



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 086 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

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

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1405)

[English]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, National Volunteer Week, April 17 to April 23, honours and recognizes Canadians who volunteer.

First celebrated in 1943 to honour the contribution of women volunteers to the war effort, National Volunteer Week now pays tribute to all community volunteers.

In my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton, volunteers help many organizations and lend strength to our community. Volunteers serve on boards and committees, act as mentors, organize cultural activities, support seniors, offer shelter, work with youth, read to the blind, coach teams and so much more. Without volunteers, many key services could not be offered.

I ask all members to please join me in paying special tribute to Canada's 6.5 million volunteers whose time and energy make life better for others. Let us show our Canadian volunteers that we care.

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HEPATITIS C

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight the House will vote on my motion calling on the government to immediately compensate all those infected with hepatitis C through tainted blood, as recommended by the Krever inquiry.

All opposition parties support my motion and I hope the Liberals do too. The last time the House voted on this issue, all the Liberals voted against compensation. Since then they have filibustered at the health committee, delayed debate in the House, all to prevent the vote from happening, but now they can delay no longer.

If the government votes against my motion, then it must explain why it is against compassion. If it votes for my motion, thus admitting that it has been wrong for eight years, it should apologize for the pain and suffering it has caused so many.

I sincerely hope the government will follow Parliament's wishes and immediately compensate all victims.

End the delays. End the excuses. Compassion is needed now. Compensate the victims now.

* * *

BEEF INDUSTRY

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some of Canada's best beef is produced in my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac.

Last week, businesses and organizations throughout New Brunswick had an opportunity to purchase this prime beef on the hoof at the Carleton county spring show and sale.

This annual event is an opportunity for the St. John River Valley's beef producers and 4-H'ers to bring their steers to market and raise the profile of their industry.

This year's show and sale saw 58 steers sold for a grand total of \$130,547.30. I was pleased to be able to purchase a steer myself from Andrew and Tracey McIntosh.

I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to the board of directors of the Carleton county spring show and sale, particularly president Jack Smith, for another successful event. I would also like to congratulate Kristina Parkinson who earned the title of grand champion and 4-H champion.

I must also applaud Valley Equipment, Valley Honda and Connell Chrysler, buyers of this year's charity steer which raised \$6,612.50 for the Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick.

S. O. 31

•(1410)

[*Translation*]

2005 CANADIAN NATIONAL BROOMBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to pay tribute to some one hundred young broomball players from Quebec for their outstanding victories at the 2005 Canadian National Broomball Championships, in Leduc, Alberta, and Prince George, British Columbia.

In the juvenile boys division, L'Assomption college won the gold medal. In the juvenile girls division, the Panthères took the silver. In the ladies A division, the Huskies claimed gold and Quest, the bronze. In the mens A division, team Frost won the gold and the Dragons, the bronze.

Congratulations to all the coaches, the fans and all the athletes, particularly the following eight young women from my riding: Marie-Noëlle Beaulieu, Joanie Charlebois, Cynthia Bourgon-Touchette, Marie-Pierre St-Denis, Laurie Robichaud, Julie Chevrier, Alexandra Chevrier and Myriam Chevrier.

The Bloc Québécois is proud of these young Quebecers and their amazing wins. Bravo, Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

THUNDER BAY LAW ASSOCIATION

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to extend congratulations to the Thunder Bay Law Association on the occasion of its 100th anniversary.

As the association marks law day, it is worthy to note its efforts to serve not only its members but the broader community by providing continuing legal education, maintaining a reference law library, providing a forum for communication, discussion and advocacy of paralegal issues, as well as promoting other activities of a non-profit nature.

If the legal profession in general is known for its sense of collegiality, congeniality and camaraderie, then this sentiment may be an accurate description of the Thunder Bay Law Association. May it continue to grow and prosper over the next 100 years.

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PARKS CANADA

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone remembers back in the 1990s when the federal Liberals cut the budget to Parks Canada. Ten years later, Banff National Park is facing a backlog of repairs for its decaying facilities.

In a recent federal government audit only 3% of Banff's facilities were considered to be in good condition. The rest were rated fair or poor.

To counter this problem, Parks Canada decided to implement a second fee increase in the last six months for those entering Banff with more fee increases to come. The Liberals feel that fee increases are the best way to clean up their mess. What they do not realize is

the collection of park fees is a pittance of what is needed to maintain a world-class tourist destination.

The people who use the park, particularly our seniors, are being punished for the Liberals' lack of planning. Small business owners are telling me that people will not stop in Banff anymore simply because it costs too much.

In order for Banff to stay competitive, the Liberals should not be creating a disincentive for visitors.

It is time the government realized the park is for Canadian people to enjoy, not to be maintained by a never-ending range of service fees and charges.

* * *

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague just stated, it is National Volunteer Week in Canada. This is an annual event to pay tribute to Canada's 6.5 million volunteers. It is estimated that the value of their work is over \$14 billion a year. This contribution by Canadians of all ages is enormous, whether in sports, cultural activities or in helping each other in tough situations.

Volunteers are the backbone of a compassionate society. I challenge all Canadians to become involved in some voluntary activity. Whether big or small, their contribution will not go unnoticed and the philanthropic spirit of this country will grow.

This week we thank our volunteers for their contribution to the continued health and prosperity of our society.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Marc Boulianne (Mégantic—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, the Centre d'action bénévole du Granit held its annual meeting to honour its volunteers.

Over 100 volunteers were honoured and presented with certificates. I congratulate them, particularly Gérard Fluet, who was named volunteer of the year for his dedication in the field of health.

I also want to mention the hard work done by all the volunteers in my riding; these skilled and dedicated workers make a remarkable contribution to our community.

Volunteer work is a unique way for people to help shape our community. Without the thousands of volunteers who work each day in the various cultural and social sectors, our society might be quite different. They have our thanks.

•(1415)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of colleagues the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women that was tabled in the House of Commons yesterday.

The report, “Gender-Based Analysis: Building Blocks for Success”, is the culmination of intense consultations with equality seeking organizations from across the country, as well as government departments and agencies.

The report's main recommendation calls on the government to do things differently, indeed to legislate the systematic application of gender based analysis of all federal policies and programs.

It includes stronger accountability measures for government agencies and departments and strengthened reporting mechanisms to determine progress in incorporating gender considerations for all Canadians.

This report is a major step forward in closing the equality gap that exists between Canadian men and women. I wish to thank committee members and to acknowledge their hard work and dedication on this issue. I also want to thank members of my own Liberal women's caucus for their doggedness and support in advancing this effort.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has added dithers to the great Canadian parliamentary lexicon.

In the face of irrefutable, overwhelming revelations of systemic Liberal Party corruption and with nowhere to run and nowhere to hide, he has no choice now but to dither and duck. It is the new Liberal disco, foxtrot, rumba, tango, shuffle, dance: dither and duck.

The Liberal government has resorted to daily announcements in an attempt to hide from its own corruption. The Liberals avoid at all costs the prospect of facing the opposition in the House. What do they do? They dither and duck.

Unbelievably, the House leader for the Prime Minister cancelled an opposition day motion because he did not like the wording or intent of the motion because it would, of all things, hold the government accountable.

Yesterday, two days in a row, facing the largest political scandal in Canadian history, unbelievably, the Prime Minister was absent from the House. It is a new Liberal dance. It is the dither and duck, dither and duck, dither and duck.

All good Liberals grab a partner and do the Liberal shuffle, dither and duck.

[Translation]

S. O. 31

THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me today to draw attention to the first anniversary of the recognition by this House of the Armenian genocide, in which 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottomans.

[English]

The 20th century has seen two world wars and numerous historic conflicts. In spite of this, crimes against humanity are not a thing of the past but continue, unfortunately, to be daily occurrences in many countries.

We witness the persecution of minorities on the basis of their political opinion, race and religion. Some are well-known, such as the Armenian genocide, others, such as the 1922 genocide of the Pontian Greeks, are not so well-known.

[Translation]

In recognizing this historical event as a crime against humanity, as genocide, Canadian parliamentarians have affirmed that crimes of genocide, both past and present, will not be tolerated nor will they be forgotten.

[English]

I thank all members of Parliament who supported the motion last year. I invite them to join the Canada-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group and members of the Canadian Armenian Society this afternoon to mark this anniversary.

Long live their memory. We will never forget.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, three Canadian workers will be killed today while just doing their jobs. That is why in 1991 NDP MP Bob Rae introduced legislation to proclaim April 28 as the National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job.

Started in Canada, it is now commemorated in more than 70 countries worldwide.

While statistics may highlight the violent deaths of men, women are no less at risk from violence and injury. In 2003, 110,000 Canadian women were injured and 37 Canadian women were killed while at work.

Our health care workers, most of them women, are especially vulnerable to injuries largely because of the lifting they are required to do, with injury rates higher than any other group of workers.

On April 28 I ask everyone to please join me in remembering those Canadians injured or killed in the line of work but, more important, every day honour the memory of those who have died on the job by committing to prevent work related injury and illness.

Oral Questions

•(1420)

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Rotary International is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, an organization dedicated to supporting local, national and international communities through humanitarian, educational and cultural programs.

I am proud to be wearing the official Rotary International tie in commemoration.

Rotarians live by a simple philosophy and given the current political state of affairs, it is a philosophy to which the Prime Minister and his party might well pay particular attention.

Of the things we say or do: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Truth, fairness, goodwill and working for the benefit of all. These are the keys to Rotary International success and longevity.

I congratulate Rotary International on its 100th birthday.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AUTHORS OF LA PLANÈTE TERRE RÉINVENTÉE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Earth Day will be celebrated this week on April 22, and so I would like to read a brief excerpt from *La planète Terre réinventée*. This is a book written by a number of 10 to 12 year-olds in the Quebec City area.

I met four of the young authors at the Salon du livre de Québec: Sabrina Germain, Raphaël D. Rhéaume, Ann-Sophie Lachance and Mikhaël Couture-Picard. These are the words of Sabrina, who is 11 years old:

Today I was made queen of the world. I think that life could be a lot better than it is, so I decided to reinvent the planet. That requires magic powers, and I have the right to those powers because I am queen.

—I add some colour and I improve people's lives. I invent peace and make war disappear.

The earth I want must have no pollution, so that the animals that live in the water will have a good place to live.

The fact that these young writers are so sensitive to all these issues augurs well for the future. Congratulations to all the contributors to *La planète Terre réinventée*.

* * *

[*English*]

ALMONTE, ONTARIO

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today in the House of Commons to congratulate the town of Almonte, Ontario in my riding of Carleton—Mississippi Mills upon celebrating its 125th anniversary this year.

The town was named after Mexican diplomat and military leader, General Juan Almonte, whom the Scot and Irish settlers admired for his fierce loyalty in the defence of his homeland.

On September 25, 1880, Almonte was incorporated as a town. Almonte is the birthplace of famous sons Dr. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball; and Robert Tait Mackenzie, the sculptor and surgeon.

Almonte is an outstanding community that is recognized for its natural and architectural beauty, lively cultural scene, high quality of life and respect for its heritage and environment. It is a friendly town and its people embrace the true sense of community spirit. I feel very privileged to represent such a welcoming place.

I congratulate the citizens of Almonte on their 125th anniversary.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, shortly the Minister of Veterans Affairs will be introducing a new veterans charter in the House. I rise today to pay tribute to the veterans organizations that have brought some of their members from across the country to take part in this memorable day.

They are: Mary Ann Burdett, Dominion President, the Royal Canadian Legion; Pierre Allard, Director, Service Bureau, the Royal Canadian Legion; Ken Henderson, Dominion President, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada; Lorne McCartney, Secretary-Treasurer, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada; Brian Forbes, Honorary Secretary-General, the National Council of Veterans Associations; Cliff Chadderton, Chairman of the National Council of Veterans Associations and also the Dean of the heads of veterans organizations; Bob McKinnon, past National President of Gulf War Veterans Association; Dave Munro, National President, Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association; Harold Leduc, past National President, Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association; Gaëtan Martel, National President, Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping; and Don Ethell, past National President, Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Transport an extremely serious question.

A former minister revealed that the Minister of Transport had done some lobbying without telling him that Mr. Cossette was one of his clients and without even being registered as a lobbyist. Is this true? If so, has the Minister of Transport submitted his resignation to the Prime Minister?

Oral Questions

•(1425)

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the allegations made by Mr. Gagliano are pathetic. These are comments made by a man who, I would say, is in a sorry state at this time.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are many people in the country who have an unfavourable opinion of Alfonso Gagliano. That said, he has made some specific allegations and I want to know whether the minister is actually refuting them.

We already know the minister lobbied the Bloc Québécois MPs on behalf of Cossette. Did he have a meeting as described by Mr. Gagliano? Did he meet on behalf of Cossette with the minister and was Cossette one of his clients?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, no one on that side of the House gave much credibility to the words of Mr. Gagliano. I do not see why his word has now become golden.

However, I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that I have never been paid for any lobbying whatsoever.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to turn this over to the Prime Minister because this is the kind of answer the minister was giving yesterday, that he might not have paid for that.

The question is this. Was Cossette Communications one of his clients and did he lobby a minister on behalf of that client, yes or no? Did the Prime Minister know this when he was appointed to cabinet?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): First, Mr. Speaker, the minister answered the Leader of the Opposition's question quite directly. He said, "no", and that no means no.

Second, as with all ministers, an examination of their background, skills and experience was undertaken both by the government and by the RCMP. I have to say that no one has ever questioned the integrity of the Minister of Transport.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are very serious allegations. Did the Minister of Transport meet with Cossette Communication and Alfonso Gagliano to discuss the \$100 million contract with Cossette Communication, yes or no?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister answered that question. However, we know that the Conservatives like to selectively choose commentary on individual testimony to suit their own purposes.

Since the leader of the Conservatives follows testimony so closely, he ought to be aware that his star candidate in Quebec was named during testimony at the Gomery commission when Jean Brault was on the stand.

Further, Mr. Cannon and his company, AmeriContact, received \$25,000 in sponsorship money in 2001 after contact with Alfonso

Gagliano's office. Perhaps in fairness to Mr. Cannon's reputation we should all wait for Justice Gomery's report.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not asking about the Gomery inquiry. We are asking about another Liberal scandal, a new Liberal scandal. I know the minister is up to his neck in defending Liberals from scandal, but this is a new scandal that only the transport minister can answer.

The transport minister lobbied the federal government for a \$100 million contract without registering as a lobbyist as is required by law. The transport minister must stand in his place and do the right thing and resign. Will he do it?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I swear—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of Transport is rising to answer the question. The hon. member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam will want to contain himself so we can hear the answer. He did ask the question. Now we will have a response from the hon. Minister of Transport.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre: Mr. Speaker, I swear I never did any lobbying for a \$100 million contract for anyone.

•(1430)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Warren Kinsella has stated, under oath, that members of the Prime Minister's entourage arranged for Earnsccliffe to get a contract and that the Prime Minister was aware of that fact. All the Minister of Finance can think to do is hide behind the Ernst & Young report, referred to as "watered down" by Justice Gomery, the initial version of which identified a widespread failure to comply with contracting policies and regulations.

Since he knew, why did the Prime Minister not take action to prevent Earnsccliffe, the firm of his close advisors, from profiting from an improper tendering process?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. gentleman seems to be relying upon some unreliable information. The allegations are not supported by the written record. They are not supported by the audit done by Ernst & Young. They are not supported by the Auditor General of Canada. They are not supported in the independent comments offered yesterday by Mr. Goldenberg. They are only supported by the opposition and even the deputy leader of the official opposition calls that source poisoned partisanship.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said she did not see most of Earnsccliffe's reports because they were filed verbally. In addition, Justice Gomery said the Ernst & Young report was watered down in response to pressure from officials of this government. This is being used as an excuse, when there was very clearly a conflict of interest.

Oral Questions

How can the Prime Minister not have seen a conflict of interest when the his former chief of staff was the spouse of David Herle, who worked for Earnscliffe? How could he not see a conflict of interest when his chief of staff was the spouse of David Herle, who was himself the PM's campaign manager? Did he not realize this was a conflict of interest?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, Ms. O'Leary corresponded with the Ethics Commissioner; as a result of this correspondence, she declared her status, and then she followed the Ethics Commissioner's recommendations to the letter.

Second, Ms. O'Leary stated unequivocally that she had never interfered in the awarding of any contracts. Her answer is clear: never. She made this statement under oath.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was aware of the interventions made to ensure Earnscliffe got the contracts for the Department of Finance, because he intervened himself to add pressure.

What does the Prime Minister have to say about Warren Kinsella's statement under oath that the former finance minister had even called him at home to complain?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the remark with respect to the alleged telephone call is completely fallacious. Again, I would ask the hon. gentleman to check the record. Check all the written record that is published in the material. Check with Ernst & Young. Check with the Auditor General. Check with Mr. Goldenberg. Time and time again you will find that your allegations are blatantly and completely false.

The Speaker: I hope the Minister of Finance was referring to any allegations I might have made when he said your, but I have been quite silent on—his. I am glad for the clarification. The hon. member for Repentigny.

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the documents submitted in evidence to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts show beyond any doubt that the finance department intervened at least four times to promote Ekos, Earnscliffe and Everest.

How could the Prime Minister say here in this House on April 14 that he knew nothing and had never intervened in this regard, when documents show, on the contrary, that the Prime Minister was running his own little parallel sponsorship scandal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's statement is not true, it is completely untrue. There has never been any intervention in the awarding of contracts. All I wanted as minister was an open competition, as did my assistant, Ms. O'Leary, the deputy minister and the finance department. That was what we proposed from the start.

* * *

[English]

THE PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Prime Minister

chose to make a presentation on his broken promises on foreign aid when this House was falling apart due to the actions taken by this government to take away the democratic right of the opposition parties to hold the government accountable.

We have tried to make the House of Commons work. How exactly does it help the House of Commons to work when the Prime Minister first tries to take away the democratic rights of the opposition and, second, refuses to explain himself?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member obviously must know, the planning for yesterday's presentation of the international policy review has been done for quite some time. It was very important that following the presentation I take the opportunity to meet with a number of key ambassadors so the message would go back to their capitals, and that is exactly what I did.

I would like, however, to take this occasion to congratulate the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of International Trade and the minister responsible for overseas aid. I must say that yesterday was a very successful day for Canada.

* * *

WHISTLEBLOWER LEGISLATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we just offered the Prime Minister an opportunity to explain why he would take away the democratic rights of the opposition parties and he refused to answer the question. That says it all.

Let us turn to the whole issue of corruption. The Prime Minister pretends to care about corruption but what he says does not match what he does. In the new whistleblower legislation that has been brought forward, the very individual who in 1999 brought forward the entire scandal on sponsorships would not have been protected. How is it dealing with corruption when he will not protect the people who expose corruption?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have a question on this bill. In fact, we put this bill before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. It is conducting an extensive study. It has made a series of recommendations and I am in the process of examining them. This is a first reading bill that is designed for the House to be involved in its design. We will respond in due course.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, raging Liberal Warren Kinsella raised concerns as far back as 1995 through memos, letters and phone calls about rigged contracts that he felt favoured the company employing the Prime Minister's leadership campaign manager. One memo read that the "competition was flawed, the payments are excessive, the work is probably not needed, and the research community can be fully expected to blow the whistle on the political connections".

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister's former EA, Terrie O'Leary, confirmed under oath that she had discussed these concerns with the current Prime Minister. We now know the Prime Minister was aware of these concerns over the shady contracting. What, if anything, did he do about it?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the hon. gentleman is simply following the wrong path. Mr. Kinsella is not supported by the written record that has been filed with the public accounts committee. He is not supported by any of the audits that have been done, either by Ernst & Young externally or the Auditor General internally. Some of his testimony yesterday was directly contradicted by Mr. Goldenberg.

Indeed, the only support he has is from the opposition and that very member has described him as a "poisoned partisan". So much for his star witness.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is not a lot of love in the Liberal ranks, and the Prime Minister can hide but he is eventually going to have to run.

This question is for him. These are serious allegations in reference to questionable government contracts being used to subsidize the Prime Minister's leadership campaign. Warren Kinsella also said, "I and perhaps others would consider it inappropriate that you cross-subsidize that political activity using the public treasury. That's inappropriate".

Will the Prime Minister now admit his knowledge and his involvement in the contracting practices of his department that funnelled taxpayers' money through Earncliffe to finance his leadership activity?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made a reference to leadership money. The hon. member knows that at that period of time there was no leadership race. In fact, the leadership race did not occur for another six or seven years.

What the hon. member omitted to say is that every single penny I raised in the leadership race has been fully disclosed. It is all in the public record. The question is, since I have fully disclosed, why have the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Central Nova not made full disclosure of their leadership funds?

* * *

● (1440)

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is pretty selective memory.

The Prime Minister gave sworn testimony that Boulay was the merest acquaintance, only for a very short time around 1990, but in 1994 he wrote one of several distinctively personal letters to Boulay. This one promised to give Boulay's business a boost. A very busy new finance minister took the time to personally send Boulay's resum  directly to the federal office for regional development in Quebec for action. Why the unusual privileged treatment?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from Paul Wells' blog. In fact, Paul Wells says:

Claude Boulay's testimony has been substantially exculpatory of [the Prime Minister]...we've spent the week hearing speculation and hearsay about Boulay's relationship with [the Prime Minister], and both [the Prime Minister] and Boulay have now testified that there wasn't much of a relationship. There are places in the world where a politician who'd leaned on hearsay as hard as [the Leader of the Opposition] has this week would be a little sheepish after a day like today...

Members opposite should all be hanging their heads in shame after the character assassinations and drive-by smears.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): If only those Liberals knew the meaning of shame, Mr. Speaker.

Here are some facts. Not only did Claude Boulay work on the Prime Minister's 1990 leadership campaign, he also worked on the Prime Minister's local campaign in 1993. We also know as a fact that, weeks later, the new finance minister, now the Prime Minister, gave his good buddy Boulay a tangible reward with a personal referral for government contracts, so the Prime Minister has to explain—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is what Mr. Boulay said, "We never had one-on-one meetings. We run into each other at different activities". He said he doubted that the Prime Minister even wrote the birthday letter. He noted that the letter miscalculated Mr. Boulay's year of birth by 11 years, a mistake he did not think the finance minister of the day, somebody who is very good with numbers, would have made.

The fact is that the hon. member and her party, by commenting selectively on testimony that favours their narrow partisan interests, are smearing Justice Gomery's work and smearing the reputation of this House.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has been rising and defending the Prime Minister so vigorously in the Earncliffe matter over the past two days, because he himself was doing the very same thing at the same time. In a letter of March 24, 1995, the Minister of Finance, who was the minister of agriculture and agri-food then, wrote his colleague at PWGSC to ask him to award an untendered contract of less than \$50,000 to Earncliffe.

What kind of credibility does the minister think he has in defending the Prime Minister?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter was fully discussed in the House over a year ago. I indicated at that time the reasons for the urgency in the matter referred to. Indeed, it has been in written form for more than a decade. The project was successfully completed and it received. At the end of it, a favourable review from the Auditor General.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many things discussed in the House then, now prove not to have been correct.

His colleague at PWGSC wrote, “The Department of Agriculture is trying systematically to avoid complying with the Treasury Board guidelines for the awarding of contracts”.

I ask the Minister of Finance whether he is not defending his Prime Minister so vigorously because he too was a member of the parallel group, and the two of them were running their own sponsorship scandal on the side?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago I had the privilege to work with the hon. gentleman as fellow House leaders and I thought he would be above some slimy attempt at character assassination.

I would point out that the correspondence back and forth between the Department of Public Works and the Department of Agriculture some 10 years ago had to do with disputes between the departments about the appropriate procedures to be followed. When questions were indeed raised at the official level, they were referred to the deputy minister of agriculture, who corrected the procedures.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Alfonso Gagliano said that the current Minister of Transport had approached him to put in a good word for his friend François Duffar, of Cossette, a company trying to land federal contracts.

The Minister of Transport admits receiving fees from Cossette. He also admits seeing Alfonso Gagliano at his office with his client from Cossette, François Duffar. He also admits going out for supper with his client from Cossette and Gagliano. If these are not lobbying activities, then what are they?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we could call that a social gathering. There were many such gatherings that many people attended. The leader of the Bloc has sat at the same table as Mr. Gagliano. There was no lobbying involved. It was a social gathering, period.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport would have us believe that he invoiced only for policy analysis or brainstorming, but not for time spent arranging so-called social gatherings with ministers for his friends, and their subsequent meals.

I hope he does not expect us to believe that, because we do not. If he was not lobbying, then what was he doing?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you know full well that during all those years I attended a lot of social gatherings and did a lot of policy analysis for most of the networks and many private sector clients. This was always covered by the press, radio and television. I always spoke my mind. I am being called a lobbyist. In 12 years, I believe I came here to Ottawa three or four times to give a speech on behalf of the private sector. After all, that was not my job. Let it go.

*[English]***SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the sponsorship scandal was in its heyday, the Prime Minister's political organizer, Lucie Castelli, sat on the Quebec Liberal Party's finance committee. Her colleagues on that committee were those upstanding citizens Alain Renaud and Jacques Corriveau, who allegedly obtained \$500,000 from Groupaction and the sponsorship program without doing any work.

Lucie Castelli was the Prime Minister's eyes, ears and right-hand person in the riding. How are Canadians supposed to believe the Prime Minister knew nothing about this when his political operatives were so deeply connected?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would that be the same Mr. Renaud that the opposition has taken the testimony of as sacrosanct when he alleged that there were meetings between the Prime Minister and somebody else?

I think that probably would be the same Mr. Renaud. Again, it speaks volumes about the opposition that will stand in the House one day and attack somebody's credibility and then on another day vault them up onto a higher plane as sacrosanct, as somebody who offers undeniable evidence before a commission.

We would all benefit if the opposition would simply wait for Justice Gomery's report, as Canadians want them to do, because Canadians deserve the truth.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the reason the Prime Minister is not answering this is that he just cannot remember.

Serge Savard was a million dollar bagman for the Prime Minister. Coincidentally, I am sure, Savard received \$500,000 in sponsorship cash after Lucie Castelli lobbied on his behalf to have his sponsorship application overturned and approved. Boy, I bet he loves Lucie.

When will the Prime Minister admit that he cannot clean up the sponsorship scandal because he is part of it?

• (1450)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that allegation is absolutely false.

Further, this week the Prime Minister released Canada's international policy statement to strengthen Canada's role in the world. He announced funding and reform to improve Canada's immigration system, announced Canada's Kyoto plan to tackle greenhouse gas emissions and signed a historic agreement on federal gas tax investments with British Columbia for cities and communities, and all the Conservatives could talk about were birthday greetings.

Oral Questions

This is a government that is addressing the issues that face Canadians four-square when all the opposition wants to talk about are birthday greetings. Canadians will choose this Prime Minister over that party.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister would like us to believe arm's length rogues are responsible for ad scam. His arm is rather short.

The Prime Minister's chief riding organizer, Lucie Castelli, made sure \$500,000 flowed to his million dollar fundraiser and golf buddy, Serge Savard. After Savard was told no to gobs of sponsorship cash, the Prime Minister's riding aide intervened and unclogged ad scam money.

Will the Prime Minister finally admit he has not told Canadians the full truth about his ad scam knowledge?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians determine whom they trust to get to the bottom of this issue, they trust Justice Gomery and they trust our Prime Minister who appointed Justice Gomery and supports the work of Justice Gomery and does not have any fear of the report of Justice Gomery. In fact, he believes that Canadians deserve that report before an election.

I will tell the House whom they do not trust. Canadians do not trust the Conservatives who want to kneecap the work of Justice Gomery and who want to deny Canadians the opportunity to have the truth before they face a decision in an election.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Lucie Castelli is the Prime Minister's eyes and ears in his riding. The Prime Minister's aide had her eyes on an ad scam application from the Prime Minister's million dollar fundraiser and golf buddy, Serge Savard. She put her ear to the phone to Public Works to find out why Savard had not received his slice of the ad scam pie. The sum of \$500,000 in sponsorship slush flowed to the Prime Minister's faithful friend and Liberal Party bagman from Castelli's efforts.

How are Canadians to believe the Prime Minister knew nothing about ad scam?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those allegations are absolutely false.

Let me quote from the *Chronicle-Herald*:

An election under the present circumstances would put the country in peril.... [The Conservatives] have been accused of being afraid to wait for the Gomery report - in case it exonerates [the Prime Minister]. This...is exactly what it will do.

If they do pull the plug, the Conservatives will be easy prey to the charge of recklessness and opportunism—

They are afraid of the Gomery report because they know that report will judge our Prime Minister fairly.

* * *

HEPATITIS C

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since becoming a member of Parliament, I have risen in the House on several occasions to speak in favour of compassion and understanding, and assistance for hepatitis C victims across Canada, including those who fall outside the January 1, 1986 to July 1, 1990 group who were previously included in a program of assistance, and

to encourage and support our Minister of Health in considering extending assistance to these previously excluded victims.

Could the Minister of Health please inform the House on the government's position on today's vote regarding compensation for people?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to state that the government will vote in favour of the principle of the motion. We agree because it supports what we as a government have already been doing. We are committed to the discussions launched in November to explore all available options for providing compensation.

However, while we are supporting the motion, we recognize the limitations and flaws of that motion. It must be made clear that compensation can only be made once the discussions underway have concluded. Everyone is working in good faith as fast as they can to reach a successful outcome.

* * *

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is the perfect poster boy for the democratic deficit.

Again yesterday in the House of Commons, representatives of the Canadian public called upon the PM to take practical action by making use of a trust account. All they want from him is a sign of good faith.

When will the Prime Minister stand up like a man, assume his responsibilities, make apologies and put the dirty money into a trust account, once and for all?

• (1455)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been clear, as has the Liberal Party.

If the party has received any inappropriate funds, it will reimburse the taxpayers. It is not possible to do so, however, without all the facts. That is why we are waiting for the Gomery commission's report.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Prime Minister.

One of the reasons this Parliament is not working is that the Prime Minister and his government keep thumbing their noses at things that are passed in the House: the motion on DFAIT, the motion on the Air-India inquiry, the motion on Glen Murray, and now the motion on setting up a trust fund to put aside the money.

Will the Prime Minister finally show some respect, show that he acknowledges that this is a minority Parliament and the government has a responsibility to respect the will of Parliament, and put that money aside?

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the party has been absolutely clear; the Prime Minister has been clear; the Minister of Transport has been clear that any funds that were received inappropriately will be returned to the taxpayer.

Let us face the facts on this. The Liberal Party and our Liberal Prime Minister are the ones who are determined to get to the truth. We do not fear the truth. We will make the appropriate actions based on that truth when we have the Gomery report.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, may I just remind the government, if it continues to violate the will of the majority of the House, it does so at its peril.

The Minister of Transport keeps answering about his views on Alfonso Gagliano and his own definitions on lobbying.

I would like the Minister of Transport to just be clear. Today a number of articles describe a meeting between the former minister of public works, Alfonso Gagliano, himself and François Duffar of Cossette Communication Group. Did that meeting take place, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said a number of times that this was a social meeting, period.

[English]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Okay, Mr. Speaker, it was a social meeting after which Cossette Communication got a \$100 million contract.

Let me ask a second question. Was Cossette Communication a client of the Prime Minister's Quebec lieutenant? By client I mean did he ever receive money—he was a radio talk show host—from Cossette Communication?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition had read the reports in the newspapers and magazines and so forth, he would have seen that it has always been obvious that I provided research, analysis and strategies to a number of private sector clients over the years, including Cossette Communication.

[English]

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): The fog is clearing, Mr. Speaker. Now we know that there was a meeting.

We would like to know, did the Minister of Transport, when he was in the private sector, organize a meeting between François Duffar of Cossette Communication and the then minister of public works, Alfonso Gagliano? Did he make the social gathering happen?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the same answer applies.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): But what is the answer, Mr. Speaker? I do not get it. Anyway, I am going to put it very clearly.

Did the Minister of Transport receive money, receive payments, from Cossette Communication, for anything? Did he receive money

from that organization and did he organize meetings between Messrs. Duffar and Gagliano? Yes or no?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, same question, same answer.

* * *

• (1500)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment has expressed his dream of seeing one hydroelectric transmission line stretching from east to west in Canada.

Can the Minister of the Environment guarantee he will never force Hydro-Québec to sell its electricity to other parts of Canada at a price lower than what it can get on international markets?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I realize the Bloc knows nothing of the Canadian Constitution, but the Government of Canada has no power to force Hydro-Québec to buy or to sell hydroelectricity.

Our plan, however, is based on the concept of partnership. We know that the Government of Quebec, Hydro-Québec and the Government of Ontario are very interested in forming a partnership with the Government of Canada to reduce greenhouse gases and thus honour our international commitment as part of the Kyoto protocol.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's line is operating at low voltage.

The point of the exercise is to protect Hydro-Québec against federal meddling in its operations.

Will the government promise that Hydro-Québec will not be obliged to carry electricity in transit across Quebec, without the formal agreement of Quebec?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with questions like that, the Bloc is demonstrating its total uselessness yet again. We are talking about a partnership with the Government of Quebec. Nobody is imposing anything on anyone. If there is one thing Hydro-Québec can do without, it is the protection of the separatists.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2000 the Liberal government made two commitments to the victims of crime. One was to make more information available to them when it came to transferring offenders, and the others who could not attend parole hearings would receive audio tapes of the hearings. As usual, these two promises made were two promises broken.

How is today's announcement regarding victims any different? Is it not anything more than a public relations exercise prior to an election?

Oral Questions

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the strong advocacy of my colleague from the riding of Nickel Belt, today as soon as question period is over, we will be introducing both amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and announcing changes in relation to the way our corrections system deals with victims, including the two specific items that the hon. member has mentioned.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister should not be so smug. Those parole amendments were recommended five years ago, and the government did nothing but dither.

Perhaps the minister would like to face Montreal police officer Walter Filipas and try to convince him of the virtues of the long overdue legislation. In 1993 Filipas was shot in the head by Claude Forget. This would-be cop killer is scheduled for statutory release in September.

Will the minister personally ensure that Forget's case is properly reviewed before he is pushed back onto the streets by statutory release?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the hon. member knows, I know that he knows actually, that is a matter that will come before the parole board. If there are extenuating circumstances in this case, obviously the parole board will review it. I will say in addition to that, I today am not only tabling amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, I am also asking the standing committee on justice and human rights to take up a broader review with that act, including the issue of statutory release.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Official Languages.

On April 11, the members of the House passed, with a huge majority, Bill S-3, which I sponsored, at second reading. However, now, the Conservative members are turning around and postponing consideration of the bill in committee.

Can the minister help us deal with the Conservative members, who are engaging in petty politics at the expense of francophones living in a minority situation in Canada? Can he help us deal with this?

• (1505)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 35 years after this country was declared officially bilingual, the official opposition has finally said yes; supposedly, it gave its okay at its convention in March. I say supposedly because, yesterday, we saw clear evidence to the contrary, when a Conservative-Bloc alliance tried to indefinitely postpone this bill, which would improve the lives

of official language minority communities in Canada. Its true position is clear.

As for our government and our party, these communities know that they have been able to rely on us in the past, they can rely on us now and they will be able to rely on us in the future.

* * *

[English]

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 1992 the Calgary Airport Authority has paid more than \$250 million in airport rent for a facility that was valued at that time at \$118 million. The federal government's contribution over that time has been zero. Instead, Calgary's rent will increase by a whopping 125% to \$56 million, charges that will undoubtedly be passed on to the travelling public and the beleaguered airline industry.

My question is for the Minister of Transport. For once, will the government support the airline industry and our local airports—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister has made so many representations on this topic that I know we are going to have some action. I am working diligently with the Minister of Finance and this issue will be solved.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a long time coming and I do not think the minister is paying attention to all the CEOs of the airport authorities.

The government continues to use airports to extract a hidden tax from air travellers and the airline industry. El Al, Israel's national airline, has already warned that if the costs keep rising, it might be forced to drop Canada from its roster. On top of all this, Air Canada and even WestJet are having trouble operating in this overtaxed industry.

Can the Minister of Transport explain to this House how higher airport rents benefit the airline industry in Canada?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the representations of this caucus and of airport authorities across the country, we will find a more equitable formula before the end of June.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its latest budget, specifically in annex 8, the government proposes changes to the Income Tax Regulations to increase the maximum pension benefit accrual rate from 2% to 2.33% for public safety occupations, including correctional officers. This measure is retroactive to January 1, 2005.

Why, after making this promise in the budget, is the President of the Treasury Board refusing to negotiate with the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in constant dialogue with the union, the CSN. Staff report that progress is being made. We will reach a conclusion when both sides are satisfied that we have reached an agreement.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities.

Last week the Government of Canada announced the first bilateral agreement in the delivery of the promised new deal for cities and communities in British Columbia.

With agreements reportedly close to being signed with Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Alberta, can the minister inform the House on the status of negotiations with the province of Ontario, where the Government of Canada is committed to delivering \$1.9 billion over the next five years to cities and communities across the province?

Hon. John Godfrey (Minister of State (Infrastructure and Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member properly notes, we signed a fantastic deal on Friday with British Columbia and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

Negotiations are proceeding well with Ontario and indeed right across the country in every province and territory. However, the money will not flow if the budget does not pass.

I ask the members opposite to hearken to the words of the mayor of Regina, "This budget should not be used as a political pawn". I would listen to the mayor of Toronto who said, "It would be a huge setback if the gas tax money did not flow", and the mayor of Vancouver who said, "It would be crazy and stupid to call an election when funding for cities hangs in the balance".

* * *

● (1510)

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on Monday, April 4 by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell arising from a question by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill during that day's question period in

which the hon. member made reference to a Liberal member of the House being under criminal investigation.

I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this matter. I would also like to thank the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill for her intervention.

In presenting his case, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell stated that during question period, when posing a supplementary question to the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration about a matter involving possible abuses of the temporary resident permit system, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill mentioned that a Liberal member had been under criminal investigation but without naming the member. The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell felt this was inappropriate as it "cast a net on every single one of us on this side of the House of Commons" and asked that the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill withdraw the reference she made in her question.

In reply, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill stated that her remarks were based on an article found in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper for March 31 and she quoted from it. I have myself read this press report and note that immediately following the text quoted by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill, another press report states that the named Liberal member denied the allegations made against himself or herself and also states that the RCMP had carried out several interviews but had not talked to the Liberal member in question nor had laid charges.

It seems to me significant that the reported police investigation did not even go as far as talking to the member against whom the allegations had been made and, further to this, that no charges were laid. It is also important to note that the press report does not mention a "criminal" investigation of the Liberal member, in the sense that the Liberal member was suspected of committing a criminal act. Rather, the press report indicates only that allegations made against the member were being investigated. It is possible that the allegations were of interest to the RCMP in relation to suspected criminal activities by persons other than the member named.

[Translation]

For these reasons, I am concerned that all hon. members be mindful of the injury that may be done by quoting in the House media reports about other members. All members of Parliament are hon. members and are entitled to be treated with respect in this chamber and to be given the benefit of the doubt regarding allegations of such a serious nature.

Routine Proceedings

•(1515)

[English]

At first glance, the situation here seems to be one where the sub judice convention might apply and constrain members from making the kind of comments made here. However, the difficulty in this matter is that it falls below the threshold for application of the sub judice convention by which members are restrained from making any comments in this House relating to a matter that is before the courts because the convention only applies once charges have been laid. The reference by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill was to a criminal investigation, without any reference to charges being laid against the Liberal member, and before any charges were laid. Furthermore, charges have not been laid since.

Members of Parliament as elected public figures are often subject to criticisms and comments in the media which, on occasion, rightly or wrongly reflect poorly on their actions, if not also their character. The usual rules about defamation do not apply, at least not to the same extent, in respect to members of Parliament. We are expected to accept public criticism and unfavourable personal comment from time to time, however difficult this might be. This applies inside this Chamber as well. However, parliamentary custom expects members not to impugn the character of other members. The mention of a criminal investigation of a Liberal member would seem to have this effect, though the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill may not have intended this.

I cannot find that there is a prima facie breach of privilege in this case as I cannot see that the ability of the Liberal members of Parliament to carry out their duties has been impaired. I would encourage all hon. members, however, to respect the usual courtesies and practices of this House, and I would invite the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to review the application of the sub judice convention as to whether it should also apply when an investigation is alleged or reported before charges are laid, which is a little more work for the committee.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

*[English]***INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation on its visit to Jamaica from February 28 to March 2, 2005, and I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation on its visit to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas from March 2-4, 2005.

* * *

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), I am tabling two certificates of nomination. Both certificates would be referred to the Standing Committee on Transport.

The first one is a certificate of nomination with respect to the Ridley Terminals Inc. The second certificate is with respect to the Great Lakes Pilotage Authority.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES MEMBERS AND VETERANS RE-ESTABLISHMENT AND COMPENSATION ACT

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-45, an act to provide services, assistance and compensation to or in respect of Canadian Forces members and veterans and to make amendments to certain Acts.

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

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-46, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Criminal Code.

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

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, respecting its participation in the meeting of the Political Committee of the APF held in Libreville, Gabon, from March 3 to 6, 2005.

* * *

•(1520)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Finance. In accordance with its order of reference of Friday, February 25, the committee has considered votes 1, 5, 10, L15, 30 and 35 under Finance in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and reports the same.

* * *

*[English]***CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT**

(Bill C-243. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

Second reading and reference to Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of Bill C-243, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (establishment of the Office of Victims Ombudsman of Canada)—Member for Nickel Belt

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for me to withdraw my Bill C-243.

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Order discharged and bill withdrawn)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, presented on Tuesday, March 23, be concurred in.

I am pleased to kick off this three hour debate on the concurrence motion on the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates that was presented on Wednesday, March 23.

The committee report was very critical of the government and for good reason. I will just read the report for all members in the House so they will know what the concurrence motion is about. The sixth report reads:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee agreed to the following motion:

That the Committee present a report to the House expressing its dismay and frustration at the lack of time allowed for the study of the Supplementary Estimates (B). Therefore this Committee recommends that the supplementary estimates be referred to the Committee at least 21 sitting days before the required reporting date.

The report deals directly with a situation the committee unanimously found to be completely unacceptable. The supplementary estimates B was given to the committee in such a fashion that we only had one committee day that we could possibly use to deal with the supplementary estimates B. Of course, that committee date had been booked and witnesses were scheduled long before that. We found unanimously that this was completely unacceptable, which led to the tabling of the report.

I just want to go through this in a little bit of detail so it is clear just how nonsensical it was. The supplementary estimates were tabled in the House on February 25 of this year. At the time they are tabled in the House, they are deemed to have been reported to the committee. This was done on a Friday, which was the Friday before a week when the House was not sitting. Therefore there was no opportunity for the committee to deal with supplementary estimates B during that down week.

The week we returned, our first committee meeting was on March 8. Under the rules of the House and Standing Order 81(5), it is clear that the supplementary estimates B must be reported to the House three sitting days before the last allotted day.

We came back to the House on Monday, March 7, prepared to hear our witnesses at the March 8 committee meeting and realized that was the only meeting available to us to review the millions of dollars of spending that the government had added to its initial estimate. It was a substantial change in budget and the committee was given only one meeting.

Because of a sense of responsibility and even though we had no time to book witnesses to come to the meeting, we did review the

estimates and we did report them back to the House on the 10th, which was the latest date for us to do so. We had to report back to the House by 10 o'clock in the morning of March 10, even though we had only one committee meeting available.

When the committee members realized what had happened, we sent a report to the House explaining in very curt terms how extremely upset we were with the process. We called for what I think was a logical solution to this ongoing problem. In our motion we called for the government to table the estimates in the House, because they are then deemed to have been reported to the committee at that time, at least 21 sitting days before the day on which we need to report them back to the House. We felt that 21 sitting days would be an appropriate length of time to deal with the supplementary estimates B in a practical fashion.

Part of the concern of the committee went beyond this specific problem of the supplementary estimates B.

• (1525)

Many times members of all committees have expressed great concern with the accountability of government in this Parliament. Part of it is the main estimates, supplementary (A) estimates and supplementary (B) estimates. Part of it is the performance reports, which, quite frankly, give nothing but fluff. I have yet to see a performance report, which is part of the government accountability process to the House, where the government has admitted that it has done something poorly.

Everybody knows the government has done a lot very poorly. Everyone acknowledges that the public service, from time to time, does things in a way that is not as good as it is certainly expected to do. However when it comes to the performance reports, we never see that in the reports. That is another part of this process that we feel is completely unacceptable.

Then, of course, right after the budget is presented in the House, the first part of the accountability cycle is the plans and priorities where the government talks about how it will implement what was presented in the budget. That document in itself is not appropriate, is not substantial, is not all that is required and has to be improved.

The whole estimates process continues throughout the year every year. When we look at the budgeting process of the House everyone will acknowledge there are lots of flaws. It does not take a member of Parliament long to figure that out.

When I first came here in 1993, I was on the agriculture committee. In my life before politics I was a farmer and also worked as a farm economist with Alberta agriculture. One of the things I did was look at programs that the provincial and federal governments had put in place dealing with farmers, farm training, business management and several other areas.

I was part of a team for the province of Alberta who got together with federal officials to put together some joint farm management programs and other similar programs between the federal and provincial governments. I knew those programs intimately from that point of view.

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When I came to Ottawa in 1994, I looked through the numbers in the estimates and wondered where the spending was on these programs. I could not tell from the estimates document where the spending was reported in the estimates. It was at one of the very first meetings of the agriculture committee while reviewing the estimates when I realized that something had to change.

We have had an awful lot of talk about change to improve that whole process but it has been mostly talk. Some changes have been made but for the almost 12 years I have been here it is not nearly enough. The government is not being held to account any better now than it was when I first came here in 1994.

To give some credit to members of Parliament from all parties, our party, the previous Reform Party and Alliance Party, and now the Conservative Party, has led the charge in many ways, but members from all parties, even the government side, have worked hard to improve this process. However the government and departments move along kicking and scratching as slowly as they possibly can when it comes to actually allowing these changes to take place.

A long list of some excellent reports have come out on this issue and it is worth talking about some of them. The good work done in these reports should be acknowledged. The unfortunate thing is that most of them have not led to substantial change, although I did talk about some success, again due to the hard work of members of Parliament from all parties and certainly my party was very much involved.

I just want to refer to a few key reports. The first report, entitled "The Business of Supply: Completing the Circle of Control", was a report presented by the Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in December 1998, almost seven years ago. It is referred to as the Williams-Catterall report or Catterall-Williams report, depending upon who is referring to it. The co-chairs were a government member and a member of the Reform Party at the time.

● (1530)

The report actually led to the establishment of the committee that I now chair, the Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which is the committee that presented the motion to allow more time for committees to properly examine the supplementary estimates B. That is a good thing that has happened.

This committee provides a higher level of scrutiny of government budgets and government spending than we ever had before. However, as chair of the committee I would be the first to admit that it is nowhere near as high as it should be, and there are several reasons for that.

I do not think it is the members of the committee who are really the problem. I do not think it is the committee itself that is the problem. It is that the government will not allow the changes to happen that are needed to really allow effective scrutiny.

We need other things, and I will talk to those a little bit, but I am sure my colleagues and colleagues from other parties will be prepared to talk about them in more depth. However I want to refer to two other committees before I conclude.

In 2000, five years ago, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented a report entitled "Improving Reporting to Parliament a Project — Phase 2: Moving Forward". The committee was chaired by a current member of our committee, the government operations and estimates committee. The report really did move things along a little further. I assume the member who was the chair of that committee will probably speak to this. However the committee did move it along a little bit more and there was a bit more improvement in the level of scrutiny but nowhere near enough.

That is clear when we refer to the next report, which was entitled "Meaningful Scrutiny: Practical Improvements to the Estimates Process". This was a report tabled in September 2003 by the Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates chaired by another Liberal member and with members of our party on the committee.

There have many other reports between these reports but these certainly were three of the key reports that quite correctly pointed out a lot of the problems in accountability.

Even after all that, the progress that has been made is nowhere near enough. There is a lot to be done.

I want to talk a bit about what types of things I am talking about just so that is clear. First, there has to be an improvement in the way the estimates are reported to the House, in the way the plans and priorities are presented to the House and in the way the performance reports are presented to the House. None of these reports are nearly as meaningful as they should be.

In fact, most members of Parliament in this House of Commons would argue that those reports are actually meant to hide how the money is being spent rather than to divulge in a way that is easy to figure out. The documents that are supposed to be accountability documents are presented in a fashion that they just do not do what one would expect them to do in terms of giving members of Parliament the information they need to properly examine spending. The problem starts in the way the reporting is done.

I talked about that when I talked about when I came down here in 1994 and tried to find the information on agriculture programs and joint provincial-federal programs but could not find anything in the documents. It took a lot of work for me to dig and actually find out where those numbers were presented.

● (1535)

In going through the documents, I found they were a little here, there and everywhere. It took the department an awful lot of work to figure out how much money had been spent on these programs and where the source was because I wanted to know. We know the source is taxpayer money and that is why we should spend it carefully. However, which departments, which parts of the departments and under what programs the money was delivered was almost impossible to figure out.

Clearly, the problem starts with the way the government reports information to the House. That is the starting point. Then we have a problem with the way committees review this information.

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Committees have an awful lot of work to do. Sadly committees of the House of Commons simply do not have enough people in terms of researchers available, people who will work on behalf of members of Parliament to help drive the agenda laid out by the committee. The committee is not engaged in this from day to day. It has a lot of other tasks, functions and work to do. It should get the appropriate information far enough ahead to know what it should examine to deal appropriately with spending estimates, and with the other various reports that come in the yearly cycle and the longer term cycle, and to provide proper scrutiny of the spending of taxpayer money.

Again, that and particularly the supplementary B estimates is the reason we presented the report to the House. We hope the government will respond accordingly.

After three hours of debate, this will go to a vote. I would be very surprised if any member of any party voted against the report. It is a report that does a very small part of what has to be done, but at least we decided we would tackle this and carry on from there.

Quite frankly, as chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, I and other committee members have done a lot of work over the last few months to try to make the committee operate even more effectively, especially in terms of using the research available and having more research available. Researchers specifically should be looking at the estimates, the performance reports and the yearly cycle. They should be giving the members of the committee the information they need ahead of time so we can do a better job of providing that scrutiny.

We have moved a small way. We do a better job of monitoring the spending of taxpayer money than we did when I came here in 1994. Credit goes to members of all political parties, but we have an awful long way to go and we have to look now at moving that along. We do not need another report. There may come a time in a few years where another report to move things to the next step will be required.

I referred to the information in the three reports. If we implemented more of those recommendations, we would do a much better job. That is a starting point. We do not need any fancy report. We need to implement more of these and there is an lot that can be done in that regard.

If we look, in a very broad, at some of the things we should do to improve the whole process of scrutiny, we should remember that the main purpose of committee review of the estimates is to hold the government to account. That means the committee should ask the tough questions in public about what Canadians get for the tax dollars the government spends on their behalf. This is the first point and that means we have to go through this process better.

I have only a minute left so I will not get into more of the specifics of what I would like to say. I will leave that to my colleagues and to members of other political parties. We will see whether the motion is the perfect solution, certainly it is a reasonable solution. I hope Parliament will pass it and I look forward to the vote on it. I look forward to great improvements to be made in the years to come in terms of more carefully scrutinizing the way government spends taxpayer dollars.

● (1540)

I look forward to the committee being effective. When I am on the other side after the next election, and I hope Canadians will provide that opportunity for me and my colleagues because we would be good for the country, I expect the committee to do a better job. If I am on the other side in government, and I expect that to be the case, it is critical the committee do a better job and I will do what I can to help that happen.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not think there will be much disagreement with regard to the motion itself. As vice-chair of that committee, the prospect of calling a number of departmental representatives before the committee to do a review of the supplementary estimates and to report back within basically two days was somewhat unrealistic. We only have one meeting to do this.

Although we have a lot of different departments to deal with, we were not dealing with the main estimates. We were dealing with the supplementary estimates, which were the final adjustments for the last fiscal year. It was not a big deal in the sense that many of the adjustments in the supplementary estimates substantively put into place any labour agreements that may have been reached since the review of the estimates and the supplementary A estimates.

The committee was given the opportunity to look at the supplementary B estimates. The member will recall there was a fallback plan that in the event any members from any of the parties had any concerns or questions, those questions would be resolved fully to their satisfaction prior to reporting back to the House. There is no question that it was definitely inconvenient.

The member has now raised all kinds of other issues regarding how we do the estimates. It is important to discuss this area, but I am not sure if this is the time to discuss it.

My question to him relates to his allegation that the government is doing something that does not allow members of Parliament to do their job. I would question the member's allegation on that.

It is the responsibility of parliamentarians to do the work. Parliamentarians have the tools to not only look at the documents but to call as many witnesses as they want from departments. We have the tools to get internal reports and to have visitations to look at certain things. There are an enormous number of tools available to us. However, members of Parliament do not often do those things for one simple reason. It is primarily because there are not enough resources, research capabilities, assets or time in the committee's schedule to do that.

I would ask the member to reconsider whether the fault lies with the government or whether it lies in the way we are structured in that what we choose to do in committee does not go as far as it really could and should.

● (1545)

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, before I answer the member's question, all members of the committee try to do their job. This is a non-partisan committee and everyone works together very cooperatively. even those members on the government side. From that point of view, it is a refreshing committee of which to be a part.

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All members of Parliament want to do a proper job of scrutinizing the spending of taxpayers' hard earned money. We are talking about money that is earned by our families, our friends and our neighbours back home. That is the reality. We are talking about billions of hard earned dollars which are sent \$1,000 here and \$1,000 there, sometimes too many thousands of dollars. Taxes are certainly too high. If we can do a better job of focusing the spending and if we can do a better job of scrutinizing that spending, then we can take less money from people but still provide the services that are necessary. That is the goal of my party.

The member has asked if this is the fault of the government. I would argue that in many ways it is. It is a different situation on committees now than in the past because we have a minority government. The opposition has a majority on committees now. We have a lot of say now. In the past the government had the majority and it used its majority to prevent the committee from providing appropriate scrutiny. The member knows that.

Let me refer quickly to one particular case and that would be the sponsorship program. That number was questioned at a committee I believe in 1998. Certainly it was taken to a committee after that and the committee questioned the 2000 expenditures. The minister was there. The government side of the committee hid the information. To that extent, I would argue—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It would be totally improper for the government to hide information. In fact, it was as a result of an internal audit that was posted on the website of public works and government services. How could it be hidden? The member has misspoken. He has misled the House on this matter.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): That is a point of debate. The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be brief because I know the member will want to respond. I first have to address the previous question by the apologist from the Liberal Party on the other side.

This is a very serious matter. I give all the credit to the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright for bringing it to the House and pursuing this. We are talking about here is the basic scrutiny of the expenditure of taxpayer money. We are doing everything we can to bring this to light under constant muzzling from the Liberal Party, and hiding expenditures. This was an opportunity. The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates was created to bring greater scrutiny. It is being muzzled by the government, by apologists such as the member, preventing us from looking at the expenditure of people's money.

Through all the member's efforts, are we getting anywhere? We heard through the election campaign and through the Prime Minister's leadership campaign how he would reduce the democratic deficit. Is it working? Is anything really happening? Has there been any constructive effort on the part of the government?

• (1550)

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, as chair of the committee I want to answer this very carefully. I would say no, we have not seen any effort on the part of the government. On the other hand, all members of the committee have been cooperative and have really

tried to do a good job of providing that scrutiny. That includes the government members on the committee. They are really trying to do a good job. We work together in a very non-partisan fashion.

If the member is asking me if the government has driven any movement to try to provide more meaningful information, to try to have performance reports that actually reflect the performance of the department, and for all that the answer is no. They do not want the information to improve. There is a lot of talk about improvement. The current President of the Treasury Board has talked a lot about how he will change things at Treasury Board and that we will have better reporting. However, it has not happened.

I doubt we will ever see the government improve that process. It will be up to us in the time we have remaining before the election.

This is an important thing to remember, and it will be up to us. Should we form the government after the election, and I believe we will but that is up to voters, I do not want to prejudice, then it is clearly still up to us to ensure the committee functions a lot better. It is up to us as government then to ensure the information given to all committees is information that will allow them to figure out how the money is spent, not to hide it as is too often the case right now.

Mr. Lee Richardson: Madam Speaker, I forgot to mention the cynicism in the country. I think it is particularly important at this time, with the scandals going on in the current government, that we proceed with this and that we get it. I would hope that the hon. member would be able to assure us that we could have passage of the motion today.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, after the three hours of debate and after everyone has had their say, there will be a vote. I am confident that the vote will pass. I do not know why it would not pass. It would be really hard to figure out, that the government would reject the concept of giving us just 21 sitting days to examine the supplementary estimates B and report them back to the House.

I would assume this motion will be passed. It is only a small step, but a significant step in allowing a better job of examining this information.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak in this debate on the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The House is being asked to adopt this report, which reads as follows:

That the Committee present a report to the House expressing its dismay and frustration at the lack of time allowed for the study of the Supplementary Estimates (B). Therefore this Committee recommends that the supplementary estimates be referred to the Committee at least 21 sitting days before the required reporting date.

I want to briefly mention the events that led to this report.

The supplementary estimates (B), 2004-05, were tabled in the House on February 25, 2005, and immediately referred to the appropriate standing committees.

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March 21 was the last day of the supply period in question and over three weeks after the supplementary estimates were tabled. However, since the House calendar had allotted two weeks for members to work in their ridings and since the committees had to report back to the House by March 10, the committees had only four sitting days in which to consider the supplementary estimates.

On March 8, 2005, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates considered the supplementary estimates (B) for the Privy Council, the Treasury Board Secretariat, Public Works and Government Services Canada and the Senate. At that meeting, the committee concluded that it lacked the time to properly study the supplementary estimates. Consequently, it passed a motion calling for the supplementary estimates to be tabled at least 21 sitting days before the required reporting date. This was later confirmed at the March 22 meeting.

• (1555)

[English]

I would like to emphasize at the outset that the government fully supports improvements to the estimates process to enhance parliamentary scrutiny of government spending. For example, as part of the government's efforts to enhance accountability, the 2005 budget reiterated the government's commitments for improved reporting to Parliament and committed the government to consulting parliamentarians further on this matter. In particular, the budget stated:

—the government will consult with parliamentarians in the coming months to develop a blueprint for improved parliamentary reporting. The blueprint will include the estimates as well as many other reports...Through these consultations, the government will determine how best to provide parliamentarians with more timely and accessible information on program spending and results.

The government continues to welcome proposals to enhance the manner in which the estimates are handled in the House of Commons and notes that the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates began examining the estimates process in the fall of 2004. The government looks forward to the results of this broader review.

Let me now turn to some of the implications of the report of the government operations committee presently before the House. This report does not raise concerns with the tabling of the supplementary estimates in the fall, as there is ample House time in the fall calendar for committees to review these supplementary estimates.

However, this report would pose a real challenge with the final supplementary estimates in the February-March period. As I noted earlier, committees had four sitting days to review the 2004-5 supplementary estimates (B) this past winter. This is completely consistent with past practice.

For example, in 2004 committees had 10 sitting days to review supplementary estimates (B). In 2003 committees had six sitting days. In each of 2000, 2001 and 2002 committees had only five sitting days. In 1999 committees had only four sitting days and in 1998 committees had only three sitting days to review these supplementary estimates.

If the government had been obliged to table supplementary estimates (B) 21 sitting days in advance, using the 2005 House calendar as an example, the supplementary estimates would have had

to have been tabled by February 2. It would have been impractical for the government to present the supplementary estimates this far in advance for a number of reasons.

I would like to outline briefly for the House these reasons. The production of the supplementary estimates is a very time consuming process involving submissions from all the departments, an extensive review process by the Treasury Board Secretariat, approval by the Treasury Board itself, and then the production of these supplementary estimates.

Currently, this process starts in late November-early December in departments with submissions to the Treasury Board Secretariat being made in the first weeks of January in order to have the supplementary estimates ready to be tabled in late February.

Advancing this process to begin even earlier in order to meet an earlier tabling date would not be practical for either departments or for Parliament, given all the current constraints around the business of supply and the nature of the parliamentary calendar.

We also need to keep in mind the purpose of the final supplementary estimates in order to provide funding for unforeseen circumstances and emergencies. Advancing the estimates process any earlier would not be advisable as it would increase the chance that items would be missed which would undermine the very purpose of the final supplementary estimates.

• (1600)

The government's practice has been to table the supplementary estimates at least three weeks before the final supply day, so parliamentarians have sufficient time to examine these supplementary estimates. However, I would like to stress that the government itself does not control the House calendar. In its wisdom, the House has decided that it should have two constituency weeks, that is weeks where members can work in their constituencies in the month of March. The calendar is established by the Speaker following the procedures set out in the Standing Orders and consultations with members of the House.

The House calendar is itself not within the jurisdiction of the government. Should members of Parliament insist on having a full 21 sitting days to review the supplementary estimates each winter then we might have to decide not to have two constituency work weeks in the month of March. This might be the only practical way to ensure the 21 sitting day proposal can in fact be respected.

In conclusion, I would point out that the committee adopted this report shortly after reviewing the supplementary estimates (B) this past year. The committee did not conduct any research into the precise nature of the preparation of these estimates or the time delay required nor did it have any consultations specifically on this matter with the Treasury Board Secretariat or other experts.

I would also point out that this is a very complex question and in our view requires further examination. That is why I note with considerable enthusiasm that the government operations committee has been, as I mentioned earlier, examining the broader issues relating to the estimates process.

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I would suggest that the committee examine this specific matter, the need for 21 sitting days before the final supply period, in the context of this broader review. Then the government and all members of the House would be better apprised and better able to make the decisions necessary to contemplate this kind of change.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to see the parliamentary secretary rise to speak directly to our report and to the problem. He acknowledged that there is a problem and has claimed that the 21 days is the problem.

Certainly, the committee came up with 21 days without considering details, although we did discuss it. However, we did not have as long a debate as we could have had as to whether 15 days or 21 days makes more sense. I would certainly be open to a discussion on that. We were upset enough when we were only allowed one day in which we could possibly review the supplementary estimates (B) in committee. That day was already scheduled. We had it scheduled weeks before.

The committee was upset enough that it brought a report before the House. I think the report is a very good starting point. I think we should pass it. If the government, whether it is us or them in a few months down the road, wants to change that figure, we can talk about it. We would be open to that debate.

He said 21 days is too long, that we would have to figure out the supplementary estimates (B), in other words the final spending for the year, in February. What is wrong with that?

I had a secretary back in the days when we had secretaries, who had a notice posted above her desk that read: "A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine". I think that sums up the situation. The fact that the government does not plan far enough ahead to give the committee this appropriate amount of time to deal with the supplementary estimates (B) is something that the government and the department should fix from their side. The committee feels that it is critical that it should have ample time to examine the supplementary estimates (B) on behalf of Canadian taxpayers.

We take the job of scrutinizing the spending of hard-earned tax dollars very seriously and we need ample time for a review. The government can certainly make a lot of other changes that would be extremely helpful. Those are changes in the way the numbers are reported, by giving ample time for the committee to look at them, and through meaningful performance reports. We just simply do not have that right now and there are lots of other things the government can do. The committee could make some changes too, and we are working on that right now. I would certainly welcome more questions.

• (1605)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Vegreville—Wainwright for his comments at the beginning of his intervention. Nobody on this side of the House thinks that the idea of one sitting day to review these estimates is by any means an ideal circumstance. I think we share the concern of members of the government operations committee and also of members of other standing committees who also have the responsibility to review these estimates.

We share the view that there can be improvements in this process. That is why I said sincerely that the committee of the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright should review this issue. The member for Mississauga South also serves on that committee. It should do so to have this broader review done and to look at, for example, the question of the House calendar in the month of March. Perhaps there is some room in that discussion for changes.

Certainly the government does, always has and always will continue to do everything it can to make sure that we respect the principles of the supplementary estimates and produce them in a timely way, with the amount of detail in the performance reports outlined by hon. members in the interest of making this review much more meaningful and serious.

From our side, to have the committee make recommendations on a broader review of this process, taking into consideration some of the points that I raise, would certainly be something we would welcome.

The report of this committee, as I understood it, as the member for Mississauga South indicated, was not necessarily about a factual problem with these particular estimates; it was more a demonstration of the need to look at the different timelines. My understanding from that particular committee process, and hopefully we will hear from the member for Mississauga South as well, is that members had in fact reviewed those estimates on their own with a view to calling witnesses if in fact they thought it was important to do so. Members of the committee concluded that they did not need to hear specific witnesses with respect to those specific supplementary estimates (B).

I recognize that this is an issue. I recognize that members want to be able to exercise their responsibility of oversight of government spending, and these are important estimates. For that reason, to have a broader review and a chance to look at all the different competing factors and timelines I think would be beneficial for the House.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great attention to the hon. parliamentary secretary about this very important subject, but there is something that comes to mind. That is this: there are conflicting principles in all of this.

I have, how should I say it, a little less hair and a few more years than some members around here, meaning to say that I do not have children who are young. I have grandchildren. The issue of the March break is not nearly as important to me as it is to some hon. colleagues. I do not deny that it is important, after many months in winter of sitting and working very hard, which members on all sides of the House do, to have that period off in winter with their families.

Now of course if we have a longer period of time to consider the estimates, in my opinion that effectively means to do away with an innovation of recent years whereby we have given time for members to go to their constituencies to be with their families during the March school break. We cannot do both simultaneously. We cannot produce the estimates earlier. We all know that. That is pretty well fixed. Also, of course, the school districts across the entire country are not going to change the March break because we are sitting. The two principles conflict.

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How can we possibly do all this, in other words, give many, many more days to consider the estimates when for instance this year I think we only sat something like five days in the entire month of March? That is the difficulty I have.

I was the leader of the government in the House for many years around here, to date I think the second longest serving one in Canadian history, as a matter of fact, and that was a problem when I was there. I have had colleagues say to me that they needed more time to study estimates. When I said to these same colleagues, "Okay, let us take less time off in March", they said, "Oh no, we cannot do that".

How can we possibly do both at the same time? That is the contradiction as I see it. I wonder if my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, sees this problem as I do. How are we going to possibly reconcile that, given the pronouncements of members at House leaders' meetings and every other informal venue when they say very forcefully that they want to be with their families—and there is nothing wrong with that—during those periods in March?

• (1610)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I think the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is correct in saying that members, particularly those with young families, want to be able to spend some of that time in the month of March at home or travelling with their families.

He referred to his lack of hair; I may have more hair than the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Like many other members, he referred to his grandchildren. My wife has a 15 year old son, my stepson, Selby Evans. Selby takes the March break according to the New Brunswick school calendar, which this year unfortunately did not collide with the many weeks in March where we did not sit. There was some distress for my wife and me because it is very important for us to spend time as a family during this period.

As I said, the government alone does not control this House calendar, and that is one factor that members will have to consider when they vote on this issue. We have to do so conscious that this may be the sacrifice we decide collectively to make.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, with respect to the comments the parliamentary secretary has just made and with respect to the response by my colleague, the committee chair and member for Vegreville—Wainwright, I would like to point out that—and I think many of my committee colleagues will agree—the issue here is the spirit of the motion and not the letter.

While my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright will call on us to vote, I think that the essence in a democratic process is that, by clarifying one another's comments, we move the matter along and really improve it. When I say really, I do not mean—and my colleagues will agree—spending one, two or three days on it. Still, at issue is taking the time to study the items in the supplementary estimates.

In my comments, I will first consider the budget cycle in its entirety—I will point out certain things—which includes the specific question raised in the motion, with respect to timing.

Consideration of the estimates, votes and the supplementary estimates is one very important aspect of the job of MPs in committee, but, more generally, of our work as parliamentarians. The motion concerns the supplementary estimates, but it is interesting to debate it in broader terms.

What we do in fact in studying the supplementary estimates and other items is analyze them. MPs analyze how public funds will be spent and distributed. This is very important, as my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright pointed out at the start. The analysis is crucial because it has to do with the way the government intends to spend every cent taxpayers contribute to government coffers. It is no small matter.

The role of government is to redistribute the collective wealth and to meet the needs of the public. We all know the needs are many and pressing. We also know how little they are being met at the moment.

Consideration of the estimates, votes and the supplementary estimates is vital. It is not symbolic, because it is linked directly to government spending, obviously, as I have mentioned.

In my opinion, and no doubt that of many others, this study therefore deserves all possible attention. Members must, therefore, have enough time. The notion of time needs to be defined, that is the deadline, as opposed to the maximum amount of time we would all like to have. The members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates have voiced their consternation and frustration in order to indicate how seriously they take this task. They did not make a criticism just for the sake of doing so. It is, moreover, inconceivable that we should give the impression that we are approaching something so important in a way that might be interpreted as cavalier, as if we were not concerned about this very important work we are doing in committee. Yet this work is of the highest importance, and we do indeed want to assign to it the great importance it deserves. It needs to meet the expectations of the public, no more and no less. So the time required must be taken.

• (1615)

If it is necessary to redefine the expression "time required", it would not be 21 days, I am sure, but it will certainly not be one or two days either, as I said.

I feel that this is a matter of respecting the democratic process, at least I feel it is also about that. The issue at stake here is the respect of our fellow citizens, that is, the people we represent. And the basis of that respect is for us to respect their legitimate expectations, especially where public finances are concerned.

In my opinion, this motion is justified and important. The time must be taken to closely scrutinize the government's requests for supplemental funding, and thus to require justification. This is critical, at a time when, more than ever, the population is absolutely entitled to demand accountability.

It is a known fact that having too much information is the same as having too little. When we have to go through this much information in so little time, we may not look at it as carefully as we should.

Committee members need more than just one day's notice to examine such voluminous and complex documents. Let us acknowledge that a budget document, whether for the main or supplementary estimates, is not very user-friendly. It has to be deciphered. The House of Commons has highly-skilled staff to help us with this task, but each member of the committee has to take on this task, give it serious thought, develop tools and be as well prepared as possible at committee meetings.

I will reiterate my last thought. It would be an aberration to have only one, two or three days to consider these budgetary estimates. Furthermore, this aberration could lead, and may have led, to other more serious aberrations. You may have guessed that I am referring to, without going into detail—it is being discussed enough these days and rightfully so—the scandals, the sponsorship scandal and the gun registry scandal in particular.

With regard to the review and consideration of estimates and budgets, if we had the right tools and if we could effectively review such ample documentation, we could obtain truly timely information and answers. In fact, as parliamentarians, we could obtain information that would allow us to act more expeditiously.

We want the members to be able to conduct a serious, in-depth and comprehensive review and to have more time for this than they currently do. We must take the time to study the figures. When necessary, the committee must be able to take the time to call witnesses and ask questions.

In response to the comments by my colleague from Mississauga South, I recognize that parliamentarians are responsible for ensuring they have access to the most complete and useful set of tools possible. However, I will put the ball back in the member's court by saying that it is always appropriate for the government, in keeping with its philosophy of transparency, to keep improving these tools, as well.

Dealing with such an important matter in so little time is part of the democratic deficit. As parliamentarians, we must work to minimize this deficit, and eliminate it, if possible. I want to be part of this process and, to this end, I believe that this motion is entirely justified.

• (1620)

The committee members, of which I am one, must have the time to do their job properly. I sincerely hope that everyone in the House will support substantial improvements to this process.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, discussions have taken place among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That in relation to its study on Canada's defence policy and the future role of the Canadian Forces, 10 members of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel:

(a) to London, Ontario on May 12 and 13, 2005;

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(b) to North Bay and Petawawa from May 18 to May 20, 2005;

(c) to Dwyer Hill, Ontario on May 31, 2005;

(d) to Winnipeg, Manitoba and Victoria and Esquimalt, B.C. from June 27 to 30, 2005; and

(e) to Colorado Springs, CO, Washington, DC and Norfolk, VA in the United States from July 10 to 15, 2005,

and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1625)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I move:

That 12 members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be authorized to travel to Niagara-on-the-Lake from August 21 to 23, 2005 to attend the Conference of the Canadian Association of Public Accounts Committees, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding the order made on March 11, 2005 in relation to its study on the government action plan on official languages, the Standing Committee on Official Languages be authorized to travel to Bathurst, the eastern townships, Toronto, Windsor, Whitehorse, Vancouver, Saint Boniface and Sudbury in May 2005, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened with care to what my colleague from the Bloc Québécois has had to say, and in principle I agree with her comment on the importance of being able to properly fulfill our role as parliamentarians. Since she is new here, as I am, I imagine our views on that coincide.

We are here to do a job. On the committees of which I am a member, we receive lots of documents on which we have to vote and express our opinion. Then everything goes back to the House, with our hopes that this will advance the democratic process for the sake of those we represent.

That said, we do have a lot of support. I should take this opportunity to congratulate the researchers available to us MPs, who provide us with truly exceptional service. Rarely do we turn up at committee meetings without having already studied the issue thoroughly.

My colleague made a point of saying that everybody would be somewhat favourable to the motion and the concept involved. No one wants to make decisions without being fully informed, particularly when budgets are involved. That is, after all, how the taxpayers judge us.

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Our colleague also says that a day or two is not enough. I would like to know how many days would have been really necessary in her opinion, since she is on that committee. I have also heard what the deputy leader had to say, and I admit that practicality must come into it as well. If a day or two is insufficient, can she give us some idea? Given the deputy leader's arguments, the jump to 21 strikes me as overdoing things somewhat.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Madam Speaker, when I addressed the parliamentary secretary earlier, I was truly speaking in good faith, as are my colleagues. It was an opening and it was in this light that I was calling on my colleagues.

In my opinion, it does not matter whether we ask for 21 days or 15 days. What matters is that we recognize the principle. I am prepared to give my support too, once we have been enlightened or given information—whether in a debate or another forum—which helps ensure further reflection. I will not dig in my heels at 21 days; when I said one, two or three days, I meant that this takes time.

I thanked the House staff who assist us in committee, because they do an excellent job. I am in complete agreement, since I said it earlier, with what the member for Gatineau has just added.

The main point we must remember from what the committee members have said about the motion before us is that the time must be spent. I think a proposal of one, two, three or four days is rather inappropriate. What I wanted to point out when I rose to speak were the reasons it is important to act responsibly, transparently, with good documents in hand and to be properly equipped. Obviously, my colleagues and I said at the start in this House that there are no partisan politics on this committee. It is truly a committee where its members, all equal, have the desire to move things along.

The point I want to address is, "Let us give ourselves more time". I have no magic answers, but what interests me is considering everything people here have to say and when we return to committee taking the time to reflect.

When I say it takes the number of days it takes, that means the time required is the time needed to do a thorough and serious study so that—if I may be permitted a pun—the public really gets its money's worth.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member who just spoke is a very valuable member of our committee. She brings with her a lot of experience and is certainly very helpful to the committee when it comes to personnel issues in particular but on other issues as well.

The hon. member seems to be doubting whether the motion we brought forth about 21 days is reasonable. I want to argue that it is.

The parliamentary secretary in his presentation said that if the 21 day rule had been in place, the government would have had to have presented its supplementary estimates B sometime in the first part of February. What is wrong with that? The end of the fiscal year is March 31. Is it unreasonable for government to have decided on its final spending for that year ending March 31 in mid-February? I would argue that it is not unreasonable at all.

We must keep in mind that for true emergencies a contingency fund has been set up. The money is there.

Why is it that government, in just that short time, the middle of February, which would give the 21 days required, cannot plan its final spending for the year? To me that seems absurd. I believe that 21 days is reasonable. I also believe that we should pass this motion.

If there is discussion after and we agree to bring another motion back to the House and shorten it somewhat, I would be open to discussing that, but I do not think the 21 days is unreasonable and I think we should pass the motion.

I would just like to ask the hon. member whether she feels it is unreasonable to have the government present its final spending estimates a short month and a half before the end of the fiscal year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Madame Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright for his question. I do not think it unreasonable. All I wanted to say is that open-mindedness is essential. Should the number of days, give or take a few hours, conflict with the merits of a request, I say that common sense must prevail and something else be agreed upon.

When I was on the committee I agreed with the 21 days and to make amendments. The matter of breaks to permit members to be with their families has been raised. I do not want to give it cavalier treatment, as it is an important value in our society. I do not see why parliamentarians could not benefit as well.

So my answer is that I will vote for 21 days. However, if anyone proposed changing that somewhat, I would not be opposed to listening to arguments put forward by persons of good faith.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc, Technology Partnerships Canada; the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, The Environment; the hon. member for Langley, Transport.

* * *

• (1635)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the certain bills to which the concurrence of this House is desired.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to enter into the debate on the concurrence motion for the sixth report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

On behalf of the NDP, I welcome the opportunity to comment on the sixth report. I want to thank the member for Vegreville—Wainwright for giving us this opportunity today. This was not the regularly scheduled debate to be before the House.

As the chair of our committee, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright felt it important to bring to the attention of the House a very important and pressing issue on how the representatives in our House of Commons are managing the public finances. My colleague and friend, the chair of the committee, is doing a service to Canadians by allowing us this opportunity to reflect on this today.

By way of introduction, I am one of the vice-chairs of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. I was present when the frustration that led to this report took place. By explanation for those who have just tuned in, the very brief sixth report of the government operations committee is an expression of frustration of the members of Parliament who serve as members of that committee.

MPs, who out of good will and cooperation come to that committee on a regular basis to do the important work of being the oversight committee and the watchdogs on public spending, were very frustrated back on that day in March when we were called upon to review, study, research, comment on and entertain witnesses on the supplementary estimates of the Government of Canada in one day.

Imagine how we felt. We were given these fat volumes of budget lines, big enough that we could hardly lift and carry them. We were asked, on behalf of the people of Canada, to give our opinion and our views as to whether authority should be given to the Government of Canada to spend hundreds of millions of dollars more than were estimated in the main budget estimates.

Supplementary estimates are a natural occurrence. There are some unforeseen spending necessities that come in the fiscal year of government that cannot be foreseen or anticipated by the main budget.

There are two things. In the first place, the government has a horrendous record on their main estimates. The evidence I can give is that successive ministers of finance have been so far out on the estimates that they astound everyone in the whole country who can count. Nobody can believe how far out these ministers of finance of the Liberal government have been. There is a skepticism right off the get go as we sit down at the government operations committee and we use the word “estimates”.

Second, if there are justifiable additional expenses within the course of the fiscal year that lead to the necessity of what they call supplementary estimates B, surely if the government expects the cooperation and the goodwill of the all party committee, it should be

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given the courtesy of letting us see those estimates and some justification for that spending well in advance to garner our support.

First, it is only courtesy and second, it is only common sense. Suffice to say it was frustrating for us as committee members.

I have a comment from one of my colleagues on that committee. He is a new member of Parliament, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London. He is a Conservative member who regularly makes good quality contributions to that committee. Here is the quote of that member from the *Hansard* of our committee. He said on Tuesday, March 8:

You know I'm new to this place, but to be handed the supplementary estimates on the day we leave, on a Friday, and have to come back and really, a day and a half later, vote on these...I don't believe the Canadian public thinks that's what we do with estimates or the supplementary estimates. They think we spend a great deal more time looking at them, going over them and finding where the good hard-earned money that they send up here is being spent.

This was before our week break.

● (1640)

I could not have said it better myself. There is an expectation in the country that we are sent here on good faith as the people's representatives to be the watchdog on their hard earned dollars. In the first hour of one committee meeting, we are supposed to make sense of this mountain of literature. It is confusing to anyone, especially lay people like us, with no rationale or justification, no little paragraph next to the budget line that says “we need this money because”. There is very little of that. We have to rely on the researchers of our committee to give us some of that.

The member for Elgin—Middlesex—London expressed his frustration quite clearly at the committee. We went around the table and everybody expressed the same frustration. They asked how we were supposed to make sense of these complicated supplementary estimates in that period of time.

We are kind of behind the eight ball because as committee members we do not want to be irresponsible and deny the ability of the federal government to meet its commitments and legal obligations. We do not want to grind the government to a halt by voting down supplementary estimates of this type. We are talking hundreds of millions of dollars.

In fact, I believe it was \$1.4 billion worth of supplementary estimates, not a couple of bucks here and there, not an amount of money to make the rent at the end of the month for the government. We are talking about huge spending obligations, which, fairly or unfairly, would certainly indicate a poor budgetary process at the front end if at the back end one finds oneself \$1.5 billion short in meeting obligations.

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Then we have the Minister of Finance say things to the media such as the government does not want to build up expectations because it only has about a \$1.9 billion surplus this year and there really will be enough money for all the regional needs. Then when the cookie jar is opened up, we find it is not a \$1.9 billion surplus, it is a \$9.1 billion surplus. He is dyslexic or something. He got the numbers completely wrong. I mean no disrespect to people with that affliction. Maybe he was looking in a mirror and was reading it in the inverse or he comes from some parallel universe perhaps where everything is reversed, like in the old Superman comics. Clearly, if the Minister of Finance cannot count that high, maybe he should take off his shoes and that might help him.

We go in to committee with some skepticism. However, to be asked at this late date, with virtually no notice, and to be given one day to deal with \$1.4 billion worth of supplementary estimates is unfair, discourteous and an abuse of the process, in my mind, either by omission or co-mission. It is abusive to us. One could even call it a breach of privilege. I have a parliamentary expert here who will probably correct me, but I view it as a breach of my privileges. I am being denied the ability to do my job properly. I have a right as a member of Parliament in the House of Commons to exercise the tasks that have been assigned to me by the people of Canada in a thorough way, but I cannot do that when these things are plopped on my desk with virtually no advance notice.

I fully appreciate and recognize what my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright has done today to move concurrence in this report. It gives us the opportunity to ball the Liberals out, if nothing else. It gives us the opportunity to tell the Government of Canada that we are not satisfied, as the Parliament of Canada and the House of Commons of Canada, with the government's behaviour, track record, management of our funds and certainly not the way it approaches us for permission to spend more money at the end of the fiscal year.

I was one of the founding members of this relatively newly struck committee called the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. We went into this with some hope and optimism that this would be an opportunity to add better scrutiny and oversight of public spending.

•(1645)

I come from the province of Manitoba, where the estimates process is quite different from the federal government process. Since this committee is called “government operations and estimates”, we thought that not only would we be reviewing the operations of government and trying to make sure there were efficiencies and streamlining, but we also thought we would be able to do a thorough review of the estimates process, like we do in Manitoba.

Let me back up and tell the House a bit about what that is like in Manitoba. Prior to budgets being granted in the province of Manitoba, ministers go before committees and get grilled on their estimates line by line. Here in Parliament we do a thorough analysis after the spending has been done.

The public accounts committee and the Auditor General have a thorough review of what spending took place and comment on whether they think it was wisely spent or not, if Canadian taxpayers received good value for their money or not. Very little happens at the

front end. It is all after the fact. After the horse is out of the barn we get to comment on whether a good job was done.

In my home province, and I believe in Quebec and other provinces as well, the time, energy and resources are spent at the front end, before the spending takes place. A minister of the Crown has to sit before an all-party committee and defend why his department should get \$100 million for X, Y or Z. That is torn apart and sometimes the minister is kept there all night long.

This has two positive consequences. First, there is a thorough oversight of what spending is anticipated and whether it is justified. Second, it forces ministers to become experts in their departments, because they have to answer the toughest of questions. They get a strip torn off them for every single budget line that says, “I need more money”. Those ministers need to prove it.

We do not do any of that here. My colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London said in his remarks that the people of Canada would be disappointed to learn the actual facts of our estimates process. If what happened to us at the government operations committee is any example, there is none of this rigorous tearing apart of the budget in March at the government operations committee. There is a cursory overview if we have time to even flip open the book. I am not accusing members of Parliament of not doing their homework or not working hard, but we are just not allowed the time to do it properly.

Hundreds of millions of dollars, nay, billions of dollars are being spent by the government with almost no permission, no oversight and no scrutiny by members of Parliament, certainly not by opposition members of Parliament. Maybe there is some behind the scenes stuff on the government side. Who knows what those members do in their free time? But in the light of day where there is transparency and accountability, nothing goes on. I am not trying to upset or alarm Canadians unnecessarily, but I can tell members that there is not the scrutiny and oversight they expect.

I think all of us would be able to attest to the fact that transparency and accountability have become the buzzwords of Ottawa, would we not? There is no phrase more frequently used in Ottawa now than the phrase “transparency and accountability”. Where is the transparency and where is the accountability? It is almost an issue of natural justice. If we are denied access and the luxury of time to do a thorough job, that is not transparency. If we are denied a full opportunity to review estimates, that is not accountability.

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Accountability is not the Government of Canada, the ruling party, being able to unilaterally and arbitrarily say it did not sharpen its pencil on the main estimates, it blew it and it needs another \$1.4 billion, so “let us fire off some documents to the government operations committee and get it to okay them”. Is that good management? Is that sharpening the pencil and streamlining efficiency? Transparency and accountability may be the buzzwords in Ottawa, but they are certainly not the practice that I have seen since I have been here.

I have just learned by the magic of BlackBerry that the Prime Minister will be addressing the nation on Thursday night at 7:45 p.m. He is giving a state of the nation address. Maybe he will say something substantive about accountability and transparency.

An hon. member: He should say it here.

Mr. Pat Martin: His best gamble would be to act like Jimmy Swaggart and prostrate himself before Canadians and beg their forgiveness. That is what I would advise him to do, but in all likelihood he probably intends to try to defend the indefensible.

• (1650)

Were we able to question the Prime Minister on any one single thing that we have found failing in the time we have spent here as members of Parliament and as members of the government operations committee, we would have to say to him that the notion of transparency and accountability has not been the reality in my experience.

I am sad to say that, because I believe most members of Parliament want to do a thorough job. They want to represent the interests of the people who sent them here. They want to be aggressive watchdogs of public spending. But we do not have the tools to do that unless we pass the motion as put forward by my colleague today, which is the report of the House of Commons standing committee.

In question period today, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, a man who is the dean of Parliament and has the respect of Parliament, stood up and chewed out the Prime Minister for, in his mind, the failure to act on the democratic deficit by ignoring the will of Parliament in situations just like this.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona cited four or five examples where we have moved concurrence in a report of a committee and passed it in a majority vote of Parliament, directing the Government of Canada to do a specific thing. The Air-India inquiry is one example. The motions then are ignored as if they were just minor irritants, just another thing to get through in a busy day.

When Parliament speaks, government is supposed to listen. Government is supposed to implement the will of Parliament. Otherwise, there is no respect for Parliament and we are just wasting our time here.

I raise this only to emphasize that when we finish this debate today on this concept, this notion put forward in good faith by a unanimous vote of the government operations and estimates committee, that when we are finished debating it for three hours today, it comes to a vote. If the vote of concurrence passes, as I

expect it will, the Government of Canada will ignore that vote at its peril.

If the Liberals decide not to implement the will of Parliament in this, which is yet another example, then going to the nation tomorrow night at 7:45 p.m. and begging for forgiveness is not going to help them. They will be doomed. I predict that the wrath of Canadians will be upon them, certainly the wrath of those representatives of Canadians who make up the House of Commons. We will do it for them. If the Canadian people do not have a chance to tell the Liberal government what they think of it, it is up to us to tell the Liberal government what we think of it and we will do that at every opportunity.

As the vice-chair of the government operations and estimates committee, I support my chair, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright, in his efforts to drive this message home.

This is perhaps the shortest report that I have ever seen from a parliamentary committee. We wanted to keep it simple. We did not want to cloud this issue with unnecessary language. We did not want to mix issues. This is a single message. It is not pluralistic in any way. It deals specifically with the length of time we should be given to review and study the supplementary estimates when they come before our committee. Nothing could be more straightforward. The figure that we agreed to at committee and which is in the report is 21 days' advance notice. That is not too much to ask for a billion dollars worth of spending.

We are not talking about 21 sitting days of our committee. We are talking about 21 calendar days, during which time the committee would have had perhaps two or three meetings but during which time researchers and people working on our behalf could develop material and opinions for us to be able to do our job properly and make sound and wise judgments.

In my closing minute, I urge my colleagues to look favourably on this motion, to speak in favour of it and to restore the confidence of the Canadian people in how somebody around here cares about how their money is being managed. I would like to think that we in this chamber do and there is a way to demonstrate that: support this motion.

• (1655)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member always gets good marks on style, but I want to comment on the substance. The reality is that the supplementary estimates (B) are the final adjustments as a result of labour negotiations and settlements.

Indeed, on this particular Thursday, here we are talking about how the supplementary estimates (B) have to be reported by the following Thursday morning, which means, since we only meet twice a week, that we only have one more scheduled day of meetings. But this is a Thursday. We also had Friday. We also had Monday. We had Tuesday and Wednesday to hold meetings if we had wanted to.

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If the members would just check the transcripts of the meeting, which are public and on the web, they will see that the committee members said, "Why do we not just have everybody review it on their own, and if they have any concerns, they can bring them to the committee on our Tuesday meeting? If there are any questions by any member, we will call the necessary witnesses on the Wednesday and still be able to report Thursday".

How many members of the government operations and estimates committee came to that meeting having reviewed the supplementary estimates (B) to say that they had a problem and they wanted witnesses because they did not understand something and they needed to have answers to certain questions? None.

Perhaps the member doth protest too much. As a matter of fact, I want to suggest to him that only 3 out of 20 standing committees reported back the supplementary estimates (B). It gets even worse if we look back at the main estimates, which were reported November 30. Only 9 out of 20 standing committees even reviewed the main estimates, where the big decisions are made and the big money is approved.

When we put this in the context that every standing committee of the House of Commons has a majority of opposition members and this is what is going on, we have to understand that the problem is not so much a government trying to stop somebody from looking at the estimates; it is in fact the committee system, which has become dysfunctional and has ignored virtually half of its job, that is, to do appropriate review. We have more systemic problems.

I would like to ask the member if, as a starting point when members of Parliament come to this place, the House of Commons should offer an orientation program on an appropriate review of estimates, and also do periodic updates and training so that members of Parliament can anticipate the dates on which things happen and can start working in advance of the tabling of estimates.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Mississauga South for his lengthy preamble and short question, but I would like to quote my colleague, who is also a vice-chair of the government operations committee. At the very meeting in question, on Tuesday, March 8, the member for Mississauga South said:

I would, however, suggest that in reporting back on the supplementaries, we append a note that expresses our concern about the shortness of the time, in that it did not permit us to do a proper job, and that we fully intend to pursue this with regard to a change in the Standing Orders.

That is a quote from the committee Hansard, verbatim, of the member for Mississauga South. He has been sent here with a mission to defend the government, but he forgot what he himself said at the committee. He cannot have it both ways.

My argument is that members here do not need training to do their job well. They need opportunity. I think it is a little cavalier to say that maybe the members would do a better job if they were given an educational tutorial on how supplementary estimates work.

We know how they work. I have been here a long time, as has my colleague. We think we do not have the opportunity to do our jobs properly or are being denied that opportunity by a system that does not really demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability.

● (1700)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to compliment the previous speaker on his speech, mainly because of the way he presented it. I think that ordinary Canadians who might be watching this program, I cannot imagine why they would be, but I understand quite a few do, probably understood really well what the member was saying.

One of the problems in this country is that people do not understand what is going on here or what takes place. A lot of people just do not understand what is happening. I remember when I came here as a rookie in 1993, I walked in here and got on a committee. I did not know up from down, or down from up. I did not get much clarification on estimates and all that. We had some quick learning lessons that were supposed to help us out, but I distinctly remember the first time we came in here to vote on estimates. We all sat in the House. All the government members were sitting over there and we were sitting over here, and we went through the clause by clause thing.

Will clause 1 pass? Yes, by division. Will clause 2 pass? Yes, by division. We went whoosh through all these things. We did that with the supplementaries. I got up, walked out and asked one of the older members, what happened? He said I had just spent \$120 million. I did what? How did that happen? What kind of a system do we have?

I think that rookie members definitely need a clearer understanding of what the purpose of these committees are when it comes to estimates, particularly those with supplementary estimates (B). The estimates come in when there are a few weeks left for the House to sit. We might get another \$1.7 billion, and in some cases \$7.1 billion because someone got dyslexia. I think the numbers can be switched, but we can spend that. The attitude that a lot of governments have had forever is that if they have all this extra money, they should spend it, get rid of it because they have a new budget coming. That is a rotten attitude, especially when one lives with an operation that is \$500 billion in debt. That is not even considered.

I used to get brown envelopes from people from CIDA and other places. I did not know what a brown envelope was. I opened one and thought that they ought to at least have signed it. No, they were not for that purpose. The information was to let me know about a particular group of people, 37 people, who were being taken to Argentina to study how that country was making out with its environmental work. Why were they doing it? The information said, quite plainly, that it was a total waste of money. It was just a matter of getting rid of the money, so that they would be sure to get a share of the budget the next time around. This kind of activity has to stop.

Routine Proceedings

When we mention that to most people, they do not even know what we are talking about. We are so short on accountability in this place. Do Canadians understand? Absolutely not, because most of the people here do not understand. I appreciate the message and I hope that Canadians quickly come to their senses that we must have a government in power that is willing to say that every voice in this place will be heard on these committees and committees will be given ample time to do the work that I think needs to be done.

I compliment the committee, my fellow chairman and the vice-chairman who I heard today, for taking action on this issue. I think that has been a big problem for the 20 some years that I have been around. This issue must be addressed.

I compliment the member for presenting it the way he did and I compliment the chairman for bringing this motion forward. It is time that some accountability procedures were put into place, so Canadians can at least understand that when we spend \$180 billion, they get some inkling of what it is all about.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Wild Rose. One of his best qualities is the plain language and the straight talk that he brings to the House of Commons. That is what makes people admire his tenure and his many years as an MP.

There is one point that I would like to leave people with as I finish my opportunity to speak. If we spent more time at the front end of our spending in the estimates process and less time after the fact reviewing what we have already spent, which is the public accounts and Auditor General process, Canadians would at least know what the government plans on doing. That is not too much to ask.

We have to reverse things somehow and spend more of our energy and resources at the front end, make the government justify and defend what it plans to spend, and why it is going to spend it. The former minister from the province of Manitoba could tell us, I believe, that the estimates process is a much more rigid activity in that province. Ministers there have to really know their books and budget because they are going to be grilled by the committee on every budget line they plan to spend. We do not do that here. We do not do enough of it and we would be better off if we did.

• (1705)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, despite the partisan chipping that goes on, looking around this place I see all of the people whom I know personally and consider to be my friends, and it has nothing to do with political parties. However, when it gets down to issues of importance, we tend to dig in and give it our best shot. That is really important to the democratic process. If we were all to agree on all things, this would be a very boring place.

I think all the members on our committee would admit that we are probably the least partisan committee on the Hill. We get along extremely well. We have, from time to time, made some tough decisions, for instance a significant cut to the Governor General's budget. I believe it was more a demonstration of a broader concern than it was of spending, but this issue of estimates is really important.

I have often thought that most people would think that the estimates are like reading the telephone book. It is something that

one can only do for so long before one's eyes become mesmerized and cannot focus.

I was very concerned to know that in the history of Parliament less than half the standing committees of the House ever report back estimates or supplementary estimates to the House. Why does that happen? I guess the reason is that we have a rule in the Standing Orders that says that if the estimates are not reported back, they are deemed to have been reported back without amendment. In other words, if we do nothing there are no consequences. This is part of the problem. There is no incentive.

I participated in a modernization of Parliament committee. I believe Mr. Speaker might have even been a part of this as well. One of the things, among many changes that we continue to consider on an all party basis, was how we could make this place run a little better. One of the changes we did make, and I am not sure if many people realize this, was that if a committee did not report back the estimates, there was an obligation under the Standing Orders to either inform the Speaker in writing or to appear in the House to explain why the estimates were not returned. I have a feeling that is not being enforced, or at least that recommendation was not ratified even though it was recommended by the modernization committee.

It is a very small but important step, so that committees have an opportunity to say that if they did not do their job, there is a reason, but if it is because they are too busy or because there is so much legislation and they are not sure which has precedence, these are contradictions.

Speaking to this specific concurrence motion before the House, on a Thursday we got the numbers and it was time to do the review of the supplementary estimates (B). The committee only had one more regular day of meetings, the following Tuesday, and then it had to be reported to the House during routine proceedings on the Thursday. That meant that the committee really only had one scheduled sitting day.

I know we had this discussion, that if our meeting was on Tuesday, that meant we had to do everything that day, but we already scheduled something else. We were not given a heck of a lot more time, so we decided to do something else. We agreed in committee, this non-partisan group of MPs who just wanted to do a good job, that everybody would do their own homework and review the supplementary estimates themselves, come back to our meeting on Tuesday, and if there were any questions whatsoever on the numbers that needed an explanation, we would undertake as a committee to get the answers on Wednesday and still report it back.

Notwithstanding the protestations that we could not be accountable, we had a backup plan to deal with any problems. However, the reality is that only three out of 20 committees actually reported back the supplementaries, and only nine of the 20 committees reported back the estimates when they had them on October 8 and had until November 30 to report them back. It would be two months less a week to do the work and less than half of the committees did the work.

Routine Proceedings

● (1710)

There are those who protest that the government is interfering with accountability and we cannot do our work and so on. When there is just under two months to do something and it is not done, and the rules are that if it is not done there are no consequences, this is not something we should blame on anybody but ourselves.

If there is a will to do this, committees have to schedule their work to provide for sufficient meetings. The government operations and estimates committee, unlike others, has a large number of departments for which it has to do reviews. We also have a number of crown corporations and other agencies, about 50 of them, that we have responsibility for and we would never, ever be able to do them all every time.

Even the Auditor General does not review every department every year. Her department does auditing, selection and sampling. It is constantly working on these things and when it sees problems, officials may do it again the next year. It is put on a rotational basis so that with a sampling approach toward things, the Auditor General can get a reasonable assurance that the operations within a department are operating in the prescribed fashion.

I spoke to the Auditor General about this whole process of the estimates. The Auditor General's department has produced a document for the reference of all members of Parliament. We had breakfast one morning about this. We wanted to talk about this informally. The Auditor General was very comfortable if parliamentarians would adopt a very similar approach to the review of the estimates. In terms of looking at the risks, looking at where there were large dollars, and that a small shift in either assumptions or direction might have enormous consequences in terms of spending and undertaking obligations, and indeed on the ultimate determination of a surplus or a deficit.

I remember when the gun registry was a big issue in the 35th Parliament. I know there are a couple of members here who have made it their life's work to continue opposing it. One member is right here and he has done an enormous job, but the registry spending was within the mandate of the justice committee. It was never looked at or queried. This was one piece of the responsibility of the entire justice portfolio and it was never looked at by the committee because members were too busy doing legislation.

Why is it if something is very important to members of Parliament that somehow they cannot say we want to look at it? It is an important policy issue and it is potentially a very expensive issue, and we want to monitor it. Well it did not happen. No one said we could not look at it. Members of Parliament decided that they would not do it because we are too busy doing other things.

We have to take responsibility. I wrote a report on this matter. The former clerk of the House, Robert Marleau, wrote an op-ed piece and it was on the front page of *The Hill Times*. It said that members of Parliament ignored 50% of their jobs. The 50% of the job was doing a proper review of plans and priorities, the estimates and performance reports.

Canadians cannot be terribly impressed if an eminent person such as the Clerk of the House of Commons makes an indictment like that. It is true because there are only so many hours in a day and I bet

every member in this place gets up early in the day and goes to bed very late at night. They are away from their family and have lots on their mind, and some have trouble sleeping and travelling, and all the other attendant things. Yet, there is far more work to do and not enough hours in the day.

How do we deal with it? This report may very well turn out to be a proxy for the House of Commons to re-examine the role of parliamentarians and the way we do our job, so that we can meet our priorities. If the priorities are to micromanage dollars, then let us micromanage dollars. If our priority is to ensure that we have the best qualified people in the role and responsibilities of safeguarding the assets and the controls over spending, let us spend our time monitoring who is in those positions.

● (1715)

If our priority is to change the rules to lock down things really tight so nobody can spend a dollar without coming through Parliament, let us establish that priority. However it takes a collaborative effort.

It would easy for me to simply stand here and say to my colleagues that the opposition is on one side and the government is on the other. The opposition is saying that government does not want us to be accountable. We can get into a partisan dialogue and have a little fun with it but this is not funny. This is serious and it is important. The dollars and cents are taxpayers' money. We all understand that and we do want to do a good job on behalf of Canadians but half of our jobs, maybe even more than half of our jobs, is to take care of our responsibilities at constituency offices.

I know the member quoted me and said that we must make sure we send a little shot over the bow that Parliament did not give us enough time to do the thing and we just wanted members to know, and that was the right thing to do, but we had a way around it.

We did a report. I have been on the government operations committee from its inception. I was the chair in the last Parliament. We had a subcommittee report. The subcommittee was chaired by the member who is currently the government House leader and it had representation from the other parties.

The report contained 21 recommendations. The first recommendation was pursuant to a meeting that we called with each and every chair of every standing committee, and we served them lunch. We asked them to please come to the meeting because we wanted to talk about the issue of reviewing the estimates. We sat them down, they had their sandwiches and their cold drinks, and we asked them what the attitude was of their committee to doing a review of the estimates and getting into this. Members can imagine what was said. Most of them said that it was a nuisance, an annoyance, that it gets in the way, that they were too busy, that they did not do them, that it was like reading the phone book and that nobody had ever explained it to them.

Routine Proceedings

The first recommendation in the report of the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Estimates, entitled “Meaningful Scrutiny: Practical Improvements to the Estimates Process”, which was in the second session of the 36th Parliament, was that when a member of Parliament comes to this place they ought to get some orientation on how to understand the estimates, the meaning of the words and the vocabulary.

We knew that not every member of the House was a bean counter or an accountant. We knew that not everyone liked dealing with pages and pages of numbers. As one member said, it is a stack of books. However we do not all look at the full stack of books. We second those responsibilities of other departments to other standing committees because we all take a share of the pie. When we come together and we all do the work obviously an adequate review is done.

I think we should be very careful on how we assess the responsibility for the situation in which we find ourselves. I have no doubt that there is support for the concurrence motion and that we should do everything possible to ensure committees get more than a few days to do a review of supplementary estimates.

However a responsible committee would understand, and the chair certainly understands, that the supplementaries are coming before the end of March so why would the committee schedule meetings during those times? Why would the committees lock up all their meetings when they know the supplementaries are coming? They should have left the time open and then there would not have been a problem.

However we just carry on in our merry old way and, if it does not happen the way we want it, then we use the excuse that we already had business or witnesses planned.

I really commend the report to members to learn a little bit about the estimates process. I think members should also take the opportunity to give their input from their own committee perspective.

I hope every member will go back to their standing committee and ask what the committee's track record is on doing a review of the estimates, of having people in, of reviewing the numbers, of taking the responsibility for doing an appropriate review and of reporting it back to the House. Half of those committees have not done it and have not done it for years, and yet there is important spending going on there.

• (1720)

We are responsible. The problem is us collectively as members of Parliament. I am sorry if I sound like I am preaching but it is important. It is not enough to say that the committees are now controlled by the opposition, which they are, because when people work together they deal with the priorities in a fashion that is in the best interests of all Canadians. That is what we are here for.

I will support the concurrence motion because I recommended it and supported it in committee. However I want Canadians to understand that when certain things happen and one does not listen to the rhetoric or the allegations but gets the facts, one understands that the problem is not somebody deliberating trying to interfere with the ability of members of Parliament to do their jobs. It is in fact that

members of Parliament have decided on priorities which are other than reviewing the estimates and the supplementary estimates.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations with the other parties and I would ask that you seek unanimous consent to jump to questions on the order paper in routine proceedings. I am prepared to table three rather lengthy questions from opposition members but I think we will run out of time.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary for clarification. Is he asking us to revert back to questions on the order paper or orders of the day?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the chief opposition whip, we would be going forward to questions on the order paper so I can table the questions. It is not government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Just so I am clear on this as well, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons would like to skip ahead to questions on the order paper so that he can table the answers. We would then revert back to the motion that we are currently debating.

Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move to questions on the order paper?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 117.

[Text]

Question No. 117—**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:**

Based on investment data contained in Statistics Canada's report, “Canadian direct investment in ‘Offshore Financial Centers’” of March 14, 2005, what is the government's calculation of the potential loss of tax revenues associated with these investments?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no link between the Statistics Canada report that is referred to and any quantification of tax revenues. The report is about investment flows, not taxes, and it provides no information whatsoever about the tax positions of Canadian companies.

More generally, it is difficult to draw empirical connections between statistics on legal outbound foreign investment and supposed tax revenue losses.

There are two main reasons for this. First, such an approach would require agreement as to the base case or starting point: what model for the taxation of international income is to be considered normative? If the answer were to use Canada's existing rules, then the only cause of revenue loss would be outright illegal tax evasion, the cost of which is by definition impossible to quantify. If on the other hand the norm were a so-called “exemption system” for the taxation of foreign source income, such as the ones operated by many other developed countries, then there would be definition be no question of a tax revenue loss.

Routine Proceedings

Those arguing that outbound investment automatically reduces tax revenue implicitly assume a third model as the norm: a system in which Canada taxes all foreign source income, with at most a credit for foreign taxes already paid. This would be a possible policy choice; some other countries do use such “credit systems”. To assume it as the benchmark is, however, to advocate a basic change in Canada's international tax rules, thus raising the second major difficulty with this sort of analysis: the need to account for the behavioural changes that would almost certainly result from moving to a different system.

Both Canadian and foreign owned multinationals would react to a substantially higher rate of Canadian tax on foreign source income. Much of the income that now returns to Canadian parent companies, and is spent or invested in Canada, would no longer be repatriated. Similarly, it is unrealistic to assume that foreign controlled enterprises would leave offshore investments in the hands of their Canadian subsidiaries, paying Canadian tax on amounts they could have earned tax free through any number of other countries.

In short, simple statistical data do not translate into any meaningful assessment of “lost tax revenue”. First, a revenue loss can only be identified against a specific benchmark or standard. If Canada's existing tax rules, like those of many other countries, are considered the benchmark norm, as long as the taxpayers who invest abroad comply with the rules, there is no revenue loss. Second, measuring against a different standard, such as a “credit system”, is much more complex than is sometimes assumed, since account must be taken of the behavioural changes that would inevitably follow.

* * *

• (1725)

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 95 and 103 could be made orders for return, these returns would also be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 95—**Mr. John Williams:**

With regard to the shredding or destruction of documents and papers by government departments, agencies and Crown corporations in fiscal years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004: (a) what was the total amount paid to shred or destroy documents for each department, agency or Crown corporation; and (b) for each department, agency and Crown corporation, how many times was shredding and destruction of documents performed (i.e. how many “sessions” of shredding were purchased from outside services), what were the dates of the shredding or destruction of documents, what was the name and location of the company contracted to do the shredding, and what was the cost of the shredding as charged to the department, agency or Crown Corporation on a per-session basis?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 103—**Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis:**

With respect to the international bilateral agreements to which Canada is a signatory that result in the reduction of the 10-year residence eligibility requirement to qualify for old age security benefits: (a) with which countries does Canada currently have such agreements; (b) with which other countries is Canada currently

negotiating such agreements; and (c) what are the criteria used by Canada in initiating negotiations toward such agreements?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Mississauga South has been a good member of our committee but today I think he became very partisan in his presentation in the House.

The member talked about the fact that only 9 out of 20 committees reported the main estimates back to the House. That, no doubt, is true but why is that? The reason is that the information given in the estimates simply does not tell the story. It hides information rather than divulging information. For that reason and many others, many members of the committee simply do not see it as a useful thing to do, even though most committees do look at the estimates and do review them to some extent.

If the performance reports were being done appropriately by government they would give good information that would allow us to judge whether the government had carried through on what it promised to do in the budget, through the estimates process and so on, but they are meaningless. Interesting enough, in the performance reports no department ever does anything wrong, and we all know that simply is not the case.

I think part of the reason that many committees do not spend the time that they should on the estimates is that the information given simply does not make it a worthwhile exercise. That is wrong and that will change under our government.

The member talked about the firearms registry and claimed that no one questioned the spending on the registry. The fact is that my colleague, the member for Yorkton—Melville, on every occasion that a minister appeared on the estimates, asked the question about spending on the gun registry and the government hid the information. It did not give the information that we needed to know on that.

What is wrong with this process is that the government hides information instead of giving information.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the gun registry issue is important. The justice committee does have the tools to do that.

I know the hon. member he refers to has asked many questions. However it is up to the committee to dig into that and get the information. That is what did not happen early enough in the game.

The member makes a general statement that the estimates just do not tell members what is going on. Perhaps we should sit down and talk about how we should approach this. There are a couple of reports that recommend some changes.

The estimates is a book of the numbers but behind that book of numbers are plans and priority reports and internal reports. We can hear witnesses from any department that we want and as often as we want if we need explanations. We also have opportunities to either visit departments or the like. There are processes and there is a way to get all the information.

I do agree that in many cases the breadth of operations is such, such as Public Works and Government Services, that it is not possible to review it in its totality. One of the recommendations in the special report of the government operations and estimates subcommittee from the 36th Parliament was that we start emulating the approach of the Auditor General to reviewing the estimates, which is that we would do different aspects of each department each and every year. We would then get a blend and a mix and deal on a priority and risk basis. We would have a reasonable basis on which to make an opinion on the estimates, just as the Auditor General has a reasonable basis to opine on the financial statements.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion. There are 54 minutes remaining of the three hours provided under Standing Order 66. Accordingly, debate on the motion is deferred until a future sitting of the House.

[*English*]

HEALTH

The House resumed from April 14 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion for concurrence in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Health in the name of the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

Call in the members.

• (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 66*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Adams
Allison
Anders
Asselin
Bachand

Ablonczy
Alcock
Ambrose
André
Augustine
Bagnell

Bains
Barnes
Bélanger
Bellavance
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blais
Boire
Bonin
Boshcoff
Boudria
Bourgeois
Breitkreuz
Broadbent
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Cannis
Carr
Carrier
Casson
Chan
Christopherson
Cleary
Comuzzi
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Day
Deschamps
Desrochers
Devolin
Dion
Doyle
Dryden
Easter
Epp
Finley
Fletcher
Fontana
Frulla
Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)
Galloway
Gauthier
Godfrey
Goldring
Goodyear
Graham
Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells)
Guimond
Harper
Harrison
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jean
Johnston
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kotto
Laframboise
Lapierre (Outremont)
Lastewka
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
Loubier
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
McCallum
McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield

Bakopanos
Batters
Bell
Bennett
Bergeron
Bezan
Blaikie
Blondin-Andrew
Boivin
Bonsant
Bouchard
Boulianne
Bradshaw
Brison
Brown (Oakville)
Brunelle
Cardin
Carrie
Casey
Chamberlain
Chong
Clavet
Comartin
Côté
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner
Davies
Demers
Desjarlais
DeVillers
Dhalla
Dosanji
Drouin
Duceppe
Emerson
Faille
Fitzpatrick
Folco
Forseth
Fry
Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Gallant
Gaudet
Godbout
Godin
Goodale
Gouk
Grewal (Newton—North Delta)
Guarnieri
Hanger
Harris
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Ianno
Jennings
Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lalonde
Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lauzon
Layton
Lee
Lessard
Longfield
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Macklin
Marceau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Masse
McDonough
McGuire
McLellan
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Miller

Private Members' Business

Mills	Minna
Mitchell	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy
Myers	Neville
Nicholson	O'Brien
O'Connor	Obhrai
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Perron	Peterson
Pettigrew	Phinney
Picard (Drummond)	Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Plamondon	Poilievre
Poirier-Rivard	Powers
Prentice	Proulx
Rajotte	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Reid	Reynolds
Richardson	Ritz
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Saada	Sauvageau
Savage	Savoy
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Scott
Sgro	Silva
Simard (Beauport—Limoilou)	Simard (Saint Boniface)
Simms	Skelton
Smith (Pontiac)	Solberg
Sorenson	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Stoffer
Stronach	Szabo
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Torsney
Trost	Tweed
Ur	Valeri
Valley	Van Loan
Vellacott	Vincent
Völpe	Wappel
Warawa	Wasylycia-Leis
Watson	Wilfert
Williams	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich — 269	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Guay

Zed— 2

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***INCOME TAX ACT**

The House resumed from April 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (exemption from taxation of 50% of United States social security payments to Canadian residents), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion for second reading of Bill C-265 under private members' business. The question is on the motion.

● (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 67)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	André
Asselin	Bachand
Batters	Belavance
Benoit	Bergeron
Bezan	Bigras
Blaikie	Blais
Boire	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boulianne
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Broadbent	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casey	Casson
Chong	Christopherson
Clavet	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
Day	Demers
Deschamps	Desjarlais
Desrochers	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Epp	Faille
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Fletcher	Forsyth
Gagnon (Québec)	Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)	Gallant
Galloway	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gouk	Grewal (Newton—North Delta)
Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells)	Guimond
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harrison
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jean	Johnston
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lauzon	Lavallée
Layton	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Loubier	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Marceau	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
McDonough	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
O'Connor	Obhrai
Paquette	Perron
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Poilievre	Poirier-Rivard
Prentice	Rajotte
Reid	Reynolds
Richardson	Ritz
Roy	Sauvageau
Scheer	Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Simard (Beauport—Limoilou)	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Hilaire	Stoffer
Stronach	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)

Private Members' Business

Tilson
Trost
Van Loan
Vincent
Wasylycia-Leis
Williams

Toews
Tweed
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 154

NAYS

Members

Adams
Augustine
Bains
Barnes
Bell
Bevilacqua
Boivin
Boshcoff
Bradshaw
Brown (Oakville)
Carr
Chan
Cotler
Cuzner
DeVillers
Dion
Dryden
Emerson
Fontana
Fry
Godfrey
Graham
Holland
Ianno
Kadis
Karygiannis
Lapierre (Outremont)
LeBlanc
Longfield
Macklin
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Murphy
Neville
Owen
Patry
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Simard (Saint Boniface)
St. Amand
Steckle
Thibault (West Nova)
Torsney
Valeri
Volpe
Wilfert

Alcock
Bagnell
Bakopanos
Bélangier
Bennett
Blondin-Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Brisson
Cannis
Chamberlain
Comuzzi
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Dhalla
Dosanjh
Easter
Folco
Frulla
Godbout
Goodale
Guarnieri
Hubbard
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Khan
Lastewka
Lee
MacAulay
Malhi
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Mitchell
Myers
O'Brien
Pacetti
Peterson
Phinney
Powers
Ratansi
Regan
Rodriguez
Saada
Savoy
Scott
Silva
Smith (Pontiac)
St. Denis
Szabo
Tonks
Ur
Valley
Wappel
Wrzesnewskyj — 112

PAIRED

Members

Guay

Zed — 2

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

GASOLINE PRICES

The House resumed from April 19 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 165 under private members' business.

● (1825)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 68)

YEAS

Members

André
Bachand
Bell
Bergeron
Blaikie
Boire
Bonin
Boshcoff
Boulianne
Broadbent
Brunelle
Carr
Carrier
Christopherson
Cleary
Côté
Crowder
D'Amours
Demers
Desjarlais
Dhalla
Faille
Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)
Gauthier
Godin
Guimond
Hubbard
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kram (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lalonde
Lavallée
Lemay
Lévesque
Lukiwski
Malhi
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
McDonough
Ménard (Hochelega)
Miller
O'Brien
Patry
Picard (Drummond)
Poilievre
Proulx
Roy
Simard (Beauport—Limoulu)
St-Hilaire
Steckle
Szabo
Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Valley
Wasylycia-Leis
Wrzesnewskyj — 111

Asselin
Bains
Bellavance
Bjgras
Blais
Boivin
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Cardin
Carrie
Chamberlain
Clavet
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davies
Deschamps
Desrochers
Duceppe
Folco
Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Gaudet
Godbout
Goodyear
Hiebert
Julian
Karygiannis
Kotto
Laframboise
Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Layton
Lessard
Loubier
Lunney
Marceau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna
Paquette
Perron
Plamondon
Poirier-Rivard
Rodriguez
Sauvageau
Smith (Pontiac)
St. Denis
Stoffer
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les

Tonks
Vincent
Wilfert

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Allison
Anders

Alcock
Ambrose
Bagnell

Private Members' Business

Bakopanos	Barnes
Batters	Bélangier
Bennett	Benoit
Bevilacqua	Bezan
Blondin-Andrew	Boudria
Bradshaw	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown (Oakville)
Casey	Casson
Chan	Chong
Comuzzi	Cotler
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
Day	DeVillers
Devolin	Dion
Dosanji	Doyle
Dryden	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Fletcher	Fontana
Forseth	Frulla
Fry	Gallant
Galloway	Godfrey
Goldring	Goodale
Gouk	Graham
Grewal (Newton—North Delta)	Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells)
Guarnieri	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harrison	Hearn
Hill	Hinton
Holland	Ianno
Jean	Jennings
Johnston	Kadis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Lapierre (Outremont)	Lastewka
Lauzon	LeBlanc
Lee	Lunn
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Macklin
Marleau	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLellan
Menzies	Merrifield
Mills	Mitchell
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Murphy	Myers
Neville	Nicholson
O'Connor	Obhrai
Owen	Pacetti
Peterson	Pettigrew
Phinney	Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Powers	Prentice
Rajotte	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Reid	Reynolds
Richardson	Ritz
Robillard	Rota
Saada	Savoy
Scheer	Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Scott	Sgro
Silva	Simard (Saint Boniface)
Simms	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
St. Amand	Stronach
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Torsney	Trost
Tweed	Ur
Valeri	Van Loan
Vellacott	Volpe
Wappel	Warawa
Watson	Williams
Yelich — 147	

PAIRED

Members

Guay

Zed — 2

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to be recorded as in opposition to that motion.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Due to a lot of noise at the back of the chamber, I accidentally voted in favour of the motion. If the distinguished Chair would allow it, I would like to be recorded as proudly opposed to this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I require consent of the House to change the member's vote. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:28 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from February 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-215, an act to amend the Criminal Code (consecutive sentence for use of firearm in commission of offence), be now read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-215, its essence being to add minimum sentencing for the use of a firearm in the commission of an offence.

First I want to explain why—I know, but few people seem to realize—legislated minimums are ineffective. In Canada, we have striking examples of this.

The most striking example is that of marijuana. When I passed the bar in 1966, I had never heard of marijuana. I heard about it when I started practising for the federal crown. The number of marijuana related charges had increased significantly. At the time, marijuana was not grown in Canada any that could be found here did not have any hallucinatory effect.

Marijuana arrived during what was called the flower power era, with the hippies and all that. It started becoming immensely popular at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s. All this marijuana came from outside Canada. What was the sentence for importing marijuana into the country? It was seven years. Frankly, if the minimums had been effective I think they would have prevented much of this drug from entering Canada.

However, my experience as a criminal lawyer made me realize that almost no one who risked importing marijuana—most often, mules on behalf of others—knew that the penalty was a minimum of seven years' imprisonment. In fact, much of the time, people are not even aware that there is a minimum sentence.

Later, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the provision of a minimum sentence for importing marijuana. No marked increase in marijuana use, which had peaked, ensued. This level remains unchanged today.

Private Members' Business

The second very clear example demonstrating that minimum sentences are not effective is the death penalty. Since Canada abolished the death penalty, murder convictions have continued to drop. In fact, the murder rate has continued to decline. Once again, this clearly shows that the deterrent effect of very harsh sentences has almost no impact on the offence rate.

There is a third example. This is an increasingly rare offence. In fact, the legislation has not really been amended to make the penalties harsher, but rather there have been changes in terms of enforcement and, above all, public awareness campaigns. I am talking about impaired driving.

There were minimum sentences, and there still are. They are the same, that is 15 days in jail, I believe, for a second offence, and three months for a repeat offence. We have, however, seen a considerable decrease in the number of offences.

I remember when the police started using roadblocks and roadside testing. The success rate was about 10%, that is, 10% of the people stopped were driving impaired. Today the figure is barely 1%. Today there are fewer people driving impaired, as a result of this sampling and all kinds of other measures, such as more severe sentences, stricter enforcement of the law and the use of roadblocks, but above all changing attitudes.

This is not surprising, when we know that, in the end, dissuasion and dissuasive penalties generally have limited results.

● (1830)

Those who are calling for harsher penalties really believe that, if the risk is greater, people will likely think twice before committing a crime. Anyone who has a bit of insight into criminal nature will realize that this has relatively little impact. Evidence and experience from the past can teach us some things.

For example, I remember a case in which a British Columbia appeal judge referred to the fact that there was a time when England hanged pickpockets. At the hangings, the fascinated spectators would be robbed by other pickpockets.

In addition, if the imposition of stiffer sentences and greater use of incarceration did indeed reduce crime, one would expect the country with the highest number of incarcerations would have a lower crime rate. According to the latest available statistics, which are from 2001, Canada imprisons 101 persons for every 100,000 inhabitants, and the United States, 689 persons for every 100,000 inhabitants, or nearly 7 times as many.

Do we really think the crime rate is lower in the United States than it is in Canada? In fact, general criminality is comparable. The net increase in the United States is in homicides, where an individual's chances of being a victim are three and a half times greater than in Canada. And yet, some states still retain the death sentence.

In addition, there is the fact that people are poorly informed about what goes on in the courts and give it only passing thought. When people judge criminals in order to have them sentenced, they realize it is much more complex than they thought.

Another example is the rate of crime and incarceration in France of 70 persons per 100,000 and therefore lower than in Canada. In

France, however, juries determine the sentence in addition to guilt, while in Canada they determine guilt only, and judges subsequently impose a sentence.

When we consider individual cases, we realize that the problem of sentencing is much more complex than it first appears, and so we think that harsher sentences will lower the crime rate.

There is, however, one measure that makes a difference and that is gun control. Long before the legislation was introduced by Allan Rock, the former justice minister, we controlled guns, especially pistols, in use in Canada.

Canada's crime rate is three and a half times lower than that of the United States. They say this will not prevent the real criminals from getting hold of weapons. Perhaps, but people who commit crimes using a gun, people who kill, are not necessarily hardened criminals. There are all sorts of reasons why they are driven to commit a crime, including anger or jealousy.

According to the statistics, there are eight times as many women shot by their spouses in the United States as in Canada.

It must also be acknowledged that a minimum sentence means, necessarily, accepting that there will be some injustices. There will be cases where the judge will be convinced that the minimum sentence is too severe, but will have to impose it. Setting minimums indicates a lack of confidence in our judges. I know that some of the public share that view.

Generally, we have limited information about what goes on in our courtrooms. I can remember reading some newspaper articles on sentencing that I found enlightening. The author compared the number of reasons given by judges to justify sentencing to the number reported in the press.

● (1835)

Judges would give 7 to 12 different reasons to justify a sentence. However, the papers would report only two or three and generally the most sensational.

Nonetheless, if some sentences handed down by judges seem unreasonable, which is possible in a country as vast as ours, these sentences can be appealed in a court of appeal. In my opinion, to convince us that a minimum is important, a case should not be heard in first instance. Cases should be limited to those before the court of appeal.

Private Members' Business

Furthermore, this legislation borders on the ridiculous because it adds 15 years to life imprisonment for certain crimes. The author did not seem to know that the minimum sentence for murder is life imprisonment. He wanted to add 15 years to the life sentence if murder is committed with a firearm. The difference in the various sentences handed down according to type of murder lies in the length of time before being eligible for parole.

It seems the author of this legislation never heard of that. It is as ridiculous as in the United States, where they hand down sentences of 200 years in prison, or three life sentences, and so forth. Here we would have that same anomaly, life in prison plus 15 years.

● (1840)

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-215. I congratulate the member for Prince Edward—Hastings for initiating this legislative proposal. It is a significant contribution toward addressing a very serious problem in our society today.

I join with other members in my caucus who have already indicated support for the bill. I want to tell the member who initiated this piece of legislation, as well as all members in the House, that I am quite delighted to support the bill. I would be very happy to see it sent to committee as soon as possible so that the specific provisions of the bill can be addressed and any concerns focused on at that time.

In general terms it is a very important step in the right direction. The purpose of the bill is to get tough on crimes that are committed with guns. The crime could be in any circumstance or any situation. It recognizes the lethal nature of the crime and the particular danger that is faced by the victim in such a circumstance. It is a reflection of a serious problem in our society today. So many crimes of late have been committed with guns which puts individuals at much greater risk of being wounded or dying. It is a serious problem.

The bill says very clearly that if a crime has been committed with a gun, there should be an additional sentence imposed on the culprit. The bill indicates the need for a tougher provision in the law which says that we as a society will stand firm against the widespread use of guns and that we will remain absolutely vehement in our expression of concern for the victims who are faced with such a horrific experience. I cannot even begin to imagine how horrifying an event like that must be. That certainly has been driven home to all of us by the news reports of late, by individual police reports and by first-hand experiences recounted to each one of us.

The statistics have been repeated on numerous occasions in the House but it is worthwhile to repeat some of them and talk about some of the reports that the police have actually presented to the public and to parliamentarians. I appreciate the hard work done by the member for Prince Edward—Hastings who initiated the bill. I commend him for giving us such a clear picture of the problem at hand.

I note in particular that his findings show a robbery rate which increased for the first time since 1996. Robberies committed with a firearm increased by more than 10% in 2003 and they continue to account for about one in seven robberies. That was quite a new

statistic for me. It opened my eyes to the depth of the concern expressed by the member and others.

The fact that two years ago there were 2,300 robberies committed with a firearm is just mind boggling and very alarming. I also note the statistics showing that 88% of robberies with firearms reported by police were committed with guns that were either already banned or handguns that should have been registered.

● (1845)

We can think of the harm these crimes do to our society. For someone who is wounded or frightened by a gun in a robbery or an assault, the scars must be very deep. And let us not forget those people who have actually lost their lives as a result of the use of handguns and firearms in robberies and other aggressive incidents.

In 2003 of the 161 firearm homicides in Canada, 109 were committed with handguns. It is a serious problem and one that we want to see addressed with every resource available.

One way this could be dealt with is in the kind of sentences that are handed down to those who use firearms while committing crimes. The provisions of the bill are very clear. Let us have tougher prison sentences for those who use guns when committing crimes.

This is an important initiative for many in our society. Victims' rights groups support it. The police forces across the country certainly support it, as does the Canadian Bar Association.

Many women's groups support this initiative as well. These are organizations who fight on behalf of victims of violence, many of whom happen to be women. These organizations really believe that the use of firearms must be reduced because women primarily are the victims of such a prevalence of guns in our society. Women are impacted by gun related violence at a much greater rate than men. We should not forget the impact that this has on all of the families and communities across Canada.

It is quite obvious from the police reports that women are affected disproportionately by the use of firearms in the case of criminal activities. I think about the Toronto police service report that we received for February, just a couple of months ago. One report indicated that two men entered a bar and were asked to leave. One of the suspects pulled a handgun on a woman, pulled the trigger twice but the gun malfunctioned fortunately. In another incident a man and a woman were found shot in an underground parking garage.

I could go on with all kinds of statistics showing the incredible impact that crimes involving guns have on our society. Our responsibility as MPs and representatives of the people is to actually deal with this issue.

We should support the bill. We should send it to committee. There may be some concerns regarding how such a law would be applied, how it could actually be made effective. The specifics of the bill have to be sorted out at committee. That is the appropriate place to deal with it clause by clause. Needless to say the principle is the point of our debate today. As an individual member and with the support of many of my colleagues in the NDP caucus, I want to give my support for the bill. It will have a significant impact on families and communities across Canada.

Private Members' Business

● (1850)

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to speak to the bill. Bill C-215 is important legislation.

When we talk about legislation and we get consensus on an issue on both sides of the political spectrum, we know we have an issue that transcends the political pressures that sometimes get in the way of good common sense.

The legislation is a private member's bill. I give full accolades to my hon. colleague from Prince Edward—Hastings for bringing it forward. It is important and it points to a serious problem in society, a problem where it has taken such a soft approach on criminal justice from so many aspects. The pendulum has swung so far.

It is important for the House to consider how it can stop the pendulum from swinging farther. We need to bring it back to where we can deal with the criminal justice elements in our society in a very aggressive way and in a way that will protect society from itself. A society that does not protect itself from criminals is one that is in serious danger.

I want to lend my support to the bill. It speaks significantly to more pressures on the criminal justice element. We cannot do everything in one legislation, but this legislation specifically adds additional sentencing to firearm use crimes. I want to concur with the intent of the bill. It addresses the serious problem out there and it tries to correct it. Any time we have legislation that will do that, it is a good thing.

The bill is not just about incarcerating people and throwing away the key. It is about deterrents. It would give criminals a sober second thought of the consequences of being caught in this kind of activity.

The four slain RCMP officers who were serving society in Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt is in my riding. I had the opportunity to attend the funerals and memorial services. I also had the opportunity to talk to many front line RCMP officers. I talked to them about the four slain RCMP officers, the worst incident since 1885 as far as the RCMP is concerned. It staggers the normal thought process to understand what went on there. It shook the nation from coast to coast because it was so dramatic.

The questions flowing from that are intense and are worthy of consideration. How could something like this happen? The RCMP say that this is not the only incident that has happened. It is seeing a different kind of criminal element on our streets today, criminals that have no regard whatsoever for front line RCMP officers. In fact, they will target them. When they become the target, then they are not just walking into dangerous situations, whether grow ops, drug use, family violence or other situations, they now are the target of the criminal.

When criminals have that much disrespect for our law enforcers, then we have a serious problem. They know nothing will happen to them if they are caught. Our criminal justice system has become so soft. Some of the penitentiaries and prisons are so soft and easy to be incarcerated within, something with which I have a difficult time.

In my riding I have a minimum security prison in Grande Cache. The warden took me around the prison a few years back when I first

became a member of Parliament. He explained how proud he was of the prison because prisoners could get their first year apprenticeship, a first year NAIT program, which is post-secondary education. He was very proud of the shop and rightly so. He showed me the welding courses, the woodworking and culinary programs. It was state of the art facilities.

● (1855)

The natural question for me was this. They have 24 hours in a day, the same as me, how many hours do they work? They are being prepared to go into the workplace where they will work an eight or ten hour day. If they are here 24 hours, maybe 12 hours a day would apply to getting this program under their belt. I said this to the warden and I could not believe what he told me. He said no, that they could work only four hours, maybe four and a half hours a day. I said to him that they would be going from prison out into the real world and the workplace. They had nothing to do for 24 hours, except eat and be looked after, but they could only be worked four hours a day. I told him that this did not work for me.

The warden phoned me back about a year later. He said that I would be very proud of him. He said that the prisoners were working seven and a half hours a day. This is seven and a half hours a day for minimum security, where they are preparing them to face the real world, still is not adequate to me. At least it is a step in the right direction. We can understand how little the fear is in that minimum security prison, when that is the penalty.

The front line RCMP officers were slain in a very violent incident. This individual who took those lives had no business being on the street. His rap sheet had 30 criminal charges over three decades. Eight times he was convicted. His charges ranged from firearms, break and entry, unlawful confinement, death threats, possession of stolen property and assault. Our criminal justice system failed those RCMP officers. It failed the communities of Whitecourt and Mayerthorpe and it failed society.

This will be repeated again and again. Individuals such as James Roszko, who took the lives of the officers, are in every riding in this country. Every detachment has a list of these kinds of individuals who could in the right circumstances be equally as dangerous.

If we do not put laws in such as Bill C-215, we will not have any hope of changing our the system. We will not have any hope of criminals becoming more responsive to understanding the penalties of their action.

Another example is the grow ops. These are not individuals who are in possession of marijuana. These are actual grow ops of marijuana. When we look at the statistics, most are anywhere from \$300,000 to \$500,000. Last year in B.C. one in seven did prison time. In Calgary, one in ten did prison time. When we see that kind of lax approach in our criminal justice courts, then we understand we have a serious problem.

Private Members' Business

It is not only the judges who are at fault here. It is also our crown prosecutors and our whole justice system. They plea bargain away case after case. Many of our crown prosecutors are stretched to the maximum. They do not have the opportunity or the time to do their work on each case. They are told to run them through and get them back on the streets. If we talk with the front line RCMP officers, they will tell us that.

The Conservative Party has a significant amount of changes that we want to make to the criminal justice system. I will quickly read some of the changes.

First, we want to institute mandatory minimum sentences for violent repeat offenders. Second, we would require that sentences of multiple convictions be served consecutively. We want to make time mean time. Third, we would eliminate statutory automatic release. Fourth, we would reform the National Parole Board, including increasing input from the community and from the victim. Fifth, we would repeal the gun registry.

The Conservative Party also would do things such as minimum sentences for criminals who use a firearm, strict monitoring of high risk individuals, a crackdown on smuggling and put more law enforcers on our streets.

We see these things as important to changing the paradigm in our criminal justice system. Society has been jolted by these kinds of incidents, so much so that the House has to recognize just how serious it is out there. We have to bring into this House laws, debate them and change the laws so we give the direction to our judges and our court system so they will do what needs to be done to stop criminals in their tracks and protect society from these individuals. It is important that we do all of these. I cannot impress upon my colleagues enough how important it is.

• (1900)

We have to look at this legislation in a very serious way. I support it and I encourage everyone in the House to support it. It is the first step. Let us send it to committee. We can change it a bit if we need. Let us send a message to law enforcers and to our criminal justice system.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to comment on Bill C-215 and to follow my hon. colleague from Yellowhead and my friend from the Standing Committee on Health.

The bill was tabled on October 18 by the member for Prince Edward—Hastings. It is a bill proposing harsher sentences for serious offences under the Criminal Code in the commission of which a firearm or imitation is used.

The most important aspect of Bill C-215 is undoubtedly the extent of the proposed increase in minimum sentences. The bill proposes minimum sentences that go way beyond those currently prescribed in the Criminal Code. In fact, the use of minimum sentences in the code is quite exceptional. Although they are most commonly found in the part of the code that deals with firearms and other weapons, the increased use of them is fairly recent and not much is known about the effectiveness of the 1995 amendments.

I would therefore like to begin by focusing my comments on the principles of sentencing. Following that I would like to talk a bit about the problems Bill C-215 seeks, well-meaningly, to rectify: what is it that is not working well in the application of the existing provisions that would justify the amendments that are proposed?

We would all argue that crime is a major issue. In my riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour it is a particularly problematic issue. We have had a rash of swarmings and robberies and people do not feel safe in their homes, as they should. How do we fix it is the question.

To begin with the principles of sentencing, let us examine what is provided for in sections 718 to 718.2 of the Criminal Code. In section 718, we find the following:

The fundamental purpose of sentencing is to contribute, along with crime prevention initiatives, to respect for the law and the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by imposing just sanctions that have one or more of the following objectives:

- (a) to denounce unlawful conduct;
- (b) to deter the offender and other persons from committing offences;
- (c) to separate offenders from society, where necessary;
- (d) to assist in rehabilitating offenders;
- (e) to provide reparations for harm done to victims or to the community; and
- (f) to promote a sense of responsibility in offenders, and acknowledgment of the harm done to victims and to the community.

The principle of proportionality, that is to say, the principle that the sentence imposed should be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of the responsibility of the offender, is a fundamental principle.

Furthermore, the courts are required to take aggravating and mitigating circumstances relating to the commission of the offence or the situation of the offender into account. They must consider the harmonization of sentences, that is to say, the imposition of similar sentences for similar offences and in similar circumstances, the totality of sentences when consecutive sentences are imposed and they have a duty to consider less restrictive sanctions before depriving an offender of his or her liberty and pay particular attention to the circumstances of aboriginal offenders.

Mandatory minimum sentences, especially those that are higher, can be contrary to several of the principles of sentencing codified in the Criminal Code, especially the principle of proportionality. They may also infringe the charter when the mandatory sentence is excessive or unusual.

That is why, in light of the principles set out in the Criminal Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we have in Canada a sentencing regime that promotes an individual approach. Our system allows the courts to impose sentences that are appropriate in light of the particular circumstances surrounding the commission of the offence and the offender.

The law that applies in sentencing does not authorize the courts to promote one of the stated principles to the exclusion of all others. Minimum sentences, especially those at the high end, are designed to give precedence to the principle of denunciation. Furthermore, the primary objective is to highlight the punitive aspect of a sentence, although retribution as such does not appear in the list of codified sentencing principles.

Private Members' Business

I am afraid that there is in our society an erroneous impression that minimum sentences are effective as a deterrent measure. I do not believe that is the case. The many studies that have been conducted in Canada and elsewhere show that minimum sentences have no effect on reducing crime. We merely have to look at the rate of gun crimes committed in the United States and the harsh penalties that apply there in order to understand that there is no direct link between the existence of harsh sentences and the commission of offences, though we would like to think otherwise.

In any event, even if we were to consider adopting minimum sentences that are significantly higher than those presently, it is our duty to examine the application of the existing provisions in order to identify whether there are shortcomings or gaps to be corrected. Criminal sanctions are the harshest measure of coercion in our society and we have a duty to resort to them when justified, and only when justified.

• (1905)

In the case of many of the offences targeted in Bill C-215, the current applicable sentences can range from a minimum of 4 years to a maximum of 14 years or life imprisonment.

By making use of much harsher minimum sentences, Bill C-215 seeks to make substantial changes in the approach to sentencing in Canada. I have commented on how minimum sentences generally risk being inconsistent with the principles of sentencing. I will not spend much more time on that.

I will simply conclude this part of my remarks by noting that with the large range of possible sentences in the existing relevant provisions there is ample room for the courts to impose as harsh a sentence as is desirable in the particular circumstances of any case and that there are no shortcomings to be rectified through this approach.

What is more, on the subject of current trends in the use of firearms to commit crimes, especially in the case of violent crimes, the rates are not increasing. On the contrary, recent justice statistics show a substantial decline in the rate of violent crimes committed with firearms, including homicide and robbery.

In 2002, 72% of violent crimes were committed without any weapon and 2.2% of violent crimes were committed with a firearm. That does not mean that action is not required and that is no comfort to those affected, but it must be effective and not just a show of force.

The existing sentences with respect to firearm use in crime are among the harshest in the whole of the Criminal Code and the current situation with respect to the use of firearms in crime in general does not show an increase. On the contrary, the current trend is clearly in the direction of a substantial decline.

So how would we be justified in passing the extremely high minimum penalties proposed in Bill C-215?

In conclusion I would like to reiterate my point with respect to the importance that we must give to the principles of sentencing when we examine any bill that proposes criminal sanctions. This task should engage us as parliamentarians here in the House even more

when a bill proposes exceptionally harsh measures as Bill C-215 does.

Mandatory minimum penalties adopted in an ad hoc fashion result in great disparities in the law and undercut a principled, rational approach to sentencing reform. We need to do something about crime. Let us focus on the ways to reduce crime that work, that do make us safer and do make us more secure.

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I too am pleased to speak to Bill C-215.

Like all those who spoke during the first hour of debate, I too share the view that the objectives of the bill are laudable. However, I, like most of the members who spoke, am concerned that the approach taken to address the issue raises significant problems.

Having reviewed the transcript of the first hour of debate, I could not help but notice the strong tone taken by the member for Calgary—Nose Hill with respect to the remarks made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice. She said that the parliamentary secretary could not have read the bill. This was in relation to the concerns that he raised with respect to the potential application of the minimum penalties proposed in the bill.

The member for Calgary—Nose Hill took great pains to read out the offences that are listed in Bill C-215. The point she wished to make was that the hypothetical case of an 18 year old shooting a bunch of car tires was not an offence captured in the bill and that it was irresponsible for the parliamentary secretary to say that it was.

I have read the bill and I am certain that the parliamentary secretary has read the bill. It seems to me that the member for Calgary—Nose Hill has not read it herself. Perhaps it was she who was acting irresponsibly in enumerating all the offences amended by the bill but neglecting to mention section 85, which is the offence of using a firearm in the commission of an indictable offence.

Mischief causing damage to property over \$5,000 is an indictable offence. It is indeed captured by this bill which seeks to amend section 85 by providing a minimum penalty of 10 years for discharging a firearm in the commission of an indictable offence. This penalty must be consecutive to the one imposed for the underlying offence.

The possible application of such a severe penalty, given the nature of the hypothetical crime we mentioned, must undoubtedly be the reason why the parliamentary secretary felt compelled to highlight the problem.

Another issue the member for Calgary—Nose Hill took issue with was the concern most of the other members expressed with respect to the proposal to add supplementary penalties. Ironically, she did mention section 85 in this context immediately after having omitted it from the list of offences being amended. Therefore she appears to be aware of section 85's existence. Perhaps it is just that she did not know how it applied. The Liberal, Bloc and NDP members all understood and made the point that the supplementary sentences proposed were problematic.

Private Members' Business

I would like to take the time to explain, for the benefit of members of the other party, the problem with supplementary sentences. It is actually not that complicated.

It is not possible to have two penalties of imprisonment for one offence. As an example, let us look at how Bill C-215 proposes to amend the robbery offence. Clause 10 proposes that every person who commits a robbery is guilty of an indictable offence and liable:

(a) where a firearm is used in the commission of the offence or in flight thereafter, to imprisonment for life, and to an additional minimum punishment of a term of imprisonment, to be served consecutively to the term imposed for the offence, of

(i) five years if the firearm is not discharged—

(ii) ten years if the firearm is discharged...or

(iii) fifteen years if the firearm is discharged...thereby caused bodily harm or death;

It is not possible to provide two terms of imprisonment upon conviction for one offence. The member asked why this was a concern when currently section 85 sets out an additional minimum penalty, to be served consecutively, for using a firearm in the commission of an indictable offence. My colleague mentioned that we do use minimum sentencing in our law for firearms offences.

Two things are important to note: first, section 85 is a separate offence and it has its own penalty; second, section 85 does not apply when the underlying offence is one of the 10 serious offences listed.

● (1910)

The 10 serious offences listed are: criminal negligence causing death, manslaughter, attempted murder, intentionally causing bodily harm with a firearm, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage-taking, robbery and extortion.

A higher minimum penalty of four years has been incorporated in the penalty provisions for those ten serious offences already if they are committed with a firearm.

This was the principled approach taken in Bill C-68, which provided significantly higher minimum penalties for specific serious offences committed with a firearm, a bill that I supported.

The additional minimum penalty of one year or three years, depending on whether it is a first or subsequent offence, at section 85 can apply to other indictable offences: those that do not currently attract a minimum four year penalty.

Some indictable offences provided in the Criminal Code can be less serious in nature, even when they are committed with a firearm. This is why it is so important that we consider reasonable hypothetical scenarios.

The parliamentary secretary, in the first hour, mentioned one example, which some members found to be too far-fetched. However, given that it is almost identical to a hypothetical case considered in an actual judgment on the issue of section 85, I would suggest that it is not at all unreasonable to consider it.

The member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles gave another reasonable hypothetical case of someone who agrees to stand as a lookout while an accomplice carries out a robbery in a store. This lookout person would receive 19 years if Bill C-215 were passed.

The fundamental problem with Bill C-215 is that it would establish an inflexible penalty scheme, one which would force the courts to hand down grossly disproportionate sentences in cases that could quite reasonably arise.

As I stated at the outset, although the goal of the bill is commendable, that is to send a clear message to deter those who would use a firearm to commit a crime, it would not be of any use if the scheme proposed is not viable and, as such, stands a very high risk of being struck down by the courts.

I will not be supporting the legislation and I encourage my colleagues to oppose it.

● (1915)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. colleagues who have supported this bill. For those who either take some offence or appear to be unduly concerned about it, I would like to maybe allay some of the concerns and address a few of them, but also make a number of points that I believe are very important.

Probably the most important point that I have to make on this bill right now is that the status quo is not acceptable. I am talking about people like Barbara Turnbull, who was paralyzed many years ago in a gun attack, and the drive-by shooting of Louise Russo. I am talking about the hundreds and hundreds of armed robberies that take place at our mom and pop grocery store operations or variety stores, and the hundreds of assault and weapons charges that are laid. That is suggesting that we just leave things as they are and hope it works.

We are talking about human lives here. We are talking about safety and we are talking about a responsibility of this House. It is not up to us to enforce the law, but to make the law and to give the tools to our police officers, so that they can readily protect society. If we stop anything short of that, we are not serving society.

If what we have now were working, I would suggest that by all means let us not touch it and leave it alone. Every day when I drive into work, I have the radio on at 6:00 or 6:30 in the morning, and there is not a day that I do not hear of yet another assault or another murder.

We have just finished the deadliest weekend in metro Toronto's history since I introduced this bill for the first time. This is taking place across the country including the terrible tragedy of the RCMP situation. There is no end to this.

We must stem the tide, so this does not continue ad nauseam, for the safety of our citizens. We cannot have a society where people are walking around fearful of their right to travel the roads, fearful of their right to go to a party, fearful of their right to shop in a grocery store, or fearful that somehow some ill-advised individual is just going to come in and say, "Excuse me but your rights do not matter". That is not acceptable. We must do something about the status quo.

Adjournment Proceedings

Some of my Liberal and Bloc colleagues have expressed reservations and others are supportive of this bill. I am not suggesting Bill C-215 is the entire answer. As a former police officer many years ago, I am not a great fan of minimum mandatory sentencing across the board. I recognize that reality does not work, but there are occasional situations where it does work, and where a very clear message must be sent. I honestly believe this is one of those situations.

There has been a lot of collective data used by my hon. colleagues here today. One colleague mentioned that a person would get 19 years for an armed robbery with the culmination of what I am suggesting and the penalties that exist now. I do not know which province or country he is living in, but if he takes a look at the sentences that are coming out of our courts right now, I have not yet seen a situation where the criminal gets the mandatory sentence. Plea bargaining is rampant and somehow, somehow this needs to be addressed. We need to toughen the Criminal Code. There is no doubt about that.

I am suggesting, quite honestly, that this is a start. This is a bill that should go to committee. We must send a message of deterrence. This is not a message of incarceration. We must wake up criminals to the fact that they cannot continue carrying a weapon as if it is a way of life. A weapon cannot be a status symbol. To say that this is out of proportion and an offence against the charter is an absolute joke.

• (1920)

I cannot believe that argument could even be properly put forward at this particular time. When it comes time for proportionality, Bill C-215 carries the punishment. There is not one criminal who does not know that when he picks up a weapon. It is not a case of leaving the scene of an accident or whether a mandatory minimum would be suggested. That is a wrong situation, I would argue. This is a clear decision by the criminal and that simply cannot and will not be tolerated in a society if we really care about the people who we are here to protect.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 4, 2005, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Do we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 7:28 p.m. for the purpose of the adjournment proceedings?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIPS CANADA

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this series of questions is a follow-up to a question I asked with respect to Technology Partnerships Canada, a program within Industry Canada. I have some very serious questions I would like the government to answer about this program.

For information purposes, the program has allocated over \$2 billion since 1996. Its recovery rate is less than 5% of the money that it has allocated. I have three series of questions.

The first is in terms of the number of jobs created. The government has in the past talked about the number of jobs created under this program. I would like to know how many jobs have been created, how many jobs have been maintained through the program, which companies have created or maintained these jobs, and in which year were these jobs created or maintained?

My second series of questions relates to the repayments. It is a question that taxpayers across the country would be asking about a program allocating over \$2 billion. Why has only 5% of this money been recovered since 1996, and why does the government keep changing the time period in which it says it will recover these payments?

I can recall years ago the former minister, Allan Rock, saying it would be recovered within a five-year period. It stretched to seven. I recall the current industry minister saying 20 years. Why does the government keep changing the time period in which it will recover from all of these programs?

The third question I would like to pose is in terms of a review. I have been promised a review for years by the previous industry minister, Allan Rock, and by the previous industry minister who is now the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. I want to quote from a letter she wrote to me:

In 2004, I intend to launch the TPC Strategic Review. The Review will ensure TPC is meeting its current objectives, and will identify the outcomes of its efforts. It will also ensure TPC is able to provide sufficient support to emerging new strategic transformative technologies in areas such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, and environmental and health sciences.

The TPC report was promised by Allan Rock, promised by the previous industry minister, and also promised by the current industry minister in the *Ottawa Business Journal* of September 2004. The industry minister talked about being keen to review this tech funding program, and yet to my knowledge all we have had are the annual reports, many of which have arrived late.

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In the interests of transparency and openness, and in the interests of being accountable to taxpayers which is the first and foremost job of Parliament, will the government finally come clean, answer these series of questions, answer why it has not produced a review, answer the questions about the jobs created and maintained, and answer the questions about the repayments?

• (1925)

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the member has asked some very specific questions. We could get the list of corporations and the number of jobs and so on from statistics in the department.

The point is that we have a program that has facilitated business opportunity very well. There are privacy rules. My colleague well knows that if a corporation does not want all information about that corporation released, there is a difficulty in releasing all the information about a corporation that is actually working within a program.

I have been here as long as my colleague has, and quite a bit longer as a matter of fact, and I can assure all members of the House that no minister to my knowledge has said the moneys will be repaid in five years. Certainly Mr. Rock did not say that. Mr. Rock may have said paybacks will start at a certain point and continue to build over a time period but not pay back the money in five years.

The government's priority is to ensure that scientific advances in research and innovation in Canada translate into jobs and into productivity in this country. We play a critically important role in risk sharing partnership with Industry Technology Canada and its key instrument is this program. It is a program designed to partner with companies to make technology investments possible in Canada.

Technology Partnerships Canada targets key strategic technologies: wireless, biotech, environmental and aerospace. Without a vital instrument like TPC, many of our R and D project advances would not occur. TPC investments are risky and there is no question about that, but the program is not intended to be a chartered bank. It is intended to give opportunities to those who would advance technologies in Canada.

Some 89% of the projects were invested in small and medium sized businesses, companies that often experience difficulties in securing traditional private lenders for money. TPC takes risks that result in innovative technologies being advanced in this area. The risks are assessed project by project and TPC performs rigorous due diligence tests in order to ensure that the risk is within reason. This procedure returns the optimum in investments and opportunities.

I can talk about the opportunities in my own riding of a corporation that announced it was going to Mexico and as a result of the TPC investment, it is now investing \$300 million in the Chatham-Kent area. It is advancing and bringing diesel technology to Canada which we otherwise would not have had, and we are looking at some very positive results as the result of that corporation creating a thousand jobs which would have gone elsewhere.

These kinds of investments are not just in one area, but they go from area to area right across Canada. Without that type of investment and without that type of opportunity, we would lose a tremendous number of jobs. We would not remain competitive in

many industries, and research and technology would not happen in Canada.

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I note for the record that none of my questions were answered. I have asked these questions many times in the House and in committee. I have never received serious answers to these questions. According to the government, we are the party apparently that is not making Parliament work. We ask serious questions and it would be nice to once in a while get some answers.

Here are some facts. As of October 18, 2004, TPC authorized assistance of over \$77 million to Cascade Data Services; Dupont, over \$19 million; Honeywell, over \$100 million; Pratt & Whitney, over \$700 million; and Rolls-Royce Canada, over \$75 million.

The fact is that taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being allocated, for what reason it is being allocated and when, if ever, their money will be paid back? It is their money. It is not Parliament's money. It is not the government's money. These companies do not have a right to it.

The parliamentary secretary raises the issue of secrecy. If these companies are not comfortable in releasing this information, then they should not have taxpayers funding their activities in the first place. When are Canadians finally going to get some answers about this program?

• (1930)

Hon. Jerry Pickard: Mr. Speaker, there are clearly answers in this program. We have to look at each jurisdiction and each area across this country.

As far as we are concerned, when a company is doing research in technology that money does not get repaid in one year, two years or three years. It is the development of a product. It is that product going to market. It is the whole operation of the corporate interests of this company.

If we look at the investment that we have done this year alone with Ford, with General Motors, if we look at the investment with internationals I mentioned, if we look at our BlackBerry operations and research investment there, we know that those corporations put products on the market but it might take several years, and we do not require them to pay back. But the TPC program is only a loan to the corporations. They do pay back the money eventually, but in the early years, it may be five years, six years or seven years before they are ready to pay that money back.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 18, I questioned the environment minister specifically about Canada giving billions of tax dollars to developing countries to in essence send taxpayers' moneys up in smoke in developing countries' smokestacks. The minister's response was unacceptable. I will quote that response today:

We will do it despite the opposition, which does not understand the link between the environment and the economy. The opposition does not understand that in global warming there is the word "global".

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Let me say that I understand what global means, but what the government is saying and what this minister was saying is this: in other words, no matter what the elected representatives of this country say, including me and including the members on this side of the House, no matter what we say, the Liberals are going to do it anyway. They are going to ignore the will of the people and the will of those elected representatives in making those decisions.

The Conservative Party does understand what will happen to Canada's economy if the Liberals fully implement Kyoto. Let me provide a little bit of background.

The Kyoto protocol, which of course was completed in December 1997 after nothing being done for several years, requires 55 countries, representing 55% of the emissions, to reduce greenhouse gases, to agree to do so. For Canada, our commitment is 6% below the 1990 level. We have to reach that by 2008-12.

It is estimated that in 2005 we must reduce our emissions by 270 to 300 megatonnes. What do those numbers mean? They mean a lot of things. They mean that this is going to hurt taxpayers a lot. There is going to be a lot of pain to reach these numbers for the Liberal government. Since 1990, in fact, because of the Liberals' inaction on this file and some growth in the economic sector of Canada's different industries, we have increased by nearly 30% our greenhouse gas emissions.

There has been no implementation by the Liberal government, no action up to this time, and now we are faced with emission problems and, quite frankly, a serious situation that, in my opinion and the opinion of many economists, is going to cripple our economy.

Recent studies actually indicate that Canadians will pay 100% more for electricity if the Kyoto plan is implemented and 60% more for natural gas. Indeed, we are already seeing an increase in gasoline prices at the pump. It is expected by some experts that we will see an 80% increase in gasoline prices as a result of the Kyoto implementation. Again, I say "ouch". It is going to hurt a lot.

Economists say that this could even lead to a recession. Canada's buoyant economy will end up falling into the pit of recession. As a result, our economy obviously will lose many jobs and we will have serious problems.

I would like to talk briefly on what I am most concerned about. When we fall into a recession, as most countries do, the first things that are chopped are the environmental programs that have been implemented. I am concerned with that because we have a lot of problems in Canada's environment today. We need to protect and clean up our rivers. We need to clean up our lakes. We need to clean up our land sites; we have something like 30,000 contaminated sites in Canada that need to be cleaned up. There is absolutely no action on these.

I am concerned that the implementation of this Kyoto bill will actually work in reverse. Not only is it going to devastate the jobs and the economy of Canada, but it is also going to cut where we need the most action. We need action on the hands-on environment.

Even the government's own officials have admitted that the cost of Kyoto compliance will be at least \$10 billion, not the original \$5 billion that the Liberal government said it would cost.

My question is this. How can this government assure taxpayers that Liberal bumbles will not cost us billions upon billions of dollars more and how is the government going to make sure we do not lapse into a recession?

• (1935)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed with my hon. colleague's comments. I found him to be a very engaging individual on the committee. This is an individual whose party is not sure from day to day whether it supports or does not support the Kyoto plan. In fact, I am sure it is a question that has caused the member and his party to suffer back spasms from all the flipping to and fro on whether it supports Kyoto.

The member and his party have no faith in Canadians. We announced on April 13 the most aggressive and detailed plan on climate change of all the G-8 countries. I point out that the government believes in a market based approach that is critical to integrating climate change conditions in the day to day decisions of Canada's citizens.

Let us take the climate fund as an example. It is a very important item in the budget implementation bill which Parliament needs to pass. It is a market based, result oriented mechanism to encourage emission reduction initiatives.

This transformative institution will probably be the most important element of our climate change plan. This fund will generate domestic emission reductions beyond any previous estimates and the amount of domestic emissions reductions will depend, of course, on the success of the fund.

We know Canadians are entrepreneurs and that they can move forward in this area. We expect Canadians will respond, in fact we are starting to see it now with all sorts of inventive ways of dealing with the issue of climate change.

The member worries about recessions. The only major recessions we have ever had in this country have been under Conservative governments, not under Liberal governments. The member may be confused. This government has had eight balanced budgets or better for the first time in the history of Canada since 1867. Canada is the only G-7 state paying off the national debt.

I have to say that I am concerned that the Conservative Party has not agreed to support a plan that would move this country forward in meeting its Kyoto commitments. In fact, on the international front the climate fund will invest internationally in recognizing Kyoto emissions reductions where credits are verifiable, not in Russian hot air.

I would also point out to the hon. member that the technology that will be developed and is being developed in this country will be used in places such as China, Japan and other places. For example, in Japan, which I am very familiar with, in terms of contaminated sites, and in the Yangtze Valley and the Guangdong region of China where coal fired plants are being used, it is our technology that will be used over there.

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We are investing both at home to deal with our emission issues and abroad. I would think the member would welcome that. It supports Canadian business, technology and know-how. The Prime Minister has made it very clear from the beginning that we will not buy hot air. As I have often said in the House, we will not be buying it from the Russians or from anybody else in eastern Europe. We also will not be buying it from that party over there either.

What the member has to do is get behind us. He has to say that he has faith in Canadians and that we can move forward. This will not cripple the economy. We know that green technologies produce jobs and opportunities. It is the Minister of the Environment who said on day one that a competitive economy and the environment were not mutually exclusive. They can work together. No minister has said it better than the Minister of the Environment in terms of pushing that file forward.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I understand why the hon. member does not want to buy hot air over here. It is because there is none available. I, quite frankly, would suggest that the monopoly on hot air in the House is from the other side.

As far as supporting Kyoto at this stage, again with the democratic deficit what choice do we have? The Liberal government signed an international treaty binding us to terms on which we had no input.

With regard to the one tonne challenge and the things they have implemented, Canadians are running out and trying to lose weight. That is what they think the one tonne challenge means.

The Liberals are talking about a market based system. The market base will be subsidized by the government. The government will subsidize industry to implement this plan. The current rates that are set in Europe are far in excess of what the supplemental plan will be for the Liberal government.

If the member thinks that the economy is set from year to year and that it reacts from year to year on the basis of what the Liberals do, he has another thought coming. The Conservative governments in history have set the stage for the Liberal government to run us into—

• (1940)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Again, Mr. Speaker, the member unfortunately has it wrong. It was the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney, who I know is still lurking in the background over there. In 1992, he signed onto the issue of Rio with the Rio accord.

Second, on recessions, we were the ones who in 1993 inherited a \$42.5 billion Conservative debt. It is this government and this party that have moved this country forward with the support of Canadians. I would challenge anyone on that side to say otherwise. It is this government that has tapped into the entrepreneurship of Canadians.

I have more faith in Canadians than the members on the other side do. I and my colleagues on this side believe that we are going to meet our climate change responsibilities and we are going to do it because we have an effective plan. Because the Ministers of the Environment, Natural Resources and Industry moved this file forward, we have a plan that is going to work.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here to talk about immobilizers. An immobilizer is an electronic device in motor vehicles, in cars and trucks, that keeps them from being started unless one has the proper key. About 65% of the vehicles manufactured and sold in Canada now have immobilizers.

This is something I have been working on for about the last five years. I presented a bill to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and it ended up here in Parliament. I am really glad that an announcement was made just recently that as of September 1, 2007, there will be immobilizers in all new vehicles registered in Canada. That is very exciting.

However, what I want to speak about today is the immobilizers that we are going to be approving. Will they work? We want Canadians to be safe. People rely on Canada. If Canada says that a thing is safe, if the government says that vehicle or that appliance is safe, there is a trust, or there should be.

We should make sure that what we are approving and requiring is safe and effective. There is a Canadian standard, which is one of the top standards in the world. In fact, Transport Canada officials went to Europe and spoke in favour of the Canadian standard of immobilizers because it is the best in the world. There is an inferior standard, which is the European standard. There are some manufacturers that use the European standard.

Here is what I am asking for and what I am hoping to get an answer to. Why would we approve a European standard to be used in Canada when a Canadian standard is the standard that Transport Canada was arguing for when its officials went over to Europe?

Auto crime costs Canadians about \$1 billion a year. About 35 people will die this year due to an auto thief driving a stolen vehicle. It has a huge impact on our society. Hundreds of people are injured every year by thieves driving a stolen vehicle.

I have some examples. In Windsor: “Woman killed by a stolen car, a tragedy”. That was just on March 14. I have another: “High-speed crash, auto thief kills young woman”.

This example is a tragedy in Richmond, British Columbia, with a 32 year old victim. He was a youth pastor. He was a gifted pianist. He was killed by a car thief rushing through Richmond.

Another one is a tragedy in Maple Ridge. The article states that “a driver...dragged a gas station attendant seven kilometres to his death under a stolen vehicle...he said he could hear the guy screaming under the car”.

“What kind of person could do that?” said the victim's cousin. “They have to have absolutely no conscience”.

Our typical auto thief is a 27 year old male addicted to crystal meth. He is stealing the car to commit another crime and has 14 prior criminal convictions. That is from a recent study.

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The people who are stealing the cars are dangerous people. We need to have immobilizers in the vehicles to protect Canadians so Canadians do not get killed.

Through attrition, as the vehicles that do not have immobilizers come off the road and these new ones come out, Canadians will be protected, so I applaud the efforts, but what I am asking is, why not use the Canadian standard that is effective? The European standard is not effective.

The Cadillac Escalade tops the list for vehicles that are being stolen. General Motors said, "While we regret any vehicle being stolen, this is clear evidence that the Cadillac Escalade is in high demand". The Escalade comes with standard various anti-theft pieces of equipment. It comes with a European immobilizer. It is at the top of the list. It is easy to steal and that is why these people are stealing them.

• (1945)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in October 2000 the council of ministers approved an extension of the road safety vision and priorities to 2010.

The renewed program features a quantitative national target, a 30% decrease in the number of motorists killed or seriously injured. The renewed program targets several program areas, such as wearing seat belts, reducing impaired driving, increased commercial vehicle safety, and improving the driving skills of young Canadians.

Jurisdictionally all levels of government are involved. At the federal level new vehicle safety standards pursuant to the Motor Vehicle Safety Act play an important role. Some of these standards relate to vehicle theft.

Vehicle theft is a serious concern for Canadians. Vehicle theft affects all of us. As insurance rates rise, everyone loses. Over 170,000 vehicles are stolen each year in Canada, more than 460 vehicles each day. According to Statistics Canada, since 1988 the rate of motor vehicle theft has grown a dramatic 71%, including over 9% in 1996 alone.

Generally, motor vehicles are stolen either for profit or for convenience. There are many innocent victims when a vehicle is stolen. The owner, the insurance company and subsequent owners who unknowingly purchase stolen vehicles or stolen vehicle parts all experience a loss. More important, theft by young offenders frequently leads to collisions resulting in serious injuries or death.

Studies funded by Transport Canada indicate that vehicle theft is a serious road safety issue resulting in approximately 20 fatalities per year.

The department has been working on several fronts to help combat vehicle theft. In addition to the introduction of immobilization systems, the department has been instrumental in setting up procedures to assist in controlling the exchange of vehicle registrations for vehicles that are imported into Canada. This precludes the registration number of a vehicle that was destroyed in a collision from being applied to a stolen vehicle.

With these procedures, it is now possible for the provinces and territories to verify whether the registration number of an imported vehicle has been taken from a destroyed vehicle.

Transport Canada has also recently introduced requirements for the vehicle identification number plate to be permanently affixed to the vehicle. This action was a result of concerns expressed by the insurance industry regarding the ease with which vehicle identification number plates can be moved from one vehicle to another. It is expected that both the procedural changes noted and the permanent plate application will assist in reducing vehicle theft for profit.

Youth vehicle theft is a significant road safety concern. Youth theft poses a significant safety risk, as young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviour.

The department's research indicates that the installation of immobilization systems, which make it difficult for the car engine to be started without the proper disabling device, will reduce vehicle theft. Thus Transport Canada has introduced, under the Motor Vehicle Safety Act, the requirements that new vehicles be equipped with immobilization systems by September 1, 2007.

The anti-theft requirements include the option for the manufacturers to install immobilization systems meeting either the Underwriters Laboratory of Canada or the international United Nations standard. While the Canadian standard is perceived by some to be superior, the department is of the opinion that the international standard offers equivalent vehicle theft protection.

There is a wide misunderstanding among stakeholders that there are significant differences between the two standards. There are not. This misunderstanding exists from conversations.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is up. I look forward to discussing this issue further.

• (1950)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I bought a toaster or another electrical appliance, I would know it would not electrocute me because it would have a ULC sticker on it. It is a safety standard.

It is the same with immobilizers. Canadians are trusting that when we have immobilizers, they will be effective. The European standard is not effective. That is why the Insurance Bureau of Canada does not recognize the European standard. That is why the Cadillac Escalade is being stolen. It has a European standard. Thieves can steal that type of car in seconds because it does not have an effective immobilizer.

I appreciate the speech from my colleague, but it did not answer the question. The question is, why would we use an inferior European standard? The Insurance Bureau of Canada and insurance companies right across the country are saying that it is not effective and we should not use it. Why would we permit the use of an ineffective standard? Let us go Canadian.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I did not have a chance to finish my whole speech, but allow me to do that and I think my hon. colleague will understand where I am coming from.

Adjournment Proceedings

The two standards are not different. The misunderstanding exists as many are not aware that the international standard has been amended recently with the most stringent requirements. In addition to introducing the latest more stringent version, the department has added other requirements, thus aligning the effectiveness of the Canadian and international standards.

We are moving to have safer vehicles. I am sure that my colleague across the way will want to join us in making sure that Canadians are safe.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 7:52 p.m.)

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