tough decisions and tough advice on the environment to which the government needs to pay attention? Absolutely not.

The inability and the dismissal of the importance of the chair give me great cause for concern about how seriously he will take the setting of the agenda and the way in which certain items will be looked at.

It has been said that the quality of one's life is determined by the quality of the questions one asks oneself. Nothing truer could be said of this committee. The round table must be given a sound agenda and good questions to look at in order to arrive at conclusions that benefit the country.

Mr. Murray obviously dismissed the importance of the role of the chair, as did the parliamentary secretary. That lack of ability and lack of concern cause me and many other members of the House great concern about the efficacy and intelligence of the work that will be done over the next number of years.

• (1135)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share many of the concerns expressed by the hon. member across the floor, particularly when it comes to the perceived conflict of interest and the perceived patronage in this appointment. I think it reflects poorly on all parliamentarians when the Canadian public believes, as I think it does in this case, that appointments are made, not through merit but through patronage and political affiliation. We need to get beyond that.

During the last election campaign the Prime Minister stated on many occasions that he would get beyond that. However it appears that he has not. The perception of impartiality and the perception of patronage are things with which most Canadians cannot abide.

Something else that concerns me greatly, which the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley pointed out in his presentation, has to do with Mr. Murray's apparent lack qualifications.

Many of us here in the House have gone through job interviews ourselves. One thing I always did when I was up for a position in years past was to ensure I did my homework. Before I went to an interview I made sure I found out everything about the company I was applying to. I even went so far as to do some role playing with friends or other colleagues in respective industries or organizations to try to anticipate the type of questions that might be asked at the interview. I would certainly go through the job description of the position itself so I would be intimately aware and knowledgeable of all of the attributes that the successful applicant would require for the position.

What distresses me about this whole situation is that it appears that Mr. Murray did not even do the minimum required to learn about the job or the qualifications needed for the job itself. The member who just spoke and other colleagues have stated that Mr. Murray went to the interview without the basic knowledge of what the chair's role would be.

I have a couple of questions for the member who sits on the environment committee. Does he not think that other members of the round table must have confidence in the abilities of the chair to act in an effective manner? If they do not have confidence in an appointee who is to become their chair, does that not undermine the ability of the round table itself to do some effective work?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, as a country, we commit a great deal of resources and credibility to this body, some millions of dollars, and it is entrusted with the sound and important duty of advising the Prime Minister on no less an important issue than the environment.

When Mr. Murray came in front of committee with the perspective that he would be working hand in hand with the environment committee, which was not what his job was meant to be, he was unwilling and unable to answer the question on his willingness to criticize the government, which also was not part of the job. He also had a general lack of knowledge on specific environmental issues that exist at the present time. The questions were not micro in nature but macro. They dealt with certain environmental initiatives that are at the core of the environmental debate right now.

There is a thing in business called the social licence to operate. When a business no longer has that, it no longer has the credibility to operate and function within any given community. I would suggest that Mr. Murray lost a great deal of credibility in the eyes of the other members of the national round table by his lack of knowledge of the position and lack of knowledge about the issues which would greatly lessen the effectiveness of the round table.

As chair he holds the prominent position of setting the agenda, monitoring the discussion and helping to produce reports that would advise the Prime Minister. His lack of knowledge diminishes the entire capacity of the round table, to which, as I said, we contribute a significant amount of funds every given year.

• (1140)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this morning I had a chance to ask the member for Red Deer a question about the government's motivation behind the appointment and I would like to follow up on that.

Routine Proceedings

I talked earlier about how the government has a history of manipulation in so many areas. Apart from Senate reform, patronage appointments and its latest involvement in the Gomery inquiry, it has manipulated the environment file in many ways. After eight years of discussions, it still does not have a plan on the Kyoto file. We talked about carbon sequestration and how it has basically manipulated that away from the farmers and agricultural areas. We hope we can get that back so people in rural areas can actually benefit from Kyoto in some way.

The government has also manipulated the budget. I had a chance to be at the environment committee meeting just before the break. The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley was very vocal about his concern that the government was trying to manipulate the environmental file by using the budget.

I also have a concern that the qualifications of this gentleman do not seem to be adequate at all. We have been told that he has no academic or professional experience in this area. His predecessor, who was an ADM in the Quebec government, had been involved with environmental issues for 35 years and was a member of the round table before he was appointed as chair.

There are also some questions about Mr. Murray's decision making and judgment abilities. The government was told that patronage appointments should not be attending conventions and that kind of thing but Mr. Murray had the poor judgment to show up at the Liberal convention in the spring of 2005. He also made a number of policy blunders as mayor.

I am interested to know if the member feels that the government is using the weakness of the candidate to further manipulate the environment file, which it has been so successful at manipulating in the past.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it is actually very difficult to understand the motivations of the government in appointing someone who is so clearly, from an objective view, a patronage appointment, thereby creating, particularly when it comes to Kyoto, greater uncertainty as to how this will roll out.

The government seems to lack the ability to present a Kyoto plan in any kind of a timely fashion. I have referred to Kyoto as a Liberal attempt to save for retirement at about age 64. It will become extremely expensive because there has been no significant planning, thereby creating uncertainty and increasing over and over again the cost to industry.

By manipulating this important file, as we move ahead with something as important as Kyoto, climate change and pollution in general, and putting it into what is now under the light of a patronage appointment, diminishing its credibility greatly, has increased the uncertainty around the effectiveness and around how it is we are meant to meet something as important as the commitments the government made under Kyoto.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague from the NDP, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, for dealing with some of the other issues that, fortunately, I will not have to do now, specifically the Prime Minister's continual promises to stop filling patronage appointments and breaking his word on cronyism.

While doing research in Winnipeg's local newspapers I was surprised to read their reaction to Mr. Murray's leaving. As the member for Red Deer said, they were happy about it. I considered that to be my first eyebrow lifter in this process of reviewing the appointment of Mr. Murray.

I was fortunate enough to be on the environment committee that was asked to review this appointment. I thought it would be most effective to find out what the job really was and what the duty of the appointee would be.

I discovered that this particular person controls the agenda for Canada's environment strategy. This is a very important role for this person. Not only is Mr. Murray responsible for that, he is also responsible for engaging the United States, our largest trading partner, a country that is not a signatory to Kyoto, a country that will be so important to our future, in all issues of climate change, which is fearful to me. He will be integrating climate change objectives into Canada's foreign policy.

We have a large country and our population is dispersed with approximately 1.1 person every square mile. Compared to Europe, we have to travel a lot further. We have natural resources and our economy is built on natural resources. It is fearful that someone with, in essence, so much power and influence over our government and our policy, would come to the table with absolutely no credible experience or knowledge on the environment. This is the person that will be Canada's point man for the environment and our role in the environment internationally.

This is a very important role for someone to play and we should find the best person for the job based on, in my belief, his or her education and experience.

It was another eyebrow lifter when Mr. Murray came to the committee and gave answers to our questions. I, along with 10 other members of Parliament, who represent more than a million Canadians, had the opportunity to question him. I found him to be a very personable and likeable person. I understood why he had been elected mayor of Winnipeg. However, there is a first chance for an elected official and I would suggest that we needed to look at what Mr. Murray accomplished during his time as mayor of Winnipeg. However that again was an eyebrow lifter and a surprise for me.

As my colleague said, when we have a job interview we have to find the best person for the job. What concerned me the most about Mr. Murray was his basic lack of understanding on anything concerning the environment. He did not understand basic concepts. I will go through that a little further on in my presentation today. It was grossly obvious to all the members how little he understood the basic concepts of the environment.

Routine Proceedings

I did find, however, two advantages. Mr. Murray does have political experience and knows politics. He also has some influence in the government here in Ottawa. He has influence in the Prime Minister's office. Do we want someone in this position who has a direct connection to the Prime Minister, who has political experience and who knows how to skate around issues? I do not think so. I think that when something is as important as Kyoto, something as important as the environment is to our country and the future of the world, we need someone who is non-partisan and who will be able to direct the agenda of the round table effectively and without partisanship.

• (1145)

These are not advantages that we want if this position is going to be successful. The chairperson must be impartial, non-partisan and knowledgeable about the issues on at least a basic level. In my mind, this person must have a passion for what is best for Canada. Based upon the answers that he gave to the questions in committee, I do not believe that Mr. Murray is that person.

Being that I dealt with the advantages, I want to deal with some disadvantages. I have found many disadvantages if Mr. Murray were to be appointed to the round table. Specifically, there are eight that I would like to deal with today.

The first disadvantage I see in Mr. Murray taking this role is that it is a political appointment. As I said earlier and as has been referred to by some of my colleagues, there were actually two members of the Liberal Party, as my friend from Cypress Hills said earlier, the parliamentary secretary and the former executive director of the national round table, the member for Richmond Hill and the member for Ottawa South, who actually supported the motion to have his appointment sent to the House.

These are people who are knowledgeable and have environmental experience and who have sat on boards and are involved in the government's operations. They actually referred his appointment. They voted in favour of referring his appointment to the House. Again, that is an eyebrow lifter. That is three. One is enough to cause suspicion and make people re-evaluate the condition of Mr. Murray's appointment, but I would suggest that three takes it to a point that is simply not acceptable.

I think that these weaknesses and eyebrow lifters must immediately suggest to the Prime Minister that Mr. Murray's appointment should be rescinded and the vote of the House, today, tomorrow or when it is taken, should be respected and followed.

The second disadvantage is that Mr. Murray as mayor of Winnipeg does have a track record. In reviewing the newspaper clippings from Winnipeg and reviewing what is so accessible on the Internet today, I discovered that this gentleman was at the helm, at the controls of the ship, during one of the worst natural disasters ever to hit Lake Winnipeg. Raw sewage leaked into Lake Winnipeg, which is the 11th largest source of fresh water in the world. This is of critical importance to the world and Canada. He was at the helm when this happened.

My understanding from reading the newspaper columns and doing more research is that not only was he responsible for it, but he was negligent, in my opinion, because it was something that could have

been avoided. My understanding is that the previous Liberal government made a direct offer to Mr. Murray to provide moneys to the city to fix the problem and repair and upgrade the sewer system. That disaster could have been avoided. That is what I find the most distressing about his track record.

The third disadvantage is that he is a politician and certainly would have political enemies and political friends. That is the part that worries me most. As a member of Parliament I want to discourage any cronyism or partisanship. I would submit that what we need to do for environmental concerns, especially with what is happening in the world today, is find the best people for the job and put them in there no matter what the situation. We have to take politics and partisanship out of it.

How do we know that he is going to be able to provide the proper advice to the Prime Minister? How do we know that he is going to be impartial? I would suggest that we cannot know this, especially because it appears, from asking questions and reviewing his appointment, that the only qualification he has for this job is the fact that he is a member of the Liberals and a friend to the Prime Minister.

The fourth disadvantage I see is that this is a patronage appointment. As I mentioned earlier, this appointment has not been earned through qualifications. Mr. Murray does not have the qualifications so far as education goes or as far as work history is concerned. In my opinion, he is therefore going to be subject at all times to patronage payback. How does this help the environment? It cannot. It will not.

The fifth disadvantage, as stated by some of my colleagues, is that he has no knowledge of the environment. He has no knowledge of the Kyoto targets. When asked about it by a newspaper, he recites some basic understanding of targets, but really, the closer we get to the environment and the environment file we realize that this means nothing. It is just a newspaper quote.

• (1150)

He also has no knowledge of climate change. In fact, what made me think about this at the very beginning was the first question to him, when it was said that he never even put a platform about his stance on the environment in his campaign brochures. That was one of the first things I wrote as a new member of Parliament during my campaign. I made sure that I had a clear and concise message on the environment and how important it is today. I would suggest that it is one of the most important issues the federal government deals with. He had no reference to it in his campaign brochures.

The sixth disadvantage, and this surprised me somewhat, is that Mr. Murray does not even have confidence in his own abilities and has admitted that he has no expertise in the environment. We need a person in this appointment who will be able to take the lead on issues of the environment, who will be able to control the agenda of and set the priorities for the round table, as we heard from the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. He needs to understand the basic science in order to be able to set the agenda, put forward motions and control how the round table and the committee hit the agenda.

Routine Proceedings

He needs to understand the basic concepts in regard to what is happening in the global environment. Most important, as I stated earlier, he has to have a clear vision, a vision for what is best for Canada's future and the world's future, and for how we as Canadians can participate in that most effectively to give back to our great country and our great world on the environment and protect it for our children and grandchildren.

In my opinion, the very fact that he has no basic understanding and did not do the research for the job interview shows that he has an absolute lack of interest in this position. Almost any high school student would understand some basic terms. The member for Red Deer asked some questions of Mr. Murray on the cap and trade system, the gasification of garbage, sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide. Mr. Murray had a look of absolute disinterest in and a lack of understanding of all of these topics. Many high school students today would be able to give at least some definition or some answer in reference to these questions from the member for Red Deer.

This just happened. It was on March 7 that we asked these questions and these terms were put to him. He tried to skirt around the questions. I read again the transcript of that particular interview with Mr. Murray in the committee meeting and was again flabbergasted at how he tried to skate around each of the questions put to him by the member for Red Deer.

With respect, I have no bad opinion of Mr. Murray except for his taking this job when he is so clearly not competent or qualified to do so. With respect, this job is very important for Canada. As the member for Red Deer has said, recent studies indicate that Canadians may pay 100% more for electricity as a result of Kyoto. Canadians may spend 60% more for natural gas and 80% more for gasoline if the Kyoto accord is fully implemented. Even economists say that Kyoto could lead to a recession in Canada.

Is this the kind of person we want on the round table, somebody with no knowledge of the environment and with no experience and credibility on the environment or, in my opinion, with other members of the round table? I suggest not. We need someone who is going to take Kyoto very seriously and who has some semblance of experience.

Mr. Murray does not have any business experience. He does not have any negotiating experience, which obviously the chair of the round table needs to have with the U.S. being our biggest trading partner right below the border. We are going to need somebody who is going to be tough and knowledgeable, who is able to put across our position and negotiate properly to get the best deal possible for Canadians and at the same time keep the primary focus of the environment in hand.

That is the seventh disadvantage: he did not have any small business experience and no large corporate experience as far as heading any large corporations goes. He has no negotiating experience. He has no international trade experience. What could be more necessary for a head of a round table such as this who is going to be our point man on the environment? After the Liberals signing it, we are bound as Canadians to this international treaty. It is a reality and we have to be effective to get the job done. I would suggest that on this basis he is not the right person to be our candidate.

●(1155)

I see an eighth disadvantage for Canadians. If Mr. Murray is appointed the Prime Minister is sending a clear message to Canadians that democracy does not matter, that this country is not founded on democracy and that he is not obligated to listen to either the committee, which he has already ignored, or this House.

We will see how the House votes in the next few days, but I see this as the major disadvantage. The voices of my constituents, the 100,000 people I represent, do not matter. The voices of the million people represented by the other 10 MPs on that committee do not matter. The other 30 million plus Canadians represented by members of Parliament voting on this particular issue do not matter.

Will the Prime Minister listen? We will see how his promises of democracy change.

This is an important job. Even the director of the Sierra Club has indicated that in the next five years Canadian taxpayers are going to be spending \$3 billion to \$5 billion buying clean air credits abroad. This means we will be paying other countries that are not signatories of the Kyoto protocol to put off smog in their countries to create an economy and employ people in their countries. We are paying for that.

I suggest that since we are bound to do this and have no choice at this stage we need to find the best person as the head of the round table to negotiate the best treaties for us. This person has to understand the basic concept of the environment. We need a person with business experience, negotiating experience and environmental expertise to some degree; even a basic understanding would certainly be helpful to start. We need a person with management experience and a passion for Canada's environment and our economic future.

The practice of cronyism must stop. We need to put aside politics, especially for a job such as this, which is so absolutely important to Canada's future. We must have the best person for the job. That person is not Mr. Murray.

I implore all members of this House when this vote comes up to send a clear message to the Prime Minister that we need to put aside politics. We need to put aside partisanship and get the best person for the most important job. That is not Mr. Murray.

●(1200)

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments and a question for my colleague. Much has been said today about the qualifications of Mr. Murray as the chair of this round table. I think that along with that we have to ask ourselves what would any one of us do if we were offered a job by the Prime Minister. I think that puts the onus on the Prime Minister.

We have to remember that the Prime Minister said during the election campaign that he would empower committees to review all appointments, and certainly that has happened. Even though the committee reviewed the appointment and made recommendations to the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister ignored the recommendations.

Routine Proceedings

The Prime Minister flew in the face of the recommendations from the committee and made the appointment anyway, so perhaps not all the blame should go to Mr. Murray. I think being offered a position by the Prime Minister certainly is a great honour and a privilege, so what would he do other than accept? If asked, I certainly do not think he would turn down the Prime Minister.

All of this reminds me of the last election campaign just a year ago, when the Prime Minister said that he would do something about the democratic deficit, to use his old expression. The Prime Minister recognized that there was a democratic deficit and he was going to do something about it.

We all remember the Prime Minister saying on television so definitively that it is no longer going to be “who you know in the PMO”. I wonder if my colleague would comment on those thoughts.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, what is most important in a job interview, as was stated by a colleague earlier, is to be aware about the interview and about the people who will ask the questions. It was blatantly obvious to myself and other members of the committee on both sides of the House how much Mr. Murray was not aware of his job or the environment.

I liken it to my own adventure into politics. If I can be blunt, when I made the decision to get into the politics, the first thing I did was I went on the Internet and I took a look at the policies of the five major parties. I went through those policies to find out what is going on with each party. I wanted to understand how government was run and the priorities of each party. It was obvious to me that the Conservative Party had the best priorities, and that is why I am here today.

However, within a week or two weeks of accepting to run for this job, I knew what was going on with all other parties. I knew about the job. I knew what I was going to do.

Mr. Murray went the night before to the Liberal convention as a voting delegate. It is obvious to me, and anyone else I think, that this was a natural conflict if he was going to be appointed to something that would be non-partisan. However, he did not even understand any of the basic concepts, such as cap in trade. If one read the newspaper over the last year, one would have a basic understanding of the environment. It just showed me that he had no interest in this whatsoever.

He is interested in the job so far as what it will get him. He is not interested in the job so far as what he can do for Canada. That is the wrong motive. I suggest it sends a strong message to Canadians about our future. Our future is negligible unless we take it seriously, and we must take Kyoto most seriously.

• (1205)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I should preface my remarks by saying that I know Glen Murray. I worked on two of Glen Murray's election campaigns and he worked on my election campaign. He knocked on doors on my behalf in my riding of Winnipeg Centre. Therefore, I know a lot about him.

Much has been made of his relative merits or lack of knowledge of environmental issues. However, what I am more concerned about is his lack of commitment in seeing things through. When he was elected as mayor of Winnipeg the last time, people asked him

directly if he intended to work through his full term of office or would he run out on them and run for member of Parliament for the Liberal Party. He said that his commitment was to the people of Winnipeg. If they gave him their trust, he assured them that he would work through his entire term.

He was asked the same question at the environment committee when being grilled about this job. In response to the question about breaking his word to the people of Winnipeg, he said that he had changed his mind, which was different from breaking his word. He said that was not the same thing. I do not see the difference.

Is my colleague concerned that if the Prime Minister appoints Mr. Murray, in spite of the wishes of Parliament, that he will bail as soon as the writ is dropped for the next federal election and run for the Liberals in Rosedale or some place?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, it came as no surprise to see that he had no answer for that question in committee. It was put to him directly by the member from Winnipeg as to why he broke his word to Winnipeggers and why he did not agree to stay on. He had promised that he would stay on as mayor and that he would not go anywhere else. The question came as no surprise to him. Quite frankly, I remember specifically that he smiled at every question and ignored them.

When one gives one's word, no matter whether it be a political word or another word, it should be kept. If he made a commitment to the people of Winnipeg, he should have kept that word. The very fact that he was ousted by the electorate clearly indicated what the voters thought of him in Winnipeg as a result of him breaking his word.

Can we trust a person who is prepared to do that to his home town of which he was mayor and had such a large influence politically? Would we be able to trust him to stay at the national round table as chair after we spent all the time on his experience and education, which obviously will be great. In doing my research I can see that Mr. Murray has no environmental knowledge.

Can he be trusted? I would suggest he cannot. He will be unable to stay on it. He will, at the first opportunity, drop the chairmanship of the round table and zip to whatever next appointment the Prime Minister is prepared to give him.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member gave an excellent speech. He talked about a number of reasons why appointing Mr. Murray would be a real disadvantage. He talked about the fact that he had little confidence, little understanding of the issue and little vision.

I want to point out that on the environment the Liberals really have had no vision or have had a vision that has been very difficult to follow. They have misled Canadians regularly. In terms of Kyoto, they have not been clear with either the public or even with their own supporters.

Routine Proceedings

CO₂ is addressed in Kyoto but it does not deal with the other pollutants in the country. Liberals have not been clear on that. They have not told Canadians that if we implement Kyoto, it will not deal with many of our pollution problems. They have not told Canadians the costs for Kyoto. Now we find out that gas could go to as high as to \$3 a litre. If it gets that high, I do not know what will be left of the rural areas in western Canada in particular. Also, they have not talked clearly to Canadians about the fact that Kyoto will end up being a foreign aid program.

In light of the fact that the Liberals do not have a clear vision for environment, is it not even more important that they find someone with a strong background on environmental issues and a strong understanding of the issues, not someone who is a political patronage appointment?

• (1210)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I would like the question from my friend from Cypress Hills to the Liberal position on Kyoto and the lack of a clear vision or of any vision. The signatory to Kyoto should have had some laser surgery or something of that kind before signing it and committing Canada to an international treaty that will cost taxpayers billions of dollars and that will be ineffective in reducing pollutants and smog or that will be effective in any way.

Mr. Murray's appointment at this round table is very much like the Prime Minister signing the Kyoto accord. He did not understand the science or what we really needed to do. He set the agenda and the focus on the wrong items. It is very critical for the person in the chair to have some expertise so we can be dragged out of this black hole of tax dollars and move us forward on a proper track with proper vision so we can see a point in the future of where we go and how we get there.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the Prime Minister's blatant disregard for the recommendation of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development against the appointment of Glen Murray to chair of the national round table on the environment and the economy.

I am a new member of Parliament and the environment committee was my first choice for committee participation. This is also a minority Parliament. The Prime Minister set the table for stronger committees with stronger mandates. I would like to begin with what the Prime Minister once said though I dare not ever say he actually believed it himself. He said:

We have permitted a culture to arise that has been some 30 years in the making; one that can be best summarized by the one question that everyone in Ottawa believes has become the key to getting things done: 'Who do you know in the PMO?'

This Liberal Prime Minister said this only 14 months ago. Promises of slaying the democratic deficit were only meant to cover the slaying of the previous Liberal prime minister in order for this Liberal Prime Minister to claim the top job.

This was a candid admission of a self-evident truth. Political cronies with partisan ties to the Prime Minister get plum appointments. Some 3,000 to 4,000 appointments is quite a demand to fill for partisan pals, but the sponsorship scandal has shown us that many are indeed both called and chosen.

This Liberal Prime Minister also said the following some 13 months ago:

No longer will the key to Ottawa be who do you know. We are going to condemn to history the practice and the politics of cronyism.

The Liberal patronage leopard cannot change its crony spots. Let us together examine this Liberal Prime Minister's record.

The Prime Minister appointed Liberal MP Allan Rock as Canada's ambassador to the United Nations. He appointed Liberal member of Parliament Sophia Leung as his personal special adviser in order to appoint the current industry minister as a candidate in the last election. He appointed Liberal MP Sarkis Assadourian as his personal special adviser in order to clear the way for the current member for Brampton—Springdale to run in the last election. He appointed Liberal MP Yvon Charbonneau as ambassador to UNESCO in order to clear the way for his personal organizer to run in the last election. He appointed former Liberal cabinet minister Hélène Scherrer to the PMO. He appointed a host of Liberal provincial members to boards and agencies. He appointed defeated Liberal candidates, staff of Liberal cabinet ministers and personal aides to a host of ambassadorships, judgeships and panels. Their common thread was the fact that they were Liberals who knew the Prime Minister.

Most important today is the current appointment of a failed Liberal candidate, a current Liberal activist and paid voting delegate to the recent Liberal convention by the current Liberal Prime Minister to chair the national round table on the environment and the economy. Not only does this partisan appointment confirm that the torch has been passed from one Liberal prime minister to the current Liberal Prime Minister to hold high for all Liberals to see, but it further reinforces a deep and justified cynicism that breaking the hold of cronyism is another Liberal promise made and another Liberal promise broken.

Most alarming is the fact that this is happening in the age of the Gomery inquiry, a scandal that has rocked the public for its findings of a blatant Liberal Party patronage for contracts, an elaborate trail of dirty money kicked forward and back in a manner and effort to hide from public view the dispensing of Liberal Party political reward and favour.

It is important to note that the Prime Minister has made a grave error in appointing Glen Murray to chair the NRT. Primarily, it makes the review of appointments a worthless exercise in public relations rather than the intended place of sober recommendation on potential appointments. Second, the strong partisan links of the appointed to the Prime Minister will continue to colour any possible achievements of Mr. Murray as chair and will continue to be a mark against the government for breaking its promise to end cronyism. Last, as our motion at the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development said, Mr. Murray lacks sufficient experience to fulfill the role for which he was nominated.

Let us start with the process of reviewing appointments.

Routine Proceedings

The Prime Minister promised great things when he was campaigning for his job. He tapped into existing widespread understanding that appointments were not based on merit, but on relationship to the PMO. He raised expectations that his leadership would usher in a new era, a new era of ideas, a new era of vigour and energy, a new era where merit would take one as far and as high as one wanted to go. Nine years of planning to be prime minister, some would say nine years of plodding but I will give him the benefit of the doubt, the road to the PMO for the Prime Minister was paved only with good intentions.

• (1215)

It is much clearer now what the Prime Minister intended by his earlier comments on record. Committee and parliamentary review of appointments was never intended to affect his opinion and judgment on those appointments. A decision like ours at the environment committee where we voted seven to four against recommending Glen Murray for the position of chair of the NRT was envisioned by the Prime Minister as something to give him caution and seek out an alternate nominee. It was not that in actual fact. Mr. Murray, when he appeared before the committee at one point referred to himself as a nominee while no one ever believed he was. There were no other nominees for the position.

My distinguished colleague from Red Deer whom we heard earlier, the Conservative Party's environment critic, referred to the job interview process. This was no job interview. When I was elected last June, I became not only a public servant but an employer. I received hundreds of job applications from which my transition team culled the best prospects to fill a variety of jobs in my Ottawa office. For each position there were several qualified applicants selected for interviews. Each was interviewed until the best was selected.

We have no idea what process was undertaken to select Mr. Murray before it ever came to the environment committee. We know from Mr. Murray's testimony that he was asked in a phone call if he was available for the job. Then there was an e-mail telling him when and where to show up for the interview. Then a press release was issued by the PMO about his appointment.

It was fixed from the beginning. There were no options for the environment committee to interview candidates and pick the best. There was no process known from the PMO about how Mr. Murray was selected rather than others, if there were others. There was no pre-review interview for the position by the PMO. There was just a "Hey, Glen, are you available for the job? Come on down", and a press release saying it was done.

The Prime Minister never cast his net wide in a search for the best candidate. The Prime Minister never intended to take any direction from committee in making the final determination on an appointment. In the end the Prime Minister scorned the will of the environment committee and appointed Mr. Murray anyway. Liberal promise made; Liberal promise broken.

Let us move to the partisanship of the appointment of Mr. Murray by the Prime Minister. There is no doubt in the minds of the members of the environment committee that Mr. Murray is a partisan appointment. He is a failed star Liberal candidate, hand picked and courted by the Prime Minister to run in the recent federal election. Actually the Prime Minister courted Mr. Murray to break his on

record, oft stated commitment to the people of Winnipeg not to leave his mayoralty to run in the federal election. It is bad enough that the Prime Minister cannot keep his own promises to Canadians, but shame on him for putting others in the position of breaking their commitments to the people.

Mr. Murray told the people of Winnipeg that he would not short-circuit his term as mayor to run as the Liberal candidate in the recent federal election. Month after month he was asked if he would step down and run. "No time as mayor to campaign," he once responded. "It would be hard to run while I am mayor", he said another time. Mr. Murray actually never said he would not leave the city in the lurch to seek personal political fortunes with the Liberal Party and so he never finished his term as mayor of Winnipeg.

It is interesting that in his testimony before the environment committee Mr. Murray was asked many times by my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley if he would actually serve his full three year term as the chair of the NRT, or would he instead run in the next federal election. Mr. Murray's responses sounded eerily familiar. There would be no time for him to campaign. It was the same room that allowed him to wiggle out of his obligations as Winnipeg mayor.

We are not confident that Mr. Murray will finish his term as chair of the NRT. We suspect the Prime Minister has elevated him to this position as a holding ground with profile until the next election where he could again run as a Liberal candidate. One might have greater confidence that Mr. Murray would complete the three year posting if he had not already promised not to take a public service appointment in the wake of his defeat, if offered one. Liberal promise made; Liberal promise broken.

When we do a job interview, and I asked this at the committee, we look for tangibles and intangibles when we are interviewing somebody. My colleague from Red Deer elaborated on some of the tangibles that Mr. Murray lacked, such as his lack of knowledge on the issues. How can he determine and prioritize which issues the NRT should be pursuing if he does not understand them himself? There are some intangibles as well.

• (1220)

Mr. Murray before this committee was cavalier at one time saying, "Well, sometimes one changes one's mind". That is not the kind of attitude we want from somebody who said in his own words that he wants to serve members of Parliament. He was evasive to questions and belligerent at times. I would not hire him based on this alone. He not only fails on the tangibles of qualifying but he also qualifies on the intangibles.

Routine Proceedings

I want to go back to the partisanship issue. Mr. Murray ran as a Liberal candidate in the recent federal election. Mr. Murray owes much to the Prime Minister. After all, the Prime Minister went to great lengths to ensure an electoral victory for Mr. Murray. The Prime Minister chose a safe Liberal seat for him to run in. However, there was a problem. There was actually a sitting Liberal member of Parliament but that was no problem for the Prime Minister. He simply appointed that Liberal MP to the post of lieutenant governor of Manitoba in order to clear a spot for Mr. Murray. The Prime Minister will leave no Liberal stone unturned in order to reward a Liberal for doing his bidding.

It was only a matter of time before Mr. Murray, without a mayor's seat to fall back on, would be appointed for his faithfulness as a Liberal candidate. What has Mr. Murray done since his failed Liberal candidacy? He is still a card-carrying Liberal by his own testimony. He was also a paid voting delegate to the recent Liberal convention by his own testimony.

The previous ethics counsellor in 2003 ruled that anyone with a patronage appointment should not attend a leadership convention. The reasons are self-evident. One would wonder aloud whether Mr. Murray supported pot for 12 year olds and legalized prostitution and whether he voted to endorse the Prime Minister's leadership. All of these things were discussed at that convention.

One should not have to be concerned about these things but Mr. Murray's acceptance of the appointment raises the question. It would not exist if the appointment were not a partisan Liberal.

Mr. Murray testified before our committee and said, "I would like, if I could, to erase the line in a non-partisan way between Parliament and the national round table". The only way to erase that partisan line is not to appoint a partisan to the position.

Since the Prime Minister is willing to go against the advice of the environment committee and appoint Mr. Murray come hell or high water, then Mr. Murray can achieve this same end by refusing to take the appointment. If he fails to do the honourable thing, then partisanship will continue to plague his efforts.

Whether Mr. Murray does the honourable thing or not, it is incumbent upon the House to send a stern message to the Prime Minister for engaging in crass partisan patronage. He will never respect the House if we fail to do so and committees will be nothing but a public relations front for the PMO. Worse, if the House fails to stand up for the prerogatives of committees, the Prime Minister will consider committees servile to his ends.

The Prime Minister has already broken his promise to eliminate the democratic deficit. It is in our hands to do it for him.

Last, let us look at the mandate of the environment committee in examining Mr. Murray's qualifications for the appointment as chair of the NRT. I may have covered some of this earlier but allow me a little latitude as I finish.

Those who know me best know that I am not a rabid partisan. It is my duty to the people of Essex whom I serve to be fair minded in my position as a member of Parliament. I approach my participation at committee with the same mindset. Notwithstanding the partisan context within which Mr. Murray was appointed and then sent for

what one can loosely call a review, I came to the table with an open mind. I had never met Mr. Murray before, nor had I followed his career, save of course for the part about the successful election of his opponent, now my colleague, the affable and competent health critic for our party, the member for Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia.

I was looking forward to learning who Mr. Murray was and whether he had what it took to assume the appointment on merit. As preparation for the meeting committee members were handed Mr. Murray's biography. There were nice credentials, but Mr. Murray never presented in his biography credentials on the environment. Surely one would highlight one's environmental credentials and achievements in a biography if they were actually noteworthy. It was a small detail maybe. Our opponents across the way would contend it is a small detail but faithfulness in small things lays the foundation for trust and faithfulness in larger things, say a chairmanship of the NRT. This is a basic operating principle of life.

Was this a job interview? Not really. There were no other nominees put forward. Interestingly the process of nominating Mr. Murray as stated in Mr. Murray's own words before our committee was that he was phoned, then e-mailed and then showed up.

● (1225)

There was no due diligence, even on one candidate, for a job interview. There was no testimony of a grilling on issues or qualifications when the phone call was made to him. There was no probing, no series of pre-interviews. Shame on the Prime Minister for shoddy pre-interview work. No wonder everyone thinks this is a partisan appointment of someone who is unqualified for the job.

Does Mr. Murray understand his role as chair of the NRT? No. He testified that it was about networking. Then he testified that it was about setting the agenda. Then he said it was about the committee setting the agenda. Listen to Mr. Murray's own words: "We need a chairperson who can make sense of policy". The members of the committee questioned his ability to understand policy and evaluate priorities in order to set the agenda for the NRT.

My colleague at the committee probed him on NO_x and SO_x and cap and trade, and any number of issues, all of which Mr. Murray never answered. I asked him about fee base and whether he knew enough to evaluate whether that should be a priority on which the NRT should be pursuing and researching and giving advice to the government. How does a person do that if he does not know what the issues are about?

Routine Proceedings

We have post-Kyoto targets. He commented on the U.K.'s 50% to 60% reductions in CO₂ after the Kyoto timeframe, but he could not comment on whether he thought that would be something Canada should do or should not do. He could not evaluate the science of it. He could not evaluate whether it was a worthy target. He certainly could not make any recommendations on whether that should be a priority item for the NRT to be looking at and giving advice on to the government. Biomass, aquifer mapping and the list goes on and on. He does not know the issues. How could he evaluate if it is a priority for the NRT to be looking at and providing advice to the government? Those are all very key questions.

He was missing on the tangibles and missing on the intangibles. It was not a very successful job interview in my view.

I want to raise another issue. I am concerned about the values of chairing a committee such as the NRT. It is very important. It is on the environment and the economy and how he reconciles those principles.

Testimony came up at the committee. My hon. colleague from Fort McMurray—Athabasca inquired about some of his business dealings, particularly a company called Navigator PPG. This is very important. We all know Mr. Warren Kinsella is part of that company. I am going to quote Mr. Murray's testimony before the committee: "What we are negotiating right now"—for the record I should state that is between Navigator and his own company, the Glen Murray Group—is for them"—Navigator—"to carry some of the files and contracts that I have jointly with them".

It is very interesting that in my home community very important proposals have come forward by the city of Windsor to solve the border corridor mess between Windsor and Detroit. It is called the Schwartz report for those in the House who do not know about it. It proposes to ram four lanes of trucks, 7,000 trucks a day, through a federal environmentally sensitive area and an area of natural and scientific interest.

There are very significant designations for this Ojibway wilderness complex. Interestingly, Navigator has been retained through a series of groups to promote routing 7,000 trucks a day through an environmentally sensitive area of natural and scientific interest. I hardly call that an environmental principle. Yet this is a group that is involved with the Glen Murray Group. It casts some credibility on what values Mr. Murray will bring to the chairmanship. Is it really going to be about the environment or is it going to be about the economy? It is worthwhile to be concerned about that.

On all counts he failed the job interview. I am not sure he has got the right values anyway to be the chair of the NRT. He does not understand what the job is about. There is partisan political patronage, cronyism and quite frankly, it stinks on all counts. I am not ashamed to say that. That is why the committee voted seven to four against recommending him. We stand by that commitment right now.

● (1230)

I call on the House to affirm the decision of the environment committee to reject this appointment, and call on the Prime Minister to do the honourable thing which is to withdraw the appointment and find someone who is better qualified for the job.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment and then I have a question.

This is about the Prime Minister and the democratic deficit. The Prime Minister at best has been a disappointment. Not long ago I read where a columnist called him a man of bland imagination, of little inspiration and stunning mediocrity, and that his main virtue is that he is not Jean Chrétien. That is not saying much for our Prime Minister. He pledged repeatedly to fix the democratic deficit.

Since the hon. member has said that there is a democratic deficit, I would like to ask him, as our opposition leader has asked many people, can he name a single significant item that our Prime Minister has put in place to improve the democratic deficit and advance the cause of democratic reform?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, this would end up being a very short answer because the answer is no, I cannot think of one time when the Prime Minister has done anything really significant to slay the democratic deficit.

I remember all the rhetoric. I remember the Prime Minister saying he was mad as hell, that everything was going to change, and that Ottawa was going to look different. This of course was when he was campaigning for the top job of the Liberal Party of Canada. Maybe it is easier to make promises before one gets there.

There was promise after promise. We were told that we were going to slay this democratic deficit. Ottawa was going to look different. No longer was the key going to be, "who you know in the PMO".

In my speech today I listed a litany of patronage appointments. How is that anything good? I will not say contempt, but there is a disregard for the committee's opinion. We were going to empower committees. That was going to be one of the key elements that the Prime Minister was going to use to go after the democratic deficit. We were going to empower these committees to be masters of their own destiny. They were going to play a significant role in appointments, whether the Supreme Court or a review of appointments.

Look what happened in this case. Our committee registered an opinion. We evaluated the candidate on merits. We evaluated the context within which he came to the committee. We said that it was bad on all counts, seven to four, and we were going to recommend against this appointment. What did the Prime Minister do? He turned around and said that he was going to appoint him anyway with no respect for the process and no real commitment to getting rid of the democratic deficit in this country.

I will offer this much in wrapping up the answer. If the Prime Minister and the government do not want to do anything about the democratic deficit, they can all step aside and the Conservative Party of Canada will step in and do the job as the government in this country.

Routine Proceedings

We are concerned about ensuring that there are more powerful individual MPs. That is why we are having a free vote on Bill C-38. I think that is very significant. The other party is not doing that. The cabinet is going to have to vote with the government on this one. There is no freedom. How does that help empower the people through their elected representatives? It does not do that. If the government members do not want to do the job, we will be glad to do it for them.

• (1235)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his comments and his presentation today. I would like to follow up on some of the points that he made and one of my other colleagues, the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, also made dealing with the qualifications of the applicant, Mr. Murray.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment has stated on numerous occasions, as has the Prime Minister, that the primary qualification of this position is not to have intimate knowledge of the subject, but to be an effective chair.

I have heard from the presentation by my colleague from Essex and the previous presentation by my colleague from Fort McMurray—Athabasca that there needs to be far more inherent knowledge and in depth knowledge of the subject matter itself rather than just having effective chairmanship skills.

Could my colleague expand on that and whether he feels the government's position, that Mr. Murray would be an excellent employee because he is an excellent chair, is sufficient or does one need an in depth knowledge of the environment?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, that is a very insightful question because notwithstanding the government's approach on this, it is not just about having some skills at chairing a meeting. I have been in a lot of meetings before and I have never chaired them because I have never felt that I was competent enough to do it in some circumstances. People have to know that they cannot punch above their weight. They have to recognize their own limitations and apparently Mr. Murray does not recognize his own limitations.

By his own testimony, Mr. Murray said that this is a panel of experts with 24 of the most brilliant minds in this country on the environment and the economy. What is the committee going to do, make up its own mind what the agenda is going to be? In that case, we do not even need a chair. We could just ballot the question and have a secretary record what they are going to study, but the truth is that the chair is going to have to set the agenda.

In order to set the agenda, the chair is going to have to know about the issues and is going to have to know which of those issues are going to be priorities. Maybe this chair would send us off studying feebates when in fact we should be studying cap and trade.

By Mr. Murray's own comments he said that his job is to ensure the agenda is set. He said that we need a chairperson who can make sense of policy. In his own admission he says one needs to know environmental policy, to evaluate those policies, and decide what is a priority and what is not a priority.

The people of Canada deserve to know that their government works for them, including these round tables even though they are

not direct parliamentary committees. They need to know that what is out there is actually serving their interests and studying the right things.

Are we going to pay people to do something that is not even a priority for the House? That is a waste of my time. How does that serve me as a parliamentarian? Mr. Murray said he wants to serve us as parliamentarian. Well, he should have some understanding of the issues to evaluate the right priorities and provide the right advice, so that we get the right policies in this country. That takes some expertise in the environmental area, not just an ability to chair a meeting.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Essex for his intervention on this motion brought forward by my colleague from Red Deer. The analogy that he used, saying that the Liberal leopards cannot change their spots on patronage, could also be extended to say that the Liberal Party is suffering from leprosy and they rot from that leprosy in cronyism. It just continues to go on and on. It is what is causing us to have such a bad reputation in government because of all this patronage.

My riding of Selkirk—Interlake borders the north side of Winnipeg. Mr. Murray was the mayor of Winnipeg during some of the greatest catastrophes that happened environmentally in that city. Of course, my riding had to handle all of the waste and environmental pollution that the city of Winnipeg caused under his watch, essentially dumping raw sewage directly into the Red River which flowed into Lake Winnipeg, which is a huge tourist area as well as a large commercial fishery and a sport and recreation zone. That cost the province dearly.

I am quite concerned that this mayor did not care about the environment when he was mayor. He had the chance to fix it through infrastructure, but instead took money and built a \$1 million toilet on a footbridge that did nothing for the city of Winnipeg. Essentially, he proved to the community that he did not care about the environment, that he did not care about the pollution the city of Winnipeg was causing for the rest of the province. I want my colleague to comment on that.

Second, there were some rather hard comments made earlier today by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment. I am quite concerned that the parliamentary secretary is not sitting on this committee in an unbiased fashion. He is there as a mouthpiece, as a lapdog for the ministry. He is there representing the minister, not himself, and by and large representing the wishes of the Prime Minister. Does my colleague believe that the parliamentary secretary should be sitting on these committees and having any input into that matter?

• (1240)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of all those who are watching, this committee, for the most part, is functioning quite well. We function in large measure in a non-partisan fashion, but the injections of partisanship that have come to this committee have come from the parliamentary secretary himself, whether it is his characterizations of our understanding of Kyoto or other aspects. They should not be in this committee as it poisons the atmosphere and keeps us from doing our job.

Routine Proceedings

Regarding the issue of raw sewage, it strikes to two things: environmental priorities, is it a priority for the appointed; and also to the follow-through on a commitment. People make many commitments. We have heard Liberal promise made, Liberal promise broken, but the key here is follow-through. That is why promises are not kept. If one cannot stay through to the end to see environmental priorities through in a tangible way as a mayor, then how can we expect the same in chairing a committee that is responsible for environmental concerns? Will he stay around? Will we see this through? Will we get priorities actually acted on? That is critically at stake here.

We have expressed no confidence in this appointment. We call on the Prime Minister to withdraw the appointment now and provide us with a better candidate for that position.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are glad to be here to speak today. After hearing the discussion this morning, I think it sounds like Mr. Murray has about as much chance of success as a one-legged grasshopper in a chicken coop, but we will see what happens if the Prime Minister continues and is bound and determined to stay on the track he is on.

I am starting to understand the frustration and the annoyance of the environment committee. We have heard very clearly this morning from all the opposition parties about their frustrations in dealing with the Prime Minister's interference and involvement with them.

Through the last election campaign and actually prior to that when the Prime Minister was campaigning himself and was campaigning for the leadership, we were led to believe that he was going to make some substantial changes, that he was going to make some real changes to the way things were done and the way things were done in Ottawa.

Unfortunately that has not been the case, but he did make promises, especially to committees, that they would be much more involved and would have substantial and real input into the appointments that were made.

I guess we expected the Prime Minister to keep his word. Maybe we were naive, because we can see that this is not the case. One of the first indications, the first real evidence that he is not interested in following through on his promises, was shown in the appointment of Mr. Murray and the whole situation involving him.

Just to rehash it again, we want to talk a little about the process that took place. The environment committee believed that it was going to have substantial input into the appointment of the chairman of the round table on the environment. The Prime Minister came forward with Mr. Murray's name.

As we heard this morning from my colleague from Essex, who did a good job of pointing this out, there really was no nomination process at all to pick a chair for this committee. There was no place where people could apply for the job. Rather, as Mr. Murray apparently testified, he got an email. That was basically the first contact he had with the government about the job. I guess he expressed interest in it and then really the only follow-up was a phone call letting him know about the schedule and the arrangement to show up at the committee.

I am a little surprised at that. I would expect that for someone coming toward a position of such prominence as this one, where the position is basically directing the environmental direction of this country, there would be a real nomination process in place.

It actually reminds me of another area where the government is failing to really do due process. It is unrelated to this. It is in agriculture. Right now we have a process whereby there are 13,000 grain hopper cars that have been owned by the government for a number of years. Over the last seven or eight years the government has talked about disposing of those hopper cars. It has tried to come up with some way to do this. At different points, groups have expressed interest in those cars.

Over the last few months this issue has arisen again. As the government tries to deal with this, it has had to decide what it is going to do. Is it going to have a clear and open transparent procurement process here? What is it going to do?

This issue has been discussed at the agriculture committee and at the transport committee. The transport committee actually made a couple of good recommendations to the government. It said that first it wants the government to determine the maintenance costs of these cars so that everybody knows how much it costs to run them. Second, it said it wants a clear procurement process. It wants the government to be clear on how it is disposing of the cars.

Those seemed like pretty straightforward recommendations. It seemed that if they went to cabinet, cabinet should be and would be willing to adhere to them, but that was not the case. We come back and suddenly the transport committee's recommendations are being completely ignored by the transport minister. He has decided that rather than the recommendations he is just going to deal with one organization. That was all he was interested in. He is going to talk to one organization. About four or five organizations put forward proposals, but he said no, the government had the organization it would deal with picked out and it was not going to deal with any others.

This is actually a substantial investment. These cars are worth somewhere between \$100 million and \$200 million, but the transport minister said, "No, we are not interested in any kind of clear procurement process here. We are just going to negotiate a deal with one group". That went on for about three weeks.

Now we have found out that there is another group behind the scenes which is being allowed to negotiate for ownership of these cars. While the minister has told farm groups in western Canada that he was sorry, but he was only dealing with one group, he has actually been dealing with two and maybe more behind the scenes. Farmers are beginning to ask the question, "Why is this government once again misleading us?" It has said one thing and it is doing something else, say farmers. Why is the minister not willing to do things in a clear and transparent way?

•(1245)

This comes back to the same issue we are dealing with today, that of Mr. Murray. The government is not willing to deal with these appointments in a clear and transparent fashion.

Routine Proceedings

Changes are desperately needed. I guess the most important one would be to change the government and give us a chance to bring forward some of these measures that would clean up this corruption and pollution taking place in government today. Give us a chance to form the Government of Canada, I say.

It has to be frustrating for the environment committee to find itself in a situation where it is not able to influence this after the Prime Minister promised it. Basically, once the Prime Minister suggested that Mr. Murray was his choice without a nomination process, the committee rejected his appointment. In a seven to four vote, committee members said that this is not good enough, that this man is not qualified for the job. The Prime Minister turned around and completely ignored the recommendations of the committee and decided to appoint Mr. Murray to the position anyway.

The committee is interested in what is going on here. It has once again rejected Mr. Murray's appointment, this time in a nine to two vote. Via the member for Red Deer, the committee has brought the motion forward to the House today so that we are able to talk about this and let Canadians know what is actually going on in this situation.

We know it is frustrating for the committee. This whole aspect of patronage seems to go on and on and influences many different areas, not just the area of the environment. It also influences the area with which I have been involved, which is the Canadian Wheat Board.

It is interesting to note that the present Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has a failed Liberal MP working for him. I was told at one point that he was going to be the minister's expert on the Canadian Wheat Board, but as it turned out, the member, who is from Ontario, has never had to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board and as far as I know he is unfamiliar with agriculture as well. Once again, that issue goes unresolved. Second, the Canadian Wheat Board, controlled by the minister, appointed the present Canadian Wheat Board minister's campaign manager as its government lobbyist.

When Canadians look to see what is going on after the election, they will see that not only are failed Liberal candidates being appointed to patronage positions, but some of the other people involved in campaigns have found themselves with positions serving government agencies as well. That is frustrating to all of us.

I should mention at this time that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

I would like to talk further about Mr. Murray and his fitness for office. It has been frustrating to listen to the debate this morning and to realize that this man is probably not qualified for this position. We know from his history that he was the mayor of Winnipeg and was picked as a star candidate by the Prime Minister to run in Winnipeg.

My first exposure to Mr. Murray was hearing news reports about how he was going to be a tremendous candidate. The impression was given that there was absolutely no way he would not be elected to the House of Commons. He was in a contested race with a Conservative member whom we know well because he won the seat and defeated Mr. Murray.

In order to give the slot to Mr. Murray, the Prime Minister had to move one of his MPs right out of the position. That was another example of patronage. Mr. Harvard retired from his position in the House and was then appointed lieutenant governor of the province of Manitoba. Looking around the room today, I would say that those of us here would not have picked Mr. Harvard as the top candidate for that position, but nevertheless the Prime Minister was only too glad to give it to him.

Mr. Murray basically has no academic or professional qualifications for this job. He has little or no experience with global environmental issues or economic issues. His predecessor had a whole history of environmental issues and was able to lead the environmental round table with his experience. Mr. Murray does not bring that to the table.

He does not bring good judgment to the table. He attended the Liberal convention here in the spring of 2005 after the ethics commissioner clearly told people who had received patronage appointments that they should not do that. Mr. Murray also oversaw the second largest sewage spill to take place in Lake Winnipeg.

● (1250)

I would like to close by mentioning that the parliamentary secretary complained that we do not know Mr. Murray, but he also complained that the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia knew him too well. He was frustrated because he had come to the committee and revealed Mr. Murray's inadequacies.

I would like to conclude with the comment that the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia made during the campaign when he talked about Mr. Murray. He said that as far as he was concerned, it was better to be paralyzed from the neck down than from the neck up. I think that would summarize Mr. Murray's qualifications for this job.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the Conservative member's comments. I want to bring to his attention regarding the issue of Mr. Murray the fact that as the mayor of Winnipeg he did engage in, adopt and was a leader in a number of local initiatives to improve the environment, particularly on the issue of public transportation.

I want to address some of the issues that Mr. Murray will be faced with, indeed, issues that many of Canadians are faced with, which are more important than the issue we are talking about today, that of his appointment.

One issue that Mr. Murray will have to deal with is global warming and how we will meet the requirements that we have embraced in order to meet the Kyoto accord targets. We can look at the equation of how we actually address the issue of greenhouse gases in a number of ways.

Routine Proceedings

The science behind this is the fact that we burn fossil fuels and produce greenhouse gases. How we deal with that, and what Mr. Murray will have to tackle, is how we reduce the burning of fossil fuels. Perhaps the most efficient way of doing this is conserving the energy that comes from the burning of those fossil fuels. Said another way, if we conserve our energy better, we will see a reduction in the amount of carbon fossil fuels that we have to burn and, as a result, we will have a diminished production of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The best way to do this is to conserve the energy that we produce. One of the best ways to do that is connected to how we insulate and build our homes and buildings and how we conserve energies in structures such as this.

Our government has put forth something called the EnerGuide. I would strongly recommend that all Canadians, particularly those building homes, please take a look at it. It contains options and tools on which we can build in a more efficient fashion, with better insulation. We can conserve energy better and in doing so we will reduce the amount of fossil fuels we burn and thus reduce greenhouse emissions. The interesting thing about doing this is that we will actually be able to meet our Kyoto requirements and go beyond them. That is the beauty of it.

My question for the member of the Conservative Party is on the issue of global warming. Does his party believe in global warming? Or does it ascribe to the notion that global warming is something that is backed by junk science and is merely a variation in the pattern of temperature variation that has occurred on our planet for hundreds of thousands of years?

● (1255)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Selkirk—Interlake.

The member opposite raised the issue of global warming and asked Mr. Murray whether he could deal with that issue and whether he had a proper understanding of it, which is why we are here today. The motion from the environment committee is due to the fact that Mr. Glen Murray has insufficient experience in environmentally related fields of study. The committee has called upon the Prime Minister to withdraw Mr. Murray's appointment to the national round table on the environment and the economy.

The committee's concern is that Mr. Murray does not have the understanding necessary to deal with the issue of global warming. As we heard earlier this morning, members are concerned that he does not have the experience to deal with the issue of Kyoto. The government has manipulated that file in many ways and, from what we heard this morning, we do not have confidence that Mr. Murray has the ability to see through the manipulation that has surrounded that file.

After listening to the presentation by the member for Red Deer, it is clear that in his interview Mr. Murray did not have an understanding of carbon sequestration to adequately discuss the issue at that time. As I mentioned before, I am from a rural area where carbon sequestration is a huge issue. Farmers need to be confident that they will get paid something for the carbon and the carbon sequestration framework that we are setting up.

We are not at all confident that Mr. Murray has the ability or experience to deal with the manipulation that has taken place in the budget that was presented by the government where it has tried to slide environmental issues in under the radar in order to bring about huge change for Canadians in their tax structure and the amount of taxes that they will be paying.

It is clear that Mr. Murray, as he actually said himself at committee, realizes he has huge inadequacies. We just believe that those inadequacies are large enough that he should not be appointed to this position. We need a clear process for nominating someone who does have the experience to deal with those issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): May I point out to the next speaker that under normal circumstances there would be 10 minutes for debate and 5 minutes for questions and comments, however, because the three hour time allowance will finish at 1:10 p.m., members will only have 10 minutes, whether it be 5 minutes for debate or 5 minutes for questions and comments.

● (1300)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the previous comments I made on the appointment of Mr. Murray to the national round table on the environment and the economy by discussing his history and track record in the city of Winnipeg.

As I have already stated, Selkirk—Interlake borders Winnipeg on the north side. Mr. Murray, under his watch when he was mayor, was the author and the individual responsible for the pollution that came out of the city of Winnipeg and was dumped into the Red River. It continues to this day.

During his 10 years as mayor, Mr. Murray had the opportunity to address the problem of making sure that we had proper sewage treatment in the city of Winnipeg to protect against the overflow and spillage of raw sewage into the Red River which, by and large, moves through my riding and goes straight into Lake Winnipeg. It affects the commercial fishery. My kids swim in that lake and they are swimming with raw sewage from the city of Winnipeg. People go there because it is a tourist attraction. Mr. Murray could have made the choice to invest in infrastructure to fix the environmental hazards that the city of Winnipeg has inherent in its system.

Mr. Murray has been out of the job for about a year now. Every time we have more than two inches of rainfall in the north part of the city, because the entire infrastructure is connected, the gutters drain into the sewage system, the sewage system overflows and it goes as a direct discharge into the Red River. This is unforgivable. Mr. Murray had the choice but instead he focused in on his own pet projects.

Routine Proceedings

A good example of that is the Esplanade Riel bridge that he built in Winnipeg. He spent \$1 million in building a toilet. He put in place on this footbridge a restaurant that nobody would lease. It is a monolith that will sit there in recognition of the type of job that is Mr. Murray's legacy to the city of Winnipeg: a restaurant that nobody wants, a \$1 million toilet that is not being used, and we still have an infrastructure problem with sewage being dumped straight into the Red River. How could the Prime Minister even consider him as someone to fill such an important role as chairman of the NRTEE? This is an individual who should be chastised, not rewarded. This is someone who should be fined, not given a plum patronage position.

I am also quite concerned about the involvement of the parliamentary secretaries on committees. The environment parliamentary secretary, who sits on the environment committee, was in the House making quite the impassioned plea, saying that we were playing politics. Just about everybody in the House has rejected Mr. Murray's appointment to the round table and yet the Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister of the Environment has the gall to stand in his place and criticize us for making this an issue in the House of Commons.

The environment committee has already rejected Mr. Murray's appointment. The Prime Minister went ahead and ignored the recommendations of the committee. We want to bring it before the House so that the House can make the decision and then give direction to the Prime Minister that this individual is not acceptable for this position.

It has been said over and over again that the Prime Minister promised to fix the democratic deficit. The Prime Minister said that he would put an end to cronyism and ensure that it was not who one knew in the PMO who got the jobs. However the pork-barrelling goes on. We still have appointee after appointee, who are all Liberal flunkies, getting prime government jobs. That is unacceptable and it is something Canadians across the country will reject when we go to the polls.

• (1305)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member has a plan, to which the municipalities have agreed to work with the provinces and the federal government, we can work together to deal with the issue. I know that has happened in British Columbia on the issue of sewage and it has worked very well. If he has a plan or knows of people with a plan in the area that is affected he should work with us to address the problem. Obviously no one wants to see raw sewage pouring into a river stream system so that it affects people.

However, on the issue of Mr. Murray, the member may or may not know this, but Mr. Murray was a leader in public transit. The reason he was a leader in public transit was to ensure we had a decrease in the burning of fossil fuels; that is, use our cars and SUVs less. In doing so, we would actually have a positive impact on that. As well, Mr. Murray was one of the most dynamic mayors in the country. He improved relationships between municipalities and came up with a number of very innovative solutions.

In talking about the issue of the environment, I would encourage the member to deal with the issue that I know affects many of the

members in the Conservative Party, and that is the destruction of the prairie long grasses and the wetlands across the country. This destruction has been occurring for more than 100 years and we as a Parliament need to address it.

Does the member have any solutions? We have been working very hard. We have put money aside to work with local communities and municipal leaders, which is what Mr. Murray was, to implement solutions to preserve wetlands, long grasses and in other areas that we can use as carbon sinks to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that are occurring.

I ask the member whether he wants to work with us to that effect and whether he has any plans that he can give to the House and the government so we can implement things for the betterment of not only the people of the Red River area but also Canadians as a whole.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out the facts for the parliamentary secretary. The reality is that Mr. Murray had ample time to develop a plan. Proposals for cleaning up the raw sewage problem in the city of Winnipeg were brought forward to him.

I understand that the President of the Treasury Board actually spoke to him about the problem and said that he had to fix it but he decided not to. When Mr. Murray was the mayor he decided to ignore the recommendation from the treasury board president, from local municipalities and from his own city council and went ahead with his own pet peeve projects. That is completely unacceptable.

My fear is that this individual will take over the national round table on the environment and the economy and set his agenda rather than working on what is best for Canadians. He definitely did not go through with what was best for Manitoba and what was best for the city of Winnipeg. He always brought forward his own pet peeve projects in trying to build his own little legacy.

This is the problem that we have and one that we have to fix.

The municipalities in my riding north of the city of Winnipeg continue to fight for the improvement of the environment. The city of Winnipeg, under Mr. Murray, completely shut them out. Instead, it wanted to talk about how it could charge more money to the guys coming into Winnipeg to do business or to do shopping and perhaps set up toll booths on the road or charge them more taxes. Mr. Murray had a very narrow agenda, one that did not look at the entire picture.

I recommend to the government and to all members of the House that Mr. Murray's position needs to be reviewed and that the Prime Minister should back off and renege on his appointment of Mr. Murray to the national round table. We need to find someone who is qualified, who has the capabilities, the leadership skills and who can come forward with a good idea of what the environment needs so we can drive home the agenda of protecting the environment and things that are important to the country.

The member talked about the long grasses. I am a rancher so I want to ensure we have a situation where we are protecting all ecosystems. Some great projects are going on in the long grass on the eastern prairies. We need to continue to fight that way. However it will be people who have that knowledge and concern who will drive that agenda. I doubt that Mr. Murray has that concern.

Routine Proceedings

● (1310)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

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

* * *

PETITIONS

FOREIGN CREDENTIALS

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from residents of my riding of Langley and other areas in the Lower Mainland of greater Vancouver. The petitioners call upon Parliament to allow doctors to apply for Canadian accreditation in their home countries, and for Canada to process their immigration applications on a priority basis during this serious physician shortage.

MARRIAGE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present hundreds of petitions on behalf of members of my riding of Edmonton—Leduc and the surrounding area. The petitioners call upon Parliament to preserve the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. They ask that Parliament reconfirm its position that it established in this House on June 9, 1999, and that we act to do all we can to preserve that definition of marriage.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure for me to rise today and present yet another petition on the issue of marriage on behalf of my constituents in Prince George—Peace River.

The residents of the city of Prince George call upon Parliament to note the fact that marriage as defined as the lifelong union between one man and one woman is the best foundation for families and for the raising of children. They note that the definition of marriage has been changed by the courts.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to redefine marriage in federal law as being the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition pursuant to Standing Order 36 from the people of Selkirk—Interlake and some people from Provencher and Brandon—Souris.

The petitioners draw to the attention of the House that marriage as defined as the lifelong union between one man and woman is the best foundation for families and the raising of children. They state that the definition of marriage has been changed by the courts and that it is the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament to define marriage.

The petitioners pray that Parliament define marriage in federal law as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

● (1315)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Newton—North Delta to present several petitions calling upon Parliament to use forcible legislative and administrative measures to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others and to recognize that marriage is the best foundation for families and the raising of children.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I present the three petitions today.

The first petition is from constituents in my riding. The petitioners request that Parliament affirm legislation recognizing the institution of marriage in federal law as being the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

The second petition is from another group in my riding. The petitioners pray and call upon Parliament to define marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and woman to the exclusion of all others.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the third petition, the petitioners call upon Parliament to provide Canadians with greater access to non-drug preventative medicine options as well as information about these options and to sanction the personal choice of Canadians by clarifying the currently vague definition of food and drug in the outdated 1927/1952 Food and Drugs Act by repealing the outdated provisions against making truthful health claims for the prevention, treatment and cure of health challenges and non-drug approaches by enacting Bill C-420.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition by Canadians across the country who come together and ask that the House take all steps to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

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

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

The House resumed from April 4 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.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the *National Post* has stated:

—their opponents seek to tear it up or vitiate it through use of the notwithstanding clause.

The result is that Canadians are being sold a false bill of goods...they are hearing misinformation and scaremongering from a government that seeks to ram the issue down their throats with a minimum of debate.

The *National Post* concluded that the dishonest approach the government had adopted was an insult, and I agree.

In January 2004 the justice minister asked the Supreme Court of Canada to rule on whether or not the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman was unconstitutional. In its ruling of December 2004 the court refused to answer, putting the issue back into the hands of Parliament, and rightfully so.

The Conservative Party has been very critical of this government's attempt to duck difficult issues such as same sex marriage by deferring to the court.

When the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the lower court decision that determined same sex marriages should be legal under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we immediately called on the justice minister to appeal the ruling, but he refused.

Effectively, the Liberal government sanctioned the court's ruling on social policy matters, rendered the justice committee's analysis of this issue irrelevant, ignored the majority vote in Parliament to protect the traditional definition of marriage and stifled the voices of Canadians. Furthermore, the Liberal Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister reneged on their commitment to protect the traditional definition of marriage.

On June 8, 1999, the Deputy Prime Minister, the then justice minister, stood in this House and said:

The institution of marriage is of great importance to large numbers of Canadians, and the definition of marriage as found in the hon. member's motion is clear in law.

As stated in the motion, the definition of marriage is already clear in law. It is not found in a statute, but then not all law exists in statutes, and the law is no less binding and no less the law because it is found in the common law instead of in a statute.

The Liberal Deputy Prime Minister also stated, and listen carefully:

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. 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.

The government has, without any constitutional requirements to do so, changed the definition of marriage. Another promise made, another promise broken. Given this broken promise and the many other broken promises, how can any of us trust the justice minister's assertion now that religious freedoms will be protected under the law?

The so-called protection that the government has offered within Bill C-38 regarding religious freedoms is totally inadequate. The Liberal government has been totally dishonest with Canadians suggesting otherwise.

The government has only proposed one tiny clause to protect religious freedom, a clause that states that religious officials will not be forced to solemnize marriages. It has done this knowing full well that the Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled that this clause is not within federal jurisdiction. The solemnization of marriage is a provincial responsibility.

Furthermore, nothing in Bill C-38 addresses issues currently facing churches, temples, synagogues and mosques, such as being forced to rent out space for same sex marriages.

The solemnization of marriage might be outside the federal jurisdiction, but religious protections are well within this government's sphere. Parliament can ensure that no religious body will have its charitable status challenged because of its beliefs or practices. Parliament can ensure that beliefs and practices regarding marriage will not affect the eligibility of a church, synagogue, temple or religious organization to receive funds.

● (1320)

The government may have neglected to protect religious freedoms in Bill C-38, but the official opposition will not. We will be proposing amendments to provide substantive protections for religious institutions in the context of federal law. We will propose these amendments to provide full recognition of same sex relationships as possessing equivalent rights and privileges.

More important, we will propose an amendment to provide clear recognition of the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. We will do so knowing that we have the support of Canadians. The vast majority of Canadians are asking the government to do the right thing, to keep its word and protect the traditional definition of marriage.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are junctures in a country's path when it is an honour to be a member of Parliament because one is able to help make a fundamental choice, a choice that celebrates more of our rich diversity and extends that fundamental Canadian value of equality.

● (1325)

[Translation]

Originally, the goal of extending marriage—civil marriage—rights came directly from the grassroots, part of the long struggle of gays and lesbians for a society in which their right to a just, equitable relationship was recognized, meaning the celebration of their union, but also, let us hope, our celebration of their union.

Government Orders

[English]

In 1989 Alain Brosseau, a waiter leaving the Chateau Laurier, was killed because some people thought he was gay. In the shadow of this Parliament building he was thrown from a bridge directly behind the House because who he was believed to be was deemed unequal.

It is fitting that in the House within sight of that bridge we can soon declare that lesbian and gay people are equal by recognizing the equality of their relationships. Today those relationships are not equal. In five provinces and territories equal marriage is not possible. For all lesbian and gay couples and indeed for the community at large, Parliament's recognition of the equality of their love is required.

It is wrong for people such as Kim Vance and Samantha Meehan to have to travel from Nova Scotia, which then did not have equal marriage, to Ontario in order to have their marriage recognized. This debate is about them. It is not about politicians or judges, not rhetoric about the charter, but about our capacity in a world with too little love to recognize love and celebrate it and by consequence to salute the equality that is the most enduring Canadian value. This debate is and should be about people.

[Translation]

We need only think of people like Svend Robinson, who fought for a just society before the polls showed that the time had come to do it; people like Chris Phipps and Chris Higgins, who had to go to court to get their right to have a family recognized; and people like John Campey, who, during the celebration of my own marriage to Olivia Chow, and at our invitation, said a few words in the hope that one day all our gay and lesbian friends would be able to celebrate like us. That was 18 years ago now.

[English]

There are people like Bob Gallagher, who has been a tower of strength, someone who a decade ago predicted that he would see equal marriage in his lifetime and has worked tirelessly to achieve that goal. It says something about our country that he is going to be right.

Some are not with us to see the final days of this struggle, this long debate. Ron Shearer will not be with us. His partner of 28 years, my friend George Hislop, even today is being denied pension benefits by the government after a lifetime of being denied the equality of their commitment. Even after the death of George's partner, the Prime Minister refuses to recognize the centrality of their commitment to their lives.

Michael Lynch, a driving force behind this country's first AIDS organization, dedicated his life to making the lives of others more liveable. He was denied our blessing of his relationship. He never got to marry Bill, his partner of longstanding, because he died in 1991, 10 years before this country's first gay and lesbian marriages.

I was at those weddings. I was at the weddings of Anne and Elaine, and Kevin and Joe. They were held at the Metropolitan Community Church in my riding and were presided over by the incredible Reverend Brent Hawkes. Olivia and I attend midnight mass at the church every Christmas Eve. I urge people who believe that lesbian and gay relationships are somehow less deserving to go

there and they will see love, community, faith, and extended families celebrating those core human desires with others irrespective of sexual orientation.

[Translation]

It is the same feeling that we have during gay pride celebrations, which are held now in communities of all sizes, from Iqaluit to Sudbury, from Halifax to Vancouver, in English and in French. I was at the first gay pride celebration more than 20 years ago, which in Canada was held in my riding. As at all cultural festivals, we celebrated our diversity and vigorously debated this basic Canadian value of equality.

That is the society for which the NDP has always fought. In the past, we fought to ensure that the rights of Chinese Canadians were recognized and that justice was done for the first nations, as well as for the basic right to freedom through our opposition to the War Measures Act and Bill C-36.

Those of us who wanted a better world were always told that we were going about it in the wrong way. But every time, our way proved to be right. Yes, I am already looking forward to the end of this long debate and the advent of social peace in a country that is even more just.

I would sincerely like to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois and his caucus for their support, as well as those Liberal and Conservative members who bravely took a stand in favour of this bill and, thereby, of equality.

• (1330)

[English]

I would caution the Prime Minister not to play partisan games with this central issue and to recognize the central role played by members of all parties.

In closing, I would like to speak to those people of goodwill who believe that equal marriage is a threat. I respect their right to practise their faith. Indeed the same principle of equality that demands we celebrate equal relationships in the civil world requires us to protect and defend the right of each religion to perform marriage in accordance with its faith. I deplore efforts to pit one minority against another in an effort to block equality. I do not subscribe to the view that human rights are a buffet from which one can selectively choose.

I believe the same core principles provide the same core protections of every citizen of this country irrespective of sex, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. I am gratified and proud that most of my fellow citizens agree.

In recent days many people have come to reflect on spirituality and the role of faith in our world. In recent months North America has asked itself about the role of moral values in our politics. I fear we are on a path in which we selectively deem those issues that divide societies as moral while forgetting that there are far more moral choices that unite us rather than divide us.

Government Orders

I deeply hope we can achieve equality for lesbian and gay people and achieve a social peace that respects our societal obligation to protect equality while protecting each and every religion's right to practise its faith, because within that social peace we can then grapple with the moral issues that unite us: the fight against poverty; the effort for peace; that common human desire for a better future for our families and communities, a future that requires us to embrace sustainability now.

Around the world faith has motivated people to do great things. It invented the printing press. It created universal medicare. It achieved civil rights in the United States and has been a clarion call for human rights throughout Latin America and Asia. It helped bring down apartheid and stood with the ship workers of Gdansk and helped to democratize eastern Europe.

As this House extends equality to our fellow citizens, let us also refocus on those values that unite us and people of goodwill around the world: peace, dignity, the eradication of poverty, respect for each other, and the desire to help.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the bill we are debating, Bill C-38, is entitled the civil marriage act. I am proud to speak up on behalf of my constituents who overwhelmingly oppose this legislation. Just as important, they question the government's priorities. Is having same sex marriage really the best way to advance the well-being of Canadians today?

Many of my colleagues here have made an excellent case for traditional marriage as the most important social institution for bringing order to society and providing the best environment for the raising of children.

Others have pointed out that the government is a walking contradiction when it says that same sex marriage is a human right but then at the same time says that Liberal backbenchers may have a free vote on the issue, a free vote on a basic human right. Maybe the Prime Minister does not think it is a basic right after all.

Other colleagues have pointed out that almost every other country in the world, along with the United Nations, has rejected the notion that same sex marriage is a human right. They have made their cases well. That is why I will talk about this issue from a very different perspective.

As I have reflected on this issue, and now this legislation, over the last many months, I have come to realize that the true significance of legalizing same sex marriage goes way beyond the issue of marriage, as important as that is.

Equally important is the issue of whether or not the Canadian government and the courts even have the authority to alter the definition of marriage. Put another way, are there any limits at all on what the government is entitled to do? Does private civil society even exist or does everything fall within the ambit of government? That is the issue I want to take up in the short time that is allotted to me.

There is a first question we need to ask. Why do we have governments? Why does government exist? The philosopher John Locke would argue that government exists so that we can ensure the maximum possible protection of our inherent rights. In other words, he believed that we are born with certain rights that are inalienable,

that is, they are rights that cannot be taken from us. These are rights such as freedom of speech, association, religion, conscience and movement, and the right to own and use property as we choose.

Locke argued that governments and courts are created by free people to ensure that the strongest simply do not override the rights of the weakest. Thus, the people delegate to government and to courts the authority to ensure that all people have their natural rights protected.

But Locke and others also knew that governments themselves can be a danger to these natural rights that we are born with. That is why, going back to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, it has been argued that the people have a duty, a moral obligation, to reject man-made law if it conflicts with natural law, the law that says we are born with these rights which cannot be taken from us.

This is the same argument that Martin Luther King made regarding the supremacy of the natural law over man-made law in his famous "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail".

It is why Locke and the American founders wanted to place limits on government and limits on the courts. It is why they acknowledged the natural rights of all people in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Bill of Rights.

It is why the United Nations declares that all people everywhere are free, irrespective of what their governments may declare.

In other words, all of western civilization rests on the notion that government is limited in its authority and that if freedom means anything it means that individual people have the inalienable right to act freely, so long as they are not hurting others, without fear of government interference.

We might be thinking that this is all very interesting, but how does it apply in the current context? I argue that marriage is a voluntary institution that was created and preserved by free people long before governments were created. Therefore, marriage is an institution that the state does not have the authority to change.

Let me explain. Let us assume that the government gets its authority from the people and the government's job is to preserve the freedoms that are our birthright.

Now let us imagine a situation where the government said that it was going to take away our freedom to associate with whomever we wanted. Obviously we would say that that law is unjust. We would undoubtedly disobey that man-made law because it is not in harmony with what we know to be the natural law, the law that is written on every human heart, the law that says we have the natural right to associate with whomever we choose.

• (1335)

I think the debate over the definition of marriage is analogous to the example I have just given. I argue that the government and the courts do not have the authority to redefine marriage. I argue that if we grant the state the authority to redefine marriage, which is an expression of our rights to freedom of speech, religion, conscience and association, then we are also accepting that the state has the right to redefine or eliminate those freedoms themselves.

Government Orders

Traditional marriage is an expression of our inherent rights and freedoms. Let the state redefine marriage and then we are declaring that our rights are no longer inherent, that they are not our birthright. Instead, we are saying that our rights are ours to use at the whim of the Prime Minister and the courts.

Let us note, by the way, that our inherent freedoms also allow gay people the same freedoms as straight people. Gay people are also free to associate with whomever they want, to bind themselves to whomever they choose and to speak freely about it, but that does not mean they have a right to rip open the institution of marriage and call it their own.

Let us consider a different example. Family is defined as people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. If the state can change social institutions that precede the state, then on what grounds could we say that the state cannot redefine marriage?

If two friends want to be known as family, are we now required to change the definition of family to include people who are related by friendship? The same logic which says that traditional marriage discriminates against same sex unions would also say that the traditional definition of family discriminates against other kinds of relationships, like the relationship between two friends.

I raise this because advocates of same sex marriage say that traditional marriage discriminates against same sex marriage, but when they say this, they are equivocating with the word "discrimination". They are using it in two different ways, knowing that the term discrimination can be a very emotionally charged word that can suggest prejudice, but they also know, or should know, that it is a term which can be used to help point to the differences between categories.

Let me give an example. When we put something in a category, we are discriminating against everything else that is not in that category. If we have a category of things that are blue, then we are leaving out all the yellows, but that does not mean that blue is better or worse than yellow. It just means that they are different.

That is why I do not buy the argument that a same sex union is not equal to traditional marriage. They are two separate things, but we can grant exactly the same set of rights to both opposite sex and same sex couples.

Let us remember that rights are allegedly the issue here. The only difference is that their unions would have different names, which would signify the different makeup of the relationship, but equal legal rights will only satisfy same sex couples if their real concern is to be equal before the law.

For some people, however, I suspect the issue is not equal rights at all. For some same sex marriage advocates, the issue is acceptance, which is what they think they will get if their union is called marriage. I am sorry to say that I think they are mistaken. Government simply cannot legislate acceptance any more than it can legislate that people should have common sense.

Now I want to address the Prime Minister's assurance that the bill will not affect our inherent right to freedom of religion. If we read the bill, we will note that it does not say anything about freedom of religion. Actually, it only announces that it will protect the right of

clergy to not perform a same sex wedding. What about all those other situations where we may wish to express a faith position on this issue? This is what I warned about earlier in my speech.

Once we decide that the state has the authority to change an institution that came about as a result of us exercising our basic freedoms, then we concede that the state can take away or alter those freedoms themselves. A government that does not have to respect our basic inherent rights will now proclaim that if we speak against same sex marriage then we will have our freedom of speech taken away. I am sure that many people who are watching this speech may think I am exaggerating, but I am not.

During the last election campaign, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency told church groups that opposed same sex marriage that if they spoke out they would risk losing their charitable status. Churches that spoke in favour of same sex marriage received no such threats. Bishop Henry in Calgary is being hauled before the Alberta Human Rights Commission right now because he spoke out against same sex marriage.

• (1340)

If time permitted, I would provide many other examples of how our freedoms of speech and religion are being curbed today.

In the face of these facts, the Prime Minister's assurances that freedom of religion will be protected in the future ring very hollow. Why should we believe that freedom of religion will be protected in the future when this government persecutes religious groups today?

My time is up. I argue that this government is breaking new ground, but it is breaking it on private property. The government is sowing the wind and Canada will reap the whirlwind.

Bill C-38 is an attack on our freedoms and it should be defeated. I urge colleagues to vote against it.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the debate on Bill C-38 began, I knew it would be surrounded by a lot of emotion and that perhaps there would be some diametrically opposed positions taken. This is a topic that stirs up some strong feelings, of course.

I think that the majority of the Bloc Québécois members on this side of the House have discussed this and are in favour of the bill. I am in favour of it and I will tell you why.

This is the tenth time that the matter of same sex marriage has been brought up in the House of Commons. The Minister of Justice has had the courage to bring it back one more time so that it may at last be enacted and same sex couples may be assured of the same rights as any other people who want to make a life together. It is not about sex. It is about justice. It is also about love.

I recall the speech by the leader of the Bloc Québécois who spoke a great deal about love. That is, after all, the bottom line to it all. People who want to be together, be they two men, two women or a man and a woman, are people who love each other. They want to live together, to protect each other, to share their lives.

Government Orders

That is part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Everyone has the right to be happy. If that is a way for them to be happy, let us allow them to marry and be happy, at last. We are talking of civil unions here.

The bill even protects the religious institutions by ensuring that the government does not interfere in areas over which it does not have jurisdiction. The precise reason for this being included in the bill is to satisfy some of our colleagues, the Conservatives among others. This appears, however, not to be enough for them.

Let us follow the logic as I have heard it in this House—and I stand to be corrected if I am wrong. They said marriage is reserved for having children, but in 2005 people are no longer having children. In Quebec, anyway, I know that our birth rate is very low. So does that mean that people who do not want children should not be allowed to marry? The argument could be taken that far.

Does this mean that a person whose spouse has died—like myself—and who has no desire to have any more children, cannot remarry because he or she is not going to have a family? This is illogical, but it is the logic being used when they tell us that marriage is about having a family.

In our times and in the current context, it does not make sense to limit the argument in this way. It is a diversion to try to have us see things a certain way or to justify a position against same sex marriage.

Are we holding up progress by making democratic reforms here? Just look at those who have already gotten married so far. How did they manage? They went to court and the court ruled against the province to allow these people to get married.

If we do not resolve this at the federal level once and for all, then every time a gay or lesbian couple wants to get married, they will have to go to court and spend a lot of money. This costs the government money as well. At the end of the day, these couples will win and get married anyway and the problem will still not be resolved. We must not bury our heads in the sand. This situation has to be resolved.

Everyone has equal rights. We know full well that for many years the gay community has had many challenges. Gays and lesbians have been looked upon unfavourably and have been mistreated by the public because they were not necessarily understood.

Homosexuality is a fact. A person is either homosexual or not. It is not an illness. It is simply a person's attraction to someone of the same sex. They have every right to live this way, there is nothing wrong with it.

There is no sense in trying to show that it is wrong to live this way. We live in a modern society and we are well aware of our reality.

• (1350)

Such is our reality. We must be able to deal with it. We must ensure that the rights of every such individual are respected. Not so long ago, we women were nobodies. We did not have the right to vote. So we fought the battles we needed to fight to get where we are. Today, women sit in Parliament and have the right to vote. They

earned this right, and it will never be taken away from them. This is now part of our democracy.

I want to take this one step further to try to find a solution for people who want to marry. There are horror stories about this. I have heard everything. It is not always easy for homosexuals to admit their homosexuality to their family, parents and entourage, because society still does not fully accept it.

That said, we can try to imagine the process homosexuals have to go through if they want to marry. At one point, barely 30 or 40 years ago, homosexuals adopted their partners to ensure that their entire inheritance would not be lost in the event of a death. What happened if they were not married? What consideration were they given? They were not even considered to be common-law spouses. Consequently, the family could take the entire estate; it could even contest an inheritance because the individual who had shared the partner's life was considered a non-person.

If someone puts a lot into a relationship, into a couple, if someone invests in a house and property, that property has to be protected and we must ensure that if both of them invested, both of them reap the benefits. If one of them dies, at a minimum the inheritance must go to the other or be handled in accordance with the person's wishes. It should not be possible to deprive someone of what he or she has built up over the years along with his or her spouse.

That is not all. There is not only the legal aspect, of course, but also the emotional aspect. We have to change and progress.

In my riding, there are certainly some differences of opinion. Some people are in favour and others less so. However, we do not meet with such great reluctance, I do not think, as my colleagues in the Conservative Party in their ridings. This proves that Quebec is indeed distinct and very different. People are more open-minded in Quebec. However, I have met some priests who told me that it just does not make sense. On the other hand, I have also met some priests who told me that it was time to take care of this and that they hoped I would vote in favour in this bill.

But people think differently. They do not feel any need at all to pour out their feelings in public. Some do, but others feel no need. Often it is the silent majority that supports us.

It is therefore very important to realize that we have moved forward, we have made progress, and it is time to settle this issue. When the Conservatives told us a little while ago that they did not want this to be one of the government's priorities, it occurred to me that we have dithered too long on this issue. This has been dragging on for too long and we should settle it once and for all. If we were to put our shoulders to the wheel now, instead of talking about it for weeks, months or even years, it would already be settled.

I sincerely believe that we must support this bill. Let us give all human beings on this earth, in Canada and Quebec, a chance to be equal. Let us give everyone a chance to be happy, to be in love and to live well. If that happens through marriage between two people who love each other, regardless of whether they are men or women, for me, it does not matter: it is a sign of love between two people. I hope, therefore, that we will win this vote in the next few weeks.

S. O. 31

• (1355)

[English]

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my debate, I would like to take a moment to mention that many members of the Canadian Professional Police Association, the national voice for 54,000 police officers, are in Ottawa today for a lobby day to visit with members of Parliament.

The member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle and myself were thrilled to meet this morning with some great Canadians from the Regina Police Association, Darren Wilcox and Christine Tell; the Saskatchewan Police Association, Bernie Eiswirth; and from Estevan, Saskatchewan, an old friend of mine, Jay Pierson. These individuals are examples of excellence in policing and great Canadians.

They are here discussing issues of concern to the nation's police officers. I am sure all members of the House of Commons and all Canadians are proud of our police and appreciate the difficult work they do to keep us all safe. I am wearing their pin today as a symbol of my appreciation.

The issue of marriage is of great public importance to the people of Canada and of Palliser. Over the past number of weeks we have heard a great deal of debate on this subject. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute both my own thoughts and the input I have received from the people of Palliser on the question of marriage that is before us today.

I am also proud to stand here today as a member of the Conservative Party. Our party along with the majority of Canadians believe we must find a middle ground when it comes to the question of marriage, taking into account the demands by same sex couples for fair treatment under the law.

Thus, the position held by the Conservative Party is the position of the people of Palliser and it is the position of Canadians. I am fortunate to be a member of a political party that respects the rights and traditions of Canadians. I thank my Conservative colleagues, especially the leader of the official opposition, who have put forward compelling arguments in the House of Commons for us to consider.

Before getting into the substance of the bill before us, I would also like to thank the thousands of my constituents in Palliser who have contacted me with their thoughts on this issue. The will of voters in Moose Jaw, Regina, Pense, Mossbank, Caronport, Avonlea and countless communities throughout Palliser, has certainly informed my thoughts on this matter and I am grateful for the input that they have provided. It is their views and wishes that I represent here today in the House of Commons.

Let me be clear that I stand alongside the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the Conservative Party, in stating that I support the traditional definition of marriage as that of a union between a man and a woman and that I will vote against the Liberal government when this matter comes before the House. However let me also state clearly that I strongly support the Conservative Party's position on this question because, along with our support for traditional marriage, the Conservative Party supports civil unions for same sex couples.

The question before us today is how to find a balance. How do we balance competing interests? How do we balance the need to safeguard the rights of religious institutions with the request by same sex couples for equal recognition? How do we say to gays and lesbians that they are equal as Canadians and yet reassure the majority of Canadians that we respect their belief in the sanctity of marriage. These are difficult questions but they are not without answers.

As the people of Palliser have told me again and again, we need to preserve the definition of marriage that is traditionally accepted by Canadians and balance it against the legitimate desire of same sex couples to be recognized as equals and have their unions officially recognized. To do that we need to find a compromise position, a position that rejects the heavy-handed manner in which the Liberal Party has approached the issue and a position that rejects the dogmatic anti-democratic manner of the leader of the NDP who will not even allow his own members to vote their conscience or to vote according to the will of their constituents on this issue.

• (1400)

It is incumbent upon us in Parliament to find a compromise position and balance the interests of Canadians. The courts have been ruling on this issue for a number of years. Following several provincial rulings on the definition of marriage, the Liberal government drafted—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The hon. member will have five minutes remaining.

* * *

[Translation]

REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I have the honour to table the report of the Auditor General of Canada for 2005, which includes a supplement on environmental petitions from July 1, 2004, to January 4, 2005.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SPECIAL OLYMPICS WINTER GAMES

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to congratulate Miss Joyce Gosselin for her success at the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games that were held recently in Nagano, Japan.

This winter was the 12th year that Miss Gosselin has participated in the Special Olympics. She captured the silver medal for 200 meter snowshoeing, the silver for the 400 meter relay, and received the gold medal for her personal favourite, the 100 meter snowshoe race with a time of 1:07.55. This is especially exceptional because Miss Gosselin was the oldest participant in each of her events.

S. O. 31

Much of her time in Fort Frances is spent fundraising for a variety of non-profit organizations such as the Salvation Army and the Canadian Cancer Society. She has raised thousands of dollars for many community based agencies. Miss Gosselin has received much due credit for her community centred spirit. In 2004 she was declared Fort Frances Citizen of the Year as well as Female Athlete of the Year by Special Olympics Ontario.

Please join me in congratulating Miss Joyce Gosselin for her success at the Nagano Winter Games and her efforts to better Canadian society as a whole.

* * *

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Jim Gouk (British Columbia Southern Interior, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 2005 marks 100 years since a lawyer named Paul Harris and a small group of businessmen got together and started an organization that has become known as Rotary International. From that humble beginning, Rotary has grown into a service organization with 1.2 million members.

Rotary is the world's largest privately funded source of international scholarships, exchange programs and humanitarian grants.

Rotary's international project to eradicate polio by funding the immunization of every child in the world has resulted in the reduction of the incidence of polio by 99% and approaches total eradication.

Rotarians are also very active in their local communities and any community fortunate enough to have a Rotary Club has become the beneficiary of that Rotarian commitment of service to its communities. In my riding we are fortunate enough to have 11 active Rotary Clubs that provide their services, both locally and internationally.

I am sure all hon. members will join with me in thanking Rotarians for their great contributions and congratulate them on reaching this major milestone of 100 years of service above self.

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[Translation]

DIMITRIOS HADJIS

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we learned with great sadness last Friday of the death of Judge Dimitrios Hadjis. His passing is a loss to both the Greek community of Montreal and Canadian society as a whole. They have lost one of their most eminent members.

[English]

Dimitrios Hadjis was an exemplary husband and father as well as grandfather, a loyal friend, and great mentor for many of us in the Hellenic community.

The Honourable Dimitrios Hadjis was the first judge of Greek origin in Canada. His dedication to education and social justice was his greatest passion as exemplified by his continued quest for knowledge and professional growth. He was an officer of the Greek Air Force, a member of the Bar of Athens, Greece and the Quebec Bar, and finally a judge of the Quebec Provincial Court.

He will be dearly missed by myself, by his family, his friends, his colleagues, and by all who knew him because he was a man who always had something good to say about everyone. May he rest in peace, dear friend. *Eonia e mnimi tou*. Long may he be remembered.

* * *

[Translation]

ANN-VÉRONIQUE MICHAUD AND ANNE-SOPHIE GRENON

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although winter is almost over, I am pleased to pay tribute to a very talented skater from my riding, who distinguished herself a few weeks back. She is Ann-Véronique Michaud, 13, of Amqui, who won 10 medals in just two weeks.

She won three gold and two silver in February at the Canadian long track speed skating championships in Saskatoon. Ann-Véronique ended up in first position overall and shared top place with another Quebecker, Anne-Sophie Grenon, of Chicoutimi.

My warmest congratulations go, once again, to Ann-Véronique Michaud, of Amqui, and Anne-Sophie Grenon, of Chicoutimi. They deserve all of these medals, and I encourage them to continue working hard in order to reach new heights.

* * *

● (1405)

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to mention the excellence and worth of the work in international solidarity of the NGO Mer et Monde, based in Montreal, but involving over 280 participants—young people and retirees—from all over Quebec.

The Canadian government has supported this organization for several years now, and has reason to be proud of its efforts.

I had the opportunity to meet the Mer et Monde co-ordination team and I was touched and impressed by the depth of the human and social values this organization espouses and promotes in the two countries in which it operates, Senegal and Honduras, through exchanges with the individuals with whom Mer et Monde interns work.

Mer et Monde is another organization created by Canadians to affirm their convictions and their vision of a just world based on human dignity. We must recognize that it is, above all, thanks to such organizations that our country has such an enviable international reputation.

I want to state, in the House, my support for Mer et Monde, and I hope that this organization will receive all the recognition it deserves, because its initiatives have affirmed the values that make us Canadians.

S. O. 31

[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Newton—North Delta and I are deeply saddened by the passing of His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

The world has lost a champion of freedom and peace. He delivered powerful messages of harmony and democracy to the world during his 26 year papacy. In more than 170 visits to nearly 130 countries, he was tireless in his efforts to defend freedom and human rights. He was a constant voice for justice, non-violence and reconciliation for both individuals and nations.

Pope John Paul II was a man of extraordinary faith and courage. He never wavered in his struggle for what he thought was right. He led the Catholic Church with dignity, grace and purpose. He was and continues to be an inspiration to not only the one billion members of the Catholic Church but also to all other people of faith around the world.

May God bless his memory.

* * *

ROMÉO DALLAIRE

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend warm congratulations to General Roméo Dallaire on his appointment to the other place. The general has served our country faithfully since 1964 when he joined our Canadian Forces.

He has served in many posts, but perhaps his greatest service to the world is happening right now and that is his dogged battle to force the international community to prevent genocide.

General Dallaire's views were seared into his soul during the hellish cauldron of the Rwandan genocide. As head of the UN mission he did all that he could to prevent the carnage that eventually came. He and his troops repeatedly put their lives on the line and saved thousands of Rwandans.

The general is continuing his fight to force the international community to develop an enforcement mechanism to support the judicial framework we have, and back up our responsibility to protect, with an obligation to act.

Perhaps one day when we say “never again” we will truly mean it and General Dallaire will have succeeded where no others have in preventing genocide rather than trying to pick up the pieces after the murders have occurred.

Allons-y General Dallaire. We wish him very well indeed.

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[Translation]

GÉRARD FILION

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 26, Quebec lost one of the forerunners and fathers of the Quiet Revolution. Born in Isle Verte, Gérard Filion died in Saint-Bruno at the age of 95.

He was forever breaking new ground, whether it was at the *Le Devoir* newspaper, the *Terre de chez nous*, the Union catholique des cultivateurs—now known as the Union des producteurs agricoles—or the Société générale de financement, Marine Industries, the provincial commission of inquiry on education, the Conseil de presse du Québec, the Saint-Bruno city hall or in the numerous social causes he championed.

He was a tireless defender of accessible education for all; he used his great talent to ensure justice and honesty. He was a busy and committed man, who will go down in Quebec history as a true champion of free thought. Quebec remembers and salutes his unwavering commitment to Quebec society.

The Bloc Québécois extends its deepest condolences to the family of Gérard Filion, the people of Saint-Bruno and all his friends.

* * *

● (1410)

LA CITÉ-DES-JEUNES A.M. SORMANY

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, I had the opportunity to talk to a group of students of La Cité-des-Jeunes A.M. Sormany, which is in Edmunston, New Brunswick, about my role as an MP and the role of the government. I was very surprised to see how interested these young people were in Canadian and international politics.

I am one of those who believe that our young people are the future of our country and that, if they have an opportunity to ask MPs about issues of concern to them, this will help increase their interest in the key issues of the day.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Simon Nadeau and Monica Plourde for their invitation. I hope they got as much out of my visit as I did.

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[English]

RADIO LICENCE FEES

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, federal radio licence fees are hurting volunteer organizations such as search and rescue and volunteer fire departments. These organizations are paying exorbitant fees for a radio operating licence in order to use that very tool to facilitate and coordinate rescue, safety and firefighting operations.

I have contacted the Minister of Industry several times over this injustice and still nothing is being done. The Liberal government has said that the fee is to promote the economic efficiency of the resource, not to generate revenue. But the government brings in revenue amounting to \$475,000 from this so-called efficiency promotion. That amounts to a licence fee of \$850 for all volunteer fire departments and volunteer search and rescue groups.

Volunteer fire departments such as New Ross, Woods Harbour, Oakhill, Barrington, New Germany and all others deserve a break. Saving lives is a necessity, not some privilege that we pay a premium for.

S. O. 31

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since last Saturday we have all had an opportunity to reflect on the life of a truly great and noble man, Pope John Paul II.

For Catholics and non-Catholics alike, Pope John Paul II was truly a man who touched the lives of millions of people across the world. He lived an exemplary life of service both to his faith and to humanity. He helped to bring about the end of communism. He opposed the war in Iraq. He called upon all people to accept and promote social justice in every part of the world.

In 1984 he visited our country and we celebrated his vision and commitment to bettering the lives of all people. I was pleased to be closely involved with his visit to Toronto in 2002 for World Youth Day. Like all those who participated, I will forever cherish the memory of that time.

With his passing the world has lost a spiritual leader, a humanitarian, an activist for peace and justice, and a unique human being who changed the world. He will be aptly remembered as John Paul the great for he certainly was that.

* * *

SAULT STE. MARIE

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sault Ste. Marie has a tradition of recognizing citizens who make extraordinary contributions to our public life. In January we recognized with the highest honour bestowed by our community, the Medal of Merit, the Grey Sisters, Lou Lukenda, Dr. David Walde and Cathy Shunnock.

This Friday we will hold a dinner in honour of a previous Medal of Merit winner for his continuing contribution, particularly to higher education. Gerry Nori over the years served as a member and then chair of the board of governors of Algoma University. For the last few years he also chaired the Algoma University Foundation, raising money for scholarships and bursaries. He has been recognized for his efforts with the Algoma University College Senate Award.

Gerry Nori, appointed Queen's Counsel in 1969, has served our community in many other ways, through the Sault Ste. Marie Rotary Club and as a member of the Cancer Care Advisory Committee for northeastern Ontario.

Gerry, his wife Barbara and children, will be honoured at a dinner Friday night for their extraordinary effort on behalf of our community.

* * *

CIS NATIONAL HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the University of Alberta Golden Bears on winning the CIS national hockey championship this year.

The Bears defeated the University of Saskatchewan Huskies last Monday night in Edmonton to capture their 11th national title, more than any other university team in Canadian history.

In fact, Alberta is the only team in CIS history to win a championship in each of the five decades that the University Cup has been competed for.

What is the secret of their success? One factor is that the team is and has been blessed with great leadership, namely tremendous coaches: current coach Rob Daum, former coaches Billy Moores and the legendary Clare Drake.

What really distinguishes the Bears is a commitment to common excellence, as exemplified in their selfless motto above their dressing room: "It's amazing what can be accomplished when no one cares who gets the credit".

Congratulations to all of the University of Alberta Golden Bears, the players, coaches, support staff and their great fans in Edmonton.

* * *

•(1415)

[*Translation*]

INVISIBLE WORK DAY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the first Tuesday of April in 2001, the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS) created La Journée de travail invisible. I am pleased today to draw attention to the fifth anniversary of that courageous initiative.

The purpose of the day is to draw attention to the unpaid, "invisible", work done in mostly by women the home.

The AFEAS did not settle for merely focussing on the fact that some people spend their whole lives, or a large part of it, working without pay. It also has struck a committee to ensure that this important issue is discussed in a public forum. Its efforts have contributed to a better understanding of invisible work, but there is still a lot to be done.

The Bloc Québécois congratulates the AFEAS on this initiative and encourages it to continue to campaign for financial recognition of the work done by these people, who deserve our admiration.

* * *

[*English*]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honour of Pope John Paul II.

As a Roman Catholic, I feel the loss of his Holiness on a very personal level. His love and devotion to his faith, and to the human race are an example to us all.

Above all, the legacy of Pope John Paul II will be his humanitarian contributions on behalf of people of all faiths.

He fought fearlessly for freedom in his native Poland, against communism, and saw it defeated. He stood face to face with Haiti's dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier and said "things really have to change here". He went to Sicily and told the Mafia to stop the killing.

Yet for his strength of conviction, he always sought common ground. He reconciled with the Jewish movement. He praised Gandhi as one of his teachers. He even visited his would-be assassin and offered his personal forgiveness.

As a Catholic, he led the faithful. Beyond this, he tirelessly and successfully fought against social injustice around the world on behalf of people of all faiths.

Godspeed, John Paul.

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CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, remember the Canadian Alliance? How about the other alliance in the House, some call it the “un-Canadian alliance”, between the separatist Bloc and the Conservative Party? The un-Canadian alliance threatens our national unity.

The Conservative Party is drooling to bring reluctant Canadians back to the polls, and is willing to sell out its principles to get the Bloc to help it get its wish. Propping up the leader of the Bloc is a dangerous proposition. We are all aware of that party's one-issue agenda: another sovereignty referendum.

Before the election, the Conservatives were ready to make a backroom deal. One Bloc member even said, “The Conservatives said you take care of Quebec and we'll take care of the rest of Canada”. Nothing has changed.

When the Leader of the Opposition speaks of a united alternative, now I understand. He is actually referring to his separatist friends from the Bloc.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE BUDGET

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only about a month ago the Prime Minister was asked about the Chrétien years and he gave a blanket endorsement for all that transpired. The Prime Minister said, “I am very proud of what the last government did and I am very proud that I was part of it”.

Could the Prime Minister tell us if he still stands by that statement?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remember that exchange very well. I went on to talk about the fact that we inherited a \$42 billion deficit and at the end of that period it was down. I said that we were now the only G-8 country in surplus. I pointed out the fact that we had a higher level of job creation than the other G-8 countries. I pointed out our low inflation. I pointed out that we were the envy of the industrial world because of the financial turnaround in the country.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am only looking for the Prime Minister to remember that he was part of the Chrétien government and proud of it.

Oral Questions

Last year the Prime Minister promised the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia that they would get 100% control of their offshore resources. He signed a deal with Premiers Williams and Hamm. Now he has refused to bring this deal to Parliament unless it is attached to 23 other policy measures in the budget.

Did the Prime Minister tell the premiers, when they signed the offshore deal, that there would be 23 new conditions attached to its passing?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we need an elementary course in budgeting here. The offshore accords result in a substantial transfer of money to the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. Normally where the government accounts for that is in the budget. That is precisely what is happening. This is Parliament working as it should, and all the hon. member has to do is to vote for the budget.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a stand-alone promise, a stand-alone accord and it should be a stand-alone bill. The Prime Minister could use an elementary course in honesty.

Both Premiers Williams and Hamm have called for the Atlantic accord to be a stand-alone bill. The Conservative Party supports that and we will facilitate its passage as such. I think the NDP will do exactly the same thing.

Other than once again trying to wiggle out of the commitment, why is the Prime Minister refusing to make it a simple, stand-alone bill?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the health accord is a stand-alone accord. The money that is going into the military are stand-alone expenses to increase military capacity. The money that is going to overseas development aid are stand-alone increases.

The Atlantic accord, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, all come together in one document called the stand-alone budget.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is clearly confused. He and the Liberal Party are attempting to renege on a clear commitment to the people of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Prime Minister is refusing to present enough—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I recognize there is lots of enthusiasm in the House for debate today, but we are not in debate; we are in question period. We have questions and responses and it is impossible for the Chair to hear with all the noise. I will not describe it as other than noise at the moment. The hon. member for Central Nova has the floor and we would like to hear his question, I am sure.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, it tends to confuse the Canadian people.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister's refusal to present this issue as a stand-alone bill as part of a stand-alone commitment to Atlantic Canada is all about showing Atlantic Canadians where they really stand with the Liberal Party.

Why is the Prime Minister preparing to shaft Atlantic Canadians again and why are his Liberal members sitting by, watching the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when putting together the fiscal framework for the Government of Canada, one has to make a lot of decisions and a lot of tough choices. We made those choices on issues like cities, for example, senior citizens, the environment, national defence and foreign aid.

We bring them all together in a coherent, comprehensive package. That is what we do with a budget. When we vote on a budget, we cannot cherry-pick one thing we like and one thing we do not like. We have to take the package together.

If the hon. gentleman wants a comment on reneging on agreements, ask David Orchard.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to honesty, I would rather ask Mr. Justice Gomery about the integrity of the government.

The accord was signed independent of the budget consultations. It took the Prime Minister seven months to deliver on this promise, which he has not delivered. It has now taken him six weeks to try to weasel out of it.

The Prime Minister's dithering is costing Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador millions of dollars. When will he keep his commitment?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this deal is hugely important to Newfoundland and Labrador and to Nova Scotia. The two premiers of those provinces have told me how very important it is for the opposition to support the government on this measure and get this passed at the earliest possible moment.

The measure is before the House at this very moment. It is called the budget, and it can be passed today.

* * *

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Gomery commission is revealing some surprises. The Liberal Party is apparently the victim of a plot hatched by a so-called parallel group. Public testimony alone shows the government story is not credible. It reveals that the Liberal Party is at the heart of the sponsorship scandal to such an extent that, in the past three elections, all Liberal candidates from Shawinigan to Outremont to LaSalle have benefited from tainted money.

Instead of being an accessory, will the Prime Minister demand that the Liberal Party reimburse the tainted money?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc must know that supporters of all political

parties, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party and the NDP, are honest people devoted to their party, their country and their cause. It is important not attempt to tarnish the reputation of thousands of party supporters.

If one isolated group of people has done something inappropriate, it will be punished. We will see with the Gomery commission. The consequences will be felt by—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if all the Liberal supporters were honest, why call in the RCMP? Perhaps he would explain that. It makes no sense.

The party was not infiltrated by a small group. The evidence is clear. The Liberal leaders at the highest level are involved. He was the number two in that bunch. There is only one thing to do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: The Ali Babas of this world can keep quiet. There is only one thing to do—stop being an accessory, return the tainted money, create a trust fund immediately. I will repeat this outside anytime.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc leader need not get all worked up. I have said from the start that, if the party received inappropriate money, the money will be reimbursed. I said it at the outset and I repeat it once again.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to previous testimony at the Gomery inquiry, a number of high profile Liberals have been identified as being very active in the sponsorship scandal including Carle, Pelletier, Chrétien, Gagliano, Corbeil, Morseli, Bard, Corriveau. The list is long.

My question is for the Minister of Transport, the Prime Minister's Quebec lieutenant. Are all these people part of the parallel team he is trying to blame for the sponsorship scandal?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the separatists do not want Justice Gomery to succeed. The Bloc wants to force an election using unproven testimony, without all the facts and without the Gomery report. That may be good enough for the separatists, but it is not good enough for Canada.

We appointed Justice Gomery and we want to know the truth. The Prime Minister supported Justice Gomery, and we are waiting for his report.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to shirk its responsibilities by separating the Liberals into the old guard and the new guard.

Has the Prime Minister already forgotten that he was the second in command under the old guard, that he was the finance minister, that he was the vice-chair of the Treasury Board under the old guard and that many of his current ministers were part of what he calls the old guard, that is, the same old gang?

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc wants to destroy Canada and the reputation of all federalists. It does not want to give Justice Gomery a chance to finish his work.

It is possible to understand the separatists, but it is impossible to understand why the Conservative Party supports the Bloc. It is a very dangerous game.

As my mother would say, "This is utter hogwash!"

* * *

• (1430)

LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chief victim and concerns the notion of responsibility about increasing pollution because of the Liberals, increasing poverty because of the Liberals and workers who are not entitled to EI because of the Liberals.

Before the Prime Minister asks us to cry for the poor Liberal victims, can he tell us if he admits his responsibility?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the leader of the NDP wants me to accept my responsibility for eliminating the deficit, creating jobs, cutting inflation, investing in the national child benefit, and if he wants me to accept responsibility for increasing the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, I say absolutely. I am prepared to accept responsibility for improving the lives of Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is why we are falling in all the standards internationally. It is why we are way behind on pollution and we are way behind on poverty. We are being criticized by groups all around the world because of the decisions of that administration. Do not blame a Liberal though. We would not want to have any victimization of Liberals. That is the last thing we would want to see.

Today the environmentalists criticized the Liberal Party for trying to put the solution to pollution voluntarily in the hands of the automobile industry. After 16 years of talk, who does the Prime Minister ask to take responsibility? The biggest polluters on the offchance that they think like Liberals.

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said in Windsor this morning, it is a great day for the government. It is a great day for the auto industry. It is a great day for Canadians. My colleague, the Minister of the Environment, and I signed the voluntary agreement with the auto industry this morning which will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by five times three million tonnes.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just told the leader of the Bloc that if the

Liberal Party is involved in criminal activity, it will return the money. I want the Prime Minister to commit to the House that if the Liberal Party of Canada is involved in criminal activity, it will be charged to the full extent of the law.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I said, in order to set the record straight, is that if inappropriate moneys have been received, they will be returned. I have said that from the beginning. Now, in terms of the answer, no one in this country is above the law.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be absolutely clear. The RCMP has been called in. If the Liberal Party is involved in criminal activity, it will be charged. Will the Prime Minister say it?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the statement that was made by Mr. Mitchell is that the Liberal Party has been defrauded and that the RCMP has been called in to determine if the Liberal Party was the target of fraud.

It makes no sense for the Leader of the Opposition to stand up in the House and misquote what Mr. Mitchell or anyone else said.

The fact is that the hon. member ought to know it. No one in this country is above the law. The RCMP or any other police force will make the charges as they see fit. That is the essence of our system.

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PASSPORTS

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the government is not very good at securing people's money. Apparently it cannot secure passports either.

The Auditor General said that the government is not currently meeting security expectations for the issuing of passports. There is inadequate checking of passport guarantors, no electronic links to databases including bureaus of vital statistics for crime watch lists, and critical areas of passport offices are wide open. No wonder some are calling Canada's passports a terrorist dream document.

The Auditor General previously criticized the government for its handling of passports, for failing to track more than 25,000 that were lost last year.

Given the security concerns in a post 9/11 world, when is the government going to start treating—

• (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that the opposition has asked this question. What the member did not say is that the Auditor General has also said that they have not found one single example of a passport that had been given to someone who should not have had it, not one single example.

Oral Questions

The Auditor General has brought to our attention a number of difficulties and challenges that other countries meet as well. She has acknowledged that she has worked with Passport Canada. Passport Canada has started to work on some of these issues and all other issues are being resolved right now.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear they are wrapping their arms around the Auditor General who accuses them of breaking every rule in the book.

The Auditor General today revealed that the watch lists used by the passport office are so deficient they are of limited use. Just a fraction of the people on the CPIC wanted or probation violations list are on those lists so officials cannot automatically check this or cross-reference the information. In essence it means that the Canadian passport office has been issuing passports to criminals or parolees.

Why is the security of the Canadian passport system and Canada's international reputation being so sullied by the government? Why does it refuse to—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in March, Passport Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with Correctional Service Canada which directly addresses the concern that was raised in the Auditor General's report.

While examiners have already checked watch lists, the MOU means they have instant electronic access to the names of individuals who are either incarcerated or on parole who may not be eligible for a passport. This has been the case for the past month and that has been acknowledged by the Auditor General as well.

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[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when he established the Gomery inquiry, the Prime Minister himself stated that there was political involvement in the sponsorship scandal.

Today, in an attempt to distance himself from the past, he speaks of a parallel group, which supposedly directed the sponsorships. This is my question for the Prime Minister. Does he mean that the political direction behind the sponsorships came from a parallel group within the Liberal Party itself?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that this government, this Prime Minister, called for the inquiry that is now being carried out by Justice Gomery. We did so because we want answers, and because Canadians deserve answers.

Now the member is asking questions. His own leader has said that we want to have complete answers, which is why we need to wait for Justice Gomery's findings.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Prime Minister is doing everything he can to dissociate the Liberal Party from the sponsorship scandal. To accomplish this, he is trying to tell us that the Liberal Party has

nothing to do with it, and is a victim. Yet the Liberal Party is at the very heart of the sponsorship gimmick, and we all know that.

How can the Prime Minister justify the fact that, the day after Jean Chrétien testified before the Gomery inquiry, he welcomed him to caucus where he was given a hero's ovation? If he wants to distance himself from all this, why did he find Jean Chrétien so admirable the day after his testimony?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc wants to blacken the reputation of all Quebec federalists. We all know its agenda: federalism must not succeed.

The Conservatives ought not to support the Bloc's goal of destroying Canada. The Prime Minister supports Justice Gomery, and we need to wait for his report.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the real victims of the sponsorship scandal are not the Liberals but the taxpayers.

On behalf of the taxpayers, victims of the sponsorships, I ask the Liberal government why it does not immediately set up a trust fund for the dirty money the Liberals received as part of the sponsorship scandal?

● (1440)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the party has been clear. We are going to defend the taxpayers. We are going to defend the Quebec federalists. Our government is suing agencies and individuals to recover this money. The party has been clear: if it has received inappropriate funds, it will reimburse the taxpayers.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, they must not wait for the end of the Gomery inquiry to put the dirty money in trust; it must be done now.

Since the names of some of the people involved are already known, and some of the money involved has been identified, and we know that the gangrene has spread to the highest levels of the Liberal Party, how can the government pretend to be a victim of sponsorships, when it refuses to take the dirty money out of its coffers?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat: if the party has received money from agencies or individuals who are found guilty, the party will voluntarily reimburse the taxpayers.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to today's Auditor General's report, the passport office is a mess. This observation falls on the heels of today's news that the Bush administration is set to impose increased security screening for Canadians. Because of the government's failure to take security seriously, rules are about to change prohibiting Canadians from entering the U.S. without a passport.

Has there been any attempt on the minister's part to convince the United States that a passport or some form of biometric identifier is unnecessary and extremely detrimental to trade and tourism between the two—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been working on this matter with our counterparts in the United States.

First, the hon. member needs to understand that the actual measure that is being put in place by the Department of Homeland Security is primarily in relation to citizens of the United States of America. In the 9/11 commission deep concern was expressed that Americans re-entered or entered the United States of America with a variety of identity documents. The recommendation was made that for American citizens a passport or some other secure document be—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety cannot convince her U.S. counterpart that some form of border crossing card is not necessary because she cannot convince him that the security of this country is adequate, especially given the Auditor General's report today.

If the Minister of Public Safety cannot convince the U.S. that passports or border crossing cards are not necessary, how will the government ensure that by December 2006 all Canadians will have the necessary ID to travel to and from the United States?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me go back again and explain. The measure that was passed by Congress at the end of December last year is primarily directed at the citizens of the United States of America.

If the hon. member is suggesting that somehow we should be treated better than America's own citizens, then he lives in some bizarre world. In fact we are the only country on earth that is treated like the citizens of the United States because of the special relationship we have with them.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister a very clear question related to the torture and murder of Zahra Kazemi. The Prime Minister shocked everybody by not even addressing the issue about Zahra Kazemi but instead focused on the Liberal financial scandals.

If he can stay focused long enough, will he just tell us when he found out the details about the torture and murder of Zahra Kazemi? Why did he respond so weakly by sending our ambassador back to Iran instead of pulling our ambassador out?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question from the hon. member is actually quite disturbing. The fact is that the government was asked to keep this matter as secret as possible. The possibility of a doctor's life being in danger was uppermost in the government's mind. We wanted to make sure that we could get him here to a safe haven.

Oral Questions

What is disturbing about this is that the hon. member knows about this and knows the answer to the question. I find it incredulous that the hon. member would stand in the House and ask that question.

• (1445)

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is incredible is that the Prime Minister could not answer this question yesterday and still cannot answer it today.

[Translation]

Stephen Hachemi, Zahra Kazemi's son, will have to live his entire life with the harsh reality that his mother was brutally tortured and killed by the Iranian regime. And we will have to live with the harsh reality of a vague and unacceptable response by the federal government to this tragedy.

When does this government intend to apologize to Stephen Hachemi and recall our ambassador until such time as our demands are met? When?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just this morning I telephoned the Iranian foreign affairs minister. I reminded him of the Government of Canada's formal requests over the past two years to repatriate Ms. Kazemi's body so that we can conduct an independent autopsy to confirm what Dr. Aazam revealed last week.

[English]

This morning I asked the Iranian foreign minister to repatriate the body of Madam Kazemi to Canada. I have asked him that we conduct a third party autopsy to verify—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of the Environment regarding the Kyoto accord.

The government made the following promise in the throne speech, and I quote, "It will do so by refining and implementing an equitable national plan" for the implementation of the Kyoto protocol. We are aware of the Prime Minister's commitment on this issue. We are aware of all Canadians' commitment to the Kyoto accord.

When will the minister finally announce the plan for Kyoto?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, so that Canada can do its part in reducing climate change caused by human activity, and in such a way as to long-term results that further strengthen our economy, it gives me great pleasure to announce to the House that the improved plan for climate change, this major undertaking, will be made public next Wednesday, April 13.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have already seen the beginnings of this plan and it is frankly pathetic.

Oral Questions

The voluntary agreement announced today with the automobile sector simply lets the government off the hook. It allows it to wash its hands, take no responsibility for pollution, and worse, it does not require the big polluters to take any responsibility either.

The Suzuki Foundation does not think it is a great day. The Pembina Institute does not think it is a great day. People choking on smog say that it is not a good day.

Where are the penalties for no action?

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what the hon. member had for lunch today to be able to say that reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 5.3 million tonnes is not doing anything for the environment. What does it take?

The auto industry is playing its role. The environment minister is playing his role. The Minister of Natural Resources, together with the Minister of the Environment, agree that it will work. It is good for Canada. It is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is showing leadership in North America and in the world.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a completely outrageous statement to make. Canada is one of the worst polluters. The growth of our pollution, as was confirmed today by the deputy minister of the environment, has gone up by 20%, not like his minister said when he tried to say that we were wrong with that number. It is the government's own number.

The government has not saved one-half million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions from the auto sector in the years that it has been working on it and there is no penalty for any of the polluters. Where are the penalties? Give us one penalty for anybody who breaks this agreement.

• (1450)

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the most outrageous comment I have heard in this House since I came here two years ago just came from that member who just said that at 5.3 million tonnes we are not reducing greenhouse gas emissions. What grade did he get in mathematical courses in college or in high school?

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's relationship with Iran appears muddled and pretty confused. It admits the tragedy of the Kazemi case and then withdraws its ambassador for a while, but has shown no leadership among our ally nations.

Why does the government not have any plan at all to be a leader at the UN with our allies to make human rights mean something and to create a circle of pressure on this rogue state?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is very much what the Government of Canada has been doing. For two years in a row, it has been Canada, at the very United Nations to which the member is referring, that has been sponsoring a resolution condemning the situation of human rights in Iran. For two years in a row we received the support of the international

community. We will continue to put pressure on Iran, as I did this morning when I called the minister of foreign affairs of Iran.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe they are waking up over there.

The government knows the inside story of Iran. The people are ruled by fear, torture and payoff bribes to their religious police. The government knew for months the facts of the torture of Kazemi. Its excuse made today is rather late and is not very credible.

Why did the government provide political cover for Iran and why did it hide the graphic details of the doctor's report?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the opposition that is waking up. This is the very work we have been doing and that we have been involved in. He can go back to the United Nations General Assembly last year and this year again. He should read the speech I made last month in Geneva at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

This morning I reiterated a demand I have made, and one which the Minister of National Defence made in the past, and this is something we will not give up on. We know that Iran has presented us with lies and cover-ups and this is totally unacceptable.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following is what three senior Liberals are saying about the environment minister's hidden Kyoto agenda to use CEPA to push a carbon tax. The environment committee chair said, "CO₂ is not a toxic risk to human health". The finance chair said that he had a hard time understanding taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere. The former environment minister said, "I think this one was a mistake".

Why did the environment minister not trust even his own colleagues with his Kyoto hidden agenda?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no obligation to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act in order to control greenhouse gas emissions as any other substances we need to control. This being said, it would be a good policy to remove the word toxic from the law and, indeed, it is what the industry is requesting. It is sad that, for now at least, the Conservative Party does not seem to understand that.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank him very little for that last answer.

Canadians need to know who speaks for the Liberal government on Kyoto. Is it the environment committee chair, the finance committee chair, the former environment minister, all of whom are opposed to using CEPA as a back door to push a carbon tax, or is it the present environment minister?

*Oral Questions***JUDICIAL REFORM**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even a student in economics 101 would know the difference between a regulatory regime and a carbon tax. I am sure it is only because they want to fight Kyoto at any cost that they are so blinded and using this kind of argument.

I want to quote what the Canadian Fertilizer Institute had to say. It said that it was still the right thing to do for Canadian farmers. The same has been said by other industries like the mining industry. They want the word toxic removed from CEPA and they are comfortable using CEPA as a regulatory tool for greenhouse gas emissions.

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•(1455)

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a former communications expert and right hand of one of the owners of an agency at the heart of the sponsorship scandal has confirmed that he met with members of the Chrétien cabinet or people from the Prime Minister's Office.

Can the Prime Minister assure us that none of his former or current cabinet ministers participated in meetings with agencies to divert money from the sponsorship program to the Liberal Party of Canada?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are allegations, not facts. We have to wait for the Gomery report.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is trying to hide behind the work of the Gomery inquiry in order to refuse to give answers here in this House about the use of sponsorship money by the Liberal Party of Canada.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he does not have to wait until the end of the Gomery inquiry to tell us the truth? I repeat my question. Did any minister from his current or former cabinet have meetings with agencies, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister deserves credit for having appointed Justice Gomery, for supporting Justice Gomery in his work and for fervently being focused on getting to the bottom of the issue.

The government wants to get to the truth. The separatists do not want to get to the bottom of this issue because they would rather have an election based on incendiary daily testimony than have the facts.

Federalists in Quebec and Canadians across Canada know that what is good for the separatists is not good for Canada, which is why Canadians want Justice Gomery to complete his work.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, prior to the last election, the government promised that MPs would have a substantive say in the appointment of Supreme Court judges.

The election has come and gone and from all reports so has the Liberal promise of judicial appointment reform.

Why does the Prime Minister think that curing the democratic deficit is only for leadership or election campaigns?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows the answer to his question because I will be appearing before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on Thursday morning to share the proposal with regard to judicial reform.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from all reports, it is a promise made and a promise broken, which is the only consistent pattern with the Liberal government. Whether it is Senate reform or the appointment of judges, the Prime Minister has broken his word on curing the democratic deficit.

Why does the Prime Minister think that it is only his opinion that matters when it comes to appointing Supreme Court judges for all of Canada?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite the hon. member to stop reading newspaper reports and making policy on newspaper reports. He should read what we have to say and respond to that. He should also appreciate that the Constitution vests the authority with respect to Supreme Court appointments in the executive branch of government. That is what we are responding to, among other things, along with a democratic process being put in place.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources.

The Government of Canada is delivering on one of its key Kyoto commitments, vis-à-vis emission reductions.

Could the minister provide the House with further details of the voluntary emission reduction plan he signed in Windsor this morning with the Canadian auto sector?

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House that the Sierra Club came out today with a news release in support of the voluntary agreement that the Minister of the Environment and myself signed this morning.

The reduction of 5.3 million tonnes is good for the economy and good for the environment. The agreement we signed with the auto industry is good for the economy as well as the environment.

Government Orders

●(1500)

AIR-INDIA

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the Prime Minister offered to distraught family members of the Air-India tragedy were words of condolence. Not a word was uttered about the necessity of establishing a public inquiry to unearth the truth. Even the Deputy Prime Minister could not see any benefit to holding a public inquiry.

When is the Prime Minister going to return to his election commitment of transparency and accountability in this government and promptly agree to convene a public inquiry?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House before in relation to similar questions, the next step in this process is for me to meet with the families, along with senior government officials, the head of CSIS and the head of the RCMP. Those meetings will take place in the very near future. I hope to talk to the families about the questions they believe remain unanswered and then we will move forward from there.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not an answer. The question is, why has the Prime Minister failed to convene a public inquiry to help relieve the pain and suffering of the families of the victims of the Air-India tragedy?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the next step in this process is for me to meet with the families and I certainly look forward to doing that in the near future.

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[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Having benefited considerably from the sponsorship money, the Liberals want to play innocent and are claiming to be the victims of a plot.

I again ask the Prime Minister, for the third time, if he can guarantee that no member of his previous or present cabinet took part in meetings with advertising agencies to divert sponsorship money to the Liberal Party of Canada.

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition continues to talk about allegations, not facts.

We have appointed Justice Gomery. Justice Gomery is doing his work and his work is actually proceeding very well. We support Justice Gomery. We will look forward to his report and both the government and the party will respond thoroughly to Justice Gomery's recommendations.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada-U.S. relations are vital not simply to trade but also if we are to work together on safeguarding North America. Communities along the border depend significantly on the success of our efforts.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. We have invested significantly in security initiatives here at home, but how are we working with the United States to preserve our cooperation and ensure its understanding of our partnership?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a very good and constructive question. Let me reassure the hon. member, who comes from an area that contains one of our busiest border crossings, that we are working very closely with the Department of Homeland Security in relation to ensuring that we are better able to identify high risk goods and high risk people and keep the borders open.

For example, the area from which he comes, Fort Erie and Buffalo, will be the location of our very first pre-clearance pilot project. In fact, we are investing enormous amounts of money, over \$9 billion since the tragedy of 9/11, in different areas to ensure that our border continues not only to facilitate trade but to be safe and secure. I want everyone to—

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery from the Northwest Territories of the Honourable Speaker Paul Delorey, the Honourable Premier Joseph Handley, and the following members of the Northwest Territories Cabinet: the Honourable Floyd Roland, the Honourable Charles Dent, the Honourable Brendan Bell, the Honourable Michael McLeod, the Honourable Michael Miltenberger and the Honourable David Krutko.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

●(1505)

[English]

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

The House resumed 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.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before statements by members and oral questions, we were discussing and debating this important question, the definition of marriage.

I was discussing the need to find a compromise position, a position that rejects the heavy-handed manner in which the Liberal Party has approached this issue and a position that rejects the dogmatic anti-democratic manner of the leader of the NDP, who will not even allow his own members to vote their conscience or to vote according to the will of their constituents on this issue.

It is incumbent on us in Parliament to find a compromise position and balance the interests of Canadians.

Government Orders

The courts have been ruling on this issue for a number of years. Following several provincial rulings on the definition of marriage, the Liberal government drafted legislation that would allow same sex marriages. However, instead of allowing the House of Commons to vote on the legislation, the Liberals referred it to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Fortunately for us and for Canadians, the Supreme Court indicated that it was up to Parliament to define what marriage means.

Without a doubt, marriage must be defined in the future as it has always been defined, as the union between a man and a woman, but that does not preclude the protection of equal rights for same sex couples and the recognition of same sex relationships.

In December, the Leader of the Opposition articulated a position which achieves the balance that Canadians and the people of Palliser have been looking for. The Conservative Party position, first, retains the traditional definition of marriage, second, ensures that same sex couples are afforded equal rights and benefits, and third, includes substantive provisions to protect religious organizations and religious freedoms.

This is a position that expresses the will of Canadians and is consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Conservative Party's position also balances the needs of same sex couples with the rights of religious organizations who hold a traditional view of marriage.

Not only is this moderate and thoughtful position on such an important issue consistent with the will of the majority of Canadians, it is consistent with the solution favoured by most countries that have engaged in similar debate on this issue.

Registered domestic partnerships are available in Sweden, Spain, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland and parts of Italy. Civil pacts are available in France. Other countries are considering introducing legislation to provide protections, rights and benefits to individuals in committed same sex relationships.

This is an important point. Canadians are not the only ones who are hesitant about altering the definition of marriage. This is a position held by millions around the world who agree not only on the definition of marriage but on the importance of traditional marriage to society.

There is also a consensus in the countries I mentioned earlier that we need to recognize the status and legal rights of same sex couples.

As speakers before me have noted, the question is not about rights or equality. It is about marriage and whether Canadians want to change the definition of marriage. It is about how Canadians want to recognize committed same sex relationships. That is the choice before Parliament.

The position of the Conservative Party is that we should recognize same sex committed relationships as civil unions while continuing to retain the traditional definition of marriage. As I have stated before, this is also the position of the vast majority of my constituents in Palliser.

In closing, I would urge the members here today to listen to the will of their constituents. Not only are Canadians looking for clear

thinking and a middle ground on this contentious issue, they are looking for leadership. Most of all, they want their voices to be heard.

I am proud to say that I have listened to the people in my riding of Palliser and represented their wishes on this important issue. I am proud to be a member of a political party that is willing to allow its members to vote freely on this issue so that the voices of their constituents can be heard.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the government's bill on civil marriage and the legal recognition of same sex unions.

In tabling this bill, the government is acting responsibly in order to reaffirm its commitment to three important principles: equality, freedom of religion and full and transparent democratic debate. The government recognizes that this is a matter of equality and fundamental human dignity and that partners of the same sex must not be denied the ability to enjoy and formalize one of life's most significant relationships.

[*English*]

It is very interesting that in this past week when we have been travelling across the country talking about the public health goals for this country, the number one word that came up time and time again was "belonging". It became extraordinarily important to Canadians that people would feel secure in a personal and cultural identity which made them feel that they belonged. The words "equity" and "dignity" and the idea of social inclusion are now fundamentally accepted as a determinant of health.

It is interesting as we discuss this extending of civil marriage how many speakers will speak about the rights. Many speakers, including our justice minister and our Prime Minister, and the eloquent decision of the Supreme Court have talked about this as an issue of rights. Today I want to talk about why it is the right thing to do to extend the opportunity for all couples in this country to commit to one another and to formalize their relationship.

It was 25 years ago when I first attended a civil ceremony at city hall in Toronto. The eloquent justice of the peace talked about this country as being only as strong as its individual family units, that a chain is only ever as strong as its individual links. In the bill we are talking about making each link in this country as strong as it can possibly be. It helps individuals to be stronger by being part of a unit. It helps families to be stronger because of the commitment of the parents. It helps groups in the provinces and in the country to benefit from this fundamental link in our country which is the family.

We formalize our relationships with one another as we sign contracts and other documents and pledge allegiance. It clarifies our expectations and it strengthens our relationships. For me this debate has served us well as Canadians to really examine what marriage means to each of us.

Government Orders

Earlier this year United Church Moderator Peter Short hosted the breakfast on the Hill. It was impressive when he eloquently articulated some of the issues, which were beautifully written in his article. He said:

How, then, shall we be faithful to marriage? Not by forbidding change. Change is the only medium in which faithfulness can really be faithfulness. Faithfulness is to an unchanging environment as autopilot is to flying.

So let me express my hope and my prayer for all who are married and for all who stand at the gate of the honourable estate. Love is always a risk. So is life. But we believe in marriage as a good house that shelters the presence of the greatest of gifts. It is a good house for all the people and an honourable estate from which no one should be turned away.

It was interesting as Dr. Short spoke with us, that he explained the struggle that had taken place in the United Church of Canada over 20 years ago in terms of the ordination of gay ministers. The continued progressive leadership on this difficult issue has been an amazing strength for this country to have an institution such as the United Church of Canada way out ahead on this.

It was his explanation of how two people who had committed to one another are really saying that they could do more together than each of them could do apart. As a family physician, I felt it was the same as two and two make five. It is the commitment together that actually means there is a little pressure to get through those tough times.

I was very impressed by the order of service for the same gender covenant by the United Church which was compiled and edited by Fred Graham and Louise Mangan-Harding. They were talking about developing a covenant service. They said that when a local congregation becomes aware that a couple wishes to share a life of equality, of mutual love, of care, respect, forgiveness, comfort, joy, hospitality and faithfulness and if no previous commitment is violated, the congregation may wish to develop with the couple a liturgical celebration of a committed relationship. I think we all know that a covenant is a voluntary bond by which the parties make certain pledges to one another.

● (1515)

In looking at this I was thinking of how frightened I was at my own marriage 26 years ago about what actually I was committing to. It was very impressive to read these vows again, as Moderator Short has said, that we would not want to exclude anyone from.

The statement of purpose indicates that marriage in the United Church is “a timeless and holy moment, a moment of hope and expectation. To share their lives, to encourage creativity, to inspire each other to reach beyond the limits of the ordinary—not at the expense of a partner’s individuality but inspired by the strength of the common bond....We witness the making of a covenant, as two persons publicly declare their intent to enter into an intimate relationship of enduring love, of deep fidelity and trust, expressing the highest aspirations. May those gathered here who live in intimate and loving relationships find that relationship renewed and strengthened, as we offer the prayers for these two people who are about to begin a united life together”.

It is always helpful to remember those promises and to wonder why anyone would not feel that any two people in this country who want to make this serious promise to one another should be prohibited from doing so. To think that two people would say “to be

my beloved partner, to be no other than yourself, I promise to respect you, trust you, cherish you and help you; I promise to be faithful to you and honest with you; I promise to share my life with you in abundance and in need; I promise to forgive us as we have been forgiven and try with you to love ever more dearly ourselves, our word and our God, that we may serve together”. In a society that is ever growing, in a society that needs to figure out ways of being stronger, it seems odd that we would deny a couple this opportunity.

If standing together before their friends to pledge their lives to a future together, why would a God of love deny a couple this opportunity is what Moderator Short has asked.

On the plane last week I watched the movie *Shall We Dance?* There was a wonderful scene where Susan Sarandon asked why she needed a marriage and was worried that hers was breaking down. I was truly touched by the admission that being married actually has a witness on one's life. The wonderful screenplay by Audrey Welles puts that into something which touches each of us personally.

We need to remind ourselves that this is not only for religious people. A number of the gay and lesbian people in my riding want to remind us that being gay and lesbian does not mean that one is not religious. There are gay people and lesbian people who are religious and others who are not, in the same way that there are heterosexual people who are religious and others who are not.

It is the heterosexual people and non-religious people in my riding who have been very concerned that if marriage was only left to churches they would not be allowed to get married at city hall. They would be allowed to go to city hall for a civil union and that is unacceptable to them. They are challenging us to say that option would only be there because we are afraid to give full rights of marriage to the homosexual and lesbian community.

We cannot have two tiered marriage in the same way as we fight every day against two tiered medicine. This is about equality. It is about civil rights but it mainly is about the right thing to do.

My parents were florists. I remember as a little girl the first time that one of the gay members of the staff had enough nerve to bring his same sex partner to the Christmas party. I remember thinking it was wonderful. I remember as a resident having to redefine the next of kin. I remember our fight in the House on same sex benefits. Now we must take this final step to full equality.

This is about people feeling included. It is about security. It is that this country will only be as strong as its individual units.

● (1520)

Members of my staff refer to themselves as post-charter kids. They grew up knowing only the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They know that this is the right thing to do. They know the Canada that they will inherit will be stronger as a result of our acting in the House now, not waiting for them to do it later.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take members back to the dawn of the last century which was one of tremendous social change in the western world. A young, modern generation challenged the social mores that had prevailed. No longer were many willing to seek the approval of the traditional pillars of society to validate their behaviour or thoughts. The only approval they sought was that of their own intellect. Accordingly, a cultural conflict between different belief systems emerged. Traditional belief systems were challenged, often justly so, and new ones were born.

One of the more pronounced manifestations of this cultural conflict played out in a Tennessee courtroom in the summer of 1925. A high school biology teacher, John Scopes, was charged with illegally teaching the theory of evolution in breach of that jurisdiction's then anti-evolution statute. The trial represented the conflict between traditional belief systems and the new social and intellectual or secular values that challenged them. Secular values and religious values collided in a public sphere.

A dramatized account of the trial was published 30 years later by playwrights Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. The play was entitled *Inherit the Wind*. While fictionalized and using artistic liberty, the play's account of the trial provides important social commentary on the collision of secular and religious values in a public arena and it remains relevant to this day.

The protagonist of the story, Henry Drummond, loosely based on celebrated American lawyer Clarence Darrow, challenged those who would hide behind and distort traditional religious beliefs to deny the emergence of new secular values. Yet, while defending and advancing these new values, Drummond's character did not dismiss traditional religious beliefs.

Indeed, the final scene of the play has Drummond in an empty courthouse with a copy of Darwin, representing secular values, and a copy of the Bible, representing religious values, in each hand. Holding them both in his upturned palms he stares from one value to the other, balancing them thoughtfully as if his hands were scales and they teetered with equal weight.

Balancing these values is not an easy task, but it is one we all intrinsically know that we as a society must strive to achieve. The undeniable truth of the ages is that no society can exist and prosper without such a balance.

In the House today we are confronted with a similar cultural conflict as that of the earlier age, as another traditional belief system is faced with the challenge of new social values. Religious and secular values once again collide in the public sphere as the House considers legislation that will dramatically change the institution of marriage, an institution that has remained constant across both history and cultures.

The institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman is deeply rooted in the religious belief systems of the Jewish, Sikh, Muslim and Christian faiths, faiths that represent the vast majority of Canadians. That such wide swaths of religious belief systems with their many significant disagreements are united in their common defence of marriage is a significant point for public policy consideration.

Government Orders

Yet we can recognize that the teachings of the various religions cannot and should not be our only consideration if we are to achieve a proper balance on this matter. Secular values have evolved. We now realize that it is unacceptable for the state to prevent any two people who love one another and are willing to make a lifelong commitment from entering into a union. Consequently, equality is not the issue.

Same sex couples are entitled to all the benefits and responsibilities accorded to opposite sex couples. The issue has been settled. Subsequently, this debate becomes a debate about the institution of marriage and its definition. How the state will settle this cultural conflict between the religious and secular systems is our charge as legislators.

● (1525)

Like the Henry Drummond character, we must seek a balance that is both thoughtful and gives equal weight to each belief system. We should not underplay the magnitude of the proposed change.

Consider the words of John McKellar, the openly gay executive director of Homosexuals Opposed to Pride Extremism. He said:

Marriage is not an arbitrary convention and is not meant to change with the times. We're not talking about music, fashion or art. We're talking about an institution whose 4 prohibitions—you can only marry one person at a time, only someone of the opposite sex, never someone beneath a certain age, and not a close blood relative.

He said these “have been grounded in morality and in law for millennia”.

For the federal government to give official sanction to a redefinition of this institution, relying exclusively on the secular values, would not achieve a proper balance. It would impose upon this country a solution that is completely devoid of any consideration of religious belief systems held by the vast majority of Canadians. We must accommodate and be tolerant of both.

We have been vigilant in Canada, as a country of tolerance and cultural diversity, to ensure that no one religious belief system dominates our public policy. However, it is equally imperative that we ensure that religious values are not completely discounted.

Deeming the enlightened and progressive secular values of here and now as the only ones worthy of public policy consideration, while casting off those traditional religious beliefs that preceded them as simply outmoded and irrelevant, is an unsound practice. As John McKellar has stated, “we cannot and must not ignore the lessons of history and natural law”.

Accordingly, neither secular nor religious values should have a monopoly on the formulation on public policy in Canada. The only appropriate approach is one that seeks, like Drummond's character, one that accommodates and balances the values of both. On this account, the legislation identified is deficient. Furthermore, another deficiency identified in this legislation is the lack of genuine protection for religious freedoms.

Government Orders

The lone clause included to protect these freedoms, a clause which states that religious officials will not be forced to perform marriages, has already been ruled as falling within provincial responsibility, thus beyond the federal government's power by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Moreover, the legislation does nothing to accommodate or even grandfather those civil officials throughout the country who serve as marriage commissioners, even though the justice minister himself has suggested the religious freedoms of these officials should and would be protected.

Remarking in a recent interview, the minister said:

No one should be compelled to perform a same-sex marriage contrary to their religion or belief. We believe we can reach accommodations so that those who do not want to perform that same-sex marriage, religious officials or civic officials, by reason of religion or conscience, will not be required to do so.

Presently, some provinces are forcing marriage commissioners to perform same sex marriage, even when doing so would conflict with their religious beliefs. This has led to a wave of resignations and human rights complaints from civil officials who have refused to perform ceremonies on religious grounds.

In my home province of Saskatchewan, provincial officials have taken one of the hardest stands with regard to civil officials. Marriage commissioners, regardless of deeply held religious beliefs or tenure of service, were informed that they must perform same sex marriages or be stripped of their responsibility.

Yet the justice minister, who once stated protecting the religious freedoms of such officials was desirable, now bizarrely dismisses this as a provincial matter, no longer a concern of the federal government. Bizarre, because the government has included a clause, as mentioned earlier, stating religious officials will not be forced to perform marriages, clearly a provincial matter. Indeed, instead of taking a rigged line, like my home province, Ontario sought to achieve a balance.

● (1530)

On Drummond's symbolic scales, the legislation teeters too far in one direction. Traditional religious belief systems and secular values must be recognized in an equitable and thoughtful manner. As a result, I would like to pause and reflect.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. At the outset, it is my intention to cast my precious vote in favour of Bill C-38, in favour of the charter and in favour of all my constituents having all their charter rights.

I want to begin by talking about the charter. On Sunday I was in my constituency office and I had my 12 year old daughter with me. Unrelated to this bill or this debate, I had a copy of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms there and I gave Kayla a copy of it. I said to her that every word in it was a right that she had because she was a Canadian.

I would be lying to my daughter were I to say that to her and then stand in this place and vote against Bill C-38. I am not about to do that. The fact is we have a charter. My mom would say to me, when I was facing something extremely difficult, that if it were easy, everybody would do it. One of the reasons we are so proud is

because of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and because of the laws that we have put in place. When I travel and represent this great nation, I know I am proud.

If those things were so easy to come by, other nations would not have the respect that they do for Canada. When debates on issues of rights come up, when right and wrong for many of us is so clear, we vote in favour of rights. It gives us moral leverage on the international stage. When we start comparing our economic strength and economic leverage versus military leverage and strength that we might have, we are not in the game. When we start talking about moral leverage and moral strength and a moralistic society, it is not about going to religious extremes. It is about being prepared to stand up where it matters, which is in this place, to defend rights. We do that as members by casting our precious votes in favour of those rights and then by standing up and being prepared to defend those rights.

I am not a lawyer, I do not pretend to be, but the charter is pretty straightforward. Article 15(1) states:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination...

I did not say to Kayla that this clause would only apply if her life took this direction or that direction. I meant she had every right contained in the charter.

Section 28 states:

Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

Article 24(1) states:

Anyone whose rights or freedoms, as guaranteed by this Charter, have been infringed or denied may apply to a court of competent jurisdiction to obtain such remedy as the court considers appropriate and just in the circumstances

That has taken place with regard to this issue. We have been everywhere and now it is back where it belongs, here in the people's House.

I am from Hamilton, a labour town and a steel town. I am also the labour critic. I want to put on the record that the Canadian labour movement, one of the most pioneering entities to fight for rights and justice in the country, has clearly put its strength and reputation on the line with regard to this issue and Bill C-38.

● (1535)

We have the United Steelworkers of America in Hamilton which represents 255,000 members. It has stated:

The Steelworkers is proud to represent its lesbian and gay members. As a matter of policy, the Steelworkers is committed to advancing the rights of lesbians and gays in both their workplaces and their communities. This extends to ensuring that they have the same right as their co-workers and fellow citizens to access the important social institution of civil marriage.

This letter was signed by Ken Neumann, national director.

CEP, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, has stated:

It is quite sobering to think that not that long ago being gay, lesbian or bisexual was a criminal offence and the federal government conducted campaigns to fire them from the public service...We would add our voices to those who advocate that gays and lesbians who wish to marry should be afforded access to the legal institutions of marriage. It is a matter of fairness and a commitment to end discrimination.

Government Orders

Buzz Hargrove, on behalf of the Canadian Auto Workers which represents 260,000 members, has stated:

I am proud that our union used our collective power to bring about workplace changes in winning rights for gays and lesbians. And I am proud that our country as a whole is seen as a world leader on equal rights for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender members of society. Same-sex marriage is an important step in the struggle for equality. It's time to take it.

Lastly, the Canadian Labour Congress itself, representing over 2.5 million working people from coast to coast to coast, has states:

We believe that the Government of Canada should be bound by its own equality guarantees, including the Charter of Individual Rights and Freedoms and by its stated commitments to human rights nationally and internationally. The Government also has a positive obligation to promote equality and acceptance of all people in this country including gay and lesbian citizens. Denial of access to marriage for same-sex couples contradicts these commitments and runs contrary to the promotion of equality.

Make no mistake about it. The Canadian labour movement is supportive of Bill C-38 becoming law and that all their members and our constituents receive their full rights under the Constitution.

Mr. Art Hanger: You're a dreamer.

Mr. David Christopherson: I am a dreamer. I take pride in that. I am a dreamer in terms of what the country can be. Following that member is not my kind of dream.

I want to also make reference to the fact that religious freedoms have been protected. The Supreme Court has stated:

...the guarantee of religious freedom in section 2(a) of the Charter is broad enough to protect religious officials from being compelled by the state to perform civil or religious same-sex marriages that are contrary to their religious beliefs.

Concerning the debate about whether the feds have the jurisdiction to do that, in my home province of Ontario the government has already taken action and it is law at that level. That protection is clearly there 100% in Ontario. I know other legislation is being looked at across the country as provinces adhere to their Supreme Court rulings.

Let me also talk a bit about the notion of separate but equal, a compromise, which is often put by the members of the official opposition. We have seen this before. We know what happened with our neighbours to the south when they tried separate but equal with the school systems as a compromise approach to having to deal with their federal court, which ordered that separation discontinue. It made the case that separate was not equal.

One of our own courts, the British Columbia Court of Appeal, has said:

marriage...is the only road to true equality for same-sex couples. Any other form of recognition of same-sex relationships, including the...falls short of true equality.

There is no compromise on these rights. There is no nice, safe little political ground to go to where we can appease everyone. This is one of those where we have to stand up and state where we are. The notion that there is a compromise is not upheld in law. From a practical point of view, I do not see how one can say there are two tiers of rights in the country. We either have rights or we do not. Bill C-38 will allow all Canadians to say, "I have my rights".

• (1540)

In closing, the young people of Canada will ask, what is the big deal? The big deal is that we are not passing this as easily and

quickly as we should. Fellow members of this place believe Bill C-38 deserves to be law because all our constituents deserve their rights. We not only have that opportunity; we have that responsibility. I intend to cast my precious vote in favour of my constituents and their rights.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of the NDP member who spoke eloquently about his position and intentions in the vote on Bill C-38.

I am flabbergasted in the sense that this whole issue of the charter argument keeps coming up time and time again. If we sit back and look at it and analyze what is happening with the use of the charter in this country, the Liberals, the NDP and whoever else supports this kind of initiative, it is being used by them to cover up a myriad of sins. When I say a myriad of sins, look at it: decriminalization of marijuana, decriminalization of prostitution, and same sex marriage. It is all in the same basket, and the Liberals and NDP love to use the charter to that end. It is to the detriment of this country.

It is 37 years ago that I stood before an altar before God and declared my vows in my marriage. It was before God that I was united in holy matrimony. The gravity of that moment was not lost to me because it was for one man and one woman to be joined together as it has been over the centuries, since the beginning of creation. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that we would be here today on the verge of redefining an institution that has stood as the union of one man and one woman since the beginning of time. But here we are.

I can remember this debate taking place 10 years ago in the House when a private member's initiative was brought forward to have the union of same sex individuals under that legislation. I spoke to that bill at that time. Twice the member that introduced the bill stood up on a point of order to object to my comments about the marriage of same sex people. Twice the Speaker told him to sit down because if the Speaker were to tell me to shut up, he would be doing an injustice to the House. He said that this is a place for strong opinions and we had better have strong opinions on this issue because a whole generation to come and beyond are going to be affected by what we do and what we decide in the House.

Needless to say, that bill was defeated, but here we are again today, 10 years later, with the same initiative coming forward, this time from the government of the day. The very titles of marriage are gender specific, husband and wife. The Supreme Court itself remarked in *Egan v Canada* decision that marriage is by nature heterosexual. Who has the right to define an institution that exists in all cultures in all corners of the world? It predates the existence of our own country by millennia, in fact since creation, had that been the case.

My personal feeling is that we must put this to the people in a national referendum. On this matter I am representing my own views and not necessarily the views of my party. If we are to have a free vote on this subject, we must also have free speech. I encourage all members of the House to do the same. The family is the foundation of our society and marriage is the cornerstone of that foundation. The preamble of the Canadian Bill of Rights recognizes this and expressly affirms:

Government Orders

—that the Canadian Nation is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions.

• (1545)

The proposed redefinition of marriage is the most important social issue that has ever faced our country. Capital punishment and even abortion really do not equal it.

The Prime Minister, and this goes back to my colleague from the NDP, says religious institutions will not be compelled to perform same sex marriages should this legislation pass.

Who is he kidding? When a Christian printer from Toronto is fined for refusing to do business with a gay and lesbian advocacy group, how can he say religious institutions will not be next and be compelled to perform same sex marriages?

When mayors across the country are hauled up in front of human rights commissions for refusing to issue gay pride proclamations, how can he say now religious institutions will not be compelled to perform same sex marriages?

When charitable tax status of a Catholic diocese is threatened by a Canada Revenue Agency official for a pastoral letter opposing gay marriage, how can he say religious institutions will not be compelled to perform same sex marriages?

When this government orders padres in the military to perform same sex marriages, how can he say religious institutions will not be compelled to do the same?

Any politician who says religious institutions will be protected from having to perform same sex marriages is either disingenuous or naive. Should this legislation pass, what will happen next?

Even if we were to believe the falsehood that religious institutions would not be compelled to perform same sex marriages, there are other forms of religious persecution that would occur should this legislation pass.

For example, would religious institutions be required to recognize same sex unions? If two people are married in accordance with the new legislation and then present themselves to their local church, synagogue or mosque to request membership, is that religious institution required to recognize them and accept them in its organization as married or to commune them?

If the religious institution declines to accept them as members because of its adherence to the traditional definition of marriage, how will this legislation protect the church and its members from attack under the human rights legislation?

Would a religious institution risk losing its status as a charitable institution, if it were to continue to refuse to recognize same sex marriage or if it were to teach its members, and prospective members, that such a relationship is the perversion of what marriage ought to be, according to God?

It is plainly visible what this legislation will lead to. Just ask Bishop Henry of Calgary. The charitable tax status of his diocese was threatened by a Canada Revenue Agency official after he wrote a pastoral letter stating that the Prime Minister's views on abortion

and gay marriage contravene the Catholic faith. It was the bishop's responsibility. He was compelled to deliver that message.

Passage of this legislation will only accelerate the religious persecution that is already under way in this country. Since that particular time, guess what has happened to Bishop Henry? He has been called up before the Alberta Human Rights Commission and the complaints about his opposition to homosexuality and same sex marriage are being questioned. He is under threat to freedom of speech, and so is the rest of the country.

Who has the right to say what marriage is? The courts? The politicians? I suggest neither. The Constitution says Parliament can legally define marriage, but that legal recognition reflects what marriage is, not what some social engineers want it to be. The Supreme Court of Canada backs up this assertion.

• (1550)

Allow me to quote from the Egan v. Canada decision, upon which I will conclude. It states:

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 and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and that they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship. In this sense, marriage is by nature heterosexual. It would be possible to legally define marriage to include homosexual couples, but this would not change the biological and social realities that underlie the traditional marriage.

On that note, I urge all members in the House to vote against this bill.

• (1555)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise proudly in support of Bill C-38. It addresses the issue of equality of gay and lesbian Canadians in our country by entrenching the right to civil marriage.

The courts have consistently and repeatedly found that laws which excluded same sex marriage were in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For this reason seven Canadian provinces and one Canadian territory have already legislated same sex marriages for gay and lesbian Canadians. The provinces of British Columbia, my native province; Saskatchewan; Manitoba; Ontario; Quebec; Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as the Yukon Territory have already addressed this issue through the courts. Now it is up to our country's highest political body, the House of Commons, to end discrimination in marriage against gay and lesbian Canadians.

There are those in the House who will not support this legislation. I was shocked to hear that the Leader of the Opposition will not only oppose the bill, but is also eager to repeal Bill C-38 should he form the next government. In this way he intends to perpetuate discrimination against gay and lesbian Canadians.

Government Orders

By the same token, despite the refusal to accept equality by the Leader of the Opposition, I see a small glimmer of hope for that party, as a small number of moderates such as the member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, the member for Calgary Centre-North and the member for Newmarket—Aurora have all indicated with great courage that they will stand up for equality of gay and lesbian Canadians. Those few Conservative members are showing great courage and deserve our recognition.

I also want to recognize the many members of the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois who are supporting this important step for equality.

The Leader of the Opposition will end the protection and equality afforded by this bill if he comes to power. Just how will he do that? How will he make invalid that fundamental right? What other fundamental rights will he withdraw from Canadians? He speaks of separate but equal being the tenet of his party in this case.

I would like to talk about the proposal of separate but equal that those members of the House are talking about in an effort to shield the fundamental discriminatory stand that they are taking.

We have not heard much about this doctrine since the days of the great civil rights struggles for the African-American community in the United States. The appalling segregation of the Black community in the southern United States was based on that same doctrine which somehow purports that separate treatment allows for a measure of equality.

I would like to paraphrase Martin Luther King when he talked to an end of the doctrine of separate but equal. He said that now was the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of separation to the sunlit path of justice.

I believe in uncompromised equality. It is important to remember that the courts in the United States progressively demolished this fundamentally flawed doctrine of separate but equal in the case of segregation.

Now similar court decisions in Canada have brought us to the debate that we are having today, to ratify an end to discrimination against gay and lesbian Canadians in marriage. Separate but equal is not going to address this fundamental notion of equality.

We in the New Democratic Party have taken a clear stand to end discrimination against gay and lesbian Canadians. It is a stand based on our fundamental belief that discrimination is not to be tolerated. The NDP will not perpetuate or condone discrimination. That has been the courageous history of our party.

As our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, said so eloquently earlier today, the New Democratic Party has stood up in the past for equality for Canadians of Chinese origin, first nations peoples, women, and all Canadians. We have stood up for equality in all those areas and we have also been committed throughout the history of our existence to preserving religious freedoms.

I would like to say a few words on the balance that this bill affords to religious freedoms. It is important I believe that religious freedoms be protected while we end discrimination against gay and lesbian Canadians in civil marriage legislation. We believe that this bill achieves that protection.

● (1600)

When Bill C-38 becomes law, will the status of marriage be any less? Will people in heterosexual marriages lose any of the financial, legal or social benefits of marriage? Will people who are already married feel less married? Will various religious institutions be forced to perform same sex marriages? The answer to all of these questions is unequivocally no.

I have a very clear answer for hon. members who are opposed to the bill and who fear that the bill, although it is not clear how, would somehow hurt Canadian families.

We will help Canadian families, not by opposing Bill C-38 but by fighting for the dignity and respect of all Canadians. We will help Canadian families, not by opposing Bill C-38 but by creating opportunities and good jobs. We will help Canadian families to preserve and protect our environment.

We will help Canadian families, not by opposing Bill C-38 but by improving public health care, by making life more affordable and secure for Canadian families, by ensuring access to affordable education, and by restoring integrity and accountability in government that has been sorely impacted by the ongoing revelations of gross financial misconduct by the Liberal government, as has been revealed by the Gomery commission.

We will help Canadian families most of all by taking firm and decisive action to fight the growing child poverty, the growing insecurity and the growing homelessness that is a national disgrace for all Canadians. Homelessness and child poverty is coming at a time of record corporate profits, record bank profits and record corporate tax gifts for the wealthy, as we saw in the budget.

We will help Canadian families and families the world over by strengthening Canada's independent voice for peace, for human rights and for fair trade on the world stage.

Those are the issues that matter most to Canadian families and those are the issues on which we will continue to fight in the House of Commons.

During last year's election campaign I knocked on over 6,000 doors in Burnaby and New Westminster and spoke to Canadians throughout my community. On doorsteps, in public meetings, in media interviews, any time the issue came up, I pledged to support marriage legislation that would bring equality to gay and lesbian Canadians. I will keep my commitment to my constituents and to all Canadians.

For all those reasons I will be supporting the bill and the many gay and lesbian Canadians who are striving for equality and an end to discrimination.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is ungrateful with regard to the amendment proposed by the Conservative Party on marriage is that I have been reading through a lot of what I think are seminal works on this subject.

Government Orders

I know that some of my colleagues in this place have quoted philosophers. I know one of them relied on John Stuart Mill and took his great treatise *On Liberty* to go ahead and talk about freedoms.

I want to quickly touch on this philosopher in particular because I think he is sometimes being used and abused by some of my colleagues in this place. With regard to marriage, John Stuart Mill said:

A person is bound to take all these circumstances into account, before resolving on a step which may affect such important interests of others; and if he does not allow proper weight to those interests, he is morally responsible for the wrong.

What Mill is saying is that we have to take into account the interests of children in this debate because they are third parties that are called into existence by marriage.

Mill goes on to say, “liberty is often granted where it should be withheld”, even though his treatise is called *On Liberty*.

He adds:

—but he ought not to be free to do as he likes in acting for another under the pretext that the affairs of another are his own affairs. The State, while it respects the liberty of each in what specially regards himself, is bound to maintain a vigilant control over his exercise of any power which it allows him to possess over others.

In other words, family relations have a direct influence on human happiness, more important than all others taken together.

Mill adds:

—forbid marriage unless the parties can show that they have the means of supporting a family, do not exceed the legitimate powers of the State...not objectionable as violations of liberty.

What he is basically saying is that we can prohibit a mischievous act if it is injurious to others and that such an act should be subject to reprobation and social stigma.

He talks about putting “restraints upon the inclinations when the consequence of their indulgence is a life or lives of wretchedness and depravity to the offspring, with manifold evils to those sufficiently within reach to be in any way affected by their actions”.

I wanted it to be clearly understood that John Stuart Mill would never have advocated for civil unions. He would have adamantly opposed them and I think I have given the reasons.

I will now switch from talking about philosophers to talking about history. Luckily, we have 60 centuries, 6,000 years of written human history to which we can refer when we talk about the issue of marriage. I think they shed great light.

H.W.F. Saggs, in his book *The Babylonians*, records that in the third millennium B.C. sacred marriage involved a ritual bath, love songs, magnificent ceremonial robes, gifts including outer garments of linen, and feast celebrations. It is interesting how we see some of those same things today nearly 5,000 years later.

Arnold Toynbee wrote a seminal work on history called *A Study of History*. Book five of that is entitled “Disintegration of Civilization” or what he also refers to as the “Schism in the Soul”.

He recognizes that as societies begin to disintegrate we lose our sense of self-control and our sense of discipline, and that in order to be a leader in such times people must go beyond the demands of

duty. They must fortify morale, secure safety and give strength. It requires them to step forward to inspire, to vindicate ideals and to enoble their civilizations.

To do that people need to respect traditions, religious beliefs and rituals. They need to stand for what is universal and eternal, to do what is good. They must be servants with conscience and ability to have their civilization realize its highest potentialities.

Edward Gibbon goes on in his work, the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, to cite several things that made for the decline of the Roman Empire. One of those, the first that he cites, was the immorality that destroyed the integrity of family life.

● (1605)

It is important to note that before the Punic Wars against Carthage, polygamy was unknown among Romans, Athenians and the Jews, but in the later stages of the empire, a loose marriage contract made religious and civil rights nonessential.

In three centuries of prosperity and corruption, this principle was enlarged to frequent practice and pernicious abuse. Passion, interest or caprice suggested daily motives for the dissolution of marriage, a word, a sign, a message, a letter, even the mandate of a freed man, declared the separation of a marriage. It no longer had any bearing.

The second thing that Gibbon talks about is gender confusion and the problems that had in the Roman Empire. The third is disregard for religion. I think we can see some parallels today.

I would like to go further into the details of the Roman Empire because there were some people who understood its fragility. Had these people not come about, the Roman Empire would never have been the pax Romana of 800 years that we know today. Instead, it would merely have been a flash in the pan. It would have died a quick death.

Julius Caesar in 59 BC offered rewards to Romans who had many children. He forbade childless women to ride in litters or wear jewellery. It sounds pretty stark in today's climate but, nonetheless, he understood the importance of family.

I would also like to talk about what would be my favourite Roman emperor, Octavian, after the battle of Actium known as Augustus, and the Roman Empire, had Augustus Caesar not been around in his roughly 50 year reign. The Roman Empire had 200 years of peace and, in a sense, a continuation of its golden age as a result of Augustus Caesar.

I would like to read into the record some of the things Augustus did. He interfered as little as possible in the running of the constitution. He preferred to govern through his moral authority. He inaugurated a religious, moral and social reform of the Roman people. He rebuilt derelict temples, restored neglected ceremonies and priesthoods. He revived the old state religion with all its patriotic associations and he restored the sanctity of marriage. Once again, Augustus Caesar, to elongate the Roman Empire, restored the sanctity of marriage.

Government Orders

Those guilty of initiating divorce lost three-quarters of their property to their spouse. They did not get 50%. A woman would be stripped of her wealth and ornaments, and if the man introduced a new bride into his bed, his fortune would be lawfully seized by the vengeance of the exiled wife. We should think about that in terms of divorce rates. Offenders were even disabled from the repetition of nuptials. In other words, if people had a divorce they could not get remarried.

He stimulated the birth rate. He rewarded the parents of large families. As a matter of fact, if parents had as many as five children under the Emperor Augustus, they no longer paid any tax. One can imagine what not having to pay tax would do for a Canadian family with five children.

Augustus was also a patron of poets. He encouraged those poets to devote their talents to propagating ideals. Horace, therefore, preached religious and moral reform. Ovid popularized religious revival. The system that Augustus established endured with no essential change for three centuries. That is how successful it was.

Then we come to Marcus Aurelius. His writings are still available to us, his own biography and his meditations. He was somebody who believed in being faithful to the gods and the traditions of the ancestors. In his time, outwardly Rome still stood, more resplendent and apparently more unshakeable than ever. Inwardly, however, she was in a state of mental and spiritual flux. The old order was losing its hold on men's minds and the new order was yet far off.

The old pattern of Roman civilization was showing signs of disintegration. Internal corruptions were part of the problem. He was somebody who wanted to show scrupulous respect because the state religion no longer had that and mere lip service was paid on the part of the educated to religion. To the educated man who no longer believed in the official religion, another recourse was philosophy, but here, unfortunately, there were many winds of doctrine.

• (1610)

I would go on to talk about Diocletian, for I think I would wrap up with him, but I have only a minute left.

There are things we can learn from history. I only wish that my colleagues across the way, rather than referring to modernity and some of the modern philosophies, would instead refer to 6,000 years of written human history and observe closely what ramifications changes to law have had.

If they did that, if they read Toynbee, Durant and Gibbon, if they read some of these people who were the saviours of those civilizations, they would understand that this type of action undermines civilization and disintegrates it.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate today and to voice my concern regarding this issue.

First of all, I want to say that I will not be voting for the bill.

I will not be voting for it. I believe we do a grave injustice to marriage by changing its definition. I believe firmly that we would do well to pause reflectively before we alter social structures like marriage and the family because these institutions lie at the core of

our society. They represent the accumulated wisdom and experience of the ages.

As we are all aware, traditional marriage predates European civilization. It is a physical union, yes, but it is also considered to be a spiritual union. This is why so many of our mainstream churches are against this move.

We hear many of the churches say that government is involving itself in a piece of social engineering that may prove to be very dangerous to society. Can we say with certainty what the social outcome of a redefinition of marriage will be? I am reminded of what Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic, Archbishop of Toronto, recently said:

If same sex marriage receives the approval of Parliament, then what?

He went on to say:

The law is a teacher. Does Canadian society as a whole and do parents in particular understand what the law will be teaching in this instance? It will be teaching that homosexual activity and heterosexual activity in marriage are morally equivalent. Public schools will be required to provide education in that light.

He continued:

Many parents would not agree, so is it fair to put children in the position of having to reconcile the values and beliefs of their parents with a novel state-sponsored understanding of marriage that may not be truly supported by the majority of Canadians?

These are valid concerns that the government has not yet addressed in the debate.

The churches are very concerned about their own protection. The government cannot say beyond a shadow of a doubt that churches will not at some point in the future be prosecuted by the courts for refusing to sanction and perform same sex marriages, which have, after all, received the approval of Parliament.

Has this government received assurances yet from provincial premiers that they are going to pass legislation giving protection to religious officials and organizations that decline to celebrate same sex marriages that are contrary to their faith? I do not think so.

I believe that, regardless of what the federal government says, churches will eventually be forced to perform these ceremonies or else they will lose their tax free status.

When the government offers assurances that the churches will not be put in that situation, I say they have no credibility to make that statement.

Just a few short years ago, the justice minister of the day, who is now Deputy Prime Minister, said when we were debating the same sex benefit bill that we could put our fears to rest, our fears that the same sex benefits bill would lead to same sex marriage. She said that the government would insert a clause saying that marriage is the "union of one man and one woman", to the exclusion of all others.

That did not stand up. Today, this same minister is part of an administration that threw that clause out the window and placed a bill before Parliament changing the definition of an institution that has for centuries been considered the cornerstone of society.

The same government is saying to us today, "Trust me when I say the churches will not be forced by courts to perform same sex marriages". This government is being deceptive when it states that.

Government Orders

Adding a new category, a same sex category, to the institution of marriage alters substantially the nature and definition of marriage. It changes to recognize the legal concept of marriage for the whole of society. Marriages cease to be solely the union of a man and a woman. As the president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop O'Brien, stated:

Marriage as we now know it will become but one variety of a new reality.

● (1615)

He cautioned that the word itself would ultimately lose its sanctity throughout society. He went on to say, and I agree:

We need to be able to speak of, and support, the importance of marriage as the committed...relationship of man and woman, which produces and nurtures the next generation.

This is a step in the wrong direction for our society. This government continues to hide behind the Supreme Court as if the court is forcing government to act. The Supreme Court simply said that same sex marriage was consistent with the charter. It did not say the state was compelled to legalize it.

At the height of this debate, a column in *The National Post* by Barbara Kay recently caught my eye. The headline on the column reads, "It's time to think about the children". Ms. Kay made this point:

Canadian researchers have made no effort to harvest the views of those who have the most invested in the gay marriage debate—children. Nobody has asked children if they "strongly prefer, strongly reject or don't care" whether they have: a single mom, single dad, mother and father, two moms or two dads.

She says that children are, by nature, "social conservatives" and will by nature respond that they prefer a mom and a dad. She concludes by saying:

Canada is one of only three places on Earth poised to endorse the use of children as social guinea pigs without their consent. And all because our intellectual and political elites "haven't ever really thought about it."

Ms. Kay makes a good and valid point. Researchers or government, nobody knows what the outcome of this reckless piece of social engineering will lead to. Does it not make sense to answer these vitally important questions before embarking on this course of action?

This is probably one of the reasons an Ekos poll taken on February 17 among the people of Ontario showed that 48% of Ontarians oppose same sex marriage while only 35% support it.

In conclusion, let me say that this is a terrible time for our country. Anyone who is tracking the social workings of government over the last 10 year period is painfully aware that the assault on marriage continues. One newspaper column put it this way:

Some conservatives argue that same-sex marriage is just another broken window. First make divorce easier. Smash. Then give common-law couples most of the same rights and benefits as married people. Smash. Now give men the right to marry other men and women other women. Smash. Marriage becomes just another lifestyle option, one in a long list of possible choices that a couple can make, with no special status or privilege. As the once-hallowed institution loses its lustre, even fewer people will want to be part of it.

A few years ago, back in 1995, Judge Gérard La Forest of the Supreme Court said that the ultimate reason for marriage:

—is firmly anchored in the biological and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and that they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship.

If the government is so convinced that it is travelling down a road that Canadians want it to go, then the very least it can do is allow the people of Canada to be fully represented by extending to all members a free vote. To do otherwise is a grave violation of conscience and a grave disservice to generations yet to come.

As I have indicated, Mr. Speaker, I have grave concerns as to the outcome of the social experiment that we call same sex marriage. In all conscience, therefore, I will be compelled to vote against the bill when Your Honour calls the vote.

● (1620)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been asked many times by my constituents where I stand on the issue of same sex marriage. I have always been up front about where I stand. Same sex marriage is contrary to my personal beliefs and to my religious faith. However, I understand that not everyone shares those beliefs and I recognize that I am bound by my responsibility to my constituents.

During the election campaign I promised the people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry that I would do my very best to represent their views in Ottawa. Because of that, in the month of January I sent a booklet on this issue to every household in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. The booklet contained a survey on same sex marriage. I asked the people I represent to indicate whether or not they agreed with each of five statements. I received literally thousands of replies.

Ninety-one per cent disagreed with the statement, "I support expanding the legal definition of marriage to include same sex couples".

Ninety per cent agreed with the statement, "I support preserving the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others".

Sixty-five per cent disagreed with the statement, "Same sex couples should be entitled to join in a legal union and receive benefits equivalent to those for married couples".

Ninety-one per cent agreed with the statement, "Religious institutions should not be required to perform ceremonies to unite same sex couples if it is against their faith".

Finally, 81% agreed with the statement, "Public officials should not have to perform ceremonies to unite same sex couples if it is against their religious beliefs".

I made every effort to ensure that the statements in the survey were neutral so that they would not lead the respondent toward a particular answer. Members will also notice that some of the statements support same sex marriage and some oppose it. I did my very best to ensure that the survey was fair.

Government Orders

The results are very clear. The people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, the people I represent, overwhelmingly oppose same sex marriage. A smaller but still very strong majority would oppose giving legal status to same sex unions even if they were not called marriage. A huge majority do not think anyone, whether a member of the clergy or a public official, should be required to perform ceremonies that go against their religious beliefs.

[*Translation*]

The first two statements in the survey concern the definition of marriage. Their aim was not to determine whether same sex couples should have the same rights and benefits as married couples. They sought solely to determine whether the word “marriage” or another word should be used for same sex couples. Human rights have no bearing on the meaning we give to the word “marriage”. Same sex couples can benefit from the same rights as other couples without being described as “married”.

[*English*]

In February, three members of the House wrote an open letter to all party leaders, laying out their case for same sex marriage. The letter says that their position “is not about seeking a change in marriage”, but that is exactly what they are doing when they use the word “marriage” to describe something that has never fallen within the meaning of that word.

The Oxford dictionary defines marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Webster's dictionary says the same thing. In fact, so does every single dictionary that I could find. Legislating that the word “marriage” include same sex couples is like legislating that the word “dog” include cats. It is just plain silly to tell anyone that a word means whatever we wish it to mean in spite of what everyone has always understood it to mean.

[*Translation*]

The letter also said that all gays and lesbians should have the right to decide whether to marry or not. This is like saying that all men should have the right to be mothers. These are incompatible realities. Refusing to apply the word “marriage” to the union of persons of the same sex is not a legal issue. It is moral and common sense one.

● (1625)

[*English*]

We can give same sex couples exactly the same rights and benefits as married couples without trying to legislate the definition of the word “marriage”. That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition proposes to do.

The government pretends that it is bound by decisions of provincial appeal courts to enact this legislation exactly as is and authorize same sex marriages. In fact, the government goes even further. It even pretends that once a provincial appeal court has ruled on an issue, the only way for Parliament to override that ruling would be to invoke the notwithstanding clause. The Liberals pretend to be great defenders of our court system and of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Of course, this is sheer nonsense. The truth is that the Liberal government can and does ignore and override provincial court decisions all the time.

As the Conservative treasury board critic, I am deeply involved in the issue of whistleblower protection and the rights of public servants.

Joanna Gualtieri is a very noble and courageous lady who refused to join a conspiracy of silence that allowed the Department of Foreign Affairs to waste countless millions, or even billions, of taxpayer dollars on obscenely lavish accommodations for diplomats. She recently told the government operations committee of a case in which the government enacted a law that was contrary to the court of appeal rulings in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, British Columbia and Ontario. These provincial courts all ruled that public servants should have the right to go to court to resolve employment related issues.

The federal government never appealed that decision to the Supreme Court. Instead, it simply added an obscure clause to the Public Service Modernization Act which says that public servants, unlike private sector employees, have no right to access the courts to deal with employment related matters. The government simply swept aside four provincial appeal court rulings and denied one group of Canadians access to legal rights that are enjoyed by other Canadians.

In 2000 the government passed changes to the Elections Act which flew in the face of four previous court decisions relating to third party advertising during the elections. The National Citizens Coalition, then led by our present Leader of the Opposition, challenged the government's restriction to free speech on two previous occasions and won both of them. A similar gag law was struck down in British Columbia. The Supreme Court struck down spending limits for the referendum on Quebec sovereignty.

Provincial and federal courts clearly and repeatedly stated that third party spending limits were contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, the Liberal government kept appealing, using its unlimited supply of taxpayer money to litigate the same issue time after time until it got the answer it wanted. The government pulled out all stops to force through a law that had already been ruled contrary to the charter.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Consequently, when the government claims that provincial court rulings govern such acts, no one is fooled by the tales it is telling.

The government has decided not to appeal the provincial court rulings on same sex marriage. It has decided to legislate a new definition of the word “marriage”, even though the Supreme Court has never ruled on the constitutionality of the traditional definition.

[*English*]

The Liberals pretend that anyone who opposes this bill opposes basic human rights and freedoms. This is mindless fearmongering. It is an affront to 9 out of 10 of my constituents. It is an insult and an outrage to Canadians and parliamentarians who oppose this bill. It is a testament to the monumental hypocrisy of the government.

Government Orders

I want to make one more point. In the open letter I referred to earlier, my hon. colleagues said, "This discussion is about love and commitment". They said that same sex couples, "need the support of...the state to live out faithful, loving commitments".

I disagree. Nobody needs the support of the state to live in a loving, committed relationship. The state must never get into the business of validating people's affections for one another. Love is, and must remain, between two people, their families and their God. The legal status of marriage between a man and a woman is not about validating love. It is about supporting an institution that is perceived to serve the interests of society as a whole.

If Canadians do not believe that giving legal status and benefits to same sex unions serves some higher interests to society, then they should not be compelled to grant such status and benefits. In any event, such unions cannot reasonably be called marriage.

If the government decides to press ahead with this unnecessary and divisive legislation, then it should have the courage to take responsibility for that choice instead of hiding behind the robes of judges and demonizing those who take a different view.

I will definitely be voting against this flawed bill.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all chief whips and there is an agreement, pursuant to Standing Order 45 (7), to have the recorded divisions on Bill C-278 and the motion of the member for Red Deer concerning the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, scheduled on Wednesday, April 6, to take place at 3 p.m. rather than at the end of government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in such a fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1635)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on another point of order, discussions have taken place among the parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development be the committee for the purposes of section 343 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Shipbuilding; the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright, Citizenship and Immigration.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

The House resumed 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.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to an issue which is contentious and divisive on both sides of the House, and within each party, and within Canadian society, and even within families. The issue is Bill C-38, a bill that seeks to redefine the traditional definition of marriage.

There is no doubt that there are sincere and deeply held feelings on both sides of this issue. In my own riding the overwhelming response has been in favour of the position taken by the Conservative Party of Canada. This is because my constituents, like the vast majority of Canadians, are somewhere in the middle on this issue. They believe that marriage is a basic heterosexual institution but that same sex couples also have rights to equality within society and that this equality should be recognized and protected.

We believe that the Conservative Party amendments speak to the majority of Canadians who are in the middle on this issue. Our proposal is 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, whether they be heterosexual or homosexual, civil unions or registered domestic partnerships, should be entitled to the same legal rights, privileges and benefits as marriage.

The middle ground compromise we offer recognizes the valid concerns of those on both sides of the issue. Democracy requires compromise. Where there are differences of opinion and belief, people must come together to resolve the issues that divide them. Bill C-38 offers us an opportunity to meet the democratic requirement, to find a compromise solution through debate and discussion that best satisfies all those who are involved.

I believe that the proposed amendments suggested by the Leader of the Opposition provide the best ground to find a constructive compromise that the vast majority of Canadians will feel comfortable with.

Government Orders

There are clearly three bodies of opinion on this issue within the Canadian public. At one end of the spectrum there is a group which believes that the equality rights of gays and lesbians trump all other considerations and that any restriction on the right to same sex marriage is an unjustifiable discrimination and a denial of human rights. At the other end there is another group which thinks that marriage is such a fundamental social institution not only recognized by law but sanctified by religious faith and that any compromise in terms of allowing same sex couples equal rights and benefits is unacceptable.

Many of these types of unions are subject to provincial jurisdiction under their responsibility for civil law, but there are also federal issues related to rights and benefits. Our party will move amendments to ensure that all couples in provincially recognized unions are recognized and have rights and benefits equal to those of married couples under federal law.

We would ensure that same sex couples have the same rights and benefits as married couples when it comes to matters such as pensions, tax obligations or immigration matters. We would ensure that no federal law would treat same sex couples any differently from married couples.

We believe this approach will meet the needs of those Canadians who believe that marriage is and should remain an institution which, as Justice La Forest said in the Egan decision, is by nature heterosexual, and also those who are concerned to recognize the equal status of gays and lesbians under the law.

• (1640)

The approach is not only consistent with the beliefs of the vast majority of Canadians, it is also consistent with the emerging practice in many parts of the industrialized world. Around the world there are only two countries which have legislated same sex marriage at the national level, Belgium and the Netherlands. In both countries there are some areas related to adoption or marriage of non-nationals of those countries which still make them slightly different from opposite sex marriage.

Aside from that, same sex marriage has only been allowed through provincial or state level court decisions in several Canadian provinces and the state of Massachusetts. By far, the vast majority of jurisdictions have gone the route of recognizing civil unions, domestic partnerships or reciprocal beneficiaries.

Among the countries which have brought in these laws are France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Germany, Portugal and New Zealand. I do not think any of these countries, considered among the most progressive in the world, could be considered violators of human rights.

Similarly, in the United States only one state, Massachusetts, has recognized same sex marriage through a state court decision, even though the governor and a majority in the legislature opposed it. Yet in many states, among them Vermont, California, Maine, Hawaii, New Jersey and the District of Columbia, every one of these progressive so-called blue states have brought in civil unions or similar legislative recognitions. It strikes me as a perfectly reasonable compromise for Canadian society to accept exactly the same position as these countries and states.

This Conservative compromise option may not satisfy those who believe that equality rights for same sex couples are an absolute, which cannot be compromised by accepting anything less than full marriage, or that the heterosexual status of marriage is an absolute, which cannot be compromised by recognizing equal rights for other kinds of unions. However, it will satisfy the vast majority of Canadians who are seeking common ground on this issue, who are looking for a reasonable, moderate compromise that respects the rights of same sex couples while preserving the time-honoured institution of marriage.

This compromise is the Canadian way and it is the option that only the Conservative Party is prepared to offer. We believe that if the government squarely and honestly put this option, preserving marriage while recognizing equal rights of same sex couples through civil unions or other means, it would be the option that most Canadians would choose.

The Conservative Party is not proposing a reactionary solution that would violate human rights, as the government alleges. We are proposing a moderate compromise position that would put Canada in the company of some of the most liberal and progressive countries in the western world. In fact, one could justly say that the position of the Liberal government insisting upon an absolutist approach on this issue is on the extreme, is not a reasonable approach and that the approach by most of us on this side of the House is more reflective of Canadian values.

There is no need to go to extremes in this debate. To accept a compromise that respects the will of the majority, upholds rights and preserves our deepest positions, we must accept the amendments that the Conservative Party has moved to this bill.

I have talked at great lengths with my constituents. I have surveyed and polled my constituents. The vast majority support the traditional definition of marriage. I have friends and even family members who are homosexual and even in that community they are divided on this issue.

I believe the Conservative Party is correct to offer a compromise that will satisfy the vast majority of Canadians while respecting the equality of all Canadians. I hope the Liberals and other parties will accept the Conservative Party's position so we can focus on more important issues, such as health care, education, taxation and government corruption.

• (1645)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 12 years I have had the privilege of representing the people of Kootenay—Columbia as their member of Parliament, I have never had the volume of mail, e-mail, faxes or people simply contacting me on any issue as I have had on the issue of the Prime Minister's decision to redefine marriage.

The constituents of Kootenay—Columbia hold many valuable positions on this issue. They are not unanimous. However, most agree with the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada who has stated:

As Prime Minister, I will bring forward legislation that, while providing the same rights, benefits, and obligations to all couples, will maintain the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Government Orders

Most of my constituents see the Conservative Party leader's stand as middle ground. They insist on equality for all Canadians while they understand that the word equality does not mean same. Advocates of the change of definition base their argument on equality. My wife and I or you and I, Mr. Speaker, are equal, but who in their right mind would not acknowledge that we are not the same. We have equal rights and responsibilities under Canadian law. We are subject to the same rules and regulations.

Even within Canadian law and provincial statutes, there is an explicit understanding that some laws are customized for the protection of women and children or exclusively related to men. This does not change the fact that we are equal. We are simply not the same.

We cannot ignore the obvious differences based on sex, age or special status, nor should we. Difference does not imply superiority. It simply recognizes the obvious. While we are equal, we are not the same.

Let me be as clear as I can possibly be. This debate is not about equality or human rights. This debate is about the expropriation of an eight letter English word, marriage.

It is true that all languages evolve with use. Take the word gay for example. "Don we now our gay apparel" are words still sung at Christmastime, but when first authored the words had no relationship to homosexuality.

Many of our words have evolved, but some words carry far more personal and societal historic meaning and tradition than others. Marriage is one such word. The union of a female, wife, and a male, husband, is a marriage.

Heterosexual and homosexual relationships are equal before the law, but that equality does not describe a marriage. While the unions are equal, they are not the same.

That the word marriage is even up for debate, is an absurdity in my mind.

Marriage is a loving commitment between two people. To end the description there is to rob the word of its deeper meaning, giving a totally false impression of what is at stake in this debate.

Marriage is child focussed, creating intergenerational, permanent relationships.

Marriage's deeper symbolism relating to a heterosexual relationship is captured in words like bride and groom or husband and wife.

Marriage bridges the sexual difference between male and female and naturally creates a domestic contract. Laws govern and regulate that domestic relationship, but marriage creates the contract.

If Canada embarks on this uncharted social experiment, in a generation we will arrive at a destination we cannot possibly predict today.

Speaking of rights, what about the right to use the word marriage? Why should a person have to explain they are married to a person of the opposite sex when they use a word that has been defined for centuries?

I do not understand why advocates of gay pride would want to use a word to describe the union of persons of the same sex that has always described a heterosexual relationship. Why would they not want to have their own word to describe their own special relationship?

This debate is not about equality or human rights. Those issues are settled. This debate is about individual Canadians' most closely held values.

The distinction of what makes us human is acting on beliefs and convictions, those things that motivate and shape our daily existence. The essence of Canada is our right to act on our most closely held personal beliefs. This includes the right to be religious or not to be religious.

I have noted the number of constituents who have contacted me on this issue and who have made it clear that their objection to the government's proposed redefinition of marriage is based on what they believe is best for our society's future. They have stated their position is not connected whatsoever with religion or their religious beliefs. However, the government's proposed legislation purporting to protect religious freedom is a sham, a canard, a figment of the Prime Minister's imagination.

● (1650)

Advocates of the proposed redefinition legislation claim it protects religious officials. I emphatically do not believe the Prime Minister when he says pastors, priests, rabbis, monks, imams or other religious officials will not be prosecuted or, more accurately, persecuted.

Religious organizations as charitable organizations have tax status. Does the Prime Minister really believe their tax status will not be in jeopardy if those religions do not hold to the new Liberal government group think?

Will it be okay for a religion to keep its scriptural text but be prohibited from reproducing, distributing or speaking about the text? Has the Liberal's foreign affairs minister not stated that churches should butt out of this debate? Did he not say that it was none of their business? Has a Roman Catholic diocese in Calgary not already been threatened that they could lose their tax status because they are speaking out on this issue?

What about adherents to those religious beliefs? Do persons of faith have a right to hold the same convictions as their religious leaders?

Federal Liberals are saying that Canadians can believe what they want to believe, they can hold the values that they want to hold. They are just going to be prohibited from acting on those values.

This legislation is a frontal attack on the freedom of religion of Canadians. What about persons of faith who are marriage commissioners who object to the use of the word "marriage" applying to same sex relationships? Provincial marriage commissioners have already been fired and the federal justice minister has admitted that there is nothing he can do to protect them. He is powerless.

Government Orders

The federal Liberal government and the Prime Minister tell us that this proposed legislation will be the end of the problem. In reality, it is only the end of the beginning of the problem.

The clash between homosexual rights and religious rights is being fuelled. Twelve months ago, the Prime Minister said that he would use the notwithstanding clause if the Supreme Court determined that same sex marriage would be binding on religious organizations. Then last month he said, "I defend the charter. I will not use the notwithstanding clause".

The Prime Minister's lack of clarity is alarming. Will the Prime Minister use the notwithstanding clause or will he not? It seems even he does not know.

What about charitable organizations that hold to specific values? Will they lose their status if they do not accept the new Liberal government group think?

The B.C. human rights tribunal is considering a case that involves a lesbian couple who booked a Knights of Columbus hall for their wedding reception in 2003. An agreement was struck, a deposit was made and invitations were mailed out to the couple's guests. However, when the Knights discovered the nature of the event, a clear violation of the moral tenets and beliefs of their faith, the Knights of Columbus cancelled their booking.

The Knights offered to return their deposit and give the couple an additional \$500 for their expenses as long as the couple agreed to drop the issue. Instead, the women hauled the Knights of Columbus before the B.C. human rights commission stating that they had been discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.

Which brings us back to the key question. If this legislation passes, how long will it be before churches are forced to allow gay wedding receptions and what risk does it pose to their charitable status?

As reporter, Michael Valpy, has written:

Their case points to what many legal scholars and religious leaders say is a murky area between protection of freedom of religion and protection against discrimination.

They say it could lead to religious organizations and individuals by the phalanx heading to courts and rights tribunals once the same-sex marriage legislation becomes law.

The B.C. Knights of Columbus case focuses on whether a church-related organization is the same as a church and whether freedom of religion extends beyond refusing to perform same-sex marriage to refusing to celebrate one.

The freedoms that Canadians enjoy are based in the democratic tradition that teaches us that, as individuals, it is possible to always have our say, though we do not always get our way. Democratic tradition has been built over centuries on a foundation of religious tolerance. In fact, without religious freedom there would be no democracy.

Religious freedom is ultimately the freedom to express one's most deeply held beliefs with the full protection of the law. From pure religious freedom come all the democratic freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and the right to vote.

The bill is unnecessary. It is as unnecessary as it is dangerous. It threatens not only the sanctity of marriage but our democratic rights. It must be defeated.

● (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is real pleasure to take part in this debate on marriage, which is a civil and religious issue.

Our office has received a great deal of input on this bill. I am sure that most of the people of Nanaimo—Alberni prefer to keep the traditional definition of marriage. On September 7, 2004, some 500 people congregated in front of my office to show their support of traditional marriage. There are some people among us who think their own ideas are more profound than those of the Supreme Being, millions of Canadians disagree.

[*English*]

This subject, whether we like it or not, has a very deep and profound religious significance. The judges in several provincial jurisdictions have ruled that the common law understanding of marriage discriminates against homosexual and lesbian couples who wish to marry.

The Supreme Court ruled that while Parliament had the authority to change the definition of marriage, it did not demand that Parliament do so. The Liberals have claimed that this issue is about charter rights. Indeed young Liberals at a recent convention sported badges declaring "It's the charter, stupid". Well let us talk about the charter.

In the opening statement the charter begins with a small but profound declaration: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law".

Among the thousands of letters I have received on this subject, one writer stated, "I fear God, do you?". I want to state to the House that yes, I also fear God. I am a Christian. Half a lifetime ago I became convinced of the reality of God and I committed my life to Him. I accepted Jesus, the son of God as my saviour and determined at that time to follow Him.

I am glad that the charter lists as the very first of fundamental freedoms, the freedom of religion and conscience. Therefore, I feel welcome as a Christian in my country and in this House, but I fear that the bill is a direct assault not only on marriage and on the family but on freedom of religion itself.

Government Orders

The Liberal government declares that freedom of religion is protected because religious authorities will not be compelled to perform marriages contrary to their faith. These assurances are empty. The foreign affairs minister says to the church to stay out of it. Bishop Henry of Calgary is told by officials from Revenue Canada to desist from criticizing the government or the church's charitable status might be revoked. Or, as I read just today, a news release from my own province from Quesnel, B.C., Dr. Chris Kempling, a school psychologist, has been suspended for three months by the local school board because he wrote a letter criticizing the government's same sex legislation. What about the charter rights of Bishop Henry and Dr. Chris Kempling?

Already marriage officers in British Columbia and Saskatchewan have been advised that they must surrender their licences if they will not perform same sex marriages. What about their fundamental rights? What kind of Prime Minister postures about protecting charter rights while overruling the very charter rights of his own cabinet and half of his caucus? Similarly, the leaders of the Bloc and the NDP are denying the rights of some of their own members by pressuring them to support a party line on this issue. I hope that Canadians are taking note of this issue.

I am proud to be a member of the only party and to serve with the only leader who will protect the rights of his own members, including his future cabinet on votes that involve matters of conscience. That party is the Conservative Party of Canada.

Parliament has already afforded recognition and benefits to other types of relationships. Changing the definition of marriage involves an institution that is the very foundation of society. That institution is the family. Marriage is an institution centred on the inherently procreative relationship between a man and a woman. The right of a child to have both a mother and a father will be negated.

It is almost universally considered a tragedy when a child loses a parent. There are fundamental and well established reasons why most people feel that way. Christians and others of faith already feel the attempts to intimidate and the pressure to keep their views private because the state has prescribed the correct view and what the state has now relegated as antiquated or politically incorrect views do not belong in the public sphere.

This anti-religious bias is not new in the world or unique in Canada. It is the foundation for religious oppression and persecution. When the government asked the Supreme Court to rule whether a pastor, a rabbi or a clergyman could be compelled to perform a marriage contrary to his or her religion, it clearly demonstrated that the Liberal government did not recognize section 2 which deals with fundamental rights. The question would never have been asked by a government that respects the charter. These are already clearly defined charter rights.

However, Christians have no confidence that this government or the politicized courts will act to protect their rights. We understand that the law without enforcement is of no effect.

• (1700)

The government failed the people when it failed to appeal lower court rulings. The court has failed the people by refusing to protect religious rights of Christians and other faiths to follow the teachings

of their faith and their conscience when they contradict the new orthodoxy.

This country was founded by men and women of faith, from Champlain and Cartier to Father Brébeuf. Our schools and universities, our hospitals and our colleges were almost without exception founded on principles of faith.

Our own Fathers of Confederation found inspiration in the Bible for our national motto, which adorns our coat of arms to this day, *A mari usque ad mare*, from sea to sea. This is from Psalm 72, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea". Until recently, this very nation was known as the Dominion of Canada for the same reason. It is taken from the Bible, from Psalm 72.

These words are inscribed in the arch over the Peace Tower, along with the words, "Where there is no vision, the people perish".

The same King Solomon who penned these words, renowned for his wisdom, wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".

The member for Kelowna, speaking to Bill C-38, referred to the prayer with which we open the House daily. In that prayer, we address almighty God and we ask for wisdom to make wise laws.

I assure members that I will not be supporting Bill C-38 because it is not wise legislation. It is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. It is contrary to the tradition and practice of Christians and other faiths. It will therefore lead to increasing conflict with those who adhere to religious beliefs and practices.

Over the door in the shadow cabinet room in the offices of the leader of the official opposition are inscribed the words "fear God". These words have been a part of the foundation of our nation, part of our heritage, and a reminder of the principles of faith and belief in God and service to our countrymen that made our nation the great success that it has been.

It is possible that the Prime Minister and his colleagues may find an abundance of time to contemplate the writing on the wall, for the Conservative Party is committed to defending the traditional definition of marriage and we will certainly give Canadians that opportunity in the coming election. I urge all members to hear the voice of wisdom and stand for the traditional understanding and definition of marriage.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with mixed feelings that I rise today to speak to Bill C-38, the Liberal government's attempt to change the definition of marriage in Canada.

What pleases me is that I speak today at the end of a period of dialogue with the people of Essex on the bill. Not only have we received literally thousands of e-mails, letters and faxes but I have this past week completed a series of town hall meetings in Essex, the first of their kind in recent memory by an MP in this riding.

Government Orders

Twice before, in 1999 and 2003, the definition of marriage has come before the House on motions, and twice the previous Liberal member of Parliament for Essex toed her Liberal boss's line. I am pleased to state today that this tradition has been broken and will remain so for as long as I am privileged to serve the people of Essex.

What disappoints me, after the recent Supreme Court of Canada reference, is that we are here today by a policy decision of the Liberal government. Let us recall that the Supreme Court reference neither declared heterosexual marriage unconstitutional, nor did it direct Parliament that this institution be changed. Neither did the Liberal government campaign in the recent federal election that it would change the institution of marriage. Though this is a breathtaking *volte-face* by a Liberal government that has spent 12 years perfecting the art of dodging issues for which it was given a mandate and adopting those it concealed from voters, it comes as no real surprise.

I sit on Parliament's Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. Since October last year we have seen only two pieces of legislation: Bill C-7, a housekeeping bill to move Parks Canada from the Department of Heritage to the Department of the Environment, and Bill C-15, a bill on migratory birds. That is five months and only two pieces of legislation quickly dispensed with.

Bill C-38 is intended to distract from the fact that this Liberal emperor has in fact no legislative clothes. Canadians should forget what the Liberal government is telling them. While the Prime Minister wraps himself up in misguided Liberal notions of our charter and our maple leaf, the Conservative Party of Canada is instead doing the responsible job of a government from the opposition benches.

For 12 years, the best ideas of the Liberal government have been taken from the policy books of the two legacy Conservative parties and pathetically adopted in half measures. Sadly, the only idea that truly belongs to the Liberals is changing marriage. They should listen to the Conservative Party and to Canadians instead.

Canadians would do themselves a great favour by eliminating the Liberal middleman in the next election in favour of a Conservative government that has always stood clear and accountable on maintaining traditional marriage.

Last night I sat rocking my son, Elijah, to sleep. These are not only moments to treasure, as I continue on my journey to what I hope will be old age, but they are clarifying as well. Sarah and I are his mom and dad. He comes from the uniting of our flesh in the security of the lifelong covenant of marriage. The bonding of our life for life was intended from the foundations of the earth to bring forth life. It is rooted in the laws of nature. It is a defining characteristic of marriage that cannot be altered, even if all lower courts in all jurisdictions proclaim so from the rooftops.

Elijah developed in his mother's womb. He entered the world through her labour. She birthed him into her own waiting hands as I supported and encouraged her. Mom nourishes him from her body. He will get lifelong immunities from mother's milk. He also nurses for comfort. Such needs can only be met by his mom. As a man I

cannot birth. I cannot nurse. Yet, Elijah is also part of me. While mom comforts him, I centre him. I am his anchor.

Heterosexual marriage has always benefited society, not just here in Canada, but all over the world and all across history. Scientific advances and legislative wordsmithing will never build a better family than that which has pre-existed both scientists and parliaments. The government has the power and duty to recognize this. It does not however have the power to change it.

• (1705)

Bill C-38 not only attempts to strike at society's stabilizing pillar of heterosexual marriage, it threatens to undermine the other stabilizing pillar, the rule of law. Law is stabilizing precisely because it has tradition, because it is rooted in natural law and because it is moral. Moses or Magna Carta, Hammurabi or Blackstone, the Supreme Court and its lower courts cannot look to the charter in 1982 as a break with the past. Nothing in the charter is revolutionary. Within its provisions, crafted by Canadians through their Parliament, there is no new jurisprudence. There is no kernel from which today's courts can produce tomorrow's new precedents.

In self-governments like Canada, the rule of law can only happen with popular backing or consensus. Parliaments and courts risk cleavage with the people if either or both break with history and tradition. Who will respect the law if the law does not reflect their values? Yet the Liberal government risks compounding the lower courts' mistakes by enacting a law which does not reflect the consensus of Canadians.

It is foolish to overlook 10,000 years of received wisdom known as jurisprudence. Lower courts in Canada, and nowhere else in history, threw out the common law recognition that marriage is the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of any other. The jurisprudential principle of *stare decisis*, to let decisions stand, was cast aside. The courts have ignored their own rationale and in the process have undermined their own security and credibility.

Heterosexual marriage has been self-evident, that is, not needing proof or defence, for thousands of years of human existence. It took until 1866 before Britain's highest court formally recognized marriage as it always existed. The British North America Act never felt it had to clarify gender in marriage; only it divided powers over it because of the need to protect the rights of women and children in divorce. Parliament has never since considered it needed a federal marriage act to tell the courts that marriage is between one male and one female. The courts have until recently held this interpretation as their own tradition.

It pains me to think that the fanciful notions of a few unelected judges have forced the need for presenting evidence of the nature of marriage. Since the courts have thrown their own common law tradition out the window, it falls to this Parliament to enact statute law giving strong and clear direction to the courts.

Government Orders

The Liberal government's Bill C-38 gives the wrong direction. It is up to members of Parliament with courage and backed by popular consensus to amend the bill to enshrine marriage as between one man and one woman. The courts must and will respect such direction.

A house is only as good as its foundation. The Canadian house has stood well on the firm foundations of traditional marriage and respect for the rule of law for over 130 years.

As I rocked my two year old, Elijah, finally to sleep, I wondered what I would be leaving to him. As a father I need to provide him security. As an MP I need to uphold the security and stability of the traditional definition of marriage and the rule of law.

I thank the people of Essex for expressing their firm defence of marriage and the rule of law. On their behalf, I call on colleagues of the House to amend the bill so that the courts will hear and respect that marriage in Canada will be the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of any other.

• (1710)

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to take part in the debate on Bill C-38, the Liberal bill that proposes to redefine the definition of marriage. My first responsibility is to the people of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, and at this time I will say publicly that I will vote against Bill C-38.

Since Christmas I have received tens of thousands of e-mails and letters basically telling me to vote against this bill. Over the last couple of years I have surveyed the riding to seek out the views of the constituency. Overwhelmingly the people of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette are opposed to changing the traditional definition of marriage, which they define as a union between one man and one woman. The people of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette believe that the House of Commons, not the courts, should determine the definition of marriage and that this should be done in this place in a free vote.

Over the last two years on a couple of occasions I have met and have had round table discussions with the clergy in Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette. My riding is very large and there are hundreds of churches throughout the riding. The people in the riding are very religious.

I must say that the one church that never attended these meetings was the United Church of Canada. Obviously we can understand why, because it supports same sex marriage. In my view, supported by the clergy, there was no point inviting members of the United Church to the meetings and arguing with them over why the people of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette should support same sex marriage.

The meetings were well attended. Almost 60 pastors and reverends attended the meetings. The first question was why the government was going down this path. That is a very interesting question. I think Canadians across this land are asking the same question. Why is the Liberal government using all its time and energy to deal with same sex marriage?

There are all kinds of other issues that challenge this country. Health care is number one in most people's minds. The waiting lists are very long. There is a shortage of doctors and nurses in this country, yet look at the time we spend in this House debating same sex marriage.

My response to the clergy was that the Liberal government had missed the boat. It could have dealt with this issue two or three years ago by putting in place a bill that recognized same sex unions. We would not be talking about same sex marriage today, but again the Liberals took the easy way out.

The Liberal government wanted the Supreme Court of Canada to provide the answer. It wanted the Supreme Court to rule in its favour, to make its job easy in terms of pushing forth the same sex marriage issue. It has not been easy and at this point in time Canadians are demonstrating that the Liberal government is going down the wrong path.

Another thing the pastors could not understand and they asked me about was how many countries actually have in place legal same sex marriage. I told them that at that time there were only two, the Netherlands and Belgium, and that Canada would be the third.

It is interesting that even liberal Europe and certainly the northern countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway would outlaw and not accept same sex marriage. In fact what they have is registered same sex unions. Even France's supreme court ruled that same sex marriage was illegal. It has same sex unions as well.

• (1715)

Prior to Christmas New Zealand passed a bill defining same sex unions, that marriage basically meant a union between a man and a woman. The world around us is sending a loud message that same sex marriage is in a very small minority position.

We must also say that gays and lesbians represent about 2% to 3% of the population. How is it that 2% or 3% of any population base can dictate to the rest of the population, the 97% or 99%? It is just unfair.

Another concern the pastors and clergy had was the business of protection of religion. They were very fearful. Our society has evolved in a way that we contest things. We go to court and if we lose, we appeal to the Supreme Court. We know that sooner or later this is going to end up in the Supreme Court. That is the fear. The churches, religious organizations and institutions really do not have any protection under the law, even if it is a law written in the House. The Supreme Court will rule against the laws of this House. It has in the past and it will in the future. There will be no guarantee of freedom of religion in the country if the bill passes.

Government Orders

In my riding the big concern is about agriculture. Agriculture is the backbone of my riding. People have to make a living. The BSE crisis has decimated a lot of the income. In fact, in Manitoba the cash flow from cattle was about \$500 million over the past two years, but it has probably trickled down to \$50 million. We will be lucky to realize \$50 million with the border closed, yet instead of working on opening the border, the government is working on same sex marriage. So much for the concerns of the tax paying citizens, yet there is no shortage of time for criminalizing the law-abiding gun owners of the country. The government continues to waste money by the billions.

The clergy raised a lot of questions in terms of why the government is going down this path when it does not need to. The government still has time to turn the ship around. It could still deal with this through amendments. The best course of action would be to get rid of the bill and to start from scratch. Put in place same sex union legislation and leave marriage the way it always has been in this country, which is a union between a man and a woman.

The people of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette want me to bring to this place the message that they do not support same sex marriage. I will certainly vote against Bill C-38.

• (1720)

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the bill we are debating today carries the highest importance and significance for Canadian society, for aside from all the social changes that I believe that the bill would bring in, just as important is this: if the bill passes and is upheld, the state will have crossed a new frontier for government expansion.

Governments, both provincial and federal, do not even blush as they trample upon individual or local areas of responsibility. Private property rights, families, faith and religious groups, schools, and small and large businesses have all felt the effects of a far-reaching aspect of government intrusion. Now the government is expanding its reach even further, for it is attempting to alter a fundamental reality of our society.

Whatever is decided here on the bill, marriage itself will not be changed in reality. The government may force all Canadians to recognize homosexual marriages. It may force marriage commissioners to resign if they refuse to perform something that is against their conscience. The state may even threaten religious institutions and clergy who stand up against such actions.

Through it all, marriage will endure unchanged. Marriage will exist because marriage does not come from the state and does not depend on the government.

Abraham Lincoln has been credited with this quote, which goes something like this, "How many legs would a dog have if you counted the tail as a leg?" The answer is just four. Just because a tail is called a leg does not make it a leg. If Bill C-38 passes, governments and individual Canadians will be forced to call a tail a leg, nothing more, but that is not inconsequential, for its effect on marriage, such an integral building block of our society, would have far-reaching effects.

The ramifications of altering for legal purposes the definition of marriage, such an essential institution in our society, would be far-

reaching. I believe that the onus lies on those who would change such an essential foundation to prove the necessity and prove the effects.

The Prime Minister has ignored the evidence of human history, the will of the Canadian people and recent decisions of this Parliament in bringing in the bill. His explanation has been but one line: that it is a "charter right". I would like to discuss the legal arguments surrounding that issue.

The argument that it is somehow a charter right is perhaps the most prevalent legal argument being put forth today. I remind hon. members that the Supreme Court precisely did not rule that there is a charter right to same sex marriage. By silence, the court has upheld the status quo in law in Canada today.

Dr. Somerville, a source who has been quoted a few times by members giving speeches, put it this way:

Institutions have both inherent and collateral features. Inherent features define the institution and cannot be changed without destroying the institution.

I would also remind the House that even the United Nations, certainly no bastion of conservatism and traditional values, has categorically dismissed the claim that homosexual marriage is a right. Within Canada we have heard similar experts say the very same thing.

I know this passage has also been cited here before, but I think it should be heard again. Former Supreme Court Justice Gérard La Forest, speaking on behalf of the majority in the Egan decision, said the following:

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 and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and that they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship. In this sense, marriage is by nature heterosexual.

Let us note the phrase "by nature heterosexual". He did not say "by act of Parliament heterosexual". He did not say "by judicial decision heterosexual". He said that it is a fundamental reality that marriage is an opposite sex institution, something, by the way, that the current Deputy Prime Minister argued for vociferously and quite passionately, and I might add quite articulately, when she was appealing a judicial case on behalf of the government.

This is the last ruling that the Supreme Court rendered on the constitutionality of traditional marriage. Justice La Forest is saying that marriage exists primarily for the procreation of human beings. It is the essence of marriage and its primary focus. There is nothing more important to society than the raising of children, for its very survival requires it.

• (1725)

Homosexual unions are by nature contradictory to this. There is no complementarity of the sexes. Two members of the same sex may use their God-given free will to engage in acts, to cohabit and to own property together. They may commit themselves to monogamy. They may pledge to remain in a loving relationship for life. In that sense they have many of the collateral features of marriage, but they do not have its inherent feature, as they cannot commit to the natural procreation of children. They cannot therefore be married.

Private Members' Business

I would like to add that the Prime Minister's hypocrisy on the issue of what the courts have said is really quite appalling. He tells us that we must endorse gay marriage because the courts have told us to. The Supreme Court did not tell us to. It rejected the idea that traditional marriage is against the charter. It refused to answer that reference question.

Why is the Prime Minister making this a false charter issue? Perhaps it is because he knows that this is contrary to the will of the vast majority of Canadians. Perhaps he needs an excuse to advocate this because he knows that Canadians are not behind him.

The Prime Minister then tells us not to worry because he will protect religious institutions. He has not done that with this bill. The Supreme Court did rule that only the provinces could do that.

On the one hand, he orders us to follow the rulings of the courts. On the other, he ignores the ruling of the courts. The Prime Minister's double-talk on these issues and his attempts to change the meaning of a word and an institution that are a fundamental reality of our society reminds me of a quote from *Through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll. It goes like this:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you CAN make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

There are also grave concerns regarding the practical ramifications of this bill. We have seen religious organizations in British Columbia sued over their position on same sex marriage. I speak of course about the Knights of Columbus, who refused to rent out a hall for a same sex wedding reception. It was against their core religious beliefs to do so, yet they are being persecuted.

In Calgary, Bishop Fred Henry has found himself before a human rights tribunal because he dared to articulate his church's teachings on the matter. This is without a doubt one of the worst attacks on freedom of speech and freedom of religion that we have seen in this country in generations. To think that a Catholic bishop must answer to a civil authority over matters of faith is abominable.

It is abhorrent to me, to other Catholics and to every member of every faith community. It is abhorrent because the very essence of being a religious official is to teach the faith and instruct the faithful. There is an inherent right for religious officials to do so.

These developments cause me to warn the House very seriously of what will happen if this bill is passed. The provisions in this bill to protect religious officials are meaningless. These provisions touch on the only area that the Supreme Court has ruled as outside the scope of the federal government.

It is worth repeating that the last judgment on the matter of marriage by the Supreme Court was to uphold the traditional definition of marriage. That has not changed with the recent court answers to the government's reference questions. It has not changed because the Supreme Court was silent on that reference question. In our common law tradition, in the absence of a new ruling or a new statute, the previous judgments stand.

I would like to congratulate my leader for his courageous stand in defence of marriage. Throughout this entire debate, while the pro-

same sex marriage lobby has resorted to personal attacks, charges of bigotry and twisted judicial arguments, my leader has remained consistently clear and has refrained from making any arguments based on personal attacks.

When this bill comes to a vote, I will be casting my ballot according to my conscience, on behalf of my constituents and for what I believe will be for the good of the nation. I can say with some authority that the vast majority of my constituents want me to vote in favour of traditional marriage. I will therefore be voting against this bill. I will be casting my vote freely, with no coercion from my leader or my party. I am proud to be able to do so. I hope that all members will vote freely on this matter.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to private members' business..

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT WAR VETERANS

The House resumed from December 10 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Bernard Cleary (Louis-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from the outset I want to say that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the notice of motion by this House calling on the government to acknowledge the inequality of treatment and compensation for first nations, Métis and Inuit war veterans and take action immediately to give real compensation to these veterans in a way that truly respects their service and sacrifice.

We must not forget that almost 10,000 free, brave and generous aboriginals fought under the Canadian flag during both world wars and the Korean War. During these wars, some 500 aboriginals tragically lost their lives.

Aboriginal soldiers experienced serious culture shock when they joined the army and many of them had very little contact with the British and Canadian regular forces or militia.

The perceptions and skills of a good number of aboriginals came from their history and culture. They viewed the death of an individual as a vital loss to the entire social group. Accordingly, the heavy losses they suffered were a major blow to Canada's aboriginal communities.

Yet, aboriginals were exempt from conscription during the first world war. They enlisted freely, without any obligation and in a spirit of generosity.

Private Members' Business

Aboriginal soldiers took part in every major battle, including the Dieppe landings and the Normandy invasion.

Many aboriginals distinguished themselves as scouts, the first soldiers to face the enemy. Since their enemies did not speak their languages, these soldiers were able to transmit confidential information without the enemy understanding it.

Finally, they received military decorations: 17 medals for acts of bravery during the second world war.

Beginning in the 1920s, the Last Post Fund burial privilege and pension relief were discontinued, as aboriginal veterans on reserves were treated exclusively as treaty Indians. This policy was subsequently modified.

Families of aboriginal soldiers received the same allowance as other servicemen, but in 1941-42, some allowances were placed under the control of the local Indian agent, and aboriginal soldiers and their dependants were urged to invest in Indian trust funds if they wished to receive maximum benefits.

On June 21, 2002, the Minister of Veterans Affairs offered \$20,000 per person to 1,800 aboriginal veterans or their surviving spouses. This amount is approximately 12 times lower than the aboriginals had demanded.

However, the trustee for the Indians of Canada has imposed one condition: aboriginal veterans must give up their Indian status to be entitled to veterans' benefits. So they must agree to forfeit their ancestral rights.

Initially, they had no intention of agreeing to the underhanded dealings of their trustee, but they were too old to wait much longer, so the aboriginal veterans resigned themselves to accepting Ottawa's offer.

However, the Supreme Court of Canada, in numerous rulings, claims that the collective ancestral rights of aboriginals can only be extinguished by a treaty made between Canada and the aboriginal nations concerned.

•(1735)

Thus, they cannot be extinguished unilaterally by an act, a regulation or an administrative measure of the Government of Canada.

How do we explain that the trustee for the Indians of Canada required aboriginal veterans to extinguish their ancestral rights simply in order to receive something to which they were entitled? How do we explain that the trustee for the Indians of Canada ignored section 35 of the country's Constitution and a number of Supreme Court decisions?

Aboriginal soldiers who did not agree to extinguish their ancestral rights, who continued to claim their Indian status, received \$2,320 each. They were forbidden to purchase land off reserve and were excluded from free training programs, employment or spousal benefits which were offered to non-aboriginal veterans.

There must be about 150 survivors of the 2,600 Métis who fought under Canada's flag. Métis veterans are excluded from the first nations veterans package made public in 2002. Why would the

current government not respect section 35 of the Constitution of Canada, under which the Métis are one of the three aboriginal peoples of Canada, and decide not to include them without pettiness in the regulations?

The government's strategy, which it is now using on the Indians who attended aboriginal residential schools, is to drag its feet so long that people give up or die. Such a machiavellian strategy ought to fly in the face of decent Canadians. How can we, as members of the House of Commons, accept that our own government, which is, moreover, the trustee for Canada's Indians, treat the least privileged among us so badly?

The aboriginal veterans gave their lives or might have done so in wars which were of no concern to them. They did so generously for this country, which continues to mistreat them, as was shown in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996.

However, aboriginal soldiers, like the other members of the Canadian Forces, simply want to be respected and recognized for what they have done for this country. They want to live out their days in peace, as they deserve to. They want to forget—as quickly as possible—all pettiness of their trustee and guardian. Is that not reasonable?

•(1740)

[*English*]

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent that should the debate on this private member's motion collapse, that the vote be deferred until 3 p.m. tomorrow.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a former soldier, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the historic inequality of treatment and compensation for first nations, Métis and Inuit war veterans.

When Canada committed itself to fight in the three wars of the 20th century, Canada's first inhabitants responded quickly with impressive numbers. Many thousands of natives joined the armed forces and fought in the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war, just like large numbers of their fellow citizens.

However, upon their return from the wars, they were not treated the same as their fellow veterans, and that is the issue I wish to raise today.

Let me say at the beginning that I believe all Canadian war veterans should be treated the same regardless of race, colour, creed or sex. If people are willing to put their life on the line to defend our territory and our values, they have offered our society all that a human can offer. Upon returning from a war, it is incumbent upon Canada to acknowledge its responsibility to its veterans regardless of who they are or what their racial roots are.

Private Members' Business

This acknowledgement does not have a time limit since the country continues to benefit from the veterans' effort. However, in practical terms, the veterans or their spouses are all getting older and as the time period from the second world war and Korea war continues to expand. If they are to benefit, action must be taken as soon as possible.

Those who have either lived or read the history of the middle of the last century will know that we live in quite a different time than during the war periods. Our world view has changed from a very insular society to one that is open to the world and all the differences it brings. Anyone less than 50 years old may find that it is hard to believe that Canada was not always the multicultural, multiracial society it is today.

If we go back to the beginning of the wars, aboriginal Canadians faced distinct disadvantages in joining and participating in the military. At the time, a large number lived in remote communities and spoke neither English nor French. For many, joining the Canadian military marked their first exposure to the dress terminology and unique customs of Canadian society. Before leaving the reserve, many had not been on a train, had never seen a large transport ship and had not seen large cities. It was a dramatic cultural change for them.

Serving one's country in war time is both the highest honour and the most profound duty for a young man or woman. It demonstrates their willingness to assume the most demanding and dangerous obligations of citizenship and creates a debt of gratitude owed by the society they fight to protect. For the natives, volunteering confirmed their right to choose or not to choose the military and was valued because it was freely undertaken.

However, voluntary enlistment by the first nations was controlled by the recruitment rules of each of the three services. The Royal Canadian Navy posed the greatest hurdle. Until 1943, it only accepted people of pure European descent and of the white race. The Royal Canadian Air Force had its own colour line but in 1940 decided to accept North American Indians.

Nevertheless, the stringent health and education standards were challenges that very few native men or women could get past given the terrible state of health care and education provided on reserves prior to the war. The various restrictions meant that in practical terms the only avenue open to the first nations was the Canadian army. It accepted many thousands into its ranks of whom a large number served with distinction.

Late in the second world war, the government decided to institute conscription because of the heavy army casualties in the European campaign. The conscription of native men raised a number of questions. Compelling men to serve clashed with the essentially voluntary nature of military service in most native cultures, as well as their sense of place in Canada. Even more than the voluntary military service, the conscription of an individual was linked closely to his membership in the society requiring his service. From the point of view of natives, if the defence of the state was viewed as a duty demanding compulsory measures, then those called to duty had to belong and have a stake in the society and the state.

However status natives were considered wards of the state under the Indian Act of 1927 and, as such, legal minors. They possessed none of the rights of citizenship, most especially the right to vote. However they were considered British subjects and as British subjects they were legally in the same position as other Canadian citizens. Consequently, most native men were subject to conscription with the only exception being those who were in bands that possessed treaties that specifically exempted them from conscription. In the event, a number of natives were conscripted even though they did not have the rights of citizens.

● (1745)

The challenges of the natives continued at the end of World War II and the Korean War. Aboriginal natives, upon returning home, could not access the same re-establishment benefits as their non-aboriginal comrades. This was caused by either discrimination and/or bureaucratic inefficiency.

Non-aboriginal veterans of the military were offered the choice of educational opportunities, land benefits or funds paid on the basis of a certain amount of money per day of service. These benefits were not extended to natives.

Native soldiers were told to return to reserves after the war where they were to apply for benefits through the agents rather than directly with veterans affairs, unlike other soldiers. This extra layer of bureaucracy added confusion, delays and complications for a large number of native veterans and as a result they were denied the full extent of benefits to which they were entitled.

Compared to their non-native compatriots, native veterans were at a distinct disadvantage. They had limited access to information on veterans programs and benefits. Many reserves and aboriginal communities did not have radios and high illiteracy rates in English and French meant limited access to newspapers.

As was the custom at the time, most information on veterans programs was circulated through the Canadian Legion halls. At that time natives were prohibited from entering Legion halls due to the liquor prohibitions under the Indian Act. Therefore they did not have the information that passed around the Legion halls to other veterans.

As everyone knows, governments work very slowly. However, in the case of aboriginal veterans, progress was glacial. In 2000, some 45 to 50 years after the wars, the government convened a national round table on first nations veterans issues to study the treatment of first nations veterans. The round table report of 2001 confirmed that aboriginal veterans had not received equal opportunity upon their return from the wars.

Private Members' Business

In 2002 the federal government offered living first nations veterans and their spouses up to \$20,000 each for benefits denied during the second world war and Korea. In return, these veterans had to sign away their rights to sue for further compensation. More than 1,700 took the offer but a large number did not, and this offer did not address non-status Indians, Inuit and Métis.

One area that was in particular dispute was the situation of the Métis. The former veterans affairs minister promised acknowledgement and compensation for Métis veterans. However the current Indian affairs minister announced in November 2004 that the government would limit its actions to spending \$100,000 to promote Métis contribution to Canada's war effort. The money will be used for a Métis outreach program to produce a report and a video. It will not go to the veterans.

Let me say that I firmly believe that equality of treatment of war veterans seems fundamental to this issue. I find it difficult to understand that we continue to shortchange war veterans from their due compensation. They are a diminishing number and their youngest are in their eighties. If the government were dealing with a demographic that was growing in number, then I could understand hesitancy on whether the nation could afford the cost because, in a practical sense, once a benefit is given it cannot be taken away.

However this is not the case with respect to veterans. The amount they are seeking is relatively small in today's terms. The federal government consumes approximately \$200 billion annually. The need of a few aboriginal veterans or their spouses could hardly make a dent in this vast amount of money.

Our veterans defended our democracy when we need them and, in a large part, their efforts against the great scourges of the 20th century Nazism and Communism have permitted us to enjoy the benefits of democracy and capitalism that we have today. In some ways we act like spoiled children who appreciate the benefits we have but we do not want to acknowledge the efforts of the generations that preceded us.

Today Canada is a rich country in terms of wealth and values. We are not the same country that native veterans went to war to protect. Through their commitment and outstanding performance, along with our other veterans, they helped change Canada for the good.

With the values we hold today, it is clear that native veterans were subject to unfair discrimination. If people are considered good enough to serve their country in war, then they are good enough to be compensated for their services. In the trench no one cares about race, religion or colour. Bullets are indiscriminate.

It is time for Canada to step up to our responsibilities. We must acknowledge that our actions more than 50 years ago were not just and that time is well overdue to provide the appropriate compensation to our aboriginal war veterans.

Therefore I would ask the House to acknowledge the historic inequality of treatment and compensation for first nations, Métis and Inuit war veterans in a way that truly respects their service and sacrifice. We must do the right thing.

● (1750)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade (Emerging Markets), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the second hour of debate, although I must confess, as I re-read Motion No. 193 in its entirety, I was a little surprised by the words chosen by its sponsor in formulating the motion. On the surface they would seem to reflect a lack of understanding of the history of veterans' compensation. Given a lengthy and substantial debate on this matter in the House and before the standing committee, clearly this is not the case. Nor do I doubt the sincerity of my colleague's intention. What thoughts are we left with?

With respect, the wording of the motion seems simplistic and the subject matter is far from simple. It states a generality on the subject matter that can only be reasonably dealt with by discussing the specifics. It makes assumptions that are not borne out by the facts. It confuses by implying that none of the aboriginal veterans named in the motion received real compensation. I am not sure how the hon. member can define real compensation, but the very phrase suggests something is patently not true. The end result is that serious issues are done a serious disservice.

Let us retrace the ground we have spoken and let us start with some big picture fundamentals.

After demobilization following the wars, every veteran who was honourably discharged was entitled to war service gratuity and a clothing allowance. In addition, they also received a choice of one of three benefits: first, re-establishment credit, that is money in the amount of approximately \$450; or second, educational assistance; or third, assistance under the Veterans Land Act. All too often there has been a misconception that non-aboriginal veterans received education assistance, land and money upon their return from the wars and aboriginal veterans did not. This is simply not the case. All veterans could choose only one benefit to the exclusion of others and nobody was given land.

My hon. colleague wishes acknowledgement of what the motion refers to as historic inequality of treatment and compensation for first nations, Métis, and Inuit war veterans. The government has long since acknowledged and spoken about the fact that the administrative process for first nation veterans who returned to reserves was different. In these instances, a veteran could not deal directly with Veterans Affairs, but instead dealt with an Indian agent. This meant that veterans on reserves encountered an extra layer of bureaucracy which may have resulted in some not receiving full benefits.

Private Members' Business

Following the national round table process that was established jointly with the first nations veterans, the federal government offered payment of \$20,000 to each living first nations veteran who returned to a reserve following the war, or to their surviving spouse. The amount of the payment, that is \$20,000, is consistent and is reasonable and fair when we compare it to past offers made to the merchant navy veterans, Hong Kong prisoners of war, who suffered the most deplorable conditions in POW camps, and more recent to veterans who participated in chemical warfare experiments.

It is a little perplexing that the motion implies a similar inequality of treatment of Métis and Inuit war veterans. I must point out that the situation was very different for Métis and non-status Indian veterans, so we should not lump all aboriginal veterans together.

It is at this stage of the discussion where I must reaffirm the mandate of the Department of Veterans Affairs. As a matter of law and morality, the department does not distinguish between client groups on the basis of racial and ethnic background. It provides benefits to veterans strictly on the basis of their wartime or eligible service and their individual needs. That is why it has files on individual veterans, who are not then sub-indexed by gender, race, religion or any other sort of categorization. Each file contains information pertaining to an individual's service and subsequent benefit eligibility.

Why do I raise this at this point in the discussion? A motion that suggests a discriminatory treatment of, say, Métis veterans, suggests that we would even have a list of files of groups under a general heading "Métis". Why would we? To repeat, from the government's point of view, it is about service, not race or lineage.

● (1755)

Nonetheless, the government takes serious any sort of concern about inadequate treatment. That is why separate processes were undertaken with the National Métis Veterans Association and the National Aboriginal Veterans Association to deal with issues concerning Métis and non-status Indian veterans respectively.

Veterans affairs shared its file review findings with the National Métis Veterans Association, and has continued to encourage them to share their names of other veterans and will examine them on a case by case basis. For now, based on reviews, we can say unequivocally that Métis veterans now receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

We continue and encourage those who feel otherwise to come forward and provide us with the names of veterans who they feel did not get the benefits that they were due.

In similar fashion, I believe the minister has talked to many hon. members about these issues and has made a personal commitment to have the file thoroughly reviewed so they can be reassured that our veterans have been fairly and appropriately treated.

What is the bottom line here? Surely it is to be fair, equitable and fiscally responsible in the treatment of all veterans, including of course first nations, Métis and non-status Indian veterans. The steps the government has taken to date have met that standard, perhaps not in a perfect way. Redressing any wrongs that might have taken place in the 60 years with a one size fits all solution is difficult, for all the reasons that we have already covered.

Our government recognizes the service and sacrifice aboriginal veterans made during the wars. It has already contributed approximately \$500,000 toward the construction and unveiling of the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument here in Ottawa as a tribute to the Canadian aboriginal peoples military service. Contributions of \$1.15 million were made to establish the aboriginal veterans scholarship trust fund.

Veterans Affairs has developed its aboriginal outreach strategy aimed at easing and improving communications, and ensuring that aboriginal veterans and their spouses are benefiting from the full range of department programs and services. As part of the strategy a senior officer within the department will be at the first point of contact for the aboriginal veterans spouses and organizations.

I believe the sum of the total of these efforts makes the underlying assumptions made by Motion No. 193 unsupportable. We have offered a package for the first nation veterans and many have accepted the offer. The argument may well get down to how much is enough. With respect to this it is an area where we may have to agree to disagree. I hope that everyone would agree, however, that for consistency and fairness, the amounts should be in line with similar payments offered to other groups that I previously mentioned. We are trying to rectify any double standards, not add to them. What could be fairer than that?

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the attempt of the member of the government to try to make a defence for what really should not even be defended. There should just be an acceptance of this request.

The member said that there was no way there was a designation from the government in terms of Métis or any other designation. Yet in November of 2004 the then minister of Indian Affairs said, after a significant lobbying effort by the National Métis Veterans Association, that the government would try to do something for the Métis whose benefits had not been recognized.

He is saying there is no delineation between any particular group. Veterans Affairs has said that it has identified 174 Métis who qualify or could qualify for veterans benefits. Therefore, it has in fact designated a certain group, in this case Métis. The National Métis Veterans Association says that there are some 2,000 veterans. The member should not come into the House and say that there is no discrimination or designation, that nobody is seen as Métis or anything else, when in fact there has been identification. The identification has fallen short.

Private Members' Business

Historically, in the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war, first nations, Métis and Inuit stepped up. They joined the effort in these great and terrible wars. They fought shoulder to shoulder with other Canadian soldiers. There was equality on the battlefield when it came to putting one's self in harm's way, when it came to fighting for freedom. However, when they got home the equality ended.

Other veterans were able to approach Veterans Affairs for benefits that included a variety of educational opportunities and land benefits in some cases. In some cases assessments were made in terms of the number of days, weeks, months and years of service and financial benefits were paid out. However, first nations veterans were told to go home and apply through their Indian affairs agent. That is not equality. That is not treating everybody the same, those who had come home from putting life and limb on the line.

In fact first nations, Métis and others were at a disadvantage in that process. Many of them did not have the educational opportunities even to understand the forms and the layers of bureaucracy that they had to work through. Then they were told, even recently, that they should have known to apply through the Legions where all that information was available. We forget there was a period of time when they were not allowed to go into the Legions. Rules prohibited them from doing that. They were at that time at a distinct disadvantage.

Some have even raised the question of why they are coming forward now, that it was so long ago and if it was that important to them, they should have done something a long time ago. The fact is they were either directly prohibited from making those claims in certain places where they wanted to go or it was a de facto denial because they simply did not have the capability or the means to work through the process.

People who are educated in bureaucracies have difficulties working through the bureaucratic levels. Imagine, that, in many cases, young veterans returned from war, having defended our nation and having fought with others. However, when they arrived home, they were faced with the bureaucratic morass to go through. It would be discouraging, in the sense they had been shoulder to shoulder, watching their comrades fall on either side of them, in some cases, treated as equals but when they came home they did not find that same equality provision.

For these reasons, we are asking the government, through this motion, and I commend my colleague for bringing it forward, to acknowledge that inequality.

The one thing that disturbs me a little is I am hearing the same thing about this request as I have heard about those requesting compensation for hepatitis C, and that is, "Bring it to us and we will consider it". Veterans, like the rest of us, are getting older every day. As a matter of fact, more and more have reached the end of their life and pass on. That is one less person who would be eligible for benefits.

● (1800)

I would hate to think, to presume, or even have in anybody's mind that it could possibly be one of the reasons that benefits are being delayed or denied. In fact, the more we delay and the more we deny,

the less people we will have applying simply because the reality of the cycle of life overtakes us.

I commend my colleague for bringing this forward. I would just like to read something. It is a quotation from the Conservative Party policy related to this issue. It states:

A Conservative government will treat all veterans with respect and will create a Veteran's Bill of Rights to ensure that all disputes involving veterans are treated quickly, fairly and with the presumption in favour of the rights of the veteran.

A Conservative government will ensure the veterans of Canada's wars and peacekeeping operations receive their veterans' benefits and health care in a timely fashion.

That is for the past. We also want to look to the present and the future. We want our first nations people, Métis and Inuit, to know that not only can they proudly serve today in either peacekeeping or peacemaking operations but when they do, when they are willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice, pay the ultimate price, put it all on the line, and then come home that, in fact, they will be treated equally.

This is a message for what has happened in the past. It is a message for the future as well. We ask all colleagues to join in support of this good motion.

● (1805)

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by reading the motion again. The Liberal member for Halifax West seems to have a real issue with the motion. He is indicating that the Liberal government has an issue with the motion. I want Canadians to hear the motion and let them judge why the government should have an issue with this motion. The motion says:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should acknowledge the historic inequality of treatment and compensation for First Nations, Métis and Inuit war veterans and take action immediately to give real compensation to these veterans in a way that truly respects their service and sacrifice.

How could the Liberal member for Halifax West, how could the Liberal government, how could the Liberal Prime Minister who says he is out there to make things better for first nations people, that he is going to treat them fairly, and how could the Indian affairs minister come out there and say he is going to treat first nations and aboriginal people fairly and then have a problem with this motion? How is that possible?

Obviously there is an issue with the unequal treatment of aboriginal war veterans. It is recognized. Numerous studies have been done and reports have come out that have recognized that there was not fair compensation given to all war veterans. Those who did not receive fair compensation were the aboriginal veterans. Yes, some may have received fair compensation. The reality is that a good number did not.

When there is an issue with the words "real compensation", I guess "real compensation" would be the rightful compensation that other non-aboriginal veterans received. One would simply say they should have received the same type of compensation and the same respect that was due.

For a variety of different reasons, the first nations members went back to a reserve and to their Indian affairs agent. Quite frankly, anyone who would stand in this House and justify the actions of Indian agents and the treatment of first nations people is unconscionable.

Private Members' Business

If we look historically at the wrongs that were placed on first nations people by the Indian agents acting on behalf of the Canadian government, it was unacceptable. To somehow not accept responsibility for that as a government is wrong.

The Liberal member for Halifax West, who has issue with this motion, is saying that the government offered them a package of \$20,000 and a good number took it. Quite frankly, if a person is lying on the ground and two hours away from death, and someone is going to put a little bit of water in that person's mouth, that person will take it because there is no fight left in that person. It should not have reached that point.

I say to the Liberal member for Halifax West, who has an issue with this motion, that he needs to consider why they took it and be honest about it. A person would have to be really misreading the situation to think it was all right, that 1,700 have taken it because they thought it was a good package.

That was not the reality. It was because these people had no choice and they were reaching the point in their lives when they were not going to have that much longer to live. They wanted to have some quality of life with their families.

How many of those aboriginal veterans, that have taken what little they had been given at this point in their lives, are living in luxury? How many have the health that a good number of us have who do not live in aboriginal communities? How many have had their families receive the same education that others have? That is the realistic view of why they would have taken that compensation. It was the last drops of water that they might get before their death in order to give something back to their families. It is unacceptable to somehow suggest that this compensation picture was acceptable.

My riding has a good number of first nation communities. I have met with a number of aboriginal veterans who very willingly gave of their lives at the time. For some, as with many people, it was an experience. It seemed like an exciting time to go and fight for one's country. Others felt they had no choice because it was a situation that was deplorable.

It is difficult to imagine, but some actually left their reserves because they found those conditions more deplorable than going to war and putting their lives on the line. There were a variety of reasons why people went. I would be willing to say that the majority went because they believed in Canada and they wanted to fight for their country.

● (1810)

I grew up in the community of Labrecque for most of my life. I picked up a Labrecque history book and there was a speech that had been given by the head priest at the Labrecque Residential School to the Regina Canadian Club one year. In it he mentioned that these Indian men were going off to war to fight for their country because they were committed to their country. When they came back, he said they would expect to be treated as equals.

The fact that they would want to be treated as equals was a problem for the priest and a problem for the government. Heaven forbid. Why should they not be treated as equals? Somehow in the mind of the government of the day and in the mind of those running

the residential school, they were not equals, but to their colleagues on the battle lines they were equals.

I have spoken to a number of aboriginal veterans. My father-in-law fought in the war along with numerous relatives of his. There was no issue when individuals went to fight.

I recall a Métis fellow who worked on what was called the Labrecque Inuit and Métis farm which had been set up by priests in Labrecque to give work to Inuit and Métis. This fellow had fought in the war. He was injured and became disabled, but he was able to work. He had to fight to get compensation. After years of having worked, he finally realized that he should have been given some benefits, but he had to fight for them. My father was involved in this. This man had to fight for benefits that others had been given freely because they were white, not aboriginal. That is unacceptable.

How can anyone sit in the House today and not agree with the motion before us? How can we not go beyond the rhetoric of saying we will treat aboriginal people fairly and then do nothing? Why would we not provide compensation to these individuals and at least provide them with an opportunity to have some quality of life?

I am not surprised by this. I have also had numerous conversations with people who were in residential schools. I dealt with a first nation family that was trying to get compensation for their mother who has unfortunately passed on.

If the Liberal government keeps this up, enough of these people will be gone, so it will not have to pay out anything. More money will be available to spend on Liberal ad scams or whatever. The money will be gone and the government will not have to pay out. That is unfair, unjust and unconscionable.

There is support among all opposition parties for this, but the Liberal government is responsible for making this happen. There has to be more than just rhetoric for aboriginal veterans and residential school victims.

Imagine being part of a family whose parent went to war and the children were put into a residential school. Imagine suffering grave abuse. There have been those who told me they suffered no physical abuse, but those individuals were few and far between. More have had issues with residential schools. Imagine being the parent who went off to war and upon arrival back not being treated equally. Imagine being mistreated at a residential school. Imagine not receiving any compensation. That is unacceptable.

The Prime Minister, all members of his Liberal cabinet, and all Liberal members in general have a responsibility to ensure that compensation is paid fairly, timely and justly.

● (1815)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure our colleague who just spoke that in the annals of the history of this country there is no more respect that can be paid to any group than to those veterans who have given us the freedoms we enjoy today. There is no question that at any time it is appropriate to reassess where grievances have been made, from any source, with respect to the issues that have been raised on compensation of those who were demobilized, came back and were seeking to be part of the fabric of a country they protected and perpetuated.

I do think that when we are going through that process we should attempt to look at facts and use facts that have been established by a dialogue that was entered into, which really established with clarity what the situation is as it exists with respect to our Métis and our Métis veterans.

I do not want to repeat the remarks about the programs and the accessibility to those programs that my colleague from Halifax West has elucidated. I might remind the House that those were benefits that were available to all Canadians and all Canadian veterans returning from the wars, including aboriginal veterans.

Having said that, let me say there is no denying that for decades many aboriginal veterans, that is to say, first nations, Métis and non-status Indians, have alleged that they were not treated fairly by the Government of Canada after the wars.

In light of that, the government did respond. Four years ago, the government decided to bring all the stakeholders together to the table to investigate those concerns that are the subject of this bill, frankly, and that were expressed by the aboriginal community.

Let me say to my colleagues that in November 2000, and it probably has not been stressed enough, there was an effort to better understand and respond to the concerns of the first nations veterans. The federal government launched the national round table on first nations veterans issues, chaired by Grand Chief Howard Anderson.

The federal government established separate processes with organizations representing Métis and non-status Indian veterans to determine their post-war experience. The federal government provided over \$400,000 to support that round table process. A key element of its work included individual file reviews conducted by Veterans Affairs Canada. The research centred on any difference in value between benefits paid to first nations veterans and non-first nations veterans and the value any discrepancy would have today.

While the file reviews, research and national round table discussions found that first nations veterans did receive demobilization benefits after the wars, those first nations veterans who returned to their reserve communities after the wars had to deal with an extra layer of bureaucracy in order to receive their demobilization benefits.

They were unable to deal directly with Veterans Affairs. Rather, they had to go through the Indian agent. For some, this differential treatment may have meant that they did not receive the benefits they should have received, so on June 21, 2002, the government announced its response to the national round table and the grievances of first nations veterans related to their treatment after the wars.

● (1820)

To that end, \$39 million was set aside to offer up to \$20,000 in tax free payments to first nations veterans who settled on reserves after the wars or to their surviving spouses. The payment was also available to estates where the veteran or surviving spouse passed away after February 1, 2000, the date the national round table process began.

The first nations veterans package was offered as a gesture of goodwill. The Government of Canada believes that it was a fair offer and is comparable to other payments offered to merchant navy veterans, the Hong Kong prisoners of war and so on.

Private Members' Business

Following the 2002 announcement, Veterans Affairs Canada, with support from the Indian and northern affairs department and the national round table working groups, carried out a comprehensive advertising campaign to ensure that first nations communities were aware of the payment package and the application process. A toll free number was also established to provide information about the payments and application process. To date, 1,195 of these payments have been made.

In order to address current and ongoing issues, Veterans Affairs Canada is developing an aboriginal outreach strategy aimed at facilitating communication and ensuring that eligible aboriginal veterans and their spouses are benefiting from the full range of VAC programs and services.

The Government of Canada, and it should be an understatement to say this, is grateful to aboriginal veterans and indeed to all veterans for their wartime sacrifice and is committed to fairness and equity in providing for all Canadians who serve their country.

As I said at the outset, I believe, in looking at this file, that the government has responded fairly to the concerns raised in the motion. I also would like to add that this is not where the story ends in capturing not only the substance of what the motion is identifying but its spirit.

We wish to advise members of the following. As part of our year of veterans' activities, the government has made a commitment to provide the National Métis Veterans Association with partnership funding to explore the history and the contributions of Métis veterans during and after the wars of the last century.

Veterans Affairs Canada is currently broadening its aboriginal outreach strategy to ensure that Métis veterans and their spouses are benefiting from the full range of VAC programs and services. The government has invited the National Métis Veterans Association to share a list of approximately 2,000 names of Métis veterans so the department can review their files and ensure that they are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. This will also identify any Métis veterans who did not actually receive a demobilization benefit.

I would like to close by just simply saying that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has assured the Métis that the Government of Canada will follow through on these commitments.

President Chartrand of the Métis National Council said:

We are hopeful this will be Canada's important first step as a partner with the Métis Nation towards ensuring our Veterans will be properly respected for their service to our country and for their personal and family sacrifices.

He went on to say:

After the years of neglect and virtual abandonment of many of our service men and women there is some government action. The government has acknowledged that this issue must be dealt with fairly and quickly....

Private Members' Business

Because there may be no veterans in the future who will be the beneficiaries.

• (1825)

As for the motion, I think that while it is well-intended and we welcome these kinds of motions in spirit, I hope this debate has satisfied all in this House that the government has followed through on both the spirit and the substance of the motion in terms of the actions it has taken.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The member moving the motion has a five minute right of reply to conclude the debate.

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the members who rose in support of the motion, both today and in the first hour of debate.

I am proud to rise today, in the year of the veteran, as the sponsor of my private member's motion, Motion No. 193, to recognize and fairly compensate the service and contributions of aboriginal war veterans.

Before I get into the text of my remarks, I would like to address a couple of the points just made by the hon. member opposite.

First, he talked about Grand Chief Howard Anderson, who chaired the national round table. I will inform the hon. member that I spoke to the Grand Chief not that long ago and he expressed to me his profound disappointment at the outcome of the process. He was very disappointed that the government essentially handed a take it or leave it offer to the individuals representing the aboriginal war veterans, on National Aboriginal Day, of all days, and told them that was what they were getting, that or nothing.

I do not think that is much of a choice for veterans who are in their eighties now. The youngest are in their eighties. Handing them a take or leave it offer is giving them very little choice. It is no choice at all.

The other point I wanted to address as well is that the hon. member said that so far of this take it or leave offer there have been 1,195 payouts made. It was three years ago that this program was put into place. Hardly over 50% have even been able to take advantage of this. Talk about the strategy to contact people: obviously it has been an abysmal failure.

During World War I and World War II and in the Korean war, first nations, Métis and Inuit individuals fought shoulder to shoulder with their non-aboriginal counterparts in the Canadian armed forces. During wartime, aboriginal and non-aboriginal soldiers trained together, fought together and all too often died together. Regardless of race or ethnicity, their contributions were viewed equally in the eyes of the nation.

Upon returning home, however, aboriginal veterans found themselves treated differently than their fellow comrades were. For a variety of reasons, including discrimination, paternalism, bureaucratic inefficiency and a lack of opportunity, aboriginal war veterans found they could not access the same re-establishment benefits as their non-aboriginal counterparts. In theory, all Canadian soldiers had access to the same veterans' benefits. However, the reality proved something else entirely.

Non-aboriginal veterans were given a choice between educational opportunities, land benefits or funds paid on the basis of a certain

amount per day of service. First nations veterans who returned to live on reserve were not eligible for Veterans' Land Act grants. In order to obtain grants, first nations soldiers had to move off the reserve. Even at that, many encountered problems borrowing the necessary funds, sometimes due to systemic discrimination and often because of a lack of the requisite credit rating.

Clearly, on the whole, first nations veterans did not receive benefits equivalent to those awarded to their non-aboriginal comrades. This is a fact acknowledged by this government. In large part, this was due to the Indian Act and the federal jurisdiction over reserve lands, but those aboriginal veterans living off reserve, including the Métis, did not generally fare much better.

Approximately 2,000 Métis soldiers fought in World War II and Korea, but only a reported 3% of these veterans received either the land, education or re-establishment grants offered under the veterans charter. Many Métis veterans faced access barriers to benefits similar to those faced by first nations members. Often, information on veterans programs and benefits was non-existent in small, rural and often remote Métis communities. Furthermore, Métis veterans did not have an Indian agent to rely on for the dissemination of information.

These aboriginal soldiers, first nations, Métis and Inuit have served Canada proudly overseas. They nobly defended our values, our nationhood and our ideals. They all sacrificed for Canada's future, too many of them unfortunately paying with their lives. During the wars, they were afforded the respect and equality they deserved among their fellow soldiers, but they found out when they returned home that they were once again on an unequal footing.

In the years that have passed since, the Canadian government has failed to properly address this inequality and give these veterans the recognition they deserve.

• (1830)

It is for these veterans that I have proposed the motion. I want them to know that we in this place have heard their voices and that we appreciate their sacrifices. I believe they should be meaningfully and equally compensated for their efforts and for their valour.

When the motion comes to a vote tomorrow in this chamber I would ask all hon. members to lay partisan issues aside and stand up for what is right. Let us recognize the awesome contributions of our first nations, Métis and Inuit war veterans and act to rectify this inequality now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It being 6:32 p.m. the time provided 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.

Adjournment Proceedings

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 order made earlier today the division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 6, at the expiry of the time for oral questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

SHIPBUILDING

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in recent months the Liberal government has provided funding to shore up many regional industries, which includes money to the automotive industry in Ontario, dollars to the aerospace industry in Quebec and cash to support the beef industry in Alberta, but nothing for a strategic industry in the industry minister's own province: shipbuilding.

The minister said that it was up to the finance minister to make the decision on whether to impose import duties on a proposal by B.C. Ferries to have new ferries built by an offshore company but I would like to suggest that the industry minister must play a role that acknowledges that we have three coastlines in Canada and a leadership role in developing a plan that promotes and supports our shipbuilding industry.

Because other large vessel contracts are coming forward, including the new supply vessels for our own Canadian navy, we need an action plan sooner rather than later.

The Washington Marine Group shipyards in Esquimalt are the main shipyards that repair Canadian navy vessels from the nearby base. It plans to compete for the new supply vessels. A contract that large will help support its ongoing role as a repair and refitted of vessels.

Other shipbuilding industries around the world enjoy massive subsidies. Our own shipbuilding industry cannot even enjoy fair procurement policies that do not prejudice against them.

What plan does the Liberal government have to support the shipbuilding industries, especially when it comes to contracts for military vessels and other strategic federal government procurements, including the Canadian Coast Guard vessels?

Will the plan include items like the impact of local purchases on the economy; taxes, including payroll, property and sales taxes; and the wages generated by Canadian purchases in its request for proposals for future projects? These multiplier effects are absolutely critical and must be included in these equations.

Will the government insist that B.C. Ferries show how an offshore procurement is more cost effective than a Canadian purchase that includes all the local benefits?

• (1835)

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is firmly committed to encouraging shipbuilding in Canada. In June 2001 we announced a new policy framework for this industry. This policy consists of 24 initiatives to advance shipbuilding in Canada by focusing on investment, innovation and opportunity.

The structured financing facility provides the purchaser of a Canadian built ship with up to 15% of the construction costs of that ship. This promotes investment in the shipbuilding industry here in this country.

Technology Partnerships Canada, the National Research Council programs and tax credits exist to promote innovation in the industry. We are working to ensure a skilled workforce is developed here in this country. It is efforts such as these that will help the industry compete globally and domestically in all market opportunities.

The government has a role in addressing the challenges that face this industry and we are working with the industry to do so.

Canada is a maritime nation and, as such, shipbuilding is an important industry to this country. A central part of the Canadian history is there and we certainly will make sure it goes forward. It has a distinguished history in Canada and strong foundations are in communities right across Canada.

The shipbuilding and industrial marine industry plays an important role in key areas of public interest: marine transportation, coastal safety and national marine security. It is an employer of highly skilled, well paid workers across Canada, certainly in Atlantic Canada, in Quebec, in Ontario and in B.C., as my colleague pointed out.

The Government of Canada is firm in its commitment to help the industry position itself to develop a competitive edge in the domestic and global marketplace. This is clearly reflected in the government's 2001 policy framework and we will continue to move that forward.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is great to hear that we are acknowledging the skills and abilities of our shipbuilding industry but it is cold comfort to watch B.C. Ferries take its shipbuilding overseas and to watch Halifax struggling to build its Coast Guard vessels.

Where is the government's commitment to ensuring that this kind of shipbuilding actually happens in Canada, not in Germany, not in Poland and not somewhere else?

Adjournment Proceedings

In my province of British Columbia we have watched the shipyards close because we have not had the kind of focused attention on the shipyards that would help them stay competitive in the market. In B.C. they could not even bid on the B.C. Ferries contract.

It is fine to talk about the strategy but where is the government's commitment so we can actually build ships in Canada on the scale of B.C. Ferries?

Hon. Jerry Pickard: Mr. Speaker, when we look at a framework policy, I should mention the structured financing facility, the SFF. This is market based tool to make sure that Industry Canada does administer shipbuilding policy here in Canada.

I am proud to say that to date this SFF program has supported 23 ship construction projects that have generated \$236 million in shipyard sales and employed 2,275 person years of employment. These are real jobs, real growth and it means a more competitive industry here in Canada. That is something the member is talking about and something for which we should all be proud.

Of course it is not the only tool that we use in our policy framework. We use other tools as well. It is clear that Technology Partnerships Canada develops technologies and support to make sure that any leading edge work goes forward as well.

● (1840)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to follow up on a question that was asked by me on December 13. It was responded to by the Minister for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The question was regarding the former minister of citizenship and immigration, who has since removed herself from that position. It had to do with a long list of allegations regarding her behaviour and involving a list of issues that I will outline briefly. I cannot get to all of them because I have a very limited amount of time, but I will explain a little about the problem and I would appreciate a response from the government on this issue.

The issue is one of whether the minister has breached the conflict of interest and post-employment code for public office holders which was put in place by the Prime Minister. It should be adhered to by all ministers. Some very serious allegations have been made. By the way, the situation has shed a very negative shadow on Canada's immigration and refugee system, because if the favouritism in which it is alleged the minister took part is fact, then the impartiality of the department is not only in question, we know that it is not there and the political favours are in fact put into the system where they should not be.

Statements have been made by officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, by former staffers of the minister's office, by some who participated in her re-election campaign, all of which have been reported in the media. Therefore, this is not information that should have been hard for the government to get when I asked for it. Based on that input, we have some really serious concerns regarding the abuse of power by the former minister, the member for York West.

It was alleged that the former minister, just three days before the federal election, granted a temporary residence and work permit to Alina Balaican, enabling her to avoid the normal process upon the expiry of her original temporary work permit to apply for landed immigrant status from outside the country. Ms. Balaican was a volunteer in the minister's re-election campaign.

We have a long list of other allegations that were made, including the widely reported one about Harjit Singh, who has since been deported. He made allegations about providing pizza for the minister's staff.

I would like the government to respond to these and other allegations regarding the minister's behaviour. The member for Calgary—Nose Hill has sent a letter to the Ethics Commissions asking him to deal with this, but we should not have to wait for that. The government should explain to the people of Canada why this happened and what the government intends to do about it. That is what I am looking for from the government.

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the TRP program is very important to Canada's immigration system which plays a significant role in upholding Canada's humanitarian tradition.

Preliminary numbers show that 13,575 permits were issued last year. Only 6% of these permits were the result of ministerial intervention.

The hon. member has suggested that the program is subject to abuse. The truth of the matter is that TRPs are issued in a transparent manner. The Government of Canada is required to provide the House with full disclosure every year. Today's system is eminently preferable to the discretionary system that was used before the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and which did not require disclosure.

The Government of Canada is firmly committed to providing Canadians with all the transparency that such an important program demands. This is what we have done. Each year a full report is tabled in the House disclosing the total number of temporary resident permits issued and the reasons they were issued.

The hon. member suggests that the former minister of citizenship and immigration has acted in an improper manner. I would like to remind the member that the member for York West requested the Ethics Commissioner to investigate the matter. He has been given a mandate to examine the permits that were issued and whether or not any abuse of power took place.

The final report will be forthcoming. I suggest that the hon. member let the Ethics Commissioner do his job and make a full report to the House on all of those permits.

•(1845)

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary completely ignored the question that I asked and the subject we are dealing with. He spent most of his time referring to a program which does allow for discretionary decisions to be made by the minister or agents of the minister. That is not what I was asking about. I was asking specifically about the allegations that have been laid against the minister by people from within the department, by people who worked on her campaign and by some of those who are allegedly involved with the special favours.

These allegations raise serious questions as to whether the former immigration minister, the member for York West, attracted to her campaign individuals who were seeking special preference from the minister and whether special preference was in fact extended in one form or another. That is the question. I would appreciate it if the parliamentary secretary would answer it.

Hon. Jerry Pickard: Mr. Speaker, I would refer to the comments that I made to the hon. member.

The fact is that all of those reports have been given to the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has the detail on each one

Adjournment Proceedings

of those and the Ethics Commissioner is examining them and is required to report to the House.

Accusations can be made. Everyone knows that accusations can be made at any time. The proof of what happened is in the reports that were submitted to the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has full opportunity as a person who does not have a role in that department, but a person who overlooks the security for Canada, to make a decision in a proper way.

Let us let the system work properly. Let us allow the Ethics Commissioner to examine each and every one of those cases and report his findings back to the House. I believe that is the appropriate way and that should be the Canadian way for all of us.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:49 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Criminal Code

Mr. Lukiwski	4663
Bill C-359. Introduction and first reading	4663
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	4663

Committees of the House

Environment and Sustainable Development

Mr. Mills	4663
Motion for concurrence	4663
Mr. Wilfert	4665
Mr. Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	4666
Mr. Wilfert	4667
Mr. Lunn	4668
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	4669
Mr. Watson	4669
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	4670
Mrs. Yelich	4671
Mr. Lukiwski	4671
Mr. Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	4671
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	4672
Mr. Jean	4675
Mr. Lukiwski	4675
Mr. Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	4675
Mr. Jean	4676
Mr. Johnston	4678
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	4679
Mr. Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	4679
Mr. Watson	4680
Mrs. Yelich	4683
Mr. Lukiwski	4684
Mr. Bezan	4684
Mr. Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	4685
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	4686
Mr. Bezan	4687
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	4688
Division on motion deferred	4689

Petitions

Foreign Credentials

Mr. Warawa	4689
------------------	------

Marriage

Mr. Rajotte	4689
Mr. Hill	4689
Mr. Bezan	4689
Mr. Grewal (Newton—North Delta)	4689
Mr. Johnston	4689

Natural Health Products

Mr. Johnston	4689
--------------------	------

Marriage

Mr. Poilievre	4689
---------------------	------

Questions on the Order Paper

Mrs. Redman	4689
-------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Civil Marriage Act

Bill C-38. Second reading	4690
Mr. Sorenson	4690
Mr. Layton	4690
Mr. Solberg	4692
Ms. Guay	4693
Mr. Batters	4695

Report of the Auditor General

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Proulx)	4695
---------------------------------------	------

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Special Olympics Winter Games

Mr. Boshcoff	4695
--------------------	------

Rotary International

Mr. Gouk	4696
----------------	------

Dimitrios Hadjis

Ms. Bakopanos	4696
---------------------	------

Ann-Véronique Michaud and Anne-Sophie Grenon

Mr. Roy	4696
---------------	------

International Cooperation

Mr. Patry	4696
-----------------	------

Pope John Paul II

Mr. Grewal (Newton—North Delta)	4697
---------------------------------------	------

Roméo Dallaire

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	4697
---	------

Gérard Filion

Mrs. Lavallée	4697
---------------------	------

La Cité-des-Jeunes A.M. Sormany

Mr. D'Amours	4697
--------------------	------

Radio licence fees

Mr. Keddy	4697
-----------------	------

Pope John Paul II

Mr. Silva	4698
-----------------	------

Sault Ste. Marie

Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	4698
-------------------------------------	------

CIS National Hockey Championship

Mr. Rajotte	4698
-------------------	------

Invisible Work Day

Ms. Brunelle	4698
--------------------	------

Pope John Paul II

Mr. Lunn	4698
----------------	------

Conservative Party of Canada

Mrs. Kadis 4699

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**The Budget**

Mr. Harper 4699
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4699
 Mr. Harper 4699
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4699
 Mr. Harper 4699
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4699
 Mr. MacKay 4699
 Mr. Goodale 4700
 Mr. MacKay 4700
 Mr. Goodale 4700

Sponsorship Program

Mr. Duceppe 4700
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4700
 Mr. Duceppe 4700
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4700
 Mr. Guimond 4700
 Mr. Brison 4700
 Mr. Guimond 4700
 Mr. Brison 4701

Liberal Government

Mr. Layton 4701
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4701

The Environment

Mr. Layton 4701
 Mr. Efford (Avalon) 4701

Sponsorship Program

Mr. Harper 4701
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4701
 Mr. Harper 4701
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4701

Passports

Mr. MacKay 4701
 Mr. Pettigrew 4701
 Mr. MacKay 4702
 Mr. Pettigrew 4702

Sponsorship Program

Mr. Gauthier 4702
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4702
 Mr. Gauthier 4702
 Mr. Brison 4702
 Mr. Sauvageau 4702
 Mr. Brison 4702
 Mr. Sauvageau 4702
 Mr. Brison 4702

Canada-U.S. Relations

Mr. Sorenson 4702
 Ms. McLellan 4703
 Mr. Sorenson 4703
 Ms. McLellan 4703

Foreign Affairs

Mr. Day 4703
 Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard) 4703
 Mr. Day 4703
 Mr. Pettigrew 4703

The Environment

Mr. Boudria 4703
 Mr. Dion 4703
 Mr. Layton 4703
 Mr. Efford (Avalon) 4704
 Mr. Layton 4704
 Mr. Efford (Avalon) 4704

Foreign Affairs

Mr. Forseth 4704
 Mr. Pettigrew 4704
 Mr. Forseth 4704
 Mr. Pettigrew 4704

The Environment

Mr. Watson 4704
 Mr. Dion 4704
 Mr. Watson 4704
 Mr. Dion 4705

Sponsorship Program

Ms. Guay 4705
 Mr. Brison 4705
 Ms. Guay 4705
 Mr. Brison 4705

Judicial Reform

Mr. Toews 4705
 Mr. Cotler 4705
 Mr. Toews 4705
 Mr. Cotler 4705

The Environment

Mr. Scarpaleggia 4705
 Mr. Efford (Avalon) 4705

Air-India

Mrs. Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul) 4706
 Ms. McLellan 4706
 Mrs. Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul) 4706
 Ms. McLellan 4706

Sponsorship Program

Ms. Picard 4706
 Mr. Brison 4706

Canada-U.S. Relations

Mr. Maloney 4706
 Ms. McLellan 4706

Presence in Gallery

The Speaker 4706

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**Civil Marriage Act**

Bill C-38. Second reading 4706
 Mr. Batters 4706

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