



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 17, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 17, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table two certificates of nomination, one with respect to the Farm Credit Corporation, which stands referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, and the other with respect to the nomination of the parliamentary librarian, which stands referred to the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament.

* * *

• (1005)

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (adoption).

He said: Mr. Speaker, far be it for me to say that I had missed the opportunity to extol the virtues of this bill and the next bill that I will be introducing.

[*Translation*]

Everyone has been waiting for these two bills for a long time.

[*English*]

I think members of the House will receive both bills warmly and with open arms. One of the bills is on international adoptions and the next bill is on foreign prohibitions for criminality committed abroad. I think we will find unanimous consent on both of the bills.

The two bills reflect the input of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. They also reflect the interests of Canadians everywhere and the input of all parties who welcomed these two amendments, I dare say, with baited breath.

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

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-77, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (prohibitions).

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

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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ACT

Hon. Jacques Saada (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-78, An Act to provide for emergency management and to amend and repeal certain Acts.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on supplementary estimates A for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

* * *

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-448, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (motor vehicle fuel).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to introduce a bill that would correct the injustice of charging consumers too much for fuel by removing the GST being charged on the federal excise tax and provincial excise taxes across the country and to put that money back in the pockets of hard-working Canadians.

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

* * *

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-449, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (sponsorship of relative).

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table another private member's bill this morning which will amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to allow a Canadian citizen or permanent resident to sponsor one relative from outside the current definition of family in the act once in their lifetime.

This bill, which we in this corner of the House call the once in a lifetime bill, is intended to recognize that family membership is understood very broadly by many Canadians and that many immediate and close family relationships are not currently recognized in our immigration law.

This change represents a longstanding commitment of the New Democratic Party. As New Democrats, we believe family reunification must be a reality in Canadian immigration law, not merely something to which we give lip service.

Families are crucial to Canada and I believe this bill would help ensure that Canadian families can be together here in Canada doing what they do best: caring for, supporting, encouraging and loving each other.

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

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS**MARTIAL ARTS**

Hon. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have two sets of petitions to present to the House where the constituents call upon Parliament to amend section 83 of the Criminal Code of Canada to provide an exemption for all martial arts and all martial arts contests and competitions. They reeled off the names of the competitions and they ask that Parliament recognize that exemption.

[*Translation*]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN TUNISIA

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table the first part of a petition concerning the World Summit on the Information Society and the right to freedom of expression in Tunisia.

This petition was started by a large coalition consisting of three Quebec labour unions—the FTQ, the CSN and the CSQ—Rights and Democracy, the French section of Amnesty International Canada and the Quebec Human Rights League.

The petitioners urge the Prime Minister of Canada to demand that all independent Tunisian NGOs and human rights defenders in Tunisia have access to WSIS activities in Tunis, and that they be able to speak freely. They are also requesting that the Tunisian government release the young Zarzis and Ariana Web users from prison, as well as all other prisoners of conscience.

I want to congratulate the 20 Amnesty International school groups from across Quebec on this great campaign.

There are 10,000 signatories to the first part of this petition.

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from the constituents of Langley, British Columbia, one of the most beautiful communities in all of Canada.

They are saying that the GST on the federal excise tax is actually double taxation. They are tired of double taxation and they are asking the House of Commons to enact legislation to eliminate the goods and services tax charged on federal excise tax and other provincial and federal taxes. They want double taxation to end, and actually the private member's bill that was just introduced would be very appropriate.

AUTISM

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from my riding dealing with children suffering from autism spectrum disorder. This is a disease that affects 1 child in 195.

The petitioners call upon the government to amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include IBI-ABA therapy for children with autism as a medically necessary treatment.

They also call upon the government to contribute to the creation of academic chairs at universities in each province and that we provide training at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels so that Canadian professionals can practise and children can receive treatment in this country.

CANADA POST

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Langbank, Saskatchewan, with respect to the closure of rural post offices. The petitioners indicate that there is a significant increase in the number of rural post offices that have been closed and that Canada Post does not consider a community with nearly 700 points of call to be a viable location for supporting a federally operated post office. The petitioners ask Parliament to keep the Langbank post office open and to retain the moratorium on rural post office closures.

LNG TERMINALS

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, I am presenting another petition from citizens from all across the country objecting to the passage of LNG tankers through Head Harbour Passage. The House has heard many of these petitions. Head Harbour is the most dangerous passage in all of Canada. The citizens of Canada are asking the government to address this issue as it would any sovereignty issue. These are internal Canadian waters. The petitioners want Parliament to say no to the transport of those ships that could endanger our citizens, our economy and certainly our environment.

•(1015)

AUTISM

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to present a petition on behalf of the residents of the Hamilton area who are asking for the inclusion of autism in the therapy treatment program under the Canada Health Act and the establishment of a chair in the appropriate universities in the provinces and the territories.

[*Translation*]

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to table a petition started by an Amnesty International group representing high schools in my riding. They have single-handedly collected over 2,500 signatures.

Congratulations to Chêne-Bleu and Cité-des-Jeunes high schools on this great campaign.

This petition calls upon the Government of Canada to urge the Tunisian government to comply with the commitments it made in 2003 in Geneva with regard to the World Summit on the Information Society.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest on a point of order.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again let me note that questions on the order paper have to be answered in a timely fashion. The government is dragging its feet. I am not sure what it is trying to hide, but we went through this yesterday. Wednesday is the only day on which the Speaker will actually call Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers. We went through this issue yesterday. Why is the government dragging its feet on some of the most important issues facing the nation when it could answer these questions in one afternoon?

Mr. Speaker, I know what you will say. You are bound by the Standing Orders. We all are. I know that the government has up to 45 days, but some of these questions are routine. We need this information to do our jobs. What is the government trying to hide in relation to some of the questions on the order paper?

The Speaker: I note that the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest is really making submissions. He has not really raised a point of order because there is nothing in the rules that prevents the government from waiting until the 45th day if it wishes to answer a question.

Supply

If the parliamentary secretary wishes to respond to the representations of the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, I will hear him briefly. Otherwise we will consider the matter closed.

I stress that it is not a point of order at this point because there is nothing for the Chair to rule on. The Chair does not rule on whether or not the government is dragging its feet or whether or not any hon. member is dragging his feet. I would not think of such a thing.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, during the week of January 2, 2006, the Prime Minister should ask her Excellency the Governor General of Canada to dissolve the 38th Parliament and to set the date for the 39th general election for Monday, February 13, 2006; and

That the Speaker transmit this resolution to Her Excellency the Governor General.

Hon. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order concerning the motion before us which you have just read, and I wish to submit to you that it is out of order in that it would ask you as Speaker to do that which is an impossibility. It is a constitutional impossibility because it offends the practice and the constitutional form and design of how the House must properly communicate with Her Excellency the Governor General, because it asks you to transmit a resolution, if passed, of the House to Her Excellency.

I point to Beauséne's fifth edition at page 37, which outlines the role of Speaker as the representative of members of the House. It lays out the House's relationship to Her Excellency the Governor General. It is enunciated there that there are three times or methods when this occurs: first, upon your election as Speaker, you petition the Governor General for the continuance of the Commons' privileges; second, you personally deliver an engrossed Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne to the Governor General; and third, and the most common example, you lead us when summoned by the Governor General to the other place.

If the House wishes to collectively communicate with Her Excellency, it can only be by address to Her Excellency. That is our constitutional design. That is the form of communication which the House might only engage in with Her Excellency.

I point out to you, Mr. Speaker, that in the same fifth edition of Beauséne's at page 123, it lays out a form of address for when the House wishes to communicate with Her Excellency. It is a very rare occasion other than the reply in the address to the Speech from the Throne that the House wishes to address or communicate with Her Excellency the Governor General. History will show us that it is a very rare event indeed.

Supply

If we go back to the time of William IV in Great Britain just prior to Queen Victoria, there were events when the House of Commons wished to communicate with the king and it was done so by an address. It is a very particular form of communication. To my knowledge, it has never been carried out in this place in a form like that laid out in this motion.

Mr. Speaker, knowing that there is a particular constitutional demand upon how we speak to the Governor General, and knowing that this, if passed, would ask that you transmit this resolution to Her Excellency the Governor General, what is the transmission? Is it an email? Is it a phone call? Is it a courier delivering a resolution of the House? It is a rather peculiar way of doing business knowing that the Crown is the head and the font of power in this place.

Therefore, knowing that this transmission is not defined and knowing that this is an unknown way of communicating with the Crown as represented by Her Excellency the Governor General, I would submit that this is a resolution which is an impossibility from a constitutional point of view. It is also an impossibility from a plain language point of view because we do not know what a transmission is. Therefore, I would ask that you rule it out of order.

• (1020)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order I would like to make a few comments. First of all, it is quite outrageous and flabbergasting to hear this member rise and make this point of order. Clearly what is going on here is a political ploy that is being put forward by this member and presumably other members of his caucus who want to try to ensure that this motion will not be debated today.

I point out to you, Mr. Speaker, that this motion is entirely in order. It is wording that is characterized in a way that an opposition day motion would be characterized: "That, in the opinion of this House...". It is giving advice to the Prime Minister based on the opinion of this House that would then be transmitted to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Governor General.

I would point out that for the wording of this motion there were discussions held with the Table to ensure that the wording was appropriate, including the word "transmit". These discussions have been held.

I think we should make it clear here today that this intervention by the Liberal member is simply political posturing. It is mischievous to try to prevent this getting to the floor. It is a very anti-democratic intervention that has been made. We simply want to have this motion debated by the House, to have the House vote on this motion and to provide this advice.

It would be no different from the procedure used when there is the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne and it is transmitted to the Governor General. It would be no different from that case.

I would urge the Chair not to concede to the point that is being made here. This motion is in order. We hope that this debate on this very important motion will now begin.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must say that the argument raised by the government is absolutely pointless at this time. The resolution introduced by the NDP is absolutely in order under our standing orders.

I will therefore merely make two points in support of my position. It will not take long but should be conclusive.

First, to quote Marleau and Montpetit, page 724:

Members in opposition to the government may propose motions for debate on any matter falling within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada, as well as on committee reports concerning estimates. The standing orders give members a very wide scope in proposing opposition motions on supply days and, unless the motion is clearly and undoubtedly irregular (e.g., where the procedural aspect is not open to reasonable argument), the Chair does not intervene

That strikes me as very clear.

Second, they cannot claim that this motion is unconstitutional. It says that "during the week of January 2, 2006, the Prime Minister should ask her Excellency the Governor General of Canada to dissolve the 38th Parliament ." There have been many similar motions in this House. In fact, according to the Canadian Constitution, it is up to the Prime Minister to designate his cabinet and there is nothing to stop any member of this Parliament from introducing a motion calling on the Prime Minister to require a minister to resign. So, it is not unconstitutional.

Everyone knows that Canada's foreign policy depends on the government and the Prime Minister. Yet there is absolutely nothing unconstitutional about introducing a motion in this House calling upon the Government of Canada to change its position on international policy. That is absolutely not unconstitutional.

All of the powers of the government set out in the Canadian Constitution can be challenged by a resolution of this Parliament. Parliament is free—and this is the very purpose of opposition days—to speak out and suggest actions to the Prime Minister and the government, even within areas that are essentially their responsibility under the Constitution.

The NDP motion fully meets these criteria. It absolutely cannot be judged procedurally out of order. As for its content, it is similar to any proposal that might be made, for instance calling upon the Prime Minister to dismiss members of his Cabinet. That is his responsibility, but it could be done and the government should accept the motion, whether in good faith or not.

I therefore feel we should put an end to this discussion, accept the NDP motion and proceed with the debate.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to unnecessarily delay this any longer because I believe this is a frivolous point of order by my Liberal colleague across the way.

The simple fact of the matter is, as my NDP and Bloc colleagues have stated, that we are just trying to delay getting this on the floor where we can have a good debate.

Supply

I would remind you, Mr. Speaker, and I know you do not need to be reminded, that you are a servant of the House and it is my understanding that the House could collectively come to a decision and ask you to do something. That is all this is about.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I want to add that I believe the rights of the member for Sarnia—Lambton have been impugned by the allegation that the matters raised are politically motivated. It is his right to rise on a point of order. He has made his case, so I raise that.

The Speaker: The Chair has heard the submissions of all hon. members who have made them on this point. I want to thank the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for raising the issue and the hon. member for Mississauga South for his intervention.

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

I want to thank as well the hon. members for Vancouver East, Prince George—Peace River and Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean for their important interventions on the matter.

I note that the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton did not mention the first paragraph as the source of his objection in his point of order. It concerned only the second paragraph.

[*English*]

He was arguing that the Speaker has no ability to transmit something to Her Excellency on instructions from the House except an address, and only really the address in reply.

In this respect, I must say I am not sure the hon. member is correct. I note that many transmissions are received by the House from Her Excellency, the Governor General, for example, letters indicating that Her Excellency will be attending in the Senate later in a day to deliver a royal assent, to make a speech or whatever it might be. These matters are transmitted to the House by the Speaker.

Similarly, I could transmit back if I needed to, indicating something else was preventing me from attending the Senate, I suspect, if there was some problem, for example, if the House was not sitting.

However, I am surprised that there would be an argument that the Speaker would have difficulty in transmitting the opinion of the House to Her Excellency as expressed in a resolution of the House. If it were adopted, and I am not making any judgment as to whether or not this is likely to be adopted by the House, but assuming it were, the Speaker would be in a position to have that transmitted.

I admit that the resolution does not say how, but I think I can dream up some method of achieving that goal, perhaps paying a visit to Her Excellency and delivering a copy of the resolution or, alternatively, sending it by letter under my signature. In any event, I think transmission could take place.

In my view, the resolution is one that is within the parameters set out for an opposition day. It does express only the opinion of the House which, in my view, is something that could be expressed in the form of a resolution.

Accordingly, I find the point of order is not well taken. I am not finding it frivolous, as was suggested, but I find it not well taken and

we will proceed with the debate on the motion. I believe it is in order.

The hon. leader of the New Democratic Party, then, will be the first speaker.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a historic day in this Chamber in that a proposal is before the House that could bring all parties together in a spirit of compromise in a minority Parliament to achieve a number of key shared objectives. When that happens it is a salutary moment in this chamber. It is one that we need to consider very seriously. We need to examine the arguments why such a course of action is not only sensible, in the sense of being very much a common sense proposition, but also serves the interests of Canadians which is after all why we are here.

The objective is to get things done for Canadians over the next number of weeks and then move into an election after the holiday season in January for a voting day in the middle of February.

Three parties in the House have indicated that spirit of compromise in coming forward with this proposal. The only party so far that has refused to exercise that spirit of compromise, that sense of working together to find a common sense road ahead in order to achieve important objectives for Canadians, sadly is the very party whose unethical conduct has created the situation that we are in today.

The fact is that nothing, but nothing, prevents the Prime Minister from setting an election date on the advice of Parliament. It is, if I may say so, typical Liberal arrogance that a majority vote of Parliament is seen somehow to be irrelevant or an obstacle.

Just because something has not been done before does not mean that it might not be in fact a very good idea. The Prime Minister promised transformative change and suggested that it was required in order to fix the democratic deficit. We agree. However, now he refuses to compromise even though a majority of the House is going to be voting in favour of this advice. In other words, the Prime Minister will not be respecting the will of Parliament.

That does not sound to me, nor do I believe it will sound to Canadians, as though the democratic deficit is being addressed in a positive way. In fact, what it does is it leaves us with a sense that the democratic deficit is growing. We have a political party that received only 37% of the vote wishing to ignore the views of the House as expressed by parties representing almost two-thirds of Canadians. That, I would submit, is not the appropriate conduct for a Prime Minister of this country or for his political party.

Let us examine some of the issues here. First, we have been told by the Prime Minister and members of his party that what we are talking about is “only eight weeks”. In other words, the difference between the date that the Prime Minister has already set. He has already taken the view that there needs to be an election to determine whether his party can carry on in government as a result of the findings and recommendations of a respected justice who has examined a scandal and reported on it.

Supply

The Prime Minister has said that Canadians need to have the opportunity to judge on the findings, the recommendations, and the political party about which the investigation was conducted. We agree. The only question is when.

His proposal is on or about March 1. Our proposal, which will be coming from the majority of members in the chamber when we see the vote next week, suggests the beginning of January. Those are the eight weeks that we are speaking about.

● (1035)

What is to happen in those eight weeks? First, the House is not sitting for five of those weeks. In other words, the democratic process of members rising in the House to propose actions on key issues affecting Canadians, the process of questioning the government on its actions and holding it to account, the idea that we should be considering spending or legislation to correct the many unsolved problems that have been left to fester for 12 long years, is simply unable to be conducted during five of those weeks.

Is the Prime Minister suggesting that somehow those five weeks in particular are irrelevant to Canadians? We submit that by having the election in March those weeks are lost as working weeks for parliamentarians to work for Canadians. Therefore, there is no effective and good argument not to be having an election because during those five weeks we are literally shut out of this place in any event.

Of course, there will be something going on during those five weeks. We can be sure that vehicles such as the Challenger will be regularly booked, that there will be a number of press releases and announcements, probably from coast to coast to coast in this country, all paid for, by the way, by the taxpayer. These announcements and spending decisions will already be made by the House of Commons. As a matter of fact, what will be happening during the five weeks that we are talking about is a public relations campaign, not the actions of anything relevant to this particular House.

We will be having a publicly financed public relations campaign. Then the House will return for three more weeks. What is to take place in those three weeks? A budget will be tabled on which a vote will not be able to happen because the Prime Minister has said there will be an election on or about March 1, a budget which will not precipitate or produce any positive action whatsoever and will dominate the three weeks.

Our proposal is simply that this business of the eight weeks being somehow significant or relevant to addressing the issues of Canadians is false. The work that needs to be done by the House should take place between now and the holidays, and that is what we want to see.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

There is a solution to the situation confronting Parliament today. It is a matter of common sense.

In the spring, we managed to keep Parliament going because the Liberals agreed to some of our good ideas. This fall, we submitted proposals, but unfortunately the Liberals chose to not work with us to obtain results beneficial to people.

The Liberal Party cannot decide when it will be judged. The people did not elect a majority government, and all parties must be prepared to make compromises.

I believe there is a reasonable solution. There are options other than an election during the holiday period, which no one wants. In addition, no one wants a Liberal Party that thinks it alone can decide when its compoment should be judged.

With this motion, we are requesting an election be called in early January and the vote held in mid-February. This proposal will thus permit Parliament to pass housekeeping legislation, including some very important bills, and will make it possible for the first meeting between first ministers and native leaders to be held. It will also provide an opportunity for the clean-up in Canadian politics that is needed in order to get back to basics, to produce specific results of benefit to the public.

[*English*]

The difference between last spring and this fall is this. In the spring Liberal corruption created a parliamentary crisis. When the NDP offered good ideas to get things done for people, the Liberals were forced to agree. In the fall, Liberal corruption again created a crisis, but this time the Liberals refused to get things done for people, as the NDP suggested, such as protecting public health care in this country.

This minority Parliament is unusual in that the governing party's unethical conduct has hung over it throughout its life, creating an artificial limit to Parliament's life as established by the Prime Minister. Nothing will happen after the holidays except an expensive taxpayer-funded Liberal pre-election campaign. Let us just formalize when the election will begin. It will be underway, at taxpayer expense, so let us have it conducted under the rules of Elections Canada, with a formal initiation of the electoral process in January.

In the meantime, let us get Bill C-55 passed, a bill to protect workers' wages and pensions when there is a bankruptcy, something our party has urged for many years. It is a bill that three straight Liberal majorities did not produce. It only has come forward in the context of a minority Parliament because the NDP gets things done for working people.

Let us get Bill C-66 passed to get energy rebates to people. Parties from all sides have called for action from the government dealing with the energy price crisis.

Let us let the public transit money and energy efficiency money flow. I remind the House that this money is only there because of the NDP proposals with regard to the budget last spring. That is when we took out the corporate tax cuts and replaced them with precisely these investments that people need.

Let us allow the first ministers meeting with the aboriginal leaders to occur. Twelve years of Liberal government have left aboriginal people often living in third world conditions, and it is about time something was done about it.

The culture of entitlement to which Justice Gomery referred is, unfortunately, alive and well. The Liberal Party thinks that 37% of the support of Canadians entitles it to 100% of the power. There is no sense that there is any need to work with the representatives of Canadians from various other parties who, collectively, have the support of 63% of Canadians.

The common sense compromise that we have proposed would allow people to hear the second Justice Gomery report, which will arrive before voting day. This would enable Canadians to incorporate the recommendations in their thinking and parties would be speaking about those recommendations. In fact, some parties already have advanced proposals for reform. I am very proud of the proposals that have been brought forward by the member for Ottawa Centre, just to name an excellent example of what is before us.

However, the proposal from the Liberal Party to set the date on March 1 essentially establishes a timeline that is in the hands of the Liberal Party to be in charge of pretending to fix its own scandal and then graciously allowing people to vote.

It is true that the common sense compromise is exactly as originally promised by the Prime Minister last spring. He was under the impression at the time that Justice Gomery would deliver his final report on December 15. Our proposal would have an election taking place exactly when the Prime Minister promised Canadians it would.

The Prime Minister is taking advantage of the fact that Justice Gomery has asked for some extra time to prepare his recommendations, and the House will not be sitting during this extra time period. This simply would provide a free opportunity for Liberals and their cabinet ministers to fly all over the country, at public expense, and talk about how terrific they are. There would be no work done in that period because the House would not be sitting.

It is shameful. What we call for is the spirit of compromise.

• (1045)

I ask this simple question, and I have asked it in this House before. Why, when three party leaders of the four in the House are willing to compromise, as one should in a minority Parliament situation where no party has a majority of the support, is the fourth party is withholding that consent and sense of compromise?

It is not that the Prime Minister cannot compromise because of some rule that exists. We hear this spurious notion that somehow the motion is not constitutional. Those who would take a look at it now that it is written and before the House will realize it is. I can cite some sources. Members do not have to take my word for it.

Julius Grey, a prominent constitutional lawyer, says that there is nothing that prevents this from happening.

Here are some quotes from Hugo Cyr, a constitutional law professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

[*Translation*]

I quote:

There is nothing unconstitutional in this motion.

Parliament may be dissolved for a number of reasons following a vote of censure, a vote of non-confidence and a decision by the Governor General, on the advice of

Supply

the Prime Minister or simply because the end of the five-year period has been reached. In other words, loss of confidence is not the only reason for the dissolution of Parliament.

Since nothing prevents the Prime Minister from announcing ahead of time the date he will ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament, something the Prime Minister has done on a number of occasions, nothing prevents him from stating ahead of time in a motion put before the House the date on which the request will be made.

Nothing prevents the House from telling the Prime Minister what it considers the appropriate time to ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament.

[*English*]

I also can quote a law professor from the University of Alberta, one who is also the former attorney general of the country, now the Deputy Prime Minister of our country, who indicated that there was no obstacle to the Prime Minister accepting such advice.

I simply draw the attention of the House to the fact that we have an historic opportunity in a minority Parliament to do what Canadians and the Prime Minister have said that they want to see happen: first, get work done during the fall; second, avoid an election over the holidays; and third, have in the hands of voters the findings and recommendations of Justice Gomery about Liberal corruption. All these things are worthwhile objectives.

There is much work that can be done this fall. It would be better for Canadians not to have to participate or pay attention to electioneering in a season where their children are at home and they are able to spend time with family, thinking about values and about the future in ways that are celebratory and important.

The compromise suggestion respectfully submitted in the House would accomplish those objectives. The only objective that would not be accomplished is one that has never been stated publicly. The government has never referenced or submitted the business it would do in the wintertime. This is period of time when the House would not sit and when no meaningful business could be conducted. The only plan we have had is a plan for the fall. We propose that we work on that plan together. The Liberal Party and its leadership has suggest they do not want to participate. They would rather simply be on their own in January to sell themselves at our expense. We will not have it.

We want this compromise adopted and we call upon Canadians to urge the government to abandon its arrogance of 12 years and to begin to work with the members of Parliament whom they elected.

• (1050)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member for Toronto—Danforth began his remarks by citing this as an historic occasion in the House. That is somewhat grandiose. It might be historic because the motion before us is flawed in many respects.

The member for Toronto—Danforth knows full well, or he should know full well, that our government could not possibly accept this motion. The Prime Minister and our government have been profoundly clear that Canadians need an opportunity to see the second and final report of Justice Gomery. On the basis of that Canadians will decide. The government has said that it would call an election within 30 days of that happening.

Supply

How could our government now conceivably say that we have reconsidered, that this motion avoids a Christmas election, when we have said, on a matter of principle, that we have to hear the results from Justice Gomery before we call an election?

The member for Toronto—Danforth talks about all the legislation and the good work the House could be doing, which could be forfeited. He knows full well that the government cannot accept the motion, at least he should know that.

A woman cannot be half pregnant. The government either has the confidence of the House or it does not. If those members have the courage of their convictions, they would put a motion before the House asking whether it has confidence in the government. However, they have not done that. They put forward a wishy-washy motion that is an insult and an affront to Canadians and the House.

I ask the member for Toronto—Danforth this. Why should we not wait for the good work of Justice Gomery to be completed so Canadians can judge that fully and then go into an election?

Hon. Jack Layton: Madam Speaker, this might surprise some members, but putting aside all the rhetoric that we just heard and coming to the nub of the point, which was why we would not agree that it would be appropriate for Canadians to have the second Gomery report available to them in an election, I agree with the member. Our motion would ensure that happened.

There is one thing the motion would not ensure. The Prime Minister said, and the hon. member has just repeated it, that Canadians needed an opportunity to see the Gomery report before they voted. However, that was not exactly what they meant. What they meant was they needed an opportunity to permit members of the Liberal Party to take a considerable stretch of time, at their expense, to sell themselves, to cleanse themselves, and to offer all kinds of excuses and pretended actions following the Gomery report. They are counting on the fact that Canadians will have largely forgotten about the report before the vote takes place, or distracted. How could Canadians be distracted?

One way would be to send out a phalanx of cabinet members, at taxpayer expense, with their various assistants and staff on planes provided by Canadians. They would cross the land at a time when the House was not sitting and when members of the opposition parties would be unable to rise in the House and call the government to account for this behaviour. The Liberals would be unfettered in their capacity to spend the public's money during that period. That is what is being sought here, and it is wrong.

It is right that Canadians should have the Gomery report. It is wrong that the Liberal Party should be given a blank cheque advertising budget to sell itself. We have seen what happens when the Liberal Party begins to sell itself with our money. It is called the sponsorship scandal, the very one that the Gomery report is talking about and the very reason we are having this discussion.

● (1055)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to say at the outset of my remarks, before I get to my question, that I want to make sure that we are on the record that the Conservative Party of Canada's preference always has been since mid-April to have an election last spring or early this fall, any time

since the revelations coming out of the Gomery inquiry have been so damning of this corrupt government. I want that to be on the record.

We are now talking about this particular issue. I was intrigued by the parliamentary secretary's response, this whole red herring about wait until the Gomery report. The reality is what we are really dealing with here is the arrogance of a government that thinks it still has a majority.

Under our parliamentary system when there is a minority government it means the Canadian people have sent a message to all political parties to work together. Canadians have sent a message to all political parties that on every given day the Prime Minister must be able to prove that he has the confidence of the majority of this place. That is how our system works. Yet that is not what we are seeing from the Prime Minister. He arrogantly has said that he alone will determine when the next election is. That is not his right. It would have been his right if he had been elected with a majority government, but he has not been.

This ridiculous statement that somehow the Liberal government has fixed an election date, the Liberals do not even believe in fixed election dates. The Liberals have never supported fixed election dates, but somehow because they have chosen a date, it has become fixed.

Even under those parties, such as our party, that do believe in fixed election dates, the reality is that under a minority government it is recognized that even a fixed election date policy or provision would fall under a minority government if the government did not continue to have the confidence of this chamber.

Perhaps the member for Toronto—Danforth would care to comment on this. The reality under the Prime Minister's scenario is that even if Justice Gomery's second report is not delayed further and it does come down on February 1, the Prime Minister could wait 30 days, which would be until about March 3 before he called the election and there would be 35 more days for an election campaign. That would basically bring it to Monday, April 10 at least before we had an election and that is if Justice Gomery's report is not delayed even further. That is almost five months from now.

After the damning indictment by Justice Gomery's report on November 1, does the Prime Minister expect that this Parliament and the Canadian people should wait to pass judgment for at least another five months?

● (1100)

Hon. Jack Layton: Madam Speaker, it is true that there is a difference in approach. As the member mentioned, he wanted on the record the desire of his party to have an election sooner rather than later and that is a difference of opinion.

What we have done here is to bring forward a proposal in the spirit of compromise. I think that is a concept that should find its way more frequently into the operations in the chamber, particularly in a minority Parliament.

Supply

If we think back to the promise that was made to Canadians by the Prime Minister, the fact is that Canadians rebuked the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party and denied that party a majority of seats in this House, having heard his so-called promise to Canadians. Canadians constructed a different kind of House, one that would require that the government party would have to work with other parties in order to get things done in the interest of Canadians. Canadian voters did not trust the Liberal Party to do this on its own. They did not want to bestow the trust of the Canadian people exclusively on the Liberal Party. That is what the election results said.

The problem has been that the Liberal Party will not accept this judgment. The Liberals will not embrace it, except at the very moment that their possibility of continuing is threatened. We saw that last spring.

The proposition we have laid before this House suggests that there is a compromise that can achieve all of our collective goals. The member is right when he adds the further uncertainty of a possible delay in the Gomery report. Is the Prime Minister suggesting to us that if the Gomery report happens to be delayed beyond February 1 he is going to continue his position that there should not be an election?

The Prime Minister has said to Canadians that they should have the right to judge the Liberal Party. He, as the Prime Minister, has proposed that this Parliament come to an end. The Prime Minister has indicated that he believes it is quite possible that Canadians do not have confidence in his own government and he wants to take that issue to Canadians. The Prime Minister has proposed a timeline of March 1.

Why should the Prime Minister be the only one who can consider a possible election date? We urge him to join with us in a reasonable compromise and let us do something right for a change here in this House for Canadians.

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I suggest there are a number of fundamental problems with today's opposition motion. I will point to a few of them.

First, it is fundamentally inconsistent with the basic principles of a parliamentary democracy which in fact have guided us throughout the history of this institution. It is a serious matter to change long-standing principles and practices with no consideration to the future members of the House of Commons.

The opposition parties essentially are willing to play some political and partisan games with our constitutional conventions. We can hear them laughing across the way. It is exactly what Canadians expect from the opposition parties when talking about our Constitution, nothing more than heckling and laughing. Those parties have proven they do not have any respect for the Constitution.

I want to make a few points and then during the question and answer period we can allow the members opposite to stand and rant and rave, as we expect they will. Nonetheless, I would like the opportunity to make a few points.

We have seen a time when members have worked quite well and quite cooperatively in the House, even in the face of challenges with

what the opposition parties were looking to do. Canadians ultimately want to see a House that works on behalf of their initiatives. The House of Commons needs to work on behalf of the citizens.

Canadians want their members of Parliament to work on public business, not the private ambitions of any one party leader. Canadians want parliamentarians to debate the issues that are important to Canadians, to address their daily concerns and what they are worried about. In fact, Canadians have not been getting legislation or policy that might make their lives better, more prosperous perhaps, and secure. What they are getting from the opposition parties is endless partisan posturing, political games and positioning for electoral advantage, quite frankly.

Members opposite always quote Canadians to suit their particular position. I have talked to Canadians and they have said that things in Parliament are not going well and members are yelling and screaming at each other all the time. I continue to make the point that we put forward and passed what I believe are important initiatives. But we have a situation now where the opposition parties, in particular the leader of the NDP, has put forward a motion that in fact does not fit with the constitutional requirements of this country.

I have to say that it is not only I who might say that. I am not alone in asserting that today's motion is a violation of long-standing democratic principles and practices of Parliament. The official opposition has said, and I believe the opposition House leader just said that the government needs to have the confidence of the House. That is absolutely correct. That is the way our system works. It is based on long-standing democratic principles.

The opposition parties collectively, since they are all supporting this particular motion, through the leader of the NDP are saying they want to vote non-confidence in the government today, but they want to have the consequences essentially some time in January because it suits their political purpose. They are saying they do not want an election during Christmas, but they want to vote non-confidence today and have the election later on. In the meantime, while the House remains in session, the House presumably would be passing important initiatives for Canadians that we put forward as a government and they would be voting confidence in the government, all the while indicating that they have no confidence in the government. The opposition wants to defeat the government, but not for another month and a half or so.

Parliament does not work that way and Canadians understand that. We cannot divide confidence. Confidence is not divisible. It cannot be cut up into little pieces and apportioned over different periods of time saying, "It is okay to pass this piece of legislation which is a confidence bill and we understand that. We will pass that bill, but we do not have confidence in the government. The government should not be allowed to put forward programs that expend Canadian taxpayer money because we do not have confidence, but we will hang around while the government does that and then we will come back and say we do not have confidence in the government again in January".

Supply

●(1105)

The government very clearly either needs to have the confidence of the House or not. It is very simple. It is the way the system has worked for a long time. It is very clear to Canadians that the government must have an ability to make decisions that have an impact on Canadians going forward and it must be able to do that knowing that it has the confidence of the House, or at least the confidence of the majority in the House. Even if there are people who do not have confidence in the government, if the government does not have the confidence of the majority of the House, then it is unable to function as a government.

The opposition parties, in what they are saying and what they are reporting in the media, are essentially saying that they do not have confidence in the government, but what they are afraid to do is to take responsibility for what that may cause.

When a motion of non-confidence is put on the floor of the House of Commons, when the opposition parties vote for that and the motion passes, there is an election. The opposition parties have to take responsibility for that. They should be able to say, "We are causing an election. It will be during Christmas. We are dragging Canadians back to the polls even though two-thirds of Canadians agree with what the Prime Minister is saying and his call for an election in the spring, within 30 days of Justice Gomery's report".

The hon. member opposite said that we should wait another five months for that. He is perfectly free to say that, and I am not going to argue that position because that is the position the opposition parties have taken, but what they must do in that instance is put forward a motion of non-confidence, not a motion that suggests they do not have confidence now but the effect will take place some time in the future because they do not want to have an election at Christmas. They are trying to position themselves as not having to take responsibility for a Christmas election, but Canadians will know that is where the responsibility will lie.

The opposition parties have had an opportunity to put forward a motion of non-confidence. While they go out and speak to the media and say they do not have confidence, in the House, in this chamber, they had an opportunity to do that today and they did not. They had an opportunity to do it this past Tuesday and the opposition parties did not. They will have an opportunity to put forward that motion either next Tuesday or next Thursday. They have an opportunity to express no confidence in the government by voting down confidence bills or important bills to the government. They have an opportunity to express non-confidence and vote down the government's spending estimates which provide moneys for ongoing programs.

The fact that the opposition parties have sought not to do so clearly shows to Canadians that it is not just an issue of confidence that is truly at stake here, there are some partisan political considerations.

The leader of the New Democratic Party has cited a couple of constitutional experts, but the majority of constitutional experts have sided with the government's approach on this motion. The opposition parties continue to say that even in this minority government, the Prime Minister does not have the right to set the election date.

I will quote Ned Franks, a professor at Queen's University who said:

It is the Prime Minister's right and prerogative to go to the Governor General and ask for a dissolution of the House. It is not Parliament's. That's very clear.

David Docherty has said:

[The opposition's] saying, "We like the things you've done but unless you let the opposition decide when there's an election, we will pull the plug and not only not get things done that we think are important, but quite frankly, not get things done our supporters think are important". In short, they simply can't do it. Parliamentary non-confidence is very specific. It's non-confidence when there is a vote of non-confidence. If it's a money bill, a speech from the throne, a matter the government says is confidence or there is a motion of non-confidence, those are the times that it's clear.

That is what we are saying. Canadians should not be fooled. There is a lot of political rhetoric that is swirling around this place, but the government either has the confidence or does not have the confidence of the House and it is up to the opposition parties to express that.

●(1110)

When Canadians elected their first minority government in 25 years they expected their representatives to work together. They still expect that. They also indicated they wanted us to continue working on their priorities, Canadian priorities, not the political priorities of opposition parties.

The Prime Minister made a commitment to Canadians. He went on national television and said that he would call an election within 30 days of the second Gomery report. He made that commitment and he wants to adhere to it.

I would say that Canadians want their government and their Parliament to deliver results and that is exactly what I have been trying to do and what the government has been doing. We have almost 90 bills before this Parliament.

The opposition parties have indicated that the House of Commons has no confidence in the government but the government has successfully met more than 40 confidence challenges and has been able to continue.

We have a strong record with respect to legislation passed on health care, equalization, a new deal for cities and communities, the offshore accords, climate change and early learning and child care. It is a strong record that we will take to the Canadian people and the Canadian people will decide.

We know Canadians want government and Parliament to focus on their priorities. They do not want a premature election. They do not want their representatives to be focused on political gamesmanship. They want the government and Parliament to deliver results, which is exactly what we are doing.

We are continuing to move forward with these priorities. The Minister of Finance has presented his fall economic and fiscal update that proposes further tax reductions for Canadians, a prosperity plan for Canada's future and it delivers more than \$30 billion in tax relief in the current year and the next five years. Over 95% of that tax relief will be delivered through personal income tax.

Sadly, on the one opposition day available to the NDP in this supply cycle, it has chosen to focus on tearing this House down rather than building up this country. I have to say that the opposition day motion is an attempt by the opposition parties to demonstrate no confidence by not putting a motion before the House of Commons and saying that they have no confidence, but having that effect happen some time in January, is pretty convoluted. There has not been an expert out there who has been able to understand it.

We go back to the point of Gomery and when Gomery reports a second time. I know the opposition parties are arguing that can happen anyway and that this is all about some strategy.

The Prime Minister, when making that commitment to Canadians on national television, said that Canadians had the right to all of the facts of the Gomery Commission and all of his recommendations. However they also have a right to hear the response of the government and the response of the opposition parties before they cast their ballots. The opposition should be able to tell Canadians why they are afraid to wait for the final Gomery report before an election is called. If the opposition parties are not afraid, then they should be able to say that.

The commitment made by the Prime Minister was very clear. He said that within 30 days of the final report he would make that call. Obviously, it is not good enough for the opposition. They want an election to take place some time in February, which is four to eight weeks earlier than the Prime Minister's commitment to Canadians, but that is the choice they can make. What they should not do is try to hide behind some muddy motion that is not clear to Canadians.

We are talking about four to eight weeks and, if they want an election earlier than four to eight weeks, then they should stand in their place, put down their motion and have this place work the way it is supposed to work. If there is no confidence in the government, then drag Canadians back to the polls during the holiday season and have Canadians ultimately decide. That is the way it works.

The opposition parties are insisting that if we do not accept today's motion, then they will vote non-confidence in the government. They either have the confidence or not. We are focused on moving forward important government initiatives, not spending this day debating a motion that really has no effect.

As I have said, it is the opposition's right to defeat the government if they do not have confidence in the government, but let us consider for a moment the cost of defeating the government before we get through this legislative agenda.

• (1115)

We have Bill C-67, the unanticipated surplus bill; Bill C-68, the Canada Pacific gateway bill; the whistleblower bill in the Senate, which is essentially a bill that has come out of committee with a number of amendments that all parliamentarians provided; and Bill C-37, the do not call list, which is also before the Senate.

By defeating the government from passing its supplementary estimates, it would prevent \$1.1 billion for the Department of National Defence, nearly \$200 million for investments in public infrastructure and nearly \$120 million to promote peace and stability in fragile states.

Supply

The opposition parties also jeopardize the possibility of real concrete action stemming from the first ministers' meeting with aboriginal leaders in Kelowna next week. Phil Fontaine, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations who is opposed to Mr. Layton's motion, said that Mr. Layton's pledge to defeat the government could erase "all of the good work that we've done".

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): I would remind the hon. member not to use the name of an individual member.

Hon. Tony Valeri: I apologize, Madam Speaker. It is the leader of the NDP's motion that Phil Fontaine is opposed to.

Mr. Fontaine clearly said in *The Globe and Mail*, "This is a non-partisan declaration". He goes on to say:

I can only speak to first-nations citizens, but it is clear we all want to make progress to turn poverty into prosperity and to build a stronger federation. The well-being of our citizens living on reserves and those moving away from their communities should be above partisan politics.

Mr. Fontaine has told me directly that it was not enough for people just to meet if no action can come from it. He said that government must be able to implement outcomes from that meeting and, to do so, the government needs the clear authority, not a pending question of non-confidence.

The leader of the official opposition has already indicated that he will put forward a motion of non-confidence on November 24, at the beginning of the meeting of the first ministers. If that is the case, we really do not have the ability to take the discussion and translate that into action and ultimately do what Mr. Fontaine is asking of us because the opposition parties are preventing that from happening.

Furthermore, if the opposition chooses to defeat the government, the confidence of the parties to the Kyoto protocol in Montreal next month, a forum for Canada to demonstrate its leadership, will be jeopardized. It was reported on the radio what Elizabeth May was saying, going into that where we actually are chairing that conference, that we need a functioning government, not one in the middle of an election campaign or one with a motion of non-confidence before it.

I believe Canadians want the answers from the second report of Justice Gomery before going back to the polls. They want to see the response of the government and the opposition parties. Until that time, I think Canadians want their political leaders to use the House of Commons to debate Canadian priorities, not the timing of the next election.

The government will continue to advance its agenda for as long as it can until the opposition parties do put a non-confidence motion on the floor and vote for it. In the meantime, I would hope that the opposition parties will put aside their narrow partisan interests, work to move forward government legislation and, ultimately, at the end of this debate see that the motion in front of us cannot be accepted. It is not a motion that has any credibility with respect to the Constitution nor is it a motion that can in fact support the way the House works.

Supply

The government requires the confidence of the House and, if it does not have that, then it is incumbent upon the opposition parties to stand in their place, to show Canadians that they want to drag them back to the polls for their own partisan interests and that they want this Parliament dissolved. We do not need this sort of muddy motion that suggests we want to show no confidence today but have the effect later because the opposition parties are afraid to face Canadians and say that they are taking them back to the polls during the Christmas season because they could not wait four to eight weeks, which is what the Prime Minister committed to do, and to have the election in the spring.

• (1120)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know colleagues from all parties probably would like to ask the government House leader some questions so I will endeavour to keep this short, although I could probably go on for an hour in response to what we just heard.

He said that there was an expectation on the part of Canadians that we work together and yet what we have seen from the government over the lifetime of this Parliament is that it continues to behave as though it has a majority government.

The Liberals say that Canadians want us to work together and to pass their legislation. What Canadians want is an ethical government of integrity. They want to be able to trust their government to protect their tax dollars, not steal from them.

He raised the issue about working together. I checked the record and found that for roughly 72 of the bills that have been voted on at various stages and then passed through the House, I think we, the Conservative Party of Canada, supported about 60% of them. That is working together.

Now let us look at what the government has done. Of something like 17 opposition motions that have been before the House in a year and a half, the government has voted for 3 of them, about 13%. That is its idea of working together. Of the ones that have been passed, the majority of representatives in this chamber have passed those opposition motions because they were in the best interests of Canadians.

The member talked about governing in the best interests of Canadians. Of those motions that did pass, the government ignored them and the will of the chamber, and now it is about to do it again. There is nothing in our system that prevents the government from responding to this compromise motion.

I have already said on the record that the Conservative Party of Canada's preference would be that we would have already had the election and Canadians would have already had the opportunity to pass judgment on this corrupt government.

However, in the spirit of cooperation and compromise, we are accepting the fact that the Prime Minister does have the power to set the date for an election. He could choose to do it, according to this motion. There is nothing preventing that. He could signal that today. He does not even have to wait for the vote. I wonder if the government House leader would respond to this fact.

He can come up with all sorts of excuses why his government wants to continue to spend money and travel across the nation on its jets for the next number of months at taxpayer expense but he cannot refute the fact that Canadians want an election. They want a chance to pass judgment on the corrupt, unethical government.

• (1125)

Hon. Tony Valeri: Madam Speaker, yes, there are examples of where this Parliament has worked together. I go back to the first week in Parliament when amendments were made to the Address and the Speech from the Throne. There were other times when there has been compromise in committee. One can point to many examples.

I would have to say that the cooperation has not always come from the official opposition party, that other parties have cooperated from time to time, and we have passed very important legislation for Canadians. Even if the official opposition disagreed with the legislation, we were able to find support for it in this House.

However, the key is that we have to find majority support for our initiatives in this House of Commons and we have to ensure that we maintain confidence.

The hon. member, on the one hand, talks about this motion and that the Prime Minister has the ability to do what has been asked of him. His question indicates that he has no confidence in the Prime Minister but he let an opposition day pass on Tuesday where the official opposition had an opportunity to put forward a no confidence motion. Why did he not put that motion forward on Tuesday?

If he is going to reflect what Canadians are saying, he should know that two-thirds of Canadians are prepared to have a spring election and not a Christmas election.

While the populace across the way like to often say that they are here to represent Canadians, in this particular instance, they are representing their own political partisan interests, and that is what needs to be clear here. If they are going to vote no confidence in the government, then they should have the courage to do so in their place and take responsibility for what happens when they vote no confidence in the government: the number of bills that would be lost and the fact that Canadians would be dragged to the polls during the holiday season.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, considering the climate we are in here, I found the member's comments surprising when he talked about the need to work together and get majority support if we are going to work in a minority Parliament. We came to this minority Parliament fully believing that election talk would be put to the side so that we could get down to pragmatic compromise positions and move forward with legislation for Canadians.

Supply

I would say that in my region there are two issues that are paramount. One is how we stop the ongoing system of patronage, corruption and cronyism that has been exemplified by this government and which created this minority situation in the first place. People were fed up with it. Our party came forward with very clear proposals brought forward by probably one of the most eminent parliamentarians in the last generation. He came forward with proposals so that we could work together as a Parliament in order to end the system of patronage and corruption, but that was just blown off by the Liberal Party. The Liberals did not want to hear that.

The second issue that is very important for us is health care. Canadians identify it as their number one issue. We went to the government and said, "Let us work together. We will try to bring forward some very clear, simple proposals to protect public health care". Again we were blown off.

I would ask the hon. member how he thinks there has even been a discussion about working with Parliament to move forward when his party continually refuses to compromise and work with the other parties.

• (1130)

Hon. Tony Valeri: Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot this morning with the opposition parties talking about how government is not willing to compromise, but I would have to point to the number of things that have in fact passed this House because there was compromise. I just go back to the amount of legislation that has been passed in this House. In order to do that, we had to have the majority. In order to get that majority in this House of Commons, there had to be some element of compromise. I have worked with the hon. member's House leader on a number of initiatives that we were able to move forward with in this House because there was compromise.

On the issue of the protection of public health care, certainly the critic for the NDP and the Minister of Health met and discussed. There was a proposal put on the table that the NDP walked away from. We are very committed to public health care. In fact, we have had a \$41 billion investment in health care. We are committed to wait times on health care. We know that it is the number one issue for Canadians. We are the defenders of health care and we will continue to be. Whether the NDP decides to join with us or not, we will move forward on that particular initiative because it is important to Canadians.

There has been compromise, but what the hon. member fails to understand is that when something is incorrect, such as the motion in front of us today, it is not supportable. We do not support it on principle, not because we do not want a compromise, but because it is wrong.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in his address to the House, the leader of the NDP said that the Liberals do not have the right to determine when they should be judged. I find that somewhat curious, because I am pretty sure that the government can dissolve Parliament at any time and go to the Governor General. I thought that was kind of interesting.

He also said that in January no work will be done because the House will not be sitting. I have seen committees meet when the House is not formally sitting. I have seen the opposition parties have

meetings and discussions and do all kinds of work. I have seen the government also do an enormous amount of work when the House is not formally sitting but it is still working.

The issue of confidence has come up a number of times. I think it would be helpful if the House leader of the government could comment to the House about how the government operates when it has confidence. I can only assume that we have confidence until someone determines that we do not have confidence.

Hon. Tony Valeri: Madam Speaker, the hon. member's characterization of confidence is absolutely correct. That is why hon. members across the way are going to put a motion of non-confidence on the floor and take responsibility for what happens in dragging Canadians back to the polls.

On the point about the House not sitting in January, I imagine that the hon. leader of the NDP sat on a council in Toronto that did not sit all the time. I am hoping the hon. member is not suggesting that the city of Toronto ceased to operate and ceased to govern when council was not in session. Government continues when the House is not in session. In fact, that is what would happen in January. The government would continue to provide services to Canadians. The government would continue.

I would say to members that until we have non-confidence put on the floor of this House of Commons, we will continue to move forward with our agenda. We will continue to put forward things that are important to Canadians. It will be up to the opposition parties to dissolve this Parliament and drag Canadians back to the polls. They need to take 100% of that responsibility.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to make a comment for the government House leader. I know he will be listening somewhere in these parliamentary precincts.

He keeps talking about the Constitution. He keeps saying that the motion is not in order and could not be allowed. In fact, the Speaker has already ruled it in order.

I believe the government has already lost the confidence of the House. That will be formalized next week, depending on the government's response.

This is simply about the Prime Minister just saying yes. There is nothing in the Constitution that prevents him from saying it. There are no parliamentary rules that prevent the Prime Minister from just saying, "Yes, I would like to avoid a Christmas election".

Compromises have been made by all the other parties in the House. I can state unequivocally for the record that the Conservative Party believes beyond a shadow of a doubt that the government should have been defeated six months ago. We have never changed our position.

Supply

We maintain that position not only because of what the government did throughout the sponsorship scandal, for which we have Justice Gomery's response, and I will get into that detail, but because of even the government's subsequent response. We believe the government should have been defeated six months ago. We will not change that position.

However, we also acknowledge that all three opposition parties are needed in order to defeat the government. The three opposition party leaders came up with an incredibly reasonable proposal. It was not our first choice, but it was made in the spirit of compromise. This has nothing to do with the Constitution. If the Prime Minister had picked up the phone, called us and given us a commitment to call the election in January, all of this could have been avoided. This motion would not have had to come before the House.

For the government to say that we either have 100% confidence in it or we do not is simply not accurate. That is simply not true. The government could have just said yes and avoided all of this. The response from the Liberals, and their response alone, is going to force an election, without any question. There is going to be an election because the government refuses to find any kind of compromise.

The government has lost the confidence of the House. Let us talk about what is in play here. This is the NDP's motion. Nobody wants an election at Christmas, so the NDP came up with a proposal saying that the government has lost the confidence of the NDP and this motion provides a way for the Liberals to avoid a Christmas election.

Liberal members will argue that Justice Gomery's second report needs to be heard. Let me say this. What is coming out of Justice Gomery's report is recommendations, and recommendations only, on how to minimize the chances of a scandal like this happening. It cannot be prevented, and I will explain that in a minute, but the chances of it can be minimized. I am sure that any subsequent government, including a Conservative government, which I hope it will be, is going to follow all of Justice Gomery's recommendations.

I can tell members that a Conservative government would follow all of his recommendations. We would implement his recommendations. We would work with Justice Gomery to make sure that what needs to be done gets done. We would look at that report to the letter. Obviously that is in our interests. The leader of the Conservative Party, the leader of the official opposition, has already responded with our federal accountability act, which would put rules in place to prevent this.

Let me say quickly that nobody must ever forget that the sponsorship scandal went on for nine years. Millions of dollars were stolen from hard-working Canadians and funneled back to the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party, and the last time I checked it was the people across from me—not all of them because the NDP is across from me too—lined its own pockets with the money of hard-working Canadian taxpayers.

• (1135)

That is a fact. The Liberals have admitted it. They have admitted that they stole millions of dollars and lined their own pockets through the simple acknowledgement of having to pay back \$1.14

million when we know it is much more. The simple fact is that they paid it back: they stole that money.

There were a lot of rules in place. They were ignored from the very top, by the Prime Minister, by the finance minister, who is now the Prime Minister, and by everyone on down. All the rules in the world cannot stop someone from stealing money. If a crook comes into one's home and wants to steal then he is going to steal. However, I believe we might have exposed this much sooner had there been tougher rules.

What I want to talk about now, though, is the government's response after the worst scandal in Canadian political history, for I have no doubt that the current Prime Minister was fully aware of it. He was sitting there for eight years. It happened underneath his nose. Members of his own office, his own staff as the Minister of Finance, were calling and lobbying for sponsorship money. He was sent letters from Liberals who were telling him that sponsorship money was being used for Liberal partisan purposes and that he must stop it. All of that went ignored. That is all fact. We know all of that.

What subsequent action has been taken? Nothing has changed. Mr. Dingwall, a former Liberal cabinet minister, was sitting there when Liberals were lining their pockets with Canadians' cash. The Prime Minister's response is to give him a half million dollar severance package because he quit as the chairman of the Mint, again embroiled in another scandal. He is the same individual who was once the Minister of Public Works. He knows the rules. He was a cabinet minister. He lobbied on behalf of companies in Canada to receive federal grants, technology partnership money, and charged \$350,000 to \$400,000 in fees, which was absolutely illegal.

Has the government asked Mr. Dingwall for that money back? No. How can we leave a party in power when the culture of arrogance and entitlement is so blatant? How can we trust the Liberals to run the country, let alone clean up this mess? I do not believe we can. As the official opposition we have a constitutional responsibility to remove them from office. We believe they should have been removed as soon as we heard the revelations and the details of what went on. No modern day democracy could leave a party like that in power. This is why we are so adamant that they be removed.

The government has said that we should move a confidence motion. That confidence motion is coming in exactly one week. What is in play is that the three opposition leaders—and I will give credit to the leader of the NDP, who proposed the motion—are providing an opportunity to avoid a Christmas election. The NDP leader should get credit for that. It was his idea. But it is not that the motion has to pass, although I understand why we are doing it. We are trying to get through the thick skull of the Prime Minister and ask him if he can be rational or reasonable. It is not the motion that has to pass, although we already know it is the will of Parliament, it is the Prime Minister who has to accept it. He just has to say yes. There is nothing in the Constitution preventing the Prime Minister from standing up and saying, "Yes, okay, I accept this compromise although it is not my first choice", just as it is not the Conservatives' first choice.

Supply

●(1140)

It would allow the government to get a few critical things done in the interest of Canadians, not things that he wants to get done but that Parliament collectively as a whole thinks should be done. No, the Liberals are saying to move a confidence motion, defeat them and we will have a Christmas election. They could avoid all of that but are choosing not to.

Canadians cannot be fooled by these legal arguments. Canadians cannot be fooled by the Liberals saying that this is unconstitutional. Nothing could be further from the truth. Agreements are made all the time in the spirit of cooperation and in the interest not of Parliament but of the Canadian people. The Prime Minister could just say that he gives his word, be it in writing or whatever instrument is chosen, that there will be a general election in the first week of the new year. That is all that has to happen. That is all that is being requested.

We believe Canadians need to judge, and I come back to why they need to judge. Let us use some of Justice Gomery's words. The Liberals believe in Justice Gomery. Let me read from his report, in which he stated:

The LPCQ as an institution cannot escape responsibility for the misconduct of its officers and representatives. Two successive Executive Directors were directly involved in illegal campaign financing—

He went on to say that they accepted cash payments for their services and payments in violation of the Canada Elections Act. Everybody is aware of what happened.

What are the first five words of Justice Gomery's report in the very first bullet? His first five words are, "Clear evidence of political involvement". The Liberal Party of Canada stole millions of dollars, by their own admission, lined their own pockets and then sprinkled envelopes of cash throughout Liberal ridings in Quebec. They should show some humility, remorse or regret, but what did the Prime Minister do? He stood in the House of Commons and said that it was a great day to be a Liberal, a proud day to be a Liberal. Liberals should be ashamed of themselves.

We are very clearly, at least from everything we have seen from the government's response and listening to the government House leader, heading into an election. A confidence motion will be put before the House. The Liberals keep telling us to put a clear confidence motion before the House and defeat them. That is going to happen. That is going to happen exactly one week from today and the vote will follow that motion. Canadians will finally get an opportunity to judge the government.

I cannot imagine that Canadians would reward the government for the worst scandal in Canadian history, the blatant theft of their money. When people are rewarded for their actions, we only get more of the same. Sadly, we have seen numerous scandals, even under the Prime Minister's watch post-Gomery. The Liberals knew all the facts. They have known them for 10 years. They have known them from the very beginning. They were the perpetrators. They were the people stealing the money. They were the ones involved. They have known all along. Even after they were caught and the evidence came out, their response has been one and the same.

●(1145)

The scandals continue, from the boondoggle to André Ouellet, the former Liberal cabinet minister who had millions of dollars of expenditures at Canada Post. The government has been promising Canadians an audit since last spring. Have we seen that audit? No. The Liberals do not want us to know about that until after the election. The government is burying that information.

The scandals go on and on. The former minister of immigration who was appointed by the current Prime Minister was involved in a scandal. Exotic dancers who just happened to be working in her campaign had been brought into the country under special permits. Yes, there have been investigations and maybe it was her chief of staff or the people around her. That is always the Liberal response. Cabinet ministers are accountable for all of those actions.

Her successor, the new minister of immigration, billed taxpayers for thousands and thousands of dollars for meals. The Liberals do not show any remorse. The government makes up more excuses.

What has been the response by the Prime Minister concerning Art Eggleton, a former Liberal cabinet minister who was involved in another scandal? Mr. Eggleton broke all the rules, just like the sponsorship program. He tossed out the rules and gave untendered contracts to his girlfriend or partner. How did the Prime Minister respond to that? The Prime Minister appointed Art Eggleton to the Senate. This goes on daily.

My colleague from Calgary has done so much good work on the aboriginal files. We have seen the scandal of the water treatment systems and the Liberal inaction. The Liberals stand in the House and suggest, "How dare you want us to possibly compromise". The government cites some crazy constitutional argument, when really it is just about agreeing to avoid an election now, because the government's only option is an election the first week of January or have a confidence motion next week.

We all know there are events in play. The opposition parties collectively can be thanked, again with some credit to the NDP, for allowing this vote to happen after the aboriginal leaders conference. The government says to move it tomorrow. I know there are some timing issues so that can happen.

The Canadian people need to judge this government. The evidence is before Canadians. The government of the day will have an opportunity to look at the rules in the second report of Justice Gomery and implement them. I suspect that those rules will be implemented because I have every belief that the Canadian people will not re-elect the Liberal government. They will elect a government that has integrity, a Conservative government.

I am amazed by the government's response when it has been caught red handed in a theft of this sophistication. In my wildest imaginations I could not believe that Liberals would have taken envelopes of cash and lined their own pockets, then sprinkled the money to their friends. I would not have believed that, but Justice Gomery has. Justice Gomery has accepted all that evidence and so has the Liberal Party or it would not be paying back that money. The Liberal Party would not have written a cheque if it were not true.

Supply

If the Government of Canada has an ounce of interest in avoiding an election at Christmas, it has only one option, which is to say yes to a compromise reached by all the other parties in the House.

• (1150)

The Liberals can ask the NDP members if that was the Conservatives' first choice and they will tell them that it was not, that they did reach a compromise in good faith. Failing that, yes the Liberals will get a motion of confidence. They will get it within a week. They deserve it. They deserve to be defeated. It is time for the Canadian people to have their say.

Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague from Vancouver Island as he rambled over a number of issues, but I really wonder whether he has thought through some of the issues that he raised. There are a number, but I will take up one for this comment and question, which is it is his criticism that any person who happens to have served in the House of Commons should therefore and thereafter not be considered for any appointment or public office. He made that abundantly clear in his references to David Dingwall that because that person had served here, somehow he should not be considered for any public appointment.

I point out to him that his predecessor, the Reform member of the House of Commons, Group Captain Fraser, was appointed by the Liberal government of the day, the Chrétien government, to the Veterans Appeal Board. In fact, the member would not be here if it had not been for the appointment of that gentleman to another position. Why was he appointed? Because he was qualified.

The government and Mr. Chrétien recognized that Group Captain Fraser had many qualities. I absolutely agreed as minister for British Columbia that this person was fully entitled to be considered for the appointment and in fact he got it, and so he should have. That is the predecessor of the member who got up in the House and said that those of us who have served in the House have no abilities and therefore should not be considered afterward. That is an insult to 308 members of the House of Commons who certainly should be considered for appointments, if they wish to put their names forward, following their time in the House.

It is a criticism I level also at the NDP. In fact the member for Ottawa Centre, when he ceased to be a member for a certain period, was appointed by the federal government to the Institute of Race Relations in Montreal. The leader of the NDP in Ontario was appointed ambassador to the United Nations by the federal government, an NDP politician. He is now, of course, the UN special envoy for HIV-AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis. There is Mike Harcourt, an NDP premier of B.C. In fact there is even an NDP premier of B.C. who happened to be appointed the Minister of Health of the Government of Canada.

I am saying that the hypocrisy of the Conservatives and the NDP on this issue of appointments needs to be challenged. The fact is there are people in the House who have come here with abilities. The hon. member can speak for himself as to whether or not he has them. I will leave that up to him and the people who have watched his performance on television. The fact is that people come here with abilities, and if they have abilities, they should not be barred from

serving the Canadian people in some other capacity in the future simply because of public service here in the House.

It is time to stop this constant denigration of members of the House of Commons of all parties, but particularly the type of speech we just heard which broadcast criticisms on everyone who happens to have been elected for the majority party, in fact, still the party that has the largest number in the House and therefore is the government. That is the type of behaviour which casts aspersions on every member of the House. It criticizes every person who takes up public office, whether federally or provincially. It is a shame and should not be countenanced in this chamber.

It is fair enough to criticize on the issue of the sponsorship program, on the issue of the funds that went into the hands of people who did not earn the money. That is absolutely correct and positive. However, to broadcast criticism of that type is quite outrageous.

If we wished to broadcast criticisms of the Conservatives for what went on before, we would find that there was plenty, particularly when we think of the helicopter contracts of the Mulroney government.

Why does the member get up here and insult all 308 members of the House in the manner that he does? Why does he not get up here and be specific? Why does he not recognize that Group Captain Jack Fraser was a worthwhile member of the House, a worthy person for appointment, and people of other parties are also worthy of appointment when they get appointed, if that happens subsequent to their time in public life?

• (1155)

Mr. Gary Lunn: Madam Speaker, all of the statements I made are based on fact. Let me talk quickly about Col. Frazer. I know him as a very good friend. The member stated that if it was not for Col. Frazer's appointment to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, I would not be here. That is absolutely false.

Col. Jack Frazer retired as a member of Parliament and many months later was offered an opportunity to serve on this board. My place here has nothing to do with his appointment. He had already retired. In fact, Col. Frazer would never ever accept an appointment if he had not given up his seat. If the member is suggesting that his appointment had something to do with his vacancy, he is sadly mistaken. He is probably a man with the highest integrity that I could ever meet.

I did say that Art Eggleton, who was embroiled in a scandal and forced to resign from office, was rewarded. Those are the facts. He was rewarded by the Prime Minister with a Senate seat. Mr. Dingwall, a former cabinet minister, was given an appointment and is now embroiled in another scandal, accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in kickbacks and fees, and is not denying them. He is accepting them. In fact, the current minister—

Hon. David Anderson: Say that outside.

Mr. Gary Lunn: I will gladly say it outside.

Let me say it here first. He took in fees of \$350,000 to \$400,000. He went to the company that paid them and forced them to pay them back because they were illegal. They were wrong and Mr. Dingwall is still sitting with them.

Supply

I am talking about a culture of entitlement. Liberals believe they are entitled to their entitlements. It is a culture of arrogance. Those are the facts. That is what has happened. That is what we have seen for eight years. That is why the sponsorship program went on and the subsequent scandals continue to this day. The government needs to be defeated to restore integrity in this institution and bring back some type of accountability. Those are the facts.

Let me remind the member that the Liberals stole millions of dollars. If he claims they are innocent, why did the Liberals pay \$1.14 million dollars back? They have admitted their own guilt.

Unfortunately, in our justice system, what is the Liberal justice of the worst scandal in this country, where millions of dollars were stolen? Not one person has gone to jail. After a scandal that is over eight years old, one person is sitting in his living room serving house arrest and running across the country teaching ethics to university students. That is the idea of Liberal justice. Those are facts. They cannot be refuted.

It is time that the government was thrown out. It is time that Canadians had a say. I look forward to one week from now when there will be a clear motion of non-confidence in the government. It is too arrogant to accept a proposal, a compromise reached by all other parties, to allow Canadians to avoid a Christmas election. Its own arrogance is coming across right now and I look forward to the judgment from the Canadian people.

• (1200)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would appreciate it if the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands would make it clear that the Conservatives did have a very different position. They have been very clear that they wanted to have an election as soon as possible. They wanted to have a non-confidence motion.

It is to the credit of that party and also the Bloc that their leaders did, in a spirit of compromise, come up with a motion that we are debating today to actually give the Prime Minister a real choice. It gives the Prime Minister an opportunity to have an election that meets the criteria that he himself set out and allows legislation to go through. It allows the aboriginal affairs conference to be held. It allows the business of the House to continue. It allows an election not to be held during the Christmas period.

I would also agree with the member that the culture of entitlement is something that is so pervasive here, and obviously we can see that even today from Liberal members. Does the member believe that, based on the ethics package put forward by the NDP and I know the Conservatives also put forward a package, this culture of entitlement can actually be changed?

• (1205)

Mr. Gary Lunn: Madam Speaker, I believe it can be changed. I think it can only be changed with a new government. I will give the House a commitment that a new Conservative government would listen to ideas from people from every party and bring forward those good ideas, to bring changes, and to bring that respect back.

The bottom line is that the only way we can change people who believe that they are entitled to the entitlements is to remove them. It has spread through this Parliament like a cancer. Its tentacles have

reached every single corner of this Liberal government. The only way we can bring back and restore integrity, accountability and respect to this place is by removing the Liberal Party from office.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, the leader of the NDP introduced a motion today with the support of the Conservative Party, the leader of the official opposition, and the Bloc Québécois. This motion reflects the belief of all three opposition parties, which form a majority in the House of Commons.

Although the Conservative Party, the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois disagree on many matters—that is virtually a truism—we can say that we agree on the fact that the Liberal Party and its leader, the current Prime Minister, no longer have the moral authority to continue governing.

The Liberal Party is a disgrace. It instituted a bribery system in its own favour and broke the most basic rules of democracy. The leader of the Liberal Party made a solemn promise to clean things up. But he has done the very opposite. He is the one who perpetuated the Liberal culture of cronyism, patronage and cover-up. He is the one who broke his promise.

The leader of the Liberal Party of Canada also promised—and this was virtually a commitment he made during his leadership campaign—that he would eliminate the democratic deficit. What is the democratic deficit? It means that most of this government's powers are centralized in the hands of the Prime Minister, his department, the Privy Council, and one could add to this circle, the government leader and other advisors. He promised to eliminate the democratic deficit. But he did the very opposite by systematically refusing to take the opinion of the House of Commons into account and compromise with the opposition parties, which make up the majority in this House.

We do not suffer from collective amnesia in this House and the people listening to us have good memories as well. On June 28, 2004, the people of Quebec and Canada decided, through the election result, that the next government would be a minority government. In a British parliamentary system such as ours, a minority government means that more members were elected from the opposition parties than from the party forming the government. That is the case. It is the government, but it is a minority government. This means that the government cannot do whatever it wants. It must take the opinion of the three opposition parties into account because they have a numerical majority in the House.

The problem with the Liberal Party and this Prime Minister is that they refused to take the democratic choice of the people of Quebec and Canada into account. That is the source of the whole problem. Here too, the Prime Minister broke his promise. The Prime Minister also showed he has learned nothing from the sponsorship scandal when he introduced a budget like this on Monday. It has to be called a budget and not some economic statement, which is the official term chosen by the government. All the printed materials speak of an economic statement, but nothing could be further from the truth. This is a clearly a budget.

Supply

• (1210)

In tabling this budget, the leader of the Liberal Party has shown that he did not learn a thing from the sponsorship scandal. Let me explain.

It is an election budget—let us admit it—that perpetuates Liberal tradition at its worst. First, the Liberal government was completely dishonest in its estimates. Have you ever wondered, Mr. Speaker, like those watching us have, how this government and this incompetent Minister of Finance can make such obvious mistakes in calculating the surplus? This happens year after year. The same thing kept happening under the previous finance minister, the person who was finance minister under Jean Chrétien for nine years.

In this case, we are talking about being off by 300%. The budgetary surplus was estimated at \$4 billion, but now it seems it will be closer to \$11.2 billion. Allow me to convey what a journalist said. He was wondering why it is that the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, the Bloc Québécois finance critic, was able to predict the surplus, but the finance minister could not. We ask ourselves the question: Which side of the House is competent? This happens systematically, year after year.

On one hand, we find it odd that a surplus suddenly appears on the eve of an election. It grows. It is like raspberries that ripen overnight. When you pick berries at the end of the day, you realize that some are not ripe, but when you go back the next morning, they are. It is much the same thing with the surpluses under this Liberal government. The surpluses grow just when the budgets are being drafted. It is just more evidence of incompetence.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister brags about these budgetary surpluses, forgetting that acknowledging these exorbitant surpluses only proves that a fiscal imbalance exists. Just this morning there was an article in *Le Journal de Québec* or *Le Journal de Montréal*. Yves Séguin, the former Quebec Liberal finance minister, says that given the surplus, like the one the federal government is amassing, and given the clear evidence, day after day, of the fiscal imbalance, he understands why a majority of Quebecers are sovereignist. He is beginning to understand it. This from a former Liberal finance minister, who does not have a reputation for being sovereignist. He was the MNA for Outremont.

In my view, it demonstrates clearly what we in the Bloc have known for a long time: this government no longer has the moral authority to govern, and the surpluses are in Ottawa while the needs are in the provinces. To be convinced of this, one only needs to go and talk to the people who are trying to manage hospitals and schools these days. That will give further proof of the fiscal imbalance. The money is here.

In this, the current Prime Minister is following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Jean Chrétien. He is in fact compounding the intrusions into Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. And it is getting worse: this time, with this election budget, the Liberal Party and its leader are trying to buy the voters with their own money. Let us not forget that the federal government has surpluses on the order of \$11.2 billion, money that does not come out of the pockets of any of the elected members on either side of this House. That money comes from the people who pay taxes, the middle class. They tell us

constantly that they are paying too much tax, that their pay slip, listing all the deductions, is longer than the cheque itself.

We will be going back to our ridings on the weekend and we will find out what the people think of this budget. They will tell us that the government should not think it is giving them a gift, since it is their money and it amounts to a repayment of a small fraction of the taxes they pay to Ottawa.

• (1215)

This cynical attitude clearly shows us that the Liberal Party has learned nothing from the sponsorship scandal. It continues to behave as if nothing had happened. It is business as usual, just the same old happy routine, and nothing has changed. They are continuing to operate according to Jean Chrétien's tried and true method. That is why we say that Jean Chrétien and the current Prime Minister are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The voters will not let themselves be bought by the Prime Minister's sneaky little blackmail. The three opposition party leaders, during a normal week or weekend of activities, do in fact meet with the voters. They have come to exactly the same conclusion that I am presenting on behalf of my party.

It is in this spirit of compromise that the three leaders have agreed to support this NDP motion today. It should be re-read seriously. The meaning of this motion is to agree on proposing to the government that this fall session be terminated and to call an election after the holidays, on January 4.

If, however, the Prime Minister is sincere and truly wants to help those affected by energy prices, as he claims, reverse the onus of proof with regard to the proceeds of crime or still hold a conference with the aboriginal nations, there is nothing preventing him from agreeing to the proposal put before the House in the NDP's motion. This would give him the time to do all that and call an election on January 4. The Prime Minister could compromise, if he had an ounce of good faith. For now, he is refusing, on the pretext that the current parliamentary system does not allow this. He prefers to use demagoguery and accuse his adversaries of pushing the country into a mid-winter election, during the holidays.

We need to refresh our memories. We should remember that, when the Prime Minister made his televised statement last spring, with his hand on his heart and his heart on his sleeve, he was clinging desperately to power. He had fallen from the third floor and was literally trying to grab onto the bricks of Parliament.

Let us remember what he proposed. He gave a televised statement broadcast across Canada, for which he mobilized all the networks. He proposed calling an election on December 30 at the very latest. Why do I say December 30? Because, originally, the second Gomery report was to be tabled December 1. He made the commitment to call an election within 30 days after Justice Gomery tabled his second report. Thirty days after December 1 brings us to what date? December 30. Is that not during the winter? Is that not during the holidays? The Prime Minister himself proposed that date. Why hide behind false pretexts now, as if to say that it makes no sense to hold an election during the holidays? In any case, people want an election as soon as possible so they can get rid of this government.

The Prime Minister is condemning something he himself suggested a few short months ago, when he had no legal requirement to do so, during his solemn televised statement. He did so of his own volition.

Last weekend in Montreal, at his biannual convention, surrounded by the elves of the Liberal Party, his goose was cooked.

• (1220)

He made fun of the proposal by the opposition parties, but in reality the joke was on him.

The Prime Minister, and only he, is responsible for setting an election date. Even if the government is defeated before the end of this month, the election campaign must last at least 36 days. There is nothing to stop it from being 39, 42 or 48. The Prime Minister will set the date. That is his prerogative. The purpose of the NDP motion is to ask him to defer that date until after the holiday period, after January 4.

Once again, as he did with the sponsorship scandal, the Prime Minister is trying to shirk responsibility. A compromise is on the table. If he refuses the offer of the three opposition parties, he will have to take responsibility for the decision and face the consequences.

The Prime Minister is making a big thing about the House having to continue to sit for this or that reason, and keeps on inventing more of them. In this, as in many other matters, we feel that the Prime Minister is being hypocritical. If I am wrong and the leader of the Leader Party really wants to complete the parliamentary session, let me remind him that the NDP motion offers him that possibility by deferring the election call until January 4. So let him give up on his red herrings and instead act on this NDP motion. The election will then be called on January 4, and by then he will have been able to get through his parliamentary agenda, as well as hold the national conference with the aboriginal peoples at the end of next week. He has that possibility. If he refuses, we will know that, once again, the Prime Minister is being a hypocrite.

The Prime Minister likes to say that he will not play political games. Yet this is the same man who last spring used every procedure in the book to avoid a confidence vote, mainly by denying the opposition parties their opposition days that had already been scheduled under an agreement between the House leaders. I am not about to say my father can take his father, and I am not going to try to find out who is right. However, it was definitely procedural games we saw last spring when this party and this government House leader cancelled opposition days in order to avoid a confidence vote. As far as tricks and procedural games go, we have absolutely nothing to learn from the Liberal Party and the people opposite.

In conclusion, I will say that the Prime Minister is afraid to face voters because he knows full well that Canadians are not stupid. People in Quebec and the rest of Canada have not forgotten for a minute that throughout the sponsorship scandal, he was second in command in the government as Minister of Finance and Vice-President of the Treasury Board, and he was running for the leadership of the Liberal Party. He thus had the chance to survey all of the provinces, every legislature and all 301 federal ridings at that time. He had the chance to survey Canada and the party.

Supply

Now, he is trying to make us believe that he did not know Jacques Corriveau, Marc-Yvan Côté, Michel Béliveau or any of the other people who have been banned from the Liberal Party for life. He wants us to believe that when he bumped into them at conventions, party events and cocktail parties where people savoured hors d'oeuvres at \$500 a pop, he did not meet with them and did not talk to them about all that.

People in Quebec and the rest of Canada are no dummies. They know who is responsible for the sponsorship scandal. They know which party wallowed in corruption. They know which party built a system of kickbacks. They know which party brought shame upon itself. They know which party tried to buy the 1997 election and which party thumbed its nose at Quebecers.

• (1225)

It was the Liberal Party, and the leader of that party is the Prime Minister. If he will not call an election, it is because he is not willing to accept the judgment that Canadians will pass the next time they go to the polls.

Hon. Claude Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Rural Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised by the comments of my colleague the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. He is very angry and is attacking people. I am all the more surprised given the events surrounding the separatist head office in Quebec. I would like very much to hear what he has to say on that.

When the Oxygène 9 problem arose, it was so serious that Mr. Landry, the premier at the time, took no chances. He called for the resignation of minister Baril and appointed him vice-president of Hydro-Quebec in Chile, to ensure there was no inquiry and no guilty party. We on the other hand have acknowledged our responsibilities. Criminal charges have been laid on four people. Thirty-two civil suits have been brought representing a figure of \$57 million. We have taken many steps to prevent such things from recurring. But we hear nothing of that.

Today, we are debating a motion stating that the government no longer has the moral authority to govern. However, it can still govern until the holidays. It is a good thing that ridiculousness is not deadly, because the member opposite would drop dead on the spot. We do not have the moral authority to govern, but we can govern until January.

This is not the first time we have heard this. The member speaks of fiscal imbalance. I would point out that the government worked with the Parti Québécois. It took out loans over 10 years with the municipalities instead of taking the proper course of action, as we did, to reduce the \$62 billion debt. Had the PQ government done its work, Quebec would not be facing its present difficulties.

This is not the first contradiction by the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. We hear them here regularly. We increased transfers to the provinces by \$75 billion. We established day care and childhood education programs, among other things, and a lot of other assistance measures in keeping with jurisdictional areas. The credit reductions people are looking for are an extension of the \$100 billion we injected over five years. Our solvency is such that we want to continue in this regard.

Supply

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, you have no idea how happy I am that the hon. member for Beauce asked me a question. I saw him taking notes. I was thinking about him and there was something I wanted to say to him. Since he asked me a question, I will be able to address him and I will ask him a question. We would be prepared, if there is unanimous consent, to give him a chance to respond to that question.

My first comment is on what he said about the Quebec National Assembly. I do not know if the hon. member for Beauce is currently preparing for a career after federal politics; perhaps he will be a candidate in future provincial elections in Quebec.

Nonetheless, I must say that I cannot answer his question because I am not in the chamber of that assembly. If we were face to face at the National Assembly, I would be able to respond, but I cannot do so here. We have a great expression at home: right church, wrong pew. We are not in the right place to talk about this.

The hon. member for Beauce has certainly read the Gomery report. He certainly heard Marc-Yvan Côté's testimony when he said he handed out \$120,000 of dirty sponsorship money. Marc-Yvan Côté was in charge of 21 ridings in eastern Quebec, including Beauce. Eighteen ridings received money and 10 or so candidates received money personally.

I would like the hon. member for Beauce to tell me whether he was one of the ones who received dirty sponsorship money from Marc-Yvan Côté.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found the speech of the hon. member very enlightening. We seem to be seeing some strange spectacles with the Liberal Party in its dying days of government.

Last month we saw the first results of the Gomery report, which was one of the low days in parliamentary history. The Prime Minister came out, with obvious relief on his face, and said that it was a great vindication for the government. Yes, people were caught stealing money, yes, they had taxpayer money, but he said that they would give it back. They had been caught. What an absolutely appallingly low standard of ethics.

Now the Prime Minister is challenging the other parties that are trying to work on compromise and trying to work together. He is double daring us to have a Christmas election. Our party has made it clear that we do not want a Christmas election. We believe we should be moving to January, yet one party is insisting on defying the will of Parliament. It is hanging the thread of a Christmas election over the people of Canada.

Does the hon. member feel that the Liberal tactic is based on a contempt for the people of Canada or a fear of facing the people of Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. In fact, all the time the government is trying to save by putting off the inevitable, ultimate deadline, only proves that the Liberal Party, under the current Prime Minister, has no respect for the

public or taxpayers. Every day, we see examples of arrogance. This week's election budget was yet another egregious example.

Hon. Claude Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Rural Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Bloc members are prepared to attack individuals and try to tarnish reputations, although the Gomery report is clear. All those who are members of the current government are not involved.

Before I ask my question, I want to tell the member that I did not receive any money and that everything was done in compliance with election legislation. In the future, if his party has any comments to make, I invite it to make them outside the House. It will be my pleasure to respond. As for me, I respect the members opposite on a personal level. We all have families and people around us. Individuals should never be the subject of attack, but rather ideas. However, when members run out of ideas, they attack individuals.

Nevertheless, I understand the Bloc member not wanting to respond with regard to the situation at the National Assembly. He says that it is a case of the right church, wrong pew. Above all, we cannot mention the Laval metro scandal, Gaspésia and the interests of Quebecers because their mother house was involved. However, this should have convinced them to be more careful. A great deal of money was wasted.

Today, they are trying to teach us a lesson. However, we have admitted that there is a problem. Someone has already pleaded guilty and others are awaiting trial, before either the criminal or civil courts. All this proves that we want to take action to remedy the situation and that we have the moral authority to govern, not just until January, but for 30 days after Justice Gomery tables his final report, as we proposed and as they agreed.

As a matter of fact, the motions they introduced last spring were defeated. They cannot say that they have not had any opposition days. The motions were defeated. What does that mean? We had the confidence of the House. This is their problem, not ours.

• (1235)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I must point out to my colleague from Beauce that I was not attacking him personally, but merely asking a question. This is a mathematical exercise. At the Gomery inquiry, Marc-Yvan Côté said he had distributed dirty money in 18 of the 21 ridings he was responsible for. That means there were 3 that did not get any. The hon. member for Beauce has just said his riding is one of the three. Ms. Gosselin, the candidate in Levis in 1997, has also said she did not receive any money. So that makes two ridings, with one still to discover.

It is indecent that the Liberal Party has used this sponsorship kickback system to fund campaigns with the taxpayers' money against the Bloc Québécois in eastern Quebec.

We in the Bloc Québécois finance our campaigns with the \$2, \$5 or \$10 donations of ordinary citizens. They are the ones who contribute to our campaigns. When the election is over, we are not beholden to big business or to the banks.

It is all the more indecent that the sponsorship money went to finance the Liberal party. The Gomery report is clear on this. It describes a kickback system in which people in advertising firms were paid by their agencies to work full time for the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is corrupt. It should be kicked out in the next election, and that election should be as soon as possible.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

The NDP leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, referred to this as an historic day, thanks to this motion, to get things done for Canadians over the next few weeks and to advance a reasonable compromise that three parties, the majority of the House, support. We can get important legislation passed, such as Bill C-55 to protect the pensions of workers. We can get the fuel rebates in Bill C-66 to the people who need them the most.

We know nothing prevents the Prime Minister from setting a date at the advice of this Parliament. The motion provides a real opportunity to address the democratic deficit that the Prime Minister promised to fix. An election delayed until the spring would only make that democratic deficit worse. The Liberals would like taxpayers to fund an extra two months of pre-election spending announcements and travel around the country. This is wrong and it will not happen.

I would like to speak about the first nations conference because it has been raised here as a difficulty that we may in fact be creating. This is important to me, my caucus and my riding where there are two great first nations communities, Garden River and Batchewana. I want to address the aboriginal concerns regarding an early election.

First nations leaders have been in touch with me with regard to concerns about an early election disrupting the first ministers meeting in Kelowna next week. The NDP has a long, proud and clear record of support for first nations, Métis and Inuit objectives, unparalleled by any other party.

The member for Winnipeg Centre campaigned against the first nations governance bill. My entire caucus stood behind his aboriginal affairs committee filibuster to bring attention to Indian residential school abuse. New Democrats believe we must finally achieve fair compensation for survivors and lasting reconciliation for all of us.

The whole compromise will have the effect of protecting that first ministers meeting. All the opposition parties now agree that meeting should be protected. It also honours the principles of first nations of consensus and compromise.

I came to Ottawa wanting to do politics differently, to work positively with elected officials locally at all levels and from different parties. We came to the House of Commons in a minority Parliament to make it work and to be productive. To the best of our ability, we have done this. Our better balanced budget produced results for working Canadians in housing, protecting pensions, post-secondary tuition, the environment and aboriginal communities.

Supply

The government did not want to recognize what Canadians told it on June 28 of last year. Canadians said no to the Liberals ruling again as a majority government. Canadians elected the House with the majority of MPs from different parties other than the Liberal Party. We have had confirmed by the Gomery report the width and breadth of the culture of entitlement that has Liberals putting themselves and their party before the Canadian people or our country.

I have come to work but have not seen much of the government's recognition of a minority Parliament or working collaboratively.

First, there is a paucity of legislation, except for housekeeping bills. Even the housekeeping bills, like the ones to give legal standing for the Departments of Social Development and Human Resources and Skills Development, came a year after those departments were up and running and budgets were being spent. Even when we tried to bring amendments to that bill, every last one of them was turned down.

In committee we see the lack of recognition of a minority Parliament, refusing to work productively to get things done for Canadians.

We raised the deplorable treatment of the voluntary sector by the government's new call for proposals process. For the longest time, rather than getting to the bottom of this, the Liberals were more interested in censoring me than in doing the investigation. God help the whistleblowers under any legislation if this is the way people who bring out grave injustices that need righting will be treated.

● (1240)

My motion to conduct hearings across Canada on the Canadian social transfer was passed in June in the human resources committee. Roy Romanow said that these hearings would be the most important dialogue Canadians would have, even more important than health care. However, since we came back in the fall we have seen nothing but foot dragging in the committee not to have these hearings actually take place. These hearings have not happened and it looks like they will not happen before the government falls.

The Liberals' culture of entitlement has them believing in some divine right to rule and to ignore the will of Canadians and the will of Parliament. This Liberal culture is alive in my own riding, as well, with riding executives sending statements to the media that voters should elect a Liberal MP if they want to get anything in the riding.

Has the Liberal Party learned nothing from the sponsorship scandal, of government ministers ignoring the will of those who were elected by voters and not inviting those members of Parliament to announcements of the federal moneys being spent, Canadian money, I might add, not Liberal money, as they believe? In my riding this has led to the unprecedented resolution of city council to ensure that politicians at all levels of government, regardless of their party, are invited to these announcements.

Supply

This motion introducing this compromise is a hallmark of what can happen in a minority Parliament. Usually, with a compromise, it takes people a little while to get around to accepting it. I hope the government will listen to Canadians and to the majority of the members of Parliament and agree to this sensible approach.

The Prime Minister himself said that he wanted to get some work done this fall, including the first ministers' meeting with aboriginal and first nations. The second thing he said was that he did not want an election over Christmas. The third thing he said was that he wanted to ensure that Gomery's second report was in front of the voters before an election. Those were the things he wanted.

We said yes to all those things and our proposal to have the election called in January for a vote in mid-February would accomplish all those goals.

Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what struck me about the comments by the hon. member was the fact that he clearly indicated throughout his speech that he had confidence in the government and in the many things the government was bringing forward. He said that he wants these things to come along, to be voted on and that many of them he wants to see brought into law or into policy. Now, from what I heard him say, he clearly has confidence in the government.

He went on to complain about the fact that the Prime Minister would not accept something which is not within the normal rules of the House and not within normal parliamentary practice. He went on to say that because the opposition parties agree that this contorted, convoluted way of proceeding should be adopted, the Prime Minister somehow should ignore the normal procedure in the House and follow that.

It seems to me that the member simply does not have the courage of his convictions. Does he want the government defeated or does he not, as of now? If that is the case, I will have a much better idea of what I heard him say. However right now I am puzzled by his clear indication that he does not want the government defeated.

• (1245)

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, members have heard me and members of our caucus over the last number of weeks say that we have a common sense, reasonable compromise that we are hoping the Liberal Party will accept.

I have confidence in Parliament, and Parliament, as we will see at the end of this debate either tonight or Monday, is telling the government that it should get some business done between now and Christmas and then move to calling an election in early January that would be held in mid-February. We believe we have every right to do that.

As a matter of fact, the Deputy Prime Minister of the government said the other day that there was nothing to stop the government from reacting positively to this common sense, very practical compromise that we have put before the House today.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member refers to a common sense principle but my understanding is that the motion today calls for an election to be called during the first week of January for an election day on February 13. The member knows that the three opposition parties entered into an agreement

already and it has been stated clearly by the Conservatives, the Bloc and his own leader that next Thursday there will be a non-confidence motion put that will put us into an election immediately and the election date would be on January 9 or January 16.

If we are going to have a non-confidence motion put next Thursday for a vote, what is the purpose of the motion today? The motion today would be pre-empted totally, calling for a February 13 election, because their planned non-confidence motion next week will have an election that would take place on January 19. So that means *prima facie* that today's motion is not only non-confidence, it is just nonsensical.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many times we need to say this to the Liberal caucus, but we are calling today for a very reasonable, common sense compromise that would accomplish all of the things that the Prime Minister said that he wants to get done. He does not want to have a Christmas election and neither do we. He wants to get some work done and he wants the election to happen at a time when the final report of Gomery is out before the people, and that will happen as well. I just do not know where the hang up is with the member and his caucus on this reasonable proposal.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question relating to this culture of entitlement. In my riding, the widow of a man who fought in the second world war was just given a pension for \$3.26 a month and was told by the federal government that she would not receive any support for shovelling snow. Let us talk about a culture of entitlement when a former Liberal cabinet minister charges more for his Tim Hortons coffee in the morning than this widow of a second world war veteran will get.

Why does the hon. member think the government holds the common people of Canada in such contempt with our money?

• (1250)

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, the member and I, and others in the NDP caucus, have come here to get things done on behalf of our constituents. We want to ensure that people, such as the person he referred to and so many other people who we represent, receive the help and assistance they need.

However the government has shown itself unable to get down from its high horse and get those kinds of things done. We brought this very reasonable, common sense proposal before the House this morning in the hope that over the next day or a few days the Liberals will reconsider and actually support it.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the good people of the riding of Winnipeg Centre are justifiably furious over the revelations of the Gomery Commission's inquiry into the sponsorship scandal. Many of them have come to me and asked my party to do all we can to bring the government down and stop its ability to continue in the way it has. I am one of those furious individuals.

Just because our motion today is reasonable and is a compromise of position, I do not want anyone to think for one minute that there is not justifiable choleric and outrage on this side of the House over the degree of corruption and theft that took place in the sponsorship scandal and who knows where else.

Supply

When I read my remarks today in support of this reasonable compromise position, I do not want the fact to be lost that the organized theft in the sponsorship program in which the Liberals took part will go down in infamy as one of the most horrendous abuses of power in Canadian history.

Coming from the riding of Winnipeg Centre in the province of Manitoba, the sponsorship scandal, this organized theft, was not limited to Quebec. I have good reason to believe that the people of Winnipeg were ripped off in the sponsorship scandal in the 1999 Winnipeg Pan-Am Games. I feel good enough to say that both in the House and outside the House if necessary. Let me tell the House how that happened.

We were given a \$2.3 million sponsorship contract through the sponsorship program but only \$650,000 was delivered to the executive and organizers of the 1999 Winnipeg Pan-Am Games. The rest of the money was siphoned off as production costs by a Liberal advertising firm, the fourth largest beneficiary of all the sponsorship scandals in the Gomery inquiry. I am here to say that Winnipeg was ripped off in the sponsorship scandal as well, not just the good people of Quebec. It offended all of us right across the country.

I have said it before and I will say it again. I believe in my heart that the Liberal Party of Canada is institutionally psychopathic. It literally does not know the difference between right and wrong. It is so obsessed with keeping power at all costs that it is willing to disregard any social norms or mores or laws. In fact, it cut a swath through all things decent in order to maintain its grip on power.

I predict that when Mr. Gomery presents his second report his number one recommendation will be that the Liberal Party of Canada be disbanded out of disgrace. Just as the airborne regiment was disbanded after Somalia, the same thing will happen to the Liberal Party of Canada. We will kick them out of power first, I believe.

Some people are too thick-headed to be embarrassed. There is saying that some people cannot be embarrassed. We see the arrogance perpetuated even in the midst of this maelstrom where any person who is not psychopathic would have crumbled under the weight of the sheer disgrace. They would be on their knees in contrition. The Prime Minister of Canada should prostrate himself before Canadians like Jimmy Swaggart and beg their forgiveness. "Forgive me Lord for I have sinned", is the kind of reaction we would expect from the Liberals, but all we see is arrogance, smugness and cockiness.

What the Liberals have said is that they know the Liberal Party stole from Canadians so they will make it right by giving some of the money back. That was their first tenuous position. Their second position was their admission that the Liberal government and the Liberal Party stole from Canadians and said that the reason they needed to be re-elected was to ensure no future Liberal government would ever be able to steal from Canadians in that way again.

That is the kind of pretzel, convoluted logic we on this side of the House have been asked to accept. It is galling to any reasonable person. It offends the sensibility of any thinking Canadian to try and buy into that logic. I am one of those who has said that we should

blow their heads off at the first opportunity. I am one of the hawks in our party, I suppose.

• (1255)

Thankfully, reason prevailed. There are more statesmanlike people in my party who held a dominant position there. They said we do not bring down a government and trigger an election out of pure anger and polarity because that is the wrong motivation. I was told we have to consider the ramifications and the implications of what we are about to do because there are worthy, worthwhile things in the pipeline.

Most of those measures were in fact generated because of pressure from the opposition parties in this minority Parliament. There were things of merit that were half-way done. The Liberal government said that it did not want to have an election now because of all these worthwhile things.

We have accommodated every consideration that the Liberals raised, every reason not to blow their heads off. We have taken that into account, and considered and proposed a reasonable compromise solution which the Liberals dismiss.

First, the government said it was unconstitutional and it could not be done. We dealt with that argument in a matter of 15 minutes or so. Then the government said it was unparliamentary and there was no precedent to call upon the Governor General at some future time. We disregarded that. There is no such argument. We have the authorities that indicate what we are proposing is completely within the purview of Parliament and completely constitutionally correct.

Now the Liberals are objecting for the sake of objecting, so that they can hang on to power for another two or three months to bribe Canadians with their own tax dollars. The government is trying to blackmail Canadians when the threat of bringing down the government becomes a reality.

This is what is really offensive and perhaps what offends me most about the whole last couple of weeks. The government went to first nations and said, "You know how you've been waiting for social justice for the last 150 years or so? You know how the Indian Act has been 130 years of social tragedy? Guess what, we're going to fix all that". However, the government said that the NDP and the opposition parties are going to bring down the government before it can get a chance. It was finally going to address the despair and the misery that first nations deal with. It was just about to get around to that and now the big, bad NDP, the Conservatives and the Bloc are going to stop the government from solving all the social ills of first nations.

The government dispatched the PMO right across the country to contact every aboriginal leader, every first nation, Métis and Inuit leader to phone us and say, "The Liberals say if you guys bring down the government we are never going to get any social spending to solve this human tragedy that we are experiencing".

Imagine exploiting the most underprivileged people in our society. How low does a government get to exploit human misery? My colleague says it is similar to stealing the nickels from a blind man's cup. It is disgraceful.

Supply

I want to make it clear right here and now that we did everything necessary to ensure that the first ministers meeting does in fact take place. This is what our proposal says. Those same aboriginal leaders should be calling the Liberal government and the Prime Minister, and saying, "Accept the opposition parties' reasonable proposal because that's the way we will ensure that the first ministers meeting does in fact take place". The government is being completely disingenuous with how it spins this.

Frankly, these are the tactics that make my blood boil. I have tried to be reasonable in the eight years that I have been a member of Parliament. I have tried not to get angry about these issues. It has been an exercise in frustration to get this government to accommodate any of the reasonable positions that we bring forward.

Let us put it on the record today that it is the Liberal government that is threatening the success of the first ministers meeting, not the opposition parties. We have found a way to accommodate that and give the Canadian people a way to vent their spleen on the Liberal Party.

My final point is that there is no way on God's earth that this Liberal government should have the exclusive right to dictate the terms and conditions of its own day of reckoning. That is for the Canadian people to decide, not for a corrupt Liberal government.

• (1300)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member two questions. My first question relates to the comments made this morning by the government House leader. I am not sure whether the member heard them or not.

Basically, the government House leader was telling us about all the opportunities we have had to bring down the government if the opposition had wanted to. I wondered, while thinking back, how many times this government, especially through the government House leader, has stymied the democratic right of this House. I would appreciate the member's views on that.

My second question is, if the hon. member were a member of the governing party, would he not want to prevent an election? If there is an election, there is always the opportunity that he might lose and somebody else might win, and somebody else might see the books. I would appreciate the member's perspective on that as well.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the member knows and we are well aware that in the next few days, we are going to hear the rumbling of those big 10 tonne trucks that have portable shredding machines in the back. They are going to be backing up to the PMO and the PCO, and a tonne of shredding is going to go on. It does not take a rocket scientist to read the signs that there is going to be a regime change.

On the member's first question about why the House leader said we had ample opportunities to bring down the government, in actual fact we came here committed to making this minority Parliament work. There were opportunities, but every time we came close to exercising our right as the majority of the House of Commons in opposition, the House leader for the Liberal Party would do things like make our opposition days miraculously disappear. The Liberals undermined and thwarted the democratic process at every step of the way when it became obvious that they were in trouble.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disturbed at the level of rhetoric that is going on in this House, particularly rhetoric that goes to undermine Canadians' belief in their democratic institutions.

Mr. Pat Martin: If they would stop stealing money, the reputation would be a lot better.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I really wish that my colleague from the NDP would give the courtesy to other people to speak without being interrupted. Let me get to his point when he talks about stealing money.

He used the example of stealing a nickel from a blind man. We had bingo in British Columbia. Not one member of the New Democratic Party in this House rose at the time to say there was a problem. I did not rise at the time and brand the New Democratic Party as being criminals because I know the members of this House, and I dare say that most of them are honourable members.

The option before us is either to be bullied into supporting this motion or the opposition is going to bring the government down. That is bullying and surely the member would not condone any government using those kinds of tactics on any other group.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the member from Kitchener is trying to defend the indefensible. He is trying to represent a government that has been shamed beyond any other measurement in Canadian history. If he objects to the strong language that I have used, I am only trying to represent the righteous indignation that is evident throughout the riding of Winnipeg Centre. We have been wronged. It is not the Liberal Party of Canada that is the victim here. The people of Canada are the victims here and no hollow words from the member are going to change that reality.

• (1305)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the opposition motion presented by the leader of the New Democratic Party which proposes that the Prime Minister should ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament during the week of January 2, 2006, and set the date for the election for February 13, 2006.

I must admit that it is a bit disappointing that the NDP has not put forward a substantive motion for debate today. Last time around, the NDP took a constructive approach to its opposition days by putting forward issues that matter to Canadians. For example, Canadians had the benefit of a full discussion on such matters as environmental aspects of automobile emission standards, access to employment insurance, which is obviously a big concern in my riding and in other rural communities across the country, and the health risks of trans fatty acids.

Today, the NDP wants to talk about scheduling, about how to ignore constitutional convention and speed up the next general election by a mere eight weeks.

Clearly, the priorities of opposition members have changed. Today, they are more interested in procedural tactics rather than substantive issues that Canadians want this Parliament to address. Opposition parties are not interested in the process of governing. The opposition day motion today is really about manipulating the parliamentary and electoral calendar to serve what are clearly partisan interests.

[*Translation*]

The motion calls for an election to be held on February 13, 2006, despite the fact that the Prime Minister has already promised to call an election in early 2006.

The Prime Minister made that promise to Canadians last spring. We all know by now that an election will be called within 30 days of the final report and recommendations of the Gomery inquiry, which are scheduled to be tabled on February 1, 2006.

According to the Prime Minister's promise, the next election will be held in March, or early April at the latest. By then Canadians will be familiar with Justice Gomery's recommendations and will be able to benefit from a much improved legislative environment.

Nonetheless, that is not enough for the opposition. They want to hold an election in mid-February, which is 8 weeks, at the very most, before the date the Prime Minister proposed to all Canadians on national television.

An election any sooner would be held before Justice Gomery has completed his work, and therefore, before Canadians have all the answers regarding the problems with the sponsorship program and—equally important—regarding the measures that will need to be taken to prevent such a situation from happening again.

It will be incumbent upon the opposition parties to explain to Canadians why they are disrupting the work, not only of the government, but also of Parliament, in order to force a premature election in the middle of winter, thereby going against what most Canadians want. In fact, Canadians are still waiting for a good reason for all this.

The opposition parties are saying they do not have confidence in this government. Yet, they want to use opposition days to confirm their confidence for a just few more months. This flagrant contradiction highlights the purely political motivation behind today's motion.

[*English*]

As the government House leader indicated, some opposition members seem to believe that the notion that a government must have the confidence of the House was somehow divisible, that we could have confidence today, but tomorrow? Maybe in a few weeks they would see if they had lost confidence. The government would continue to govern, until they decided to put that loss of confidence into effect.

I said a couple of days ago that the opposition members seemed to think that confidence in government, in parliamentary terms, was like Christmas lights. We turn them on in the evening, we turn them off in the morning and then we put them away in January. Canadians will not be fooled by that simplistic analysis.

Supply

When the first minority government in 25 years was elected in 2004, the government committed to doing things differently in Parliament. Canadians expected us, as members of Parliament, to work constructively together. The record shows in many cases we have been very successful. In just 19 months we have delivered on a broad range of initiatives that will advance the interests of Canadians and continue to ensure Canada's place in the world.

For example, we passed legislation to implement the 10 year plan to strengthen health care. A federal adviser on wait times was appointed. Steps continue to be taken so we can work with the provinces to protect Canada's public health system.

We passed legislation to implement fundamental reforms to the equalization program. This balanced approach ensured that all Canadians could benefit from social services and enjoy the same quality of life, regardless of the province in which they live. These improvements mean additional resources, additional moneys being transferred to my province, the province of New Brunswick. We already have seen an improvement not only in social services, education and health care, but improvements in infrastructure as well. The government and people of New Brunswick benefit by this cooperative approach.

We passed legislation respecting civil marriage to respect the fundamental values of equality and religious freedoms as well.

We passed legislation to implement a new deal for cities and communities. This unprecedented initiative brings together the federal government, provincial governments and municipalities to ensure that the infrastructure of our communities is responsive to local needs, culturally vibrant and environmentally sustainable. Again, small rural communities in my constituency benefit from this type of initiative.

We transferred, for example, the full refund of GST paid by municipalities as simply a down payment on the new deal for cities and communities. If the government of New Brunswick would organize itself to negotiate a deal with the federal government, municipalities in my constituency and throughout New Brunswick, as well as small rural communities, would benefit from this important initiative.

We passed legislation to implement our climate change plan and meet our Kyoto commitments. In two weeks, Canada will begin hosting the conference of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol in Montreal to make further progress on our important climate change commitments.

To ensure Canadians have the best opportunities to flourish, we passed legislation to implement early childhood learning and child care agreements, which we have reached with many provinces.

To keep Canadians safe, we passed legislation to protect them from pornography and Internet luring.

Supply

I am proud of the record of this Parliament so far. We were able to pass a budget bill that further accelerated our priorities in public transit, in housing, in post-secondary education, in national defence and in foreign aid.

We made major changes to improve the employment insurance system, something that is very important to seasonal industries in my constituency. We removed many of the disincentives to work, which created a bizarre situation where a worker in a seasonal industry would go to work for what might be a shortened work period for reasons beyond the control of the worker. If the lobster season was not as productive that week, if the weather did not allow a certain harvest to take place, the workers were disadvantaged by a system which calculated employment insurance based on recent weeks as opposed to best weeks. We changed that in this Parliament and the government has served the needs of seasonal industries and seasonal workers very well, certainly in my constituency.

● (1310)

Contrary to the opposition parties, I believe there is still much work to be done. A premature election could jeopardize over 40 bills currently in the House, bills that would provide important benefits to the well-being of Canadians and to the competitiveness of Canada.

For example, Bill C-67, the unanticipated surpluses act, reflects the government's balanced approach to fiscal management by providing a proportional allocation of unanticipated surpluses to permanent tax reductions, targeted investments and debt relief. Our ability to allocate surpluses is a direct result of the sound financial stewardship of the Minister of Finance and of his predecessors.

Bill C-68, Canada's Pacific gateway act, provides the foundations for expanding our trade with the growing economies of countries like China and India and other Asian countries. This has been a priority for our government. The government of British Columbia has urged us to take action on the Pacific gateway. This is what the government is doing to ensure that the Canadian economy as a whole can prosper by the great opportunities that these markets present.

Bill C-11, the whistleblower's bill, is currently before the Senate and provides vital protection for employees who courageously come forward to blow the whistle on wrongdoing in their workplace. The bill reflects the hard work of many members of Parliament, members from Vegreville—Wainwright, Winnipeg Centre and Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. I do not think those members want Bill C-11 to die prematurely.

Bill C-37, the do not call list, is also before the Senate. It reached the Senate through the support of all parties. Jeopardizing this work for the sake of electioneering at Christmas time does not benefit Canadians.

Earlier this month the government supplementary estimates requesting from Parliament the funds needed to implement the programs that allow federal initiatives to operate. These supplementary estimates include additional investments for defence, immigration, climate change, infrastructure, public security, the health of first nations and federal-provincial partnerships.

For example, the estimates include \$15 million to implement the veterans' charter; \$36.4 million to alleviate and prevent home-

lessness; over \$230 million for investments in first nations communities and first nations peoples; \$102.9 million to mitigate the impact of BSE; \$34 million to aid the softwood lumber industry; \$74 million for the agricultural policy framework; and, \$1.1 billion to enhance Canada's national defence.

This is only a sampling of the productive agenda the government has for the next few months and the government continues to move forward this fall to deliver on our commitments.

Next week we will have, for example, a first ministers meeting with aboriginal leaders in British Columbia to address the challenges faced by our first nations. First nations leaders have stressed how important this meeting is for their communities. It would be the responsibility of opposition parties to justify jeopardizing the results of that meeting with a premature election.

Later this month the Minister of Justice will unveil a package targeted at gun crime, which we all know is an important challenge for our cities and for the safety of our communities. This Monday the Minister of Finance presented his fall economic and fiscal update, which proposes significant tax reductions for Canadians and a prosperity plan for Canada's future.

Over the next five years more than \$30 billion in tax relief is proposed and over 95% of that would be delivered through personal tax reductions. In addition, significant investments are proposed to create access to post-secondary education and encourage lifelong learning so Canadians can continue to be competitive workers in the global marketplace. Combined with investments and research, innovation and social capital, the economic update sets the stage for accelerated growth and prosperity for the nation.

● (1315)

It is important to highlight that student associations across the country were particularly pleased with the investments in access to post-secondary education. In my constituency I am fortunate enough to have Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. The student groups there had spoken to me many times about the heavy financial burden of a post-secondary education. The measures announced by the Minister of Finance will help the students at Mount Allison University.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

These measures will help students in my riding who are registered at the University of Moncton, for example. In fact, students across the country will benefit from these very important measures.

Supply

[*English*]

This is where the government's focus has been on governing. Canadians are tired of politicians playing partisan games. It is little wonder that cynicism about politicians is on the rise when people spend more time worrying about the timing of the next election than advancing the interest of their constituents in this Parliament.

Government members are here to represent their constituents and to work on making this Parliament successful. I have outlined the number of important initiatives that we have before us. We know there is an impending election that will follow the finance report of Justice Gomery. In the meantime Canadians expect us to roll up our sleeves and to get to work on delivering the commitments that we have all made to our electors.

The election will be at some point in early 2006. That was the Prime Minister's commitment. However, Canadians also want answers from the Gomery commission's final report before going back to the polls. That also was the Prime Minister's commitment. In the meantime, all parliamentarians should spend time working on the legislation that is before the House, that is in committee and that is in the Senate. They should be looking at many interesting private members' initiatives that are coming before Parliament.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I believe that Canadians want us to work together on what concerns them and on improving their lives and the lives of their families and fellow citizens. They hope the work we do here in Parliament will improve their quality of life. They do not want the debates to end in the partisan bickering that does little to honour this Parliament.

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question specifically relates to government business.

The Prime Minister referred to was Bill C-66, the energy rebate bill. He said that it would give rebates for some low income Canadians. It is a bill that we and the NDP would like to see passed, even though there are imperfections with the bill. However, the Prime Minister specifically blamed the opposition parties for the bill being unable to pass if the election were to occur eight weeks earlier.

Here are the facts. The government pulled this bill on October 19, 24 and 27 from debate in the chamber. Further, it has not put the bill at the top of the order of precedence. Yesterday, it did not put the bill forward first. We debated animal cruelty on Monday. The government knows that a majority of MPs in the House support that bill and would gladly see it pass even though it is an imperfect legislation.

How can the government continue to state to Canadians that we on the opposite side of the House are not being constructive and are not willing to pass legislation? How can it pass on the argument that seniors will not get rebates because of the opposition early election, an accusation that is clearly false?

I would like the parliamentary secretary to stand up and address that bill specifically. Why did the government pull it at least three times and two more times not subjected it to the top of the list but to

second on the list? It is the government members who are not passing the bill, not the opposition parties.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton—Leduc who highlighted one of the government bills, Bill C-66, the energy cost assistance measures act. We believe it will bring great benefit to some of the lowest income seniors and low income families across the country. It is urgently needed. That is why in a number of discussions in a meeting with the House leaders this week, we have been looking at ways to ensure that the bill is accelerated for exactly the reasons outlined by the member for Edmonton—Leduc. If parliamentarians can work together on such an important measure as providing energy relief to low income seniors and low income families, then we should do so.

However, we should not stop there. We should use the example of the willingness of parties to work together to pass that important bill and send it to the Senate. The member for Edmonton—Leduc knows if the House comes together to pass that bill, it also must pass the Senate and receive royal assent. Therefore, in his rush to the election next week, I hope the opposition members are conscious of that fact as well.

However, on this side we think that it should only be the beginning of a cooperation to pass many important legislative measures that currently sit on the order paper.

• (1325)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is often difficult to watch the final dying days of a heavyweight champ. The last fight is usually the saddest. We have seen pretty much every antic this morning, except that nobody has tried to bite my ear yet.

I listened to the hon. member's speech and was flabbergasted. He talked about whistleblower protection, yet that government persecuted Health Canada officials out of their jobs. He talked about EI reforms, yet two-thirds of Canadians can no longer access it, thanks to his government. Then he talked about protecting children from sexual predators, but the government does not have the moral backbone to stand up with other members of Parliament and raise the age of consent to 16. The Liberals refuse to do that.

I will speak, however, about his continual talk about the Liberals' support for rural Canada. In a year when we have seen the largest decline in farm income in recorded history, when we have seen despair from one end of the country to other, we see government members stand and talk about rural Canada, and they could not even spell agriculture in their little election bag of goodies that the finance minister brought out.

Let us for one second put aside the CAIS program which the Liberals use as a fig leaf of credibility with rural Canadians, a program that has been absolutely discredited from one end of rural Canada to the other. I would like the member to explain to us why his government chose to ignore farming, agriculture and rural Canada in its little election bag of goodies that the Liberals just announced.

Supply

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay perhaps did not understand. When I described what is pending in the government's supplementary estimates, a supply vote that would take place perhaps on December 8, I mentioned that there was \$102.9 million to mitigate the impacts of BSE, \$34 million to aid softwood lumber, and \$74.7 million for the agricultural policy framework.

That is why I was very surprised when the Liberal House leader asked the opposition House leaders, and the NDP House leader was there, if in the spirit of cooperation, as we discussed passing the energy cost relief bill, we would want to pass the supplementary estimates quickly, which provide exactly this kind of needed relief for Canada's farmers and producers and we were faced with silence.

In fact, there is no willingness on the part of the opposition House leaders to pass the supplementary estimates, which will increase help to Canada's farmers. I hope he can convince the NDP House leader to change her mind.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite a question. I realize that not all issues can be covered in budgets and certainly some things are overlooked, but perhaps he could enlighten the House as to what plans the government has.

There is an issue we should be aware of in our own ridings too and that is the issue of autism. The Autism Society is presently on the Hill. One of the concerns recently was about a small boy in New Brunswick who was actually put into a prison because there were no facilities in New Brunswick nor in all of Canada while he was awaiting transfer to an American institution.

I would like the member, if possible, to advise what the government is doing or planning on doing on the issue of autism to bring awareness and address concerns across Canada for facilities and proper and appropriate treatment for people with autism.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton East has done a lot of work on the issue of autism. He is correct. I have met people in my constituency in New Brunswick, different community groups and parents who are concerned. Members of my own family are affected by this terrible condition.

That is why I was pleased that the government invested so much money in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, for example. It increased the budget massively for this important agency, which grants money to important research projects, including in the field of autism. It is working with the provinces and community groups. It has increased funding for provincial health departments to \$41 billion, a very important investment in health care.

By working with the provinces and health care providers, we can make great progress on what is a very important issue to all of us in the House and certainly to the families of those who are afflicted by this condition.

• (1330)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader talk about all the accomplishments in Atlantic Canada. We were very pleased to have the renewed funding of ACOA. The Atlantic innovation fund

allows universities, small businesses and communities to work together on innovations. There is also the small craft harbours. We have had good increases in the budget. In the last five years we have been working toward a budget which would show a huge increase investing directly into the future sustainability of those communities. A member mentioned the EI fund. We have been able to accomplish a lot.

It would be regrettable that we would lose that because of a sudden diving in by the socialists into the unholy alliance of the opportunists and the separatists and we could not continue to work on those things.

The member spoke about people being frozen out of work. There are tax incentives to get people into the workforce, people who are partially employed or who are in difficulty.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the member for West Nova has also been a great advocate for some of these important investments in Atlantic Canada.

He referred to ACOA. I neglected to mention, and I am glad he reminded us of the important reinvestment that the government made, for example, in the Atlantic investment partnership. There is the innovative communities fund that he and I hope will continue the great work of the previous SCIF program in investing in small rural communities in Atlantic Canada. This is the kind of initiative we should not lose.

The member is a former minister of ACOA and former minister of fisheries and oceans. He did great work in improving the quality of our harbour infrastructure across the country. The small craft harbours program, when he was minister, received a major boost in funding. That is the kind of thing that members should work on constructively together.

Forcing a premature election would mean that some of these important investments would be jeopardized by a mad rush to the polls to satisfy a narrow partisan interest instead of thinking of the well-being and the best interests of our constituents.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Today is one of those days where Canadians could be forgiven for saying how difficult it is sometimes to discern the truth of what is going on in Parliament when we are treated to the kind of Orwellian doublespeak we have had from the government today with respect to our motion. It has been extremely amusing, but at a more profound level, sad to hear government members arguing against our motion on the basis that they want to do the very thing that our motion permits them to do. Now if that is not Orwellian doublespeak, I do not know what is.

Supply

The only options before this Parliament are either a non-confidence motion in the next little while which would make it impossible for the Liberals to do all the things they say they want to do, or an acceptance on their part of the compromise which is on the floor of the House of Commons now, which would make it possible for legislation to be passed. It would allow us to proceed to the Christmas break. It would allow us to have the supplementary estimates passed. It would allow the first ministers and first nations conference to be held without any distractions. It would allow the government to proceed to the Kyoto conference. It would allow the government to proceed to the WTO meetings in Hong Kong. It would allow for all of that without any parliamentary or electoral distraction.

All that is possible. All that is on the table here today in this motion, but have we had any substantive response to why that is such a bad idea? Instead, the government has been asking Canadians to believe that somehow by putting forward this proposal that would make all those things possible, it is we who are making those things impossible. If that does not take the cake, I do not know what does.

The only argument the government seems to have is that the Prime Minister made a promise at one point that he would call the election after the Gomery report. We already have the main Gomery report. We have the report that details the way in which the Liberal Party as an institution was found to be responsible for a great deal of corruption in Quebec. The second Gomery report is about what to do about that. But the Prime Minister said he made a promise. This is very interesting too, because I have never known the Prime Minister to be so attached to a promise in his life. Promise after promise, if we go back to the Liberal red book in 1993, which the Prime Minister helped author when he was on the other side of the House, we could spend all day articulating the promises that were made at that time which have not been kept. Yet this is the one promise that the Prime Minister will stand or fall on.

It is not a promise to the Canadian people. It is part of the Liberal strategy to have the election in a context where Parliament has not been sitting for a couple of months, when the Liberal Party will be able to campaign with the aid of the public purse, fly around the country and make all kinds of announcements without any accountability in Parliament. More time will have passed between the first Gomery report that indicts the Liberal Party and election day, and more time will have passed between the second Gomery report. It is pretty transparent. This is actually the only transparent thing the Liberal Party has ever done, but the Liberals are trying very hard to make it opaque, to make it non-transparent, to make it not obvious what they are up to.

• (1335)

It could have been otherwise. Obviously my Conservative colleagues have been anxious for a long time to have an election. They are quite open about that. They tried to bring this Parliament to an end on May 19. They would have had a non-confidence motion by now if things had been configured the way they wanted them to be configured in order to put forward a non-confidence motion.

But what have the New Democrats been up to in this House? First of all, we have tried to make this Parliament work. We have a history that stretches beyond this particular Parliament of trying to make

minority Parliaments work. That is what we did in the spring when we went to the government and said that if it wanted to amend its budget in such a way as to meet what we think are the legitimate needs of the Canadian people as we understand them, we were prepared to keep this Parliament alive and to make more work possible. Because we think that frankly this is what Canadians want us to do and I think we have been vindicated in that. I do not think any of us, or very few of us indeed, have the impression that Canadians are wandering around regretting that there was not an election in the spring.

So we come to this fall. Conservatives are still wanting to bring the government down and New Democrats, day after day in this House, are asking the government what it is going to do on ethics, whether it is going to accept our ethics package or the Conservative ethics package or its own ethics package. New Democrats are asking whether the Liberals are going to do something to clean up the cronyism and the corruption that is so rampant in the political culture of entitlement that they themselves have created.

We have had no answers, just self-congratulation, breast-beating and the usual parliamentary junk when we ask these questions.

We even had a process on electoral reform. If members recall, this was critical to us in the last election. We had hoped that out of this minority Parliament some form of electoral reform would happen. There was a process with which the hon. member for Ottawa Centre was very involved. In the end, what happened? The Liberals killed it. It is not going any farther.

The Liberals see everything through such partisan glasses that they will not even consider proportional representation, but I ask them to just think about what a different kind of Parliament it would be if, for instance, we had proportional representation in Quebec. We would not have to worry about the first past the post system sending us nothing but separatists in the next election. If the federalists had 45% or 50% of the vote in Quebec, we would have 45% or 50% federalist MPs from Quebec. Would that not be an improvement? Would we not have a different kind of Parliament? Not for the Liberals, though, no, sorry, they are still holding out hope that they can rule the country with 37% of the vote.

We have put forward some other proposals. We asked the Liberals why they would not do something on health care. We put a proposal to them to try to stop the growing privatization of our health care system. We have people on the record supporting what we were asking for, people like Roy Romanow, the head of the royal commission on health care, thus validating what we were asking the Liberals for. Did they agree? No.

At some point it became untenable for us. We do not mind keeping a Parliament working if it is working, but we could no longer countenance keeping a Parliament working and supporting and expressing confidence in a government that so clearly did not deserve it.

Supply

But we also knew that Canadians did not want a Christmas election and we also knew that there were some things happening on the floor of the House of Commons here in terms of legislation already on the order paper having to do with relief for energy costs, protecting wages in the event of bankruptcy and a couple of other things. So we said, "All right, let us try again to make things work".

Instead of having to choose between a non-confidence motion here and now and the Prime Minister's plan, we said, let us bring forward this motion in which Parliament will express an opinion about when the next election should be held, that it should be called in January for mid-February, and then all the things that the Liberals want to do can happen. The only thing they cannot do is campaign in January when no one else can campaign and do that on the public purse.

This is not a non-confidence motion. It is not non-confidence lite. It is not unconstitutional. It is not unparliamentary. The Prime Minister himself legitimized the notion of saying when the next election will be held when he himself said that he would call the election at a certain date.

• (1340)

All we are saying is that Parliament is entitled to an opinion, just like the Prime Minister is, about when that next election will take place. Parliament is going to express that opinion. Parliament will say to the Prime Minister, "Have the election called in early January for mid-February".

The Prime Minister will have to decide whether he wants to reject the will of Parliament, to repudiate the will of Parliament, and at the same time and in so doing make impossible all the things his members today say they want done. At the same time, the Prime Minister will reject the will of Parliament and show that all his talk about the democratic deficit and making this place more democratic is a complete fraud.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is a learned parliamentarian. I am aware he does know the rules and the Constitution very well. This morning the leader of the NDP said that Liberals do not have the right to determine when they should be judged. Would the member like to comment on whether or not the Prime Minister has the constitutional authority to go to the Government General any day to dissolve the House and call an election?

Having dealt with that point, the member first of all has confirmed that this is not a confidence motion. I think everybody has agreed. The member has then very eloquently made this enormous case that we should follow the will of Parliament, that the will of Parliament is to call an election during the first week of January for February 13.

Now for my question. If that is the case, then why is it that the three parties whose will he wants us to follow have entered into an agreement that next week, a week from today, they are going to bring forward a non-confidence motion that would have an election earlier than the motion they are bringing forward today? They cannot have it both ways. Which is it?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a problem—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I am being heckled by the Tories, Mr. Speaker. I do not understand it, but it is all right, I feel better.

The Liberal who raised this point has a problem with time and space. There is a chronology here. We are creating the possibility here today of not having a Christmas election. That is the choice before the member today. Of course, if the Liberals were to do the right thing, they would say, "Fair enough. We want to get the first ministers and first nations conference over. We want to get these four or five pieces of legislation through. We want to get to the supplementary estimates. We want to go to the WTO and the Kyoto conference and everything else. So we are going to accept the NDP compromise".

It is not just the NDP compromise anymore. It is a compromise that was reached because the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Bloc Québécois were willing to come together and see what could be done in the interests of all these things that the Liberals say they are interested in. But, no, oh no, says the hon. member. I am a little surprised by him. I guess he just cannot suppress this sort of partisan behaviour. Normally he is a thoughtful enough person, thoughtful enough that he would not try to stand up and defend the government on this because he does not defend the government on everything.

Instead we have this false choice being put before the Canadian people. If the government does not accept this motion today, if the Liberals vote this down next Monday when the vote takes place on this motion, they are the ones who will be precipitating a Christmas election. Those are the two choices: what is before us today or a Christmas election.

As for the idea of allowing the Prime Minister to simply do whatever he wants, even though he has the constitutional right to do that and I do not dispute that, we have constitutional rights to do all kinds of things in this country. But there is such a thing as consultation, respecting Parliament and trying to see what would be in the best interests of the country. I am sorry, but does the Constitution trump all those things? I think not.

• (1345)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member comment on the government's suggestion that an early election would put in jeopardy what has been promised by the Prime Minister for aboriginals, the very same people who have been boiling water for nine years?

The government suggests that an election would jeopardize pay raises for soldiers, the very same people who have been going to food banks to try to subsidize their living.

The Liberals say that with an election the WTO negotiations would be jeopardized. This is the same issue as Kyoto, which we do not still have anything for.

Would the hon. member agree that common sense would suggest that any government would be better than this government because we would get it done?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the only thing I am convinced of is that an NDP government would be better than this government.

With respect to the first nations and first ministers conference, even now we are trying to do the very thing that the Liberals say they are trying to do but are actually putting in danger. With the sequence of motions in the House, the postponement of the vote until Monday, and the subsequent non-confidence motion—assuming the Liberals do not come to their senses and respect the wish of Canadians that there not be a Christmas election—even then we are trying to have things happen in a way such that the first ministers and first nations conference will not be put in any kind of jeopardy.

We are doing our best. It is the government that is playing chicken with all of these things. I think the Liberals think this looks good on them, how the Prime Minister does not take orders from anybody, but of course that is the problem. The Liberals never take orders or suggestions or advice or recommendations on anything from anybody and that is why Canadians are fed up with them.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps it would be useful at this point in the debate to remind members of Parliament and Canadians watching the debate what exactly is the motion before the House.

One would think, based on some of the comments from Liberal members, that we are dealing with some ridiculous, weird idea, when in fact we are dealing with a motion that says:

That, in the opinion of this House, during the week of January 2, 2006, the Prime Minister should ask Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada to dissolve the 38th Parliament and to set the date for the 39th general election for Monday, February 13, 2006; and

That the Speaker transmit this resolution to Her Excellency the Governor General.

We have before us a very reasonable proposition, a constructive, common sense proposal to deal with a stalemate in the House. It would deal with a very difficult situation, that being the loss of confidence by the majority of members in the House, by three out of four political parties in the House, a loss of confidence in the government of the day, and a desire to go to the polls as soon as possible.

In the motion is a recognition that Canadians would prefer that we not conduct an election during the upcoming holidays. Canadians would also prefer that we complete the pressing work of the House that has been long promised and can be completed expeditiously.

Canadians want to see us keep our commitment to first nations people. They want us to be present at the Kyoto accord discussions, but they also want an election.

This proposal is merely an attempt to accommodate the wishes of Canadians, which is to have an election as soon as possible, but not at a time when it interferes with a very spiritual time in the lives of Canadians. Is that so much to ask?

We have just heard from the dean of the House, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, a member who knows the rules of this place inside and out, a constitutional expert, a parliamentary affairs expert, and a man of great wisdom. He has presented to us a rationale for this motion that makes sense.

Why do we go on with the rest of the day? Are the Liberals not yet prepared to say “uncle”? I do not hear anything. Maybe it is time that they said “uncle” and let this debate come to an end. Let the government show that it is prepared to do what is right, what is

Supply

reasonable, and show compassion, cooperation and compromise. That, in essence, is all we are talking about.

Three parties in the House from very disparate points of view have come together to compromise, cooperate and show compassion. All we are asking is for the government, the fourth party, the Liberal Party in the House, to join with us in accepting and agreeing to the wishes of Canadians.

As has been identified by so many speakers before me, this is not a party or a government that practices compromise. This is a party and a government that practices obsessive behaviour. This is a party that has, over the years, refused to compromise on so many important issues. It is perhaps more understandable today to see the Liberals refuse to compromise on such a common sense, practical and reasonable solution to a very difficult situation.

We have seen the Prime Minister's obsessive style at work before. Many have referred to different examples. We could talk about any number of issues. Perhaps most directly would be the number he did on the former Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien. Clearly, this is not a man who compromises.

• (1350)

However, that does not mean we ought not to try because his colleagues around him may have some sense of the need to compromise because they are hearing the voices of Canadians. They know the importance of respecting the wishes of their citizens and constituents.

This country was built on the values of cooperation, compromise and compassion. Surely, if anything, those should be the values at play in this chamber. Surely, that is the art of politics and is what encourages people to participate in the democratic process. Surely, those are the values that in fact deal with the Prime Minister's so-called obsession with the notion of a democratic deficiency in this Parliament and in the country.

The real question for us today is why the government does not want to accept such a reasonable compromise? Is it that the Liberals do not want a winter election? We have heard that. Many have been on the news saying they would not want to be out there asking people to go to the polls in the winter. As so many of my colleagues have pointed out, the Prime Minister's own proposal, his original proposal last February 14, called for an election in the dead of winter. Remember that he promised that the election would be called 30 days after the delivery of Judge Gomery's report that was expected on December 14. We would have been in an election anyway, in the dead of winter. That is not an argument and it is not an excuse.

Could it be that this is an attempt to distract voters from the issues pertaining to the sponsorship scandal? Is it perhaps an attempt by the Liberals to play the work of a magician and focus our attention on something other than the stark realities of the Gomery report?

S. O. 31

We know that the Prime Minister has come out of the Liberal sponsorship swamp with muck all over his boots. He wants more time to wipe it off before he stands on Canadians' doorsteps asking for their vote. He should know that it will take more than eight weeks, or 18 weeks, to get rid of the stench. The Liberals should borrow their election campaign motto from Shakespeare. Would it not make sense if they used the words, "Out, damned spot!"? I think that would be a very appropriate election slogan for the Liberals right about now.

There is the question, the real possibility, as my colleagues have said, that in fact the government is only rejecting this proposal, so that it has more time to buy the votes of Canadians, so that it has more time to campaign at public expense using the Challenger and other means of communication and transportation, and to bring goodies to the doorsteps of each and every Canadian across the country.

We certainly saw that already this week in the so-called economic update, really a budget, which managed to spread around about \$39 billion in Liberal election promises. That is over the next five years. By their own calculations, the update says that the Liberals have kept back an additional \$15.5 billion in planning surplus from the anticipated surplus over the next five years.

I guess we all wonder what the Liberals have planned for the final run up to the election. It does not take much imagination to guess how much of that remaining \$15.5 billion will be left on election day. Does the Prime Minister really think Canadians are gullible enough to believe his explanation?

If we consider Monday the first day of the Liberal campaign, here we are on day four. It is day four since the Liberal election campaign formally launched itself at the finance committee of this Parliament, and we saw how the Liberals are at it again.

It is election eve and here comes the finance minister pretending to be Santa in a pinstriped suit with a huge sack of goodies, something for everyone and each one tagged from the Liberal Party of Canada. Do not open until voting day of course because they are all IOUs. They are Liberal promises because they are really part of an election platform, not an economic update at all. But in the world of Santa, reality is not all that important. It is all about winning.

●(1355)

Liberal wins do not build houses or purify drinking water or end child poverty. Canadians are still waiting to redeem Liberal promises from elections past. Yes, Canadians remain wary indeed that we do not again end up, the day after the election, looking through the window at a banker's feast with just a chunk of coal in our stockings. Canadians ask this government to accept this reasonable, responsible, and common sense compromise. Let us get on with it.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

●(1400)

[*English*]

RAMADAN

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Eid-ul-Fitr is one of the major festivals in the Islamic faith and is celebrated after the month of Ramadan during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sundown.

Fasting during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendars, is one of the five pillars Islam. For Muslims around the world, Ramadan is a month of blessing marked by prayer, fasting and charity. It is also an opportunity for the social and cultural dialogue enabling Muslims from countries around the world to interact and to develop better relations between all of us.

Tonight we have the celebration that all members have been invited to and I call on all members to join in this celebration, again to celebrate the cultural and religious diversity of our great country, Canada.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is both with honour as well as sadness that I rise in the House today, honour because I am representing the people of my riding in Cambridge, and sadness because yet again I am sickened by the incompetence of the Liberal government.

In April of this year I seconded a motion granting immediate compensation for all hepatitis C victims and it passed unanimously. The minister and that party over there ignored it. So much for democratic reform.

That health minister is ineffective and incapable of acting in the best health interest of a small group of Canadians, let alone the entire nation. His dithering on this issue is nothing short of scandalous. The money is there, Parliament has approved it and the victims need it.

It is that party over there, the Liberal Party, that has destroyed health care in this country and allowed privatization to flourish. This is its hidden agenda.

* * *

CKTB RADIO

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to congratulate CKTB Radio on its 75th anniversary which was celebrated on November 7, 2005.

Indeed, CKTB has come a long way since its modest beginning in St. Catharines, Ontario on the second floor of the Welland House Hotel in 1930 when it was founded by Edward T. Sandall.

Over the years the radio station has expanded from a small remote station to a communications leader in the Niagara Peninsula. In 1936 CKTB became an affiliate of the new CBC network and since 1965 has been on the air 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A reliable source for breaking news as well as a public, community and entertainment information beacon, the radio station reflects the lifestyle of Niagara. Its continuing presence will be welcome for years to come.

CKTB is to be commended for its exemplary years of community service. I congratulate the radio station, its employees and owner, Standard Radio Inc., on the occasion of this exciting milestone.

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[Translation]

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since 1989, the association Reporters Without Borders has condemned the fact that journalists are being denied their right and their duty to keep us informed.

At present, 186 media professionals are behind bars in 23 countries. Reporters Without Borders is organizing its 16th consecutive annual day of action to condemn this situation.

Communication is a fundamental social process, a necessity for human beings and the foundation of all social organization.

The Bloc Québécois reaffirms, as article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression”, which includes the right to freely inform and to be informed without consideration for borders.

Let us support these women and men around the world in their desire to create an open and free information society.

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[English]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw attention to a movie that is currently being filmed in my riding called *That Beautiful Somewhere*. North Bay and Temagami serve as the backdrop for the film which is being directed by Rob Budreau.

That Beautiful Somewhere tells the story of a young woman living in Cambridge, Massachusetts who is completing her doctorate in archeology and decides to travel to northern Ontario to study a native band and ends up solving a murder mystery. According to Mr. Budreau, the film is loosely based on *Loon*, a novel by Bill Plumstead, an English professor at Nipissing University.

The principal roles in the movie will be played by well-known Canadian actors, Roy Dupuis, Jane McGregor, Gordon Tootoosis and David Fox. An additional 25 to 30 roles will be filled by actors from the North Bay area.

Once completed and released, *That Beautiful Somewhere* is scheduled to appear on TMN, the movie network.

I would like to offer my encouragement to Rob Budreau, Jim Calarco and all those involved in the production of *That Beautiful*

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Somewhere. I would encourage all Canadians to see this movie when it is released.

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• (1405)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, among his many failings, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development seems to be supporting the New Democratic government in my province of Manitoba in its plan to encourage smoking on Indian reserves.

A two tier smoking ban of the Manitoba NDP will exempt Indian reserves and ignores the basic rationale for the legislation in the first place. Surely, protecting the health of Canadians who live and work on reserves is as important as protecting those who do not.

Meanwhile, the government's inaction will open the door to class action lawsuits in the not too distant future as lawyers for aboriginal Canadians on reserve rightly ask why their health was not protected by the government. In the long term, the real losers in this scenario will be the aboriginal people themselves.

None of us are immune to the ill effects of second-hand smoke or smoking. Both levels of government are running away from a jurisdictional squabble and, as a result, are placing the importance of their own political health ahead of the health of aboriginal Canadians. They should be ashamed of themselves.

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[Translation]

A. M. SORMANY HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet a group of business students from A. M. Sormany high school in Edmundston, New Brunswick, to discuss my role as a member, the role of government and the services provided by my constituency offices.

I always enjoy these meetings, since they are an opportunity for me to discuss issues of interest to young people and share my parliamentary experience with them.

I want to thank student Julien Pitre for the invitation to address his class, all the students and their teacher, Debbie Martin, for their warm welcome.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the ninth annual Quebec International Solidarity Days are taking place from November 10 to 20. A variety of activities celebrating international solidarity are being held in over 70 countries.

In Quebec the rallying cry bringing everyone together is “Un monde sans pauvreté: Agissons!” or “Make Poverty History”. Throughout the year, as part of the global call to action against poverty, appeals are made to world leaders to take action to make poverty history.

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I invite the public to attend the lectures, the exhibits and the music and poetry events focussing on the issue of poverty. These activities raise awareness about the various forms of poverty and the possible solutions for eradicating it.

Let us all heed the appeals of Quebec's association of international cooperation agencies, for the sake of fairness and humanity.

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[English]

WORKPLACE CHARITABLE CAMPAIGN

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada workplace charitable campaign is the official charitable campaign of the federal public service and has grown to be the largest annual campaign in Canada. Funds raised by this campaign are directed to United Way-Centraide, Health Partners and other registered Canadian charities based on the donor's choice.

Canada wide, its goal this year is to reach \$26.7 million and here in the national capital region it has set its sights on \$14.2 million. So far, locally it is at 96% of its goal and it is still going.

[Translation]

Whether through the money they collect during the annual campaign or through the many hours they spend volunteering, federal employees and retirees are a powerful force within our communities. Their generosity, leadership and commitment to their communities are what make our country so strong.

The campaign will end on Wednesday, November 23, and we wish them luck in achieving their goal.

On behalf of all Canadians, we thank them for all their efforts.

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[English]

PUBLIC SERVANTS

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent the thousands of public servants who live in my constituency. They work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules. Unfortunately, Liberal corruption and politics have harmed their careers and reputations.

The Liberal Prime Minister blamed “rogue bureaucrats” for his party's corruption during the Liberal ad scam. Liberals have begun carving up the public service and moving jobs to other regions to buy votes. Mayor Bob Chiarelli, himself a staunch Liberal, said recently in the *Ottawa Citizen*, “some members of the federal Liberal caucus think the public service is their grab-bag of political spoils”.

I am proud to have fought for public servants throughout my term. I fought for whistleblower protection for the honest public servants like Allan Cutler who exposed corruption, I fought attempts by the Liberal government to carve up the public service and send jobs away in exchange for Liberal votes and I fought to restore the merit principle in our public service. In other words, I have been fighting for a clean public service with job security for its members. That is the Canadian way. That is the Conservative plan.

ST. CATHARINES MUSEUM

Hon. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on this occasion to offer my sincere congratulations to the staff, volunteers and all the board chairs on the 40th anniversary of the St. Catharines Museum.

From its humble beginnings in the old Merritton town hall in 1965 to the new location at Lock 3 of the Welland Canal, the museum continues to play a pivotal role in promoting and protecting the history of our community.

I have been an avid supporter of the St. Catharines Museum and will continue to do so. Through the work of dedicated staff, both past and present, our museum has earned the reputation as one of the finest facilities in Ontario.

I applaud curator Arden Phair and his staff for their commitment, promotion, understanding and appreciation of our heritage and the importance of maintaining it for future generations.

St. Catharines—Our Built Heritage is a new publication outlining the history of our community through pictures and stories. This book continues to show the importance of cultural and social history to the City of St. Catharines and Canada.

I congratulate the St. Catharines Museum on its 40th anniversary.

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● (1410)

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was reported recently that the Standard & Poor's rating agency downgraded its outlook for the Canadian Wheat Board because of concerns that the Liberals are weakening in their support of the board and are not prepared to vigorously defend single desk selling at the upcoming WTO meetings in Hong Kong where state trading enterprises like the board are being targeted.

It is critical that Canada not trade away the Wheat Board and other orderly marketing institutions like supply management in an attempt to please the coalition of free market fundamentalists and multinational agri-business corporations that want to run the world through the WTO.

The NDP calls on the government to show leadership on these issues and, while it is at it, it could also announce an increase in the initial price paid by the Wheat Board. Farmers need help and they need it now. They do not need to be betrayed by their own government at the WTO.

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, the Prime Minister suggested that an early election would cancel pay raises for members of the Canadian armed forces. This is not even close to being true.

In fact, on Tuesday, officials from Treasury Board testified before the Senate finance committee that Canadian soldiers are already receiving the benefit of higher salaries. I say shame on the Prime Minister for using Canadian soldiers in this feeble attempt to scare Canadian voters.

It is becoming increasingly clear to Canadians that the Prime Minister will do whatever he can to cling to power. Nobody believes the Prime Minister when he says that he did not know anything about the sponsorship scandal. Nobody believes the Prime Minister when he says that he is the only person who can clean up the mess caused by Liberal corruption in Quebec. Nobody believes the Prime Minister when he says that his only concern with an early election is the interruption of the holiday season.

I have concluded that this Prime Minister has neither honour nor principle. I trust Canadian voters will render a similar judgment on election day.

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[Translation]

LOUISE LAURIN

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Montreal Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society has just declared Madame Louise Laurin patriot of the year for 2005-06. Although this was partly for her life's work, it was mainly for her lead role in the Quebec government's adoption of an inclusive educational policy, and in particular the replacement of religious education by moral education and an introduction to world religions. This even took an amendment to the Constitution.

Louise Laurin, a woman of ideals and determination, with a long career in teaching and school administration, particularly working with immigrants, realized that a secular school with the same open welcome for all children would play a better role in ensuring integration and francization. Despite the major challenges this entailed, Louise Laurin's efforts to rally and mobilize, inform, convince and encourage were crowned with success.

An independentist from the very start, Louise Laurin has always focussed her efforts on a homeland that is inclusive, generous, open to the world, and French.

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[English]

UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia ordered an inquiry into the question of any possible Australian involvement in the United Nations oil for food scandal, even though the Volcker report found no direct evidence of Australian involvement. The Australian prime minister has ordered

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the investigation because there were "numerous documentary and circumstantial warning signs".

The Prime Minister of Australia wants to do all he can to clear the air on the question of any possible Australian involvement. I again ask our Prime Minister why he does not want to clear the air on any possible Canadian involvement with the oil for food scandal given that his closest friend and advisor, Maurice Strong, has been asked to step down from his United Nations position given that a company of Mr. Strong's son received a \$1 million cheque from the program and given that the Paribas Bank was involved in distributing the cheques for the program.

Will the Prime Minister quit stonewalling and order an investigation to clear the air for his close friends and associates and settle the question of any possible Canadian involvement in the oil for food scandal at the United Nations? Why will the Prime Minister not act on this? What is he afraid of finding out?

* * *

● (1415)

ALL INDIA PINGALWARA CHARITABLE SOCIETY

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to bring to the attention of the House the work of Dr. Inderjit Kaur. Dr. Kaur is the President of the All India Pingalwara Charitable Society.

She is presently in Canada touring the country on behalf of the local branch of the association. I would like to welcome her to Canada. This organization is dedicated to helping the poor, the mentally challenged, the orphaned and those who are terminally ill. It is an exceptional organization with a noble cause.

Presently it has three schools for the poor and have five branches and service over 1,000 patients.

Dr. Inderjit Kaur has dedicated her life to helping individuals who are less fortunate and in dire need of her assistance. There is nothing more honourable than that.

My thanks go to Dr. Inderjit Kaur for her good work.

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[Translation]

MONTÉE SAINT-FRANÇOIS INSTITUTION

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Montée Saint-François Institution, which is located in my riding, recently invited me and a number of executives from new companies in the area, to an information session on its mission of reintegration.

We heard presentations on a variety of themes: the penitentiary process, its programs, work releases, community supervision, supervising kitchen work by inmates, Life-Line and a glimpse into the life of an inmate.

The business people were impressed by how well this was all organized and found that the presentations took some of the mystery out of life in prison. Several of them indicated a readiness to enter into a partnership with the institution.

Oral questions

My congratulations to Montée Saint-François on this initiative. Our community cannot help but be enriched by the opportunity to work together on a smooth reintegration by former inmates into society.

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[English]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the forest industry and communities in northern Ontario are in crisis. Twelve years of Liberal governments have not been kind.

The northern Ontario Forest Coalition is asking for \$150 million over three years and loan guarantees reflecting the \$5 billion being held as duty on softwood lumber going into the U.S. We must move quickly on these two requests.

Provincial programs such as the prosperity fund have not helped in the critical short term. The loan guarantees would go a long way to help them access the cash they need from private institutions to meet their immediate needs.

Industry leaders are telling me that the situation is critical and different from other cyclical challenges in the forest industry. The industry is changing dramatically and it needs both short term and long term assistance.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Marc-Yvan Côté, former chief Liberal organizer for eastern Quebec ridings, admitted to distributing at least \$120,000 in cash to help Liberal candidates illegally win their elections.

Can the Prime Minister guarantee that no Liberal candidate currently slated to run in the next election pocketed or used dirty sponsorship funds?

The Speaker: As the hon. member for Central Nova well knows, questions on political party funding are out of order unless they relate to expenditures made with government funds. His question made no such reference. This question clearly has nothing to do with the Gomery commission.

It is difficult to understand how this question could be in order.

[English]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the ad scam was all about the theft of public money. Campaign war chests of Liberal riding associations were bolstered in previous elections with stolen Liberal ad scam money. The Prime Minister promised he would get all the facts. He said that people would be held to account for their breach of the public trust, and that did not happen. He refuses to identify the Liberal riding associations that used the illegal kickback cash.

Again another election is looming. Why is the Prime Minister refusing to say which riding associations received the illegal money, and when will the Liberal Party just pay back all the money it stole?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada has paid back any funds received inappropriately to the Canadian taxpayer based on analysis of the facts in Justice Gomery's report. Beyond that, the Prime Minister has referred Justice Gomery's report to the RCMP. The RCMP will investigate if there are further issues.

We also are taking action against 28 firms and agencies to recover \$57 million for the Canadian taxpayer. We have taken action. We are demanding accountability and we are strengthening governance.

● (1420)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is still over \$40 million missing. That flim-flam salesman would not know the truth if it hit him in the head.

The Prime Minister condemned the people who gave out the dirty ad scam money, but he condones those who received it, including the campaign of his principal secretary. This is the worst scandal in modern Canadian political history.

The Prime Minister boasts that he referred this to the police. The Auditor General knew about it in 2002. What was he waiting for? Since the Prime Minister is away in Korea, where he says he is governing, will the Deputy Prime Minister tell us how many RCMP investigations are there currently ongoing into Liberal riding associations?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister deserves respect for having done the right thing, ending the sponsorship program and having had the guts and the integrity to establish the Gomery commission, supporting the work of Justice Gomery and supporting his findings absolutely.

All last winter, the hon. member and his party interfered with the work of Justice Gomery and tried to shed doubt about the work of Justice Gomery. Now that we have Justice Gomery's report, just because they disagree with Justice Gomery's conclusions, they are saying that he is wrong. Canadians believe in Justice Gomery, not the Conservatives, on this issue.

*Oral questions***GASOLINE PRICES**

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six weeks ago we blew the whistle on the Liberal plan to hike mileage rates for politicians and bureaucrats. Thanks to Conservative leadership, the mileage rate hike for MPs was cancelled. The Liberals promised to do the same for government employees, but now we have learned that six weeks later the 10% mileage rate hike for federal employees is still in place, even though gas prices have gone down. Another Liberal promise made, another Liberal promise broken.

Why did the Liberals break their word to scrap the government mileage hike? Why is it so hard for them to keep their word?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is the system by which these changes are made is embedded in the agreements that are signed with our employees. I made the request, as I said I would, that this be reviewed. They did so. They did not agree to make the change. I am pursuing that with officials as we speak.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. When it comes to getting tens of millions of dollars from the government to the Liberal Party, the rules are no problem. When it comes to appointing Liberal cronies to plum patronage jobs, Liberals bend the rules, they break the rules, they get it done. When it comes to taking care of themselves, they always manage to get it done. However, when it comes to creating a single standard for Canadians so they are not getting hosed at the pump and paying for higher gas rates in Ottawa, they cannot do anything, they are impotent.

How is it that the government has managed to take care of itself, but it cannot even keep its word?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do realize the members opposite have no interest in supporting the decisions that are made by judges in our courts, have no interest in supporting the decisions that are made by other levels of government and have no interest in supporting the collective agreements that we sign with our employees. We do.

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[*Translation*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in May 2002, the Bloc Québécois proposed a complete assistance package including loan guarantees for businesses hit by the softwood lumber crisis. The federal government has always refused to implement the Bloc's proposal. Recently, again, Domtar was obliged to shut down its plants in Lebel-sur-Quévillon because of the softwood lumber crisis.

Will the minister decide finally to provide the loan guarantees the Bloc has sought for the past three years together with the softwood lumber industry?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is well aware that this is a huge challenge for the Canadian economy and the forestry industry.

Accordingly, I congratulate the Liberal members of the Atlantic, Quebec and Ontario caucuses, who helped the government in this process, which has led to some good ideas. The government will make an announcement in the future.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the past three years now, the government has been in “future” and “soon” mode. The crisis is urgent. Communities are folding throughout Quebec and in the rest of Canada. Today, we are again being told something will happen “soon”. It is time they did something.

Can the minister tell us today whether there will be loan guarantees instead of making remarks that have nothing to do with reality, as the Liberals have been doing for three years now?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made manifold contributions in the past. We are now looking to the future and are confident that the future of the forestry industry will be rosy. There are problems today, but the federal government will deal with them.

I thank my colleagues once again for their good ideas and many contributions. We will be making an announcement in the coming days or weeks.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday NAFTA brought down another ruling in favour of Canadian and Quebec softwood lumber producers. As might be expected, the Americans are very likely to continue their legal wrangling.

Does the Canadian government not understand that instead of sticking to its empty words—an example of which we have just heard—it needs to demonstrate its determination now by instituting the loan guarantees that everyone has been calling for since 2002?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc never realizes that this is a national problem. Conditions in the forest industry vary across the country. It is different in British Columbia, in the Atlantic provinces, in Ontario and in Quebec.

The government must therefore consider conditions throughout the country. We are working very hard on this matter and an announcement will be forthcoming shortly.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has been demanding loan guarantees for more than three years, as has the industry Canada-wide and in Quebec, and the other associations. The government has sloughed off all of its responsibilities all this time.

Does this government understand that it has dragged its feet long enough, that the situation is critical in such places as Lebel-sur-Quévillon, and that now, in this House, it needs to announce the loan guarantees everyone has been calling for for the past three years?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing that could create a problem with our announcement would be the Bloc Québécois' calling for an election too soon.

Oral questions

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

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

Twelve years ago, the Liberals promised to reduce greenhouse emissions by 20%. We learn now from the United Nations that Canada's emissions have gone up 24%. That is worse than America. In fact, Canada's emissions are now rising, after 12 years of Liberal inaction, at almost twice the rate of the United States.

What does it say about how far the Liberals have fallen? On greenhouse gas emissions, we are now performing dramatically worse than George Bush and his administration.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not. Canada is the sole Kyoto country that is exporting oil and gas at a very high rate. It is a large part of the explanation.

What is unexplainable is why the leader of the NDP is with the leader of the Conservative Party who wants to kill Kyoto and have an election when Canada will welcome the world in Montreal. This is unexplainable. I hope the leader of the NDP will change his mind and welcome the world at a time when there is no election.

* * *

EQUALIZATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing is clear. Canada and this government have no right to lecture anyone, including George Bush, when it comes to climate change.

I would like to ask the finance minister a question. There was nothing in the mini-budget for rural Canada. Despite the fact that farm receipts are at an all time low and farm families are struggling, there was nothing for them.

The premier of his home province says that he is "angry at the minister's failure to respect fairness for Saskatchewan". How is it that the finance minister can find \$10 billion for corporations in tax cuts, but nothing for Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that transfer payments to the province of Saskatchewan are at an all time record high. Payments to farmers in Saskatchewan from the Government of Canada over the last 18 months have added up to more than \$700 million.

The government has invested \$500 million in science and research, \$500 million in infrastructure, and \$300 million in education, training, housing and the environment. We have moved forward on all fronts. That does not include early learning and child care and money for municipalities. The Government of Canada is investing in Saskatchewan's future.

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● (1430)

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the culture of entitlement is thriving in the Liberal Party. In fact, by a

very strange coincidence, David Herle, the Prime Minister's good buddy and the Liberal Party's campaign manager, also ended up receiving an untendered contract to craft the message for the alleged economic update. What an amazing thing.

Why should taxpayers be expected to fund the Liberal Party campaign manager, so that he can write the Liberal Party platform?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is wrong. I wrote the fiscal update, in partnership with my officials.

The contract in question was with and by the Department of Finance. News reports today clearly indicate that it was within all the rules. All the guidelines were followed. In addition, it was fully and properly disclosed on the Government of Canada website.

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INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is still unethical, I can say that much.

Early this fall, the finance minister set a cloud of uncertainty over the future of income trusts with devastating results. Here is an excerpt from Bonnie's letter to the Canadian Association of Retired Persons:

I was dumbfounded when I received my statements from my broker this month... In one month we had lost \$50,000... We contacted our broker... and she explained that [the Minister of Finance] had made a statement and the rest is history.

Will the finance minister tell us specifically on what day he will announce his decision on the future of income trusts, or is he just going to stand up and equivocate, and sow more—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, I want to make that decision as quickly as possible to eliminate the uncertainty.

I would point out to the hon. gentleman that the decline in market capitalization during the month of October applied to all equities in the marketplace, not just to income trusts. Fortunately, there has been some rebound in the market lately.

The hon. gentleman should not ignore the fact that indeed the market for all equities, and income trusts are equities, went down during the month of October.

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AIRPORTS

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Toronto area travellers face the highest airport costs in the world because of the government's policies. Air travel is critical to our economic growth and prosperity. These ridiculously high federal charges hurt ordinary travellers going on vacation, pickpocket tourists and threaten business.

Oral questions

While the Liberals fly high in their Challenger jets, Toronto area residents are being grounded by gouging. Why is the government picking on GTA residents and taxing travellers to death?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there was a prize was exaggeration, the hon. member would win it.

Frankly, the Government of Canada has reduced the rent for the Toronto airport by \$5 billion over the next 50 years.

There are short term problems at Toronto airport because of the high debt and the fact that the concessions do not bring in enough revenue. Usually, the revenue is about 40%. In Toronto it is at 20%. There is a lot of work to be done there. In the short term, we are examining, at the request of the GTA caucus, how we could help Toronto airport up front. It is very difficult at this time.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is factually incorrect. I am sure it is an accident. Pearson airport taxes are going up this year by 14%. Pearson airport is the most expensive airport in the world. In the last 24 hours the minister has gone a little wobbly and has been a little unsure in terms of Liberal policies when it comes to Pearson airport.

To be clear, will the minister change his current Liberal policies of overtaxing Pearson airport and give it a tax cut, yes or not?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a \$5 billion tax cut on rent. That is an awful lot of money. For the whole country it is \$8 billion and for Toronto alone it is \$5 billion.

The airport has problems in the short term because of its debt level. We did not incur its debt level; the administration did. It also has a problem with revenues because it does not use the concessions enough. It is at 20% of revenues and it should be at about 40%.

The airport's problem is that its rent is only 14% of the cost. The rest is debt service. We will help the airport address that problem—

• (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

* * *

[Translation]

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at a special assembly today, Quebec milk producers urged the government to act. According to Marcel Groleau, the president of the Quebec milk producers' federation, "The choices are clear and time is of the essence. The government must make a choice and do so quickly".

Why is the government not attending to this matter immediately and making it clear that it considers supply management non-negotiable, before the negotiations begin?

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely ludicrous that the party over there would demand that we protect supply management in a Hong Kong negotiation and then come into

this House and defeat the government, so it cannot do that. It is ridiculous.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska for his supplementary.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is rightly cause for concern, because the minister refuses to answer.

Does the federal government not realize that its current position is not clear enough and that not only milk producers, but the members of the National Assembly as well, are concerned?

Should he not be more decisive when he speaks of supply management so that those negotiating with Canada will have no doubt that protection of supply management is a condition of negotiation?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is one government that has taken responsibility for supply management it is the Liberal government, which established the system. We want to go to Hong Kong. My colleagues, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister for International Trade, have just said we intend to protect farmers in Quebec and supply management throughout Canada.

And this is the party that wants to overturn the government and weaken our colleagues who want to go and negotiate matters of agriculture and supply management. They are more concerned about their totally partisan issues than about defending agriculture, just when we are going to Hong Kong to defend a strong Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: All the members would appreciate a little less noise. Order, please!

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Bernard Cleary (Louis-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we saw horrific images on television of the intolerable conditions in which the aboriginal community of Kitcisakik is living, without running water or electricity. For 20 years, this community has been demanding assistance to build a village in keeping with their needs and their values.

How many reports like the one yesterday will we need to see before the government actually decides to provide tangible aid to help the aboriginal people of Kitcisakik?

Oral questions

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the local community passed a resolution in February calling on the government to form a reserve. We have been working with it since that time. I would remind the hon. member that in Kelowna next week, we will be dealing with these various issues and his party will not let us do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I remind the federal government that it has fiduciary responsibility for aboriginal people. What we saw yesterday was shameful, here, there or anywhere.

Will the government agree to support the construction of a village worthy of the name, where the living conditions of the people of Kitcisakik will finally be acceptable?

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): As I said, Mr. Speaker, the resolution was passed in February. We are working with the community. We will see a community in that area. It is very important to us and to the population that the community will be part of the solution.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Development is playing politics with the Premier of New Brunswick instead of providing choice in child care for New Brunswick families. These families are demanding to be treated equally by the federal government regardless of where they live or what they do.

Will the minister finally admit that his one size fits all approach is not working for the people of New Brunswick and it is not working for the three-quarters of Canadian parents who are now feeling abandoned by the government?

● (1440)

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said to the House many times before, we have an early learning and child care system that now has eight agreements in principle, and one funding agreement.

There are eight provinces that are involved, eight provinces that have rural populations, including New Brunswick. Of the eight provinces with which we negotiated and had a final agreement, in one instance, the province of New Brunswick decided to pull the plug.

As I said yesterday, and I am just asking a question, if anybody is playing politics, who is playing politics?

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I raised the issue of violence against women in

aboriginal communities and noted that aboriginal women are 37 times more likely to be assaulted.

Yesterday, in the House, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development said that this will be specifically discussed at the first ministers meeting on aboriginal affairs next week. I have the agenda for the meeting and neither violence against women nor justice issues are on it.

Could the minister please commit today to ensuring that this life or death issue is raised at the meeting next week.

[Translation]

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to point out that \$5 million has been allocated to the Sisters in Spirit program to prevent violence. This is in addition to the \$7 million that Status of Women Canada also invested in this program.

A federal-provincial meeting on violence against women, including native women, is scheduled for January. However, if we are in the midst of an election campaign, brought on by the opposition, we will not be able to hold this meeting.

Who then will address the issue of violence against women?

* * *

[English]

KEESECKOOSE FIRST NATION

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us return to the stolen education moneys of the Keeseekoose First Nation.

The minister has led the House to believe that these financial irregularities, to use his term, are the sole responsibility of the first nation and the RCMP. In fact, the band is in departmental co-management, and believe it or not, the theft of the money took place while his department paid \$2 million to the accountants.

Could the minister confirm that over \$600,000 was stolen from the children's education fund right from underneath his accountant's and department's noses?

Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, whether the Conservatives like it or not, first nations governments take accountability very seriously. In exactly this case, when irregularities were found, they contacted the RCMP, charges were laid. It is what any responsible government would do.

What we see from the other side is an attempt to discredit the leadership of first nations communities across Canada. Shame on them.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians by now have come to the realization that the minister really does not understand what is going on. I am going to give the minister a chance to stand in the House and try to convince Canadians that indeed he has not been hit in the head by a rock.

Therefore, I am going to speak slowly and distinctly. Money was stolen from school children. Liberals were involved. Why does the minister simply not take his finger out of his butt and do something about it?

The Speaker: I think we will move on. The hon. member Ottawa—Orléans.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning's papers reported that official language communities are quite worried that there was no mention of them in the government's economic statement.

Can the minister responsible for official languages indicate whether these communities can expect additional funding for priority projects that promote their vitality and support their development?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Minister for Internal Trade, Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Among the many programs in the action plan, it is true that funding stops for two of them at the end of March 2006.

I am pleased to announce today that the funding for these two programs, one in the area of health and the other in the area of language training in the public service, will be extended beyond the end of this fiscal year.

* * *

• (1445)

[English]

TERASEN INC.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal government punched British Columbians in the nose by rubber-stamping the takeover of Terasen by George Bush bagman Richard Kinder, this after thousands of British Columbians said no. No due diligence was done. No thought was given to Kinder Morgan's horrible environmental and safety record, or the huge rate increases Kinder Morgan demands.

This is a fire sale of Canada. There have been 11,000 takeovers of Canadian companies and the Liberals just keep selling us out. Just like no action on softwood, this is a kick in the teeth to B.C.

How can the government sell out Canada so irresponsibly?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this investment was reviewed under the Investment Canada Act. I was personally recused from that decision because I had sat on the board of Terasen in my previous corporate life.

We have extracted and put in place undertakings to ensure that Canadian jobs are protected, that environmental management is strong, that the community focus of the corporation continues to be strong and that it continues to have major operations in British Columbia. It is going to be making multiples of billions of dollars of investments in Canada for the benefit of Canadians.

Oral questions

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past spring I wrote the finance minister asking if he would extend the super flow-through program for mining shares. Northern Canada is still waiting for an answer. Mining exploration is a long shot game with high risks and we need firm commitments.

The minister had the opportunity to express his commitment to the mining industry with his \$39 billion election budget that he just offered. There was nothing for forestry, nothing for agriculture and nothing for mining.

My question is simple. Why has he turned his back on the mining communities of northern Ontario and northern Canada?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly true that the mining industry is a jewel of the Canadian economy. In Canada the mining industry globally receives most of its financing. This government has historically supported that industry to a very high degree. If the opposition were to wait for the budget instead of forcing an election, the government might be able to do even more.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD AQUATIC CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2004, the Liberal government invested over \$16 million in the World Aquatic Championships in Montreal. Many Liberal cronies were involved in organizing these championships, but the federal government abruptly withdrew its additional funding.

Was an audit ever done to determine who received that money and, if so, why does the government not release the report?

[English]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the FINA organizing committee is just closing its books on the highly successful world aquatic games hosted by Montreal, which has put Montreal back on the world map in terms of host cities for superior athletic competitions. I can assure the House that a full audit will be done when the books are closed. There has been a \$1.5 million holdback against any inconsistencies in the contribution agreement.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess we would call those successful inconsistencies. If it was so successful, why is the federal government now holding back its money?

Oral questions

The notorious names of ad scam have their fingerprints all over the 2005 aquatic games, Liberal Senator Francis Fox, Serge Savard, Marc Campagna, André Ouellet, all strong supporters of the current Prime Minister.

With revelations of millions more missing in this Liberal handout scheme, why will the government not immediately produce an audit, or is it just trying to protect the Prime Minister's favourite fundraisers?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member was not listening to my answer. The audit has not been done because the books are just about to be closed, but have not yet been completely closed. The holdback is against any irregularities. The audit will be made public when it is completed.

* * *

• (1450)

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has refused to back the Canadian forest industry for over three years. Now the government has had a deathbed conversion and is set to announce a softwood package consisting of half measures. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has added insult to injury by reducing our demand for the return of U.S. imposed softwood tariffs by \$1.5 billion.

Why is the government continuing to abandon the Canadian forest industry?

Hon. Jim Peterson (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is utter nonsense. The Prime Minister has been in the vanguard of saying that the NAFTA has to be respected and that the duties illegally taken by the United States have to be returned in total.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have mismanaged our relationship with the White House for over 12 years and it is our foresters and ranchers who pay the price. The Prime Minister's record with the President is meetings on the margins but nothing to show for it.

If he cannot get the job done, will he appoint a special envoy and demand a formal meeting with President Bush in Korea? On behalf of Canadians, I say do not bother to come home without that \$5 billion cheque.

Hon. Jim Peterson (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has raised the softwood lumber issue in every single meeting that he has had with the President. It is the Prime Minister who has so strongly said that the NAFTA must be respected. I will take a back seat to no one in terms of our Prime Minister standing up for our forest industry and for all our traders who go by the rule of law. The rule of law must be respected.

* * *

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the statements by Marc-Yvan Côté at the Gomery commission, some tongues have loosened

up. Following the statements by Jocelyne Gosselin, former Liberal candidate in Lévis, and Patrick Gagnon, former Liberal candidate in Gaspé, we learn today in this House from the member for Beauce that he did not receive tainted money for his 1997 campaign. We now have the names of three candidates who did not receive tainted money. We have to conclude then that Hélène Scherrer, the candidate in Louis-Hébert, did.

How can the Prime Minister allow her to be a policy advisor in his office, when she received tainted money?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Hélène Scherrer was categorical. She said she had never received money from Marc-Yvan Côté. I would point out to the member that in a society, attitudes fraught with hypocrisy and innuendo are not to be tolerated. If there is evidence, let it be known, do not let the rumour mill run. Rigour is required at all times. That is what his leader said to *Le Soleil* in defence of André Boisclair. The very same rule should apply here.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister claim to have cleaned house following the sponsorship scandal, when the former candidate in Louis-Hébert is a policy advisor in his office?

Can the Minister of Transport confirm that neither Hélène Scherrer nor her organization received dirty money from the sponsorships?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are getting into the business of third-hand information. It is hearsay, rumours. This kind of treatment of politicians, of anyone for that matter, is unacceptable. There is nothing more harmful than rumour, because it cannot be proven. That is exactly what the leader of the Bloc said. It was a statement made in the case of André Boisclair. It should apply in everyone's case. He should listen to his leader, who is seated in front of him.

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[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday the Minister of Public Safety answered my order paper question on RCMP shortages. She stated, "Currently, there are no unfulfilled requests for RCMP officers". The minister then went on to contradict herself. Her own tables show a shortage of 1,059 RCMP officers across Canada. British Columbia is short 281, Ontario 139, Quebec 134, Alberta 85, and Nova Scotia 30.

The minister is denying the obvious. There are clearly RCMP shortages in every province. How can she still say there are no unfulfilled requests?

Oral questions

•(1455)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is probably aware, provincial governments set the number of policing resources for their province. There is a process in place by which the provinces can apply for additional positions.

The Government of Canada, and I would ask the hon. member to take this under special advisement, has approved all requests for additional positions for contract jurisdictions. The RCMP will fulfill these requests in accordance with existing agreements.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer makes it quite obvious she is still denying the facts. Here are the facts. Three towns in my own riding have unfulfilled requests. Our RCMP sources say that currently, Saskatchewan has unfulfilled requests for seven constables, 23 corporals, 14 sergeants, two staff sergeants and one officer.

Who is right about these so-called unfulfilled requests? Is it the towns and the RCMP in Saskatchewan, or the minister who is denying them?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the Government of Canada has approved all requests from provincial governments for additional positions in contract jurisdictions.

In fact, the hon. member should perhaps ask the Attorney General of the province of Saskatchewan or the Solicitor General as to whether he has formally written to me to request those new positions. After coming from the FPT meeting of justice ministers and solicitors general last week, I asked my office whether I had any outstanding formal requests from provinces for additional contract positions. It is my understanding that I do not.

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immigrants, such as those in my constituency of Brampton—Springdale, have played a vital role in shaping the Canada of today. In an effort to further enhance this vision, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has proposed a variety of initiatives to reduce backlogs and to promote regionalization, integration and retention of newcomers. The Minister of Finance has invested another \$1.3 billion over five years to improve settlement and integration services. It is another Liberal promise made and another Liberal promise kept.

Would the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration please tell this House what the moneys will mean for Canadians who want to reunite with their families?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the money is to be used for a variety of measures.

Members will want to take note of the fact that we said we would fix the system, we would build capacity and we would build the flexibility required in order to bring people of skill, ambition and integrity who fit into our mainstream and immediately become productive and competitive. Those moneys that have been designed

to allow for a speedier settling and integration are targeted specifically for that.

Some of the moneys that the committee wisely agreed would be reinvested are essentially for parents and grandparents who provide for the social cohesion required for people to be—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, western Canadian farmers are forced to sell their wheat through the Canadian Wheat Board at a price set by the government.

For the last five weeks we have stood in the House on behalf of western Canadian farmers and demanded that the government raise the initial prices. Two weeks ago, when my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain raised this issue during question period, the minister said he would be responding immediately. It is two weeks later and there has been absolutely nothing.

Will the minister finally hear the pleas of western Canadian farmers and raise the initial prices, or did he mislead the House?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the member that the western Canadian farmers who serve on the board of the Canadian Wheat Board and actually conduct the business of the board have done an excellent job on a whole series of new sales. There will be an adjustment to the initial payments that will be forthcoming shortly.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of cash-strapped farmers are demanding this change. That was not good enough for the government until there was an election imminent. Farmers want to know what is going on.

The Canadian Wheat Board has hired the Canadian Wheat Board minister's former campaign manager. The board has employed the Prime Minister's former campaign manager. The board is putting money into a project involving the finance minister's campaign manager. Now it has hired a Liberal dominated public relations firm.

The government and the Canadian Wheat Board have lots of money to spend on Liberals. When will the government raise the initial price and give farmers their own money?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Business of the House

●(1500)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands did ask a question and I know he is just itching to hear the answer from the President of the Treasury Board, but it is very difficult to hear given all the noise in the chamber. I would urge his colleagues to subdue their enthusiasm so we can hear the minister's answer.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, I know the members on the other side do not like the Canadian Wheat Board or the farmers who operate it. However, if the member would care to step outside and repeat those allegations, he can pay the \$7,000 that the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre paid when he made the same allegation outside this chamber.

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[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's attitude is a bit disconcerting. His economic statement contains nothing for the 1.7 million people in inadequate housing and the 150,000 homeless. He has not even confirmed his intention to invest the \$1.6 billion announced this summer. FRAPRU, the popular front for urban redevelopment, has criticized this mini-budget and accuses the government of using social housing issues for partisan purposes.

What is the Minister of Finance's explanation for not taking advantage of the excellent opportunity offered by his economic statement to at last respond to these groups' demands by renewing the program for the homeless?

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely incredible coming from the Bloc that they would suggest this. They voted against Bill C-48, which would have made possible \$1.6 billion for housing. We have already made a commitment that we will renew IPAC/SCPI and RRAP. In fact, as a government we have indicated that not only do we invest \$2 billion each and every year to help 636,000 people, with \$1 billion in terms of homelessness and \$1 billion in terms of affordable housing, but we will continue to invest in housing in Quebec and across this country.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canada prepares to welcome the world to Montreal's UN conference on climate change, could the Minister of the Environment tell the House what additional measure he announced this morning to make sure that Canada does its share for the future of the planet and for generations to come?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce, with my colleagues, the Ministers of CIDA, NRCan and Foreign Affairs, an investment of up to \$260 million over the next four years in support of additional global efforts to address climate change, investments by which we will improve the efficiency of the Kyoto protocol. We will renew our support for the Canadian climate change development fund. We will

make a significant contribution to the important initiatives to observe the GEOSS plan. We will establish two new centres of excellence, l'un pour l'adaptation au changement climatique and the other for—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga—Erindale, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Quebec solicits French-speaking immigrants from all over the world. After one hour of processing in Montreal, many of those immigrants board planes to Peel region, but their settlement fees of \$3,800 per immigrant stay in Quebec.

Would the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration please explain to this House, particularly to the members from the GTA, why settlement fees attached to new immigrants are not withheld for 12 months and then assigned to the province in which those immigrants eventually settle and receive services, such as Ontario and Alberta?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for giving me an opportunity to talk about an announcement that we will make in very short order. It is a repetition of an announcement made by the Minister of Finance. We are about to sign an agreement for settlement and integration with the province of Ontario, which will allow the province to spend much more on settlement and integration dollars and will take care of all of those people who come into this country and immediately get them into the marketplace so that they can utilize the skills and the talents that we so desperately need in this country.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize unreservedly to all members of the House for the remarks I made during question period. I obviously lost my composure, something I do not normally do in the House. I offer my unequivocal apologies to the House.

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●(1505)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three questions for the government House leader, all of which concern future business.

My first question is the usual question. Could the government House leader enlighten us and, by extension, Canadians as to what business he has planned for the remainder of this week and on into the following week?

Speaker's Ruling

Second, at the annual meeting of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce on September 25 of this year, the Prime Minister said, "Under no circumstances will my government attempt this autumn in any way, shape or form to precipitate our own defeat to force an early election". I would ask the government House leader this question. Does this mean the Prime Minister does not consider Bill C-66, the energy rebate bill, and the ways and means motion currently before the House to be confidence measures?

Last, in a recent signed letter, the government House leader committed to the opposition parties that they would have opposition supply days on November 15, 17, 22, 24 and 29 and December 1 and 8. As everyone knows, these are the opposition days that he withheld from us all fall. Does his commitment mean that the government will not prorogue this Parliament as it is currently rumoured to be considering? I would suggest that a simple no would suffice.

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue this afternoon with the opposition motion.

On Tuesday, November 22 and Thursday, November 24, we will have allotted days. The opposition House leaders are in fact considering a special House order to expedite Bill C-53, Bill C-54, Bill C-55 and Bill C-66 through all stages with a recorded vote at third reading. I hope we can come to an agreement on that special House order and proceed in that fashion.

If we cannot agree on that special order, then tomorrow we will begin with reference before second reading of Bill C-71, the first nations commercial bill; report stage of Bill S-37, respecting the Hague convention; second reading of Bill S-36, the rough diamonds bill; and reference before second reading of Bill C-72, the bill amending the DNA legislation. We will continue with this business next week, adding the report stage of Bill C-57, the financial governance bill, and other unfinished items.

With respect to the comment about the Chamber of Commerce, it is very clear, and I said this earlier, that Bill C-66 and the ways and means motion are in fact confidence motions. Although I am not sure I should do this, I am taking at the hon. member's word the public statements that in fact those members do support Bill C-66 and the ways and means motion with respect to taxes. Given his comment, I guess I should reconsider and speak to him once again since his party has flip-flopped on a number of occasions.

With respect to prorogation, I have to say that this rumour created by the Conservative Party was merely to keep the NDP in line with its confidence motion that it will put forward in the coming weeks. [Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It concerns the Thursday question just asked by the leader of the official opposition.

The question that was asked of the leader of the government was whether the promised dates for opposition days will be maintained and whether as a result the government will not prorogue this Parliament before the last supply day has taken place, as agreed over the leader's signature?

I would like a clear response. I did not get the meaning of his reply.

• (1510)

[English]

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, as I said to the hon. member when he in fact wrote me a letter—and I did not write him back but I merely responded to his letter with my own handwriting—the opposition days were as I indicated back in October. On October 4, in fact, I laid out an entire agenda right through to December 15, which had all of the opposition days laid out.

We are certainly going to commit to that and stick with that commitment. We require seven opposition days to be allotted in order to achieve supply. Our intention is to achieve supply.

With respect to prorogation, the only people talking about it are the Conservatives and the NDP and now the Bloc, I guess. Prorogation is not something that we have under consideration, nor are we discussing it.

* * *

WAYS AND MEANS

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1) I wish to table a notice of a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 23, 2005, and I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(1) I wish to table a notice of a ways and means motion to amend the Income Tax Act, as well as explanatory notes. I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

Also pursuant to Standing Order 83(1) I wish to table a notice of a ways and means motion to amend the Excise Tax Act. I am also tabling legislative proposals, draft regulations and explanatory notes on the same subject. Again I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on November 3, 2005, by the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona concerning comments made by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration during a meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and in a newspaper article.

I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this matter as well as the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration for responding. I also appreciate the contributions made to the discussion by the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, the hon. member for Niagara Falls and the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

Supply

Let me summarize briefly the events leading up to this question of privilege. The minister had been invited to appear before the standing committee on November 1 to discuss the Department of Citizenship and Immigration's supplementary estimates. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona claimed that at the meeting the minister treated the opposition committee members with contempt by refusing to give clear and concise answers to the questions asked. The department's supplementary estimates were subsequently defeated by the committee.

The following day, the minister met with members of the media to discuss the defeat of the supplementary estimates and made comments which appeared in the November 3 edition of the *Toronto Star*.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona asserted that these statements attacked the reputation of the Conservative members on the standing committee. In addition, the hon. member learned that the minister's director of communications had sent out an e-mail to a public interest group regarding the Conservative members' role in defeating the department's supplementary estimates. The hon. member argued that the e-mail further smeared the reputation of Conservative members and was an attempt by the minister to intimidate and threaten Conservative members of Parliament.

In response, the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration asserted that he had answered every question posed during the committee meeting fully and with courtesy. In addition, he acknowledged that the statements published in the newspaper article accurately reflected his views on the events surrounding the defeat of the supplementary estimates in the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[Translation]

First, I wish to address quickly the issue of the minister's statements in the committee meeting. As I have ruled on many occasions, committees are masters of their own proceedings. Any concerns that the hon. member may have about the minister's responses to the questions posed by committee members must be raised by the hon. member in the standing committee. If the standing committee so wishes, it may report these concerns to the House.

[English]

As for statements made outside the House, I stated at the time of the question of privilege that I do not have any control over these. This is clearly stated on page 522 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, where it is stated that it is the role of the Speaker to act as the guardian of the rights and privileges of members and to ensure that members can speak freely in the House and in committees. The Speaker's authority does not extend beyond the House, so the Speaker cannot rule on the propriety of remarks made in press releases, in television or radio interviews or in e-mails or material published on the Internet.

That said, let me assure the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona that the Chair takes these matters very seriously. I have looked at the remarks by the hon. minister and the e-mail sent out by the minister's director of communications and I can find no clear evidence of obstruction or interference in the exercise of the

member's duties. I therefore cannot find a *prima facie* case of privilege.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1515)

[English]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I begin with repetition of the motion which is before the House that was put forward by the New Democratic Party leader. It states:

That, in the opinion of this House, during the week of January 2, 2006, the Prime Minister should ask her Excellency the Governor General of Canada to dissolve the 38th Parliament and to set the date for the 39th general election for Monday, February 13, 2006; and

That the Speaker transmit this resolution to Her Excellency the Governor General.

I wish to make it clear at the outset, that the preference of our party since mid-April has been that the government does not have the confidence of the House, on account of the corruption we have seen from the Liberal Party and the Liberal government of the day. I refer in particular to one passage from Justice Gomery's report in the summary wherein he said:

The LPCQ as an institution cannot escape responsibility for the misconduct of its officers and representatives. Two successive Executive Directors were directly involved in illegal campaign financing, and many of its workers accepted cash payments for their services when they should have known that such payments were in violation of the Canada Elections Act.

I will return to that report.

The corruption and illegality we have seen from the government caused the Conservative Party to lose confidence in the government some time ago. We have demanded an election since that time and we continue to do so.

The compromise motion put forward by the New Democratic Party is being supported by the majority of the members of the House, and certainly by the Conservative Party. It is a compromise motion because the government has been unable to even face up to the prospects of non-confidence motions until this time. The Liberals have carefully gerrymandered the democratic schedule of the House to avoid dealing with the reality that they do not have confidence of the House of Commons.

This takes us to the culture of entitlement, the arrogance shown by the Liberal government, a government which feels it is so entitled to its entitlements. In the face of democratic tradition and the clear fact that the Liberals do not have the confidence of any of the opposition parties in the House, they cling to power tenaciously, showing complete disrespect for the House of Commons and for the people who elected us to this chamber.

I will reflect upon where this leaves us as Canadians. I will return to the whole concept of where the government is in terms of its culture of entitlement. It has been clear, since the inception of parliamentary government going back to the Magna Carta of King John, the original Charter of the Forest in 1215, that the government of the country and of our English forefathers must have the confidence of the House of Commons. Absent the confidence of the House of Commons, there is no right to govern and the government is illegitimate.

That has been the case in the English-Canadian tradition of Parliament since 1264. It has certainly been the case in Canada since 1841, when in the riding that the Speaker himself represents, Kingston, the first united Parliament of Upper and Lower Canada met. Since then, there has never been a government that has shown the degree of contempt for Parliament that the current government has.

From time to time people mention that Canada is a young country, and perhaps it is. However, we are an ancient parliamentary democracy. The first legislative assembly was established in our country in 1758, some 227 years ago. Since that time, we have had a balance in the country where there has been respect for Parliament and for the legislative assemblies of Canada. Only that Liberal government has abrogated that respect with the degree of contempt that we have seen by the Liberals.

• (1520)

Frankly, this matter did not have to reach the House of Commons and get to this extent. The compromise motion could have been resolved outside of any confidence motion. It could have been resolved simply through an agreement on the part of the Prime Minister, acting in concert with the leaders of the opposition parties. The leaders of the opposition parties have offered a compromise and have made it clear that the government does not have the confidence of the House of Commons and accordingly an election should be called, and they have put forward a suitable date.

Quite apart from the confidence convention to which I will speak, it would have been very easy for the Prime Minister to have agreed to that resolution. It would have been very easy for the Prime Minister to have avoided a Christmas election. The only reason this is before the House is because the Liberal government is disrespectful of everyone else in this chamber and disrespectful of the Canadians who have sent us here. The Liberals are trying to force an election over Christmas upon the people of Canada.

Liberals have taunted and cajoled the opposition parties today saying that confidence is indivisible and if we do not have confidence in the government, vote it down and they will have an election at Christmas. On those taunts, there will come a day when they will have to face the reality of that. There will come a day very shortly when they will have to face a clear confidence motion. The Liberals will have no choice but to get out from behind their barricades, acknowledge and face up to their filth and corruption and deal with the Canadian electorate.

More than anything else I am struck by the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister and the government. This is the democratic deficit Prime Minister. This is the Prime Minister who promised to respect the House of Commons.

Supply

Let me take this House back to the throne speech of 2004. These are the words of this government:

The path to achievement begins with making sure that Canadians believe their government, so that they can believe in government....

We must re-engage citizens in Canada's political life. And this has to begin in the place where it should mean the most—in Parliament—by making Parliament work better. That means reconnecting citizens with their Members of Parliament....

The Government of Canada is determined to return Parliament to the centre of national debate and decision making and to restore the public's faith and trust in the integrity and good management of government. To that end, it will, as a first step, immediately table in Parliament an action plan for democratic reform.

Those are the words of the government about Parliament. It has not done any of it. The Liberals do not respect Parliament. How can one believe a government in its throne speech could offer to restore Parliament to the centre of the national democracy, yet when confronted with a clear motion from three opposition parties in the House of Commons that they do not have confidence in this government and they want to see an election, the government turns its face on that and its own throne speech? The hypocrisy, the cunning, the self-treachery of all this is unbelievable.

The throne speech further states:

Significantly enhancing the role of all MPs will make Parliament what it was intended to be—a place where Canadians can see and hear their views debated and their interests heard. In short, a place where they can have an influence on the policies that affect their lives.

This is hypocrisy. Imagine the government promising to restore this chamber to the centre of our democracy, yet refusing to accept this motion and refusing to move to an election on a schedule that has been put forward by the opposition parties, in fact by a majority of the House of Commons.

The hypocrisy that I speak of, the false piety, does not stop there. There was a message from the Prime Minister himself. There was an ethics responsibility-accountability document filed by the government with a message from the Prime Minister dated February 4, 2004. At that time this Prime Minister said:

Parliament should be the centre of national debate on policy. For this to happen, we must reconnect Parliament to Canadians...

• (1525)

He believed in that, until it came time for his government to invoke closure on Bill C-48. Suddenly, Parliament would no longer be connected to Canadians. There would no longer be a national debate. There would be closure and contempt for Parliament. He did not believe that when the Liberals rammed through Bill C-48, the budget bill.

The Prime Minister and the government believe in nothing more than truncating the democratic process in the House when it suits their convenience and when they can hang on to office at all costs. At the end of the day, this is all that matters to the Liberal government.

In the face of the filth and corruption of the Gomery report, which ties the Liberals directly to criminal conduct and the misuse and abuse of taxpayers dollars, they still refuse to acknowledge the democratic choice of Canadians in the House of Commons and they refuse to be accountable to Canadians at the polls.

I will carry on with the Prime Minister's letter of February 4, 2004. He states:

Supply

Democratic reform affects all parties and all Canadians. I ask the leaders of the other parties for their support in implementing this action plan so that Parliamentarians and Canadians can be reconnected to the democratic process.

The Prime Minister of Canada asked the opposition parties for their support to restore democracy in the House of Commons. Yet we have before the House today a very simple motion that reflects the wishes and the clear desires of all opposition parties in the House. We have the opposition leaders asking in return that the Prime Minister might respect the House of Commons and the silence is deafening in the House.

The low cunning of the government, the deceitfulness, the guile and the falseness of the Liberals is remarkable. They will not face Canadians because they know what they are in for when the time comes.

It was not just the Prime Minister. There was a message from the leader of the government in the House. He had this to say on February 4, 2004, "we must restore Parliamentarians' role in generating authentic, thoughtful, and constructive debate". Except the Liberals do not want debate when it comes time to determine whether we should have an election and when that election should take place.

That letter of February 4, 2004 concluded as follows:

That is why I invite all my fellow Parliamentarians, as well as citizens from across the country, to share their ideas and inspire me with their experiences. We need to work together to ensure that democratic reform succeeds.

I, for one, am not inspired. I am not being allowed to represent the views of my constituents. Their view is that we should move forward with an election on the timetable that has been put forward by the leader of the New Democratic Party as a compromise to get this issue before Canadians.

It is very clear why we need an election. I would turn to the Gomery report and the stunning indictment that report contains of the government, the major findings of the Gomery report. Why is it that the Liberal government does not enjoy the confidence of the House of Commons? It is very clear, and it can be found by all Canadians at pages 5, 6 and 7 of the summary volume of the Gomery report.

The commission of inquiry found, first, clear evidence of political involvement in the administration of the sponsorship program.

Second, it found insufficient oversight at very senior levels of the public service, which allowed program managers to circumvent proper contracting procedures and reporting lines.

Third, it found a veil of secrecy that surrounded the administration of the sponsorship program and an absence of transparency in a contracting process.

Fourth, it found a reluctance for fear of reprisal by virtually all public servants to go against the will of a manager who was circumventing established policies and who had access to senior political officials.

Fifth, it found gross overcharging by communications agencies for hours worked and goods and services provided, inflated commissions, production costs and other expenses charged by communications agencies and their subcontractors, many of which were related

businesses; the use of the sponsorship program for purposes other than national unity or federal visibility because of a lack of objectives, a lack of criteria and guidelines for the program; and, very seriously, deliberate action to avoid compliance with federal legislation and policies, including the Canada Elections Act, the Lobbyist Registration Act, the Access to Information Act, the Financial Administration Act as well as federal contracting policy and the Treasury Board transfer payments policy.

● (1530)

Sure to figure prominently in the coming election as well is the complex web of financial transactions within Public Works and Government Services Canada involving kickbacks and illegal contributions to a political party in the context of the sponsorship program. Sadly, that political party is the Liberal Party of Canada, the government of the day, a government that professes its faith for democratic renewal in the House of Commons and yet, in the face of findings of criminal conduct, cannot understand how it does not enjoy the confidence of the House of Commons and is prepared, through guile and treachery, to hang on as long as it possibly can before surrendering to democracy.

Justice Gomery spoke of the existence of a culture of entitlement among political officials and bureaucrats involved with the sponsorship program, including the receipt of both monetary and non-monetary benefits, and the refusal at the end of the day of senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office and public servants to acknowledge their responsibility for the problems of mismanagement that occurred. That is a stunning indictment.

The reason the corrupt, arrogant, deceitful Liberal government does not have the confidence of the House of Commons, the reason the leader of the New Democratic Party put this motion forward and the reason it enjoys the support of the majority of the House of Commons is that we do not have confidence in people who steal public money. We do not have confidence in people who are engaged in kickbacks of public money to their political party. The Liberals should not be running this country. They are not worthy of this country. The sooner we have an election so they will face the wrath of the Canadian voters the better our nation will be.

I must say, as a reasonably new parliamentarian, that what I find most disturbing about the refusal of the government to accept the democratic will of the House of Commons is that it flies in the face of our entire democratic history. It flies in the face of the rule of law. It flies in the face of the understanding that we have in this democracy. Our Constitution is not entirely confined to paper. It exists in tradition and in the respect that we have to show one another.

I will take everyone back to something that was written hundreds of years ago by Blackstone when he said:

It is highly necessary for preserving the balance of the constitution, that the executive power should be a branch, though not the whole, of the legislature.

He further stated at page 150:

—this very executive power is again checked, and kept within due bounds by the two houses, through the privilege...

Supply

What I am getting at is that what we see from the Liberal government is a focus upon narrow legalism and upon a strict interpretation of what is or is not a confidence motion. We see none of the respect that we need to have a system of democracy that is functioning and flourishing.

The executive branch cannot treat the House of Commons with the degree of contempt, guile and treachery that we have seen from the Liberal government since the day that I took office in this chamber as a member of Parliament. It has to stop and it will stop when we get the government to recognize that it does not have the confidence of the House of Commons and we need to go to the polls where Canadian citizens, one by one, will have a chance to throw the filth and corruption of Liberal treachery out of office.

● (1535)

Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with considerable interest to the hon. member speak about the importance of democratic processes. He quoted Blackstone, the Constitution and the balance between legislative and executive branches, all of which are excellent. I also heard him refer frequently to other democratic principles but there is a fundamental democratic principle that he seems to have forgotten, and that is that we in the House follow rules. We have procedures and ways of going about it.

He talked time after time about the need to defeat the government. I disagree with him but, nevertheless, it is absolutely his right to bring such views forward. He then said that it was this government that was having trouble maintaining consistency. The fact is that his own party, month after month after month, since the tied vote in the House broken by the chair, has been saying that the government should immediately be defeated. That is fair enough, an official opposition is expected to do that, but what he cannot square in logic or in democratic principle is accepting a motion from the NDP that flies in the face of both, a motion that says it has lost confidence in the government but not yet. It is sort of like saying, oh yes, yes, yes, that it wishes to be in a certain state but, oh no, we cannot go there yet.

The member knows full well that the House of Commons and every other similar legislative body depends upon some fairly clear rules. The clear rule is that if there is to be a confidence vote, as there was last May, as the Tories can put forward or could have put forward at other times, then the House votes on it. If the government were to lose the vote there would then be an election because the government would resign. However this type of situation creates a forward looking system that is totally novel. They have not been able to give a single example anywhere in the British constitutional system of any other country which has had such a motion. They come forward with this concocted rubbish and say that if we do not follow it, it is undemocratic because three parties in the House believe we should follow it. I say that democracy is democracy and it means following rules. It is not simply the will of a majority.

Why has he reversed himself? Why has he turned himself into a pretzel as he tries to accept this motion instead of accepting the clear and constitutional position which the Conservative Party, up until recently, actually held?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, a pretzel I am not. The motion calls for and confirms the opinion of the House. My friend says that it should be defeated by reason of its novelty. I would disagree with

that. It is clearly a compromise motion that brings forward the majority opinion of the House that the government does not have confidence and it specifies an election date that is in the best interest of our community. Nothing could more rational than that.

My friend acknowledged the importance of Blackstone who is one of the great parliamentary legal scholars. The part to which I am about to refer was written some 231 years ago, shortly before the establishment of the very first democracy in British North America in 1758 in Nova Scotia. I think the logic of what was said at that time applies to this very day because what we are talking about here is not legality. We are not talking about detailed rules and procedures. We are talking about the concept of respect among the different orders of government, the executive branch and the legislative branch. We are talking about the constitutional traditions that keep our government system strong which are being abrogated as we speak by a government that does not have the confidence of the House.

Blackstone stated:

Thus every branch of our civil policy supports and is supported, regulates and is regulated, by the rest; for the two houses naturally drawing in two directions of opposite interest, and the prerogative in another still different from them both, they mutually keep each other from exceeding their proper limits—

—which is what the government is doing, exceeding its proper limits.

—while the whole is prevented from separation, and artificially connected together by the mixed nature of the crown, which is a part of the legislative, and the sole executive magistrate. Like three distinct powers in mechanics, they jointly impel the machine of government in a direction different from what either, acting by themselves, would have done; but at the same time in a direction partaking of each, and formed out of all; a direction which constitutes the true line of the liberty and happiness of the community.

Some of that language is difficult to understand but at the end of the day the language speaks to the fact that the liberty and happiness of our system of government only works if there is respect by the executive branch for this Parliament, and that is what we do not see from the Liberals.

● (1540)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a number of negotiations and discussions have been going on around this place but there seems to be a certain amount of hostage taking going on by the Liberal Party over a number of important issues. Our party certainly knows that the abhorrent conditions many first nations have had to live through has been a disgrace and a blight on this country's reputation for far too long.

Our member from Timmins fought extremely hard to draw attention to the plight of the people of Kashechewan that was long overdue. The government finally brought some measure to bear on the quality of life and I despair to even call it quality of life that these people had to endure.

Supply

The government is now saying that the compromise that the NDP has put forward would delay the important summit taking place in Kelowna, British Columbia with first nations' leaders until after the election. The government is holding this meeting out and the potential for finally changing something as being suddenly important after 12 years. The Liberals have had yet another deathbed conversion that this is an important meeting. The government was meant to have this meeting six months ago and instead placed it in a very precarious political time. This was the government's choice and not one else's choice.

The government has now said that this meeting is so important that all of the procedures and options being put forward in the House are putting it in jeopardy. The government has ignored the fact that the compromise the NDP has put forward, supported by all opposition parties, would step across this meeting and place the interests and the attention of a federal election into January and February. It would allow the government and all interested parties to work together to finally, after more than a decade of neglect, improve the quality of life for first nations in our country. Would the member please comment on that?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the commitment the hon. member has shown to aboriginal issues, along with several other members of his party. It perhaps is an area where there is some commonality of interest in this House among everyone other than the government.

The hon. member is right. A very important first ministers meeting has been scheduled for the end of this month to address what I consider to be the most difficult social justice issue facing our nation and that is the question of aboriginal poverty. However there is unanimity among all the opposition parties for that meeting to proceed. Nothing in this resolution that has been put forward would, in any way, imperil the first ministers meeting. I intend to be at that meeting and I know the leader of the NDP intends to be there. Members on both sides of the House will be there. There is no reason for that meeting not to proceed nor is there a reason for it not to be productive. Aboriginal Canadians have waited a generation for this meeting.

As my hon. friend says, for the government to hold aboriginal Canadians, who have lived in poverty for the entire duration of the Liberal government, which is almost 13 years at this point, hostage and suggest that it will not be able to proceed with this meeting because of this resolution is absolute nonsense.

It is beneath contempt for the government to be suggesting that is the reason this motion should not be proceeded with and that Canadians should not have a chance to elect a new government.

The election of a new Conservative government will spell for aboriginal Canadians, for the first time in a generation, the first time in the lives of many young aboriginal people, a government that will deal with them honestly. It will be a Conservative government based on its history of conservatism, a Conservative Party that granted the vote to aboriginal Canadians and a Conservative Party that has defined modern aboriginal policy. Aboriginal people will be treated with respect, with dignity and with honesty. For aboriginal Canadians that will be a new experience.

● (1545)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I am very pleased to speak to this motion. I have to say that a couple of years ago I did not think I would be speaking to a motion like this one. I acknowledge that the NDP has put forward a rather unusual motion today, but also let it be said that these are very unusual times in which we find ourselves. We are in a minority Parliament and a very strange and rather unique situation in terms of what is going on. I would like to focus my comments on why I think this motion is so important at this particular time.

The motion is very straightforward. It calls on the House to give an opinion that the Prime Minister should ask the Governor General to dissolve the 38th Parliament and set a general election date for February 16, 2006. That is pretty straightforward.

However, while listening to the debate today I heard the government House leader hide behind rules and claim that there were constitutional problems with this motion. He said that it was an attempt to change long-standing practices, that it was about playing political games, that it did not fit the constitutional requirements of Parliament, and so on. I then heard the member for Victoria a little while ago say that it was a delayed confidence motion.

In actual fact, this motion is none of those things. It is not a confidence motion. It is a motion which seeks to break an impasse in an environment that has been created in the House where the priorities of Canadians are not being met. In listening to the debate today and the member for Toronto—Danforth, the leader of the NDP, speak to this motion, I felt very proud that the NDP put forward this compromise suggestion.

Let us face it. What is the reality? The Conservatives have been very clear that their preference for a number of months, since the spring, has been to force an election. The NDP was not in that position. We were of a different perspective. Members of the NDP felt very strongly that we wanted to do everything we could to make this minority Parliament work. That is why we set about our work very diligently. We kept in focus the priorities and needs of Canadians and made that our purpose for being here.

We accomplished a hell of a lot of things in the House, such as Bill C-48, the NDP budget. We got the Liberals to do things in that budget that they otherwise would never have done. We got them to put money into housing, infrastructure and the retrofit of low income Canadians' homes. We got them to move on their commitments to foreign aid. It was a significant accomplishment. We went about our work with purpose and diligence because we knew why we were here.

We were also very clear that this Parliament had to function. It is clear that the Liberal Party itself created the crisis of corruption. Nobody else created it but the Liberals through the way they have conducted themselves, as Justice Gomery has pointed out, in a culture of entitlement for so many years. When that crisis happened, it became very clear that either there was going to be due diligence in making this Parliament work and we would move forward, or things were going to come to an end.

As is well known, the NDP made a second attempt to put forward some very significant proposals to stop the privatization of health care. This is something that deeply concerns people in this country. It has been brewing for years, again a problem that has been manufactured by the very same Liberal government that is now the subject of so much corruption. It too created the problem of privatization by not enforcing the Canada Health Act. The Liberals allowed the provinces to allow privatization to go ahead.

It was the NDP that took up that issue and gave some proposals to the Minister of Health to stop the privatization of our health care system. We want to maintain medicare and accessibility for all Canadians and to ensure that there is not a two tier system wherein people who have money somehow jump to the front of the line and get through the door first.

• (1550)

Regrettably, the Liberal government chose not to deal with those proposals. It basically said that maybe in 10 years it would be willing to look at ways to ensure that public funds only stayed with a public system after it dealt with the \$41 billion. That is like saying there is a crisis now, but maybe we will think about it in 10 years' time. That was completely unsatisfactory in terms of any resolution to the crisis in our public health care system. We had many discussions in our caucus. We felt that the response from the Liberal government on that score was completely unacceptable to us.

We are now faced with a situation where the government has come to the end of its credibility. That has been there for a long time, but it has come to the end of its ability to be productive on anything. This Parliament has become a very fractious place. Even so, the leader of the NDP offered a compromise, a common sense approach that would ensure that the criteria the government has laid out in terms of continuing business to the end of the session before Christmas could happen.

We have devised a proposal as embodied in this motion that would allow an election to be held without conflicting with the very special time people need with their families and their local communities over the Christmas period. We have devised a proposal that would allow this House to keep working and to pass legislation. In fact, not only would that happen, it would happen because the three opposition parties agreed to compromise and brought that forward.

That is why we are here today with this motion. I would say categorically it is not a confidence motion. It is a proposal to meet the needs of Canadians to ensure that we have an election at a time that is better for Canadians and in a way that would allow this House to continue doing its business. It would also ensure that the first ministers conference, the aboriginal conference, went ahead and was not interrupted or somehow impeded.

That has been very carefully and thoughtfully laid out. I have to say it may not be surprising but it is very disappointing to see the response from the Liberal members in this House today. Basically, without care or without thought, they are rejecting this and are covering themselves in very technical terms.

I heard the government House leader say earlier today that this motion was about tearing down the House. I thought that was so

Supply

absurd. This motion is actually the direct opposite of that. This motion is about trying to do things in an orderly way to preserve Parliament in order to deal with its business in the coming weeks. This would include dealing with the estimates that would come up on December 8, ensuring that an election was not held over the Christmas period and ensuring that people did indeed have the second Gomery report, which is a very critical factor for people in terms of determining what they would do in that election.

All those tests have been met. Every issue the Liberals brought forward as an excuse as to why they could not have an election has been answered as a result of this motion and the proposals from the three opposition parties.

Having said that, and having now heard Liberal members one after the other tell us why they just cannot accept this, we can come to no other conclusion but that they are desperate to play this out and to move through the Christmas period and get into a period where they can go around in a freeloading, free expense pre-election campaign with no accountability present in this House. That is really what this choice is about.

I would defend this motion by saying it is a principled motion with integrity to do the right thing.

The government is choosing a course of action that only benefits its own political agenda. It is about the Liberals manipulating the political agenda to get themselves into the spring when they think they can be in a better situation to go into an election.

• (1555)

It is not a surprise to us that they would take that kind of route. That is what we have come to expect in terms of how the Liberals have done business over the past dozen years. In fact, it is the very reason we are in this incredible environment of dealing with corruption in Canadian politics and in the Liberal Party. It is because of the way they operate.

We have this motion before us today. The Prime Minister has a choice to make. He can accept this compromise and work with the other parties in the House to do something that is reasonable for Canadians, or the Liberals can be hell bent on their own partisan agenda to engineer it as they want to engineer it, but everybody can see that and everybody can see exactly what is taking place.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must admit I wholeheartedly agree with the beginning of the member's speech when she stated that this is a very unusual motion. Indeed, it is very unusual. Unfortunately, the whole thing went downhill from there.

A case in point, the member illustrated her point by saying that the government likes to make commitments toward health care, but later on finally takes some action. What exactly is the motion? It says that the NDP does not have any confidence in government so it should be dissolved, but not now, later. Once again, the logic is absolutely absent. I have always thought of the New Democratic Party as being completely divorced from logic and now that has been proven quite clearly.

Supply

My question pertains to another comment the hon. member made. She referred to the second Gomery report, for which she is waiting. The Prime Minister committed to calling the election within 30 days of the Gomery report. Why does she not just wait? She should follow her own advice and do that for the spring election.

This particular motion is absolutely devoid of any logic and is not clear at all.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, if the member would read the motion, it is very straightforward and very logical.

The motion does not include the word “confidence”. It is not a confidence motion. It simply sets out a date for an election to be called that is based on the situation we are in, to ensure that legislation can be approved and that we do not have a Christmas election.

I would say to the hon. member, no one in their right mind would agree that somehow the Liberals can just keep spinning it out and go out on a pre-election campaign at public expense when the House is not even sitting. There would be no accountability, no question period and no legislation in that period. Why on earth should one party be entitled to do that given this situation?

I would say to the hon. member that yes, the second Gomery report is very important. Based on the timing laid out in this motion, Canadians will have that report. They will be able to make up their own minds. Maybe that is what the Liberals are afraid of. They want to have all of the spinoffs and to manage what they want to say before they get into a campaign. We say let Canadians have that report and let us have an election, then people can make up their own minds.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I come from a sparsely populated and beautiful region of which I am extremely proud. One day, I decided to settle there, to try to improve its economy and contribute to that region. However, this beautiful region is grappling with serious economic problems, due to the softwood lumber dispute, in particular, but also agricultural problems and cull cows, not to mention plant closures.

This government has a number of means at its disposal, but over the past three years, no measures proved effective or at least were taken, particularly to resolve the softwood lumber crisis.

When people pay 50% of their income taxes to Ottawa, they have the right to expect that the government will assume its responsibilities. However, over the past year, they have witnessed one of the worst scandals in Canadian history.

When I take part in activities or meetings, and when I talk to people on the street, I realize that they are disgusted with what is happening here. They believe that this government should no longer be in power, because it no longer has the moral authority to govern.

I want my colleague to tell me what people in her part of the country are feeling with regard to this scandal. How is this party, whose motion we are supporting today, justified in asking the government to call an election? In my opinion, the NDP's offer is a way out for this government. Why not seize this opportunity?

I want to know what the people in her riding think about the sponsorship scandal.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the hon. member that there are many issues. He mentioned softwood lumber which has had a devastating impact on local communities. I am from British Columbia and many of my local communities have been impacted by this issue. People are unemployed as a result of the crisis and as a result of inaction by the government, and the inability of the Prime Minister to stand up to George W. Bush on the softwood lumber tariffs.

I would agree that these issues have absolutely not been resolved by this Liberal government and Liberals will be held to account for this.

In terms of the timing of the election, I would reiterate that the motion put forward by the leader of the NDP was agreed to by that member's leader and the Conservative Party leader. It was an effort to show cooperation and compromise. The timing of the election would allow people to make a choice in terms of looking at the Gomery report. It was also an effort to ensure that an election would not be held over the Christmas period which most of our constituents have told us they do not want to see.

From that point of view, the motion provides the kind of compromise that meets the Bloc member's concerns and also the concerns of other members of the House. It ensures that the timing of the election would not disrupt the Christmas period.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Vancouver East, who brings to bear a sensibility and sense of compromise to this debate and in her work as our House leader.

I would like to bring us back in time for a moment and recall the context from which the current Prime Minister spoke from the hustings in the last federal election, in a moment of what I would suggest was sheer desperation as he watched his numbers slide and the potential for losing his majority government which he craved for so long.

In these desperate days of June, the Prime Minister said the Liberal Party shared the same values as the New Democratic Party of Canada. He said that we drew from the same well. How far from the truth has the government proven itself? How far from that statement has the government proven itself?

If we recall the very first days of Parliament, games were being played with even the throne speech as to whether the House would fall. The New Democrats stepped forward and said that we would not play these games. We wanted this place to function. We wanted Parliament to work for Canadians.

Supply

I will remind the Liberal members present and those watching, and those who may have made the misfortune of voting Liberal in the last election, of the values that New Democrats hold which are not shared by the government. This has been proven through the last year and a half or so. We value public health care in this country. It was through the hard work of Tommy Douglas when people believed it to be an impossibility. It was the origins of the New Democratic Party that said this is something we must build for a sense of justice in this country.

We built the public health care system through a minority Parliament. We sustained, to the best of our ability, the public health care system. When we brought forward very clear and succinct proposals to the Liberal government to curb the privatization of health care and shorten wait times, that is increasing in this country, we received an answer that said this was very interesting. We were told that we will see about it maybe 10 years from now, once the current spending has gone through. That is unbelievable. That is not sharing the values of what New Democrats hold dear.

When it comes to the environment, I have the fortune to be the environment critic for my party. I have watched over this period in the House of Commons the rhetoric of wanting to protect the environment and to encourage sound environmental policies. The government brought forward a grand and incredible total of two environment bills: one of them a housekeeping bill and the other one of some moderate substance taken from various compositions of opposition bills from previous years.

That is the ambition that the government holds toward the environment. When it comes to climate change and Kyoto, the money set aside was almost \$4 billion and just barely \$1 billion of it has been spent.

We should all take a moment and thank all of our lucky stars for the Auditor General whose persistence and diligence brought forward by an inquiring press and the sheer ability to finally have a little freedom of information and access to information exposed the entire sponsorship scandal. It brought to the light of day what many of us suspected and what some I would suggest on the Liberal benches knew in their hearts was a sense of entitlement and corruption that had been going on within the party for so long that it precipitated the last federal election and indeed is with us still today.

When the Prime Minister rose in the House to answer the question from our member for Ottawa Centre about cases of entitlement that have gone on since that time in this new Parliament at the behest and will of the Prime Minister, many of us quietly hoped that the Prime Minister would show some resolve and humility after such an indictment by Judge Gomery, the Auditor General and many within the party, to come forward and say that the cases of David Dingwall and the cases of blatant patronage will stop. We would end this. We released the seven point ethics package. The government has ignored it. It has continued on in this light of entitlement.

When we brought forward our health care proposals, when we brought forward a sound Kyoto plan with timelines and targets to address the growing concern of climate change with real numbers and real targets, the government dismissed it. Instead, it brought forward what can at best be called a discussion paper about the environment, a discussion paper about climate change, giving no

sense of urgency to the file and that business as usual will continue. This is the legacy that the government will leave behind as it leaves office.

• (1605)

Another value that we, New Democrats, hold very dear to our hearts is standing up for Canadians, standing up for our sovereignty and sense of unity, and standing up when we deal with our international trading partners when it comes to issues like water diversion and softwood lumber.

It was with great chagrin and sadness, when our international trade minister was in Vancouver some weeks ago, that I learned there would be at least two more years in the softwood lumber dispute and potentially more. What plan for action is there? We have lost over \$5 billion over a number of years and this has been going on for more than a decade.

This is a dispute that is hurting communities across this country. It is shutting down mills. It is emptying the life, blood and soul of our communities. The government comes forward and says they are just going to have to hold on a couple more years because it does not have an answer. It does not have a willingness to do what it takes to end the dispute. It claims victory after victory and continually the lawyers that we hire become wealthier and wealthier.

One last value that we hold, although there are many more and the list is exhaustive, is the value of democracy, the sense that the representatives of this place, who are elected in a free and democratic society, can come forward to this place and cast a decision that is both legal and makes common sense.

The motion before us, put forward by the leader of the New Democrats, does exactly that. It proposes to avoid the holiday season. It would allow families to be together. It would allow the Canadian public to focus on things that are important, a time of reflection, and for rejoicing and being together. Thereafter, at the ballot boxes, they can deal with the sense of entitlement and corruption of this government.

I know that secretly many members, even in the government's own backbenches, think this is a reasonable compromise. Yet, the government will ignore the will of this House, not for the first time but for the fifth time in the brief history of this minority Parliament.

There is virtually nothing consistent with the values that the Liberal government has shown and the values that we, New Democrats, hold dear to our hearts. The Prime Minister claims to have drawn upon the mutual well between the Liberals and New Democrats. The well of the Liberals is contaminated. It is not a well that I would draw sustenance from. There must be a boil water advisory which Canadians should listen to when they head to the ballot boxes, whenever that happens, because this is not a well of values and morality that anyone would want to hold dear. Canadians do not hold dear the sense of entitlement or culture of corruption. That is not the Canadian value system. It is certainly not a value of the New Democratic Party system. Those are not our values.

Supply

I come from northwestern British Columbia. We have a common sense approach to issues. We have many issues presented to us that have very strong and divergent opinions. I will point to a number of them. Yet, even in a place of great diversity where the opinions can stray from one end of the spectrum to the other, we have found in a number of cases the will and desire to form a consensus, that common sense must prevail and we are willing to compromise.

A fascinating example, which the Liberal government has promoted for quite a while and which for the life of me is beyond explanation, is opening up salmon farming in our communities. Time and time again the communities have said they are not interested and that they do not want these things. The Liberal government, through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, is both the supposed protector of wild salmon and also the promoter of farm salmon, which has brought up a number of contentious issues.

On this issue, in our riding of Skeena—Bulkley Valley in the northwest of British Columbia, commercial and sport fishermen and women, first nations and the public have unified around this issue. People who would very rarely sit together at a table and be willing to compromise have shown a compromise to say they will stand against the will of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the government in its misled promotion of such a dangerous activity.

This culture of entitlement must end. We must have a moment to decide upon this. We have brought forward and negotiated a compromise with the other opposition parties, an option that would allow important things to take place, important legislation and bills to be carried forward through the holiday season. Then, it would allow Canadians to pass judgment on that culture of entitlement and to no longer believe in the blurred morality that the government shows time and time again when it comes to its friends and supporters. It would allow Canadians to pass judgment in a time of the House's choosing, all in the full sense of what it is to be a democratic nation.

•(1610)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the arguments of the members opposite as to why we should go to an election. I want to be very clear that we on this side wish to carry on the business of government. We have no intention of calling a Christmas election. Canadians do not want a Christmas election.

In fact, prominent Canadians such as Elizabeth May, the Executive Director of the Sierra Club of Canada, spoke about the proposed timing of the opposition parties' timetable to bring down the government. She says that it poses a serious threat to the success of global climate negotiations.

Buzz Hargrove, President of the Canadian Auto Workers union states that we should try to make the government work, that there is just too much to be done to force an election. Even other prominent Canadians such as Phil Fontaine of the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations has grave concerns about the opposition motion.

Let us be clear. What is at issue here, more than anything else, is either we have respect for the parliamentary procedures of the House or we do not. It is very clear how we can have an election in the country. The Prime Minister can go to the Governor General and

dissolve Parliament or the House can lose confidence in the government, thereby forcing an election. Those are the only provisions available to us by the Standing Orders. We have to fundamentally respect that process.

In a joint declaration, all three party leaders, including the leader of the NDP, stated that only the final vote on the Speech from the Throne, the final vote on the budget, the global votes on the main estimates and those explicitly identified as questions of confidence could be considered as such. That was the argument then and it was a valid argument. It still should be a value argument today.

•(1615)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, that already has been tried today when the motion was first introduced in the House. The Liberals tried to move away from the democratic right of Parliament to do exactly what we are doing today, which is debating this very legal and lawful motion. There was a point of order brought forward, various were arguments made and since defeated. Respect for parliamentary procedures is exactly what we are doing.

When it comes to the environment, it is laudable that my hon. colleague has quoted various people who have made comments in the press. It is incredible that Canadians have watched their smog days double. We have watched the pollution rise dramatically over the last 12 years. It is incredible that there is any suggestion that the government, in its deathbed conversions, has any serious intent when it comes to issues such as the environment and first nations. It has had such an incredibly long period of time. Laments are being heard across the land for such false and empty arguments. They simply cannot be tolerated any more by the people of Canada.

In terms of a Christmas election, this is exactly to what the motion speaks. It says let us avoid the holiday season, let us use common sense and a compromise and arrive at that. It is only blustering and arrogance that will not allow the Prime Minister and the government to realize that fact.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed listening to the debate today and to some of the specious arguments at best that I have heard from the government as to why we should not go forward with this common sense compromise idea.

Many of them centre around the seniors will not get their raise in January and the infrastructure money will not flow to cities. If my memory serves me, those were all passed in Bill C-43, the budget bill last spring, and there is a problem with delivery. Those guys are great at promising all these programs. We voted them through, being good governance. We worked together. We compromised. We worked on those programs and put them out there for people. However, the Liberals have not delivered them yet. Now they are saying that they are going to withhold them if there is an election. That is ridiculous.

We hear things such as the estimates process will be in jeopardy. That is the supplementary (A) estimates. There are generally supplementary (B) estimates that come in March as well for as much money as the (A) estimates. Those would be in jeopardy under the Prime Minister's game plan for an election.

Supply

There are many different arguments that are specious and not founded in any kind of reality. We saw a budget introduced under a ways and means motion. That is a novel way to do things. This is a novel motion and deserves some serious consideration.

We are hearing rumblings that there may be even a tremendous amount of cash for farmers who will go wanting if this election is called. Farmers are not fooled by that. They already realize they have had announcement after announcement for the last 12 years under the Liberals which have never been delivered.

The argument I would put forward is that the motion deserves some serious consideration. The opposition parties have come together to put this motion forward, and I would like—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, those were excellent comments and an excellent question. People must remember when the Prime Minister went on television and asked for forgiveness and time. He promised to call an election. The first part of his promise would have placed us directly in the time zone we are declaring right now. Justice Gomery said that he would release his second report on December 1. It is undeniable. The Prime Minister has chosen the second part of his promise.

Two months ago the Auditor General's Office said that the government had an incredible addiction to announcements. It loves to make announcements. If it were possible, it would announce the same things six or seven times. She said that before the confetti hit the floor, the Liberals would move on to the next topic. They were not delivering on their announcements.

After 12 years Canadians know better than this blackmail and hostage-taking. It is disrespectful to every constituency.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the motion put forward by the NDP.

Last year, I sought election as the Liberal. I have attempted, since elected last year, to conduct myself in a way that, first and foremost, honours my constituents and helps them with their issues as much as possible, to the best of my ability. I have also tried to do what I think is in the best interests of the country.

I was elected in June last year and came to Ottawa with great expectations of accomplishing things, working with colleagues from all sides of the House.

I often get asked questions like, “What's it like as to be an MP in Ottawa?” I tell people that when I first came here I was struck by the level of collegiality that existed. Members of all sides seem to get along. Sometimes we get things done in committee and even in the House, until the lights and the cameras are turned on in the House of Commons or the spectre of an election appeared. Then all of a sudden, we conduct ourselves in a way that most in Canada find juvenile. Far too often, the business of the nation is replaced with the business of division and partisanship, where real debate is replaced with parliamentary gamesmanship and political posturing. Clearly, that is where we are today.

I am not a constitutional scholar, and I would not claim to be, nor am I a parliamentary expert. I am, however, somebody who believes that Canadians expect us to do work on their behalf and for the betterment of the country. They expect us to work while we are here.

The motion that we are discussing, even the opposition parties agree, is not a matter of confidence. The motion contains three elements meant to confuse Canadians: first, that the Prime Minister should ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament during the week of January 2, 2006; second, that the Prime Minister should ask the Governor General to set February 13, 2006, as the date of the next election; and last, that the Speaker transmit this resolution to the Governor General.

The opposition parties have characterized today's motion as a common sense compromise. In my view, the motion is senseless and is certainly not a compromise.

We already have an unprecedented compromise, unprecedented in Canadian history, when the Prime Minister of Canada has given up one of the great advantages of power: the opportunity to call an election when he sees fit. He indicated some six or seven months ago when we would have this election, and he has stuck to that ever since that point in time. Today, we have this motion.

Who is attempting to benefit from the motion put forward by the NDP? It will not be the NDP, a party that seems to be confusing its own interests with that of Canadians. Clearly, it would be the Conservatives and the Bloc Quebecois members who feel they have the most to gain and who have been able to use the NDP for their objectives. They always have wanted an election. Sadly, the NDP has fallen for this tactic. The NDP has become logistical cover for the Conservatives and the Bloc Quebecois.

In addition to the bizarre nature of today's motion, I have difficulty understanding the approach the opposition are taking in general. On the one hand, they have said that the government has lost the moral authority to govern. If that is the case, why have they not put forward a motion of straight non-confidence today? Instead, they propose a motion that any first year political science student would understand is not the way the parliamentary system works.

Marleau and Montpetit states:

What constitutes a question of confidence in the government varies with the circumstances....It is generally acknowledged, however, that confidence motions may be:

explicitly worded motions which state, in express terms, that the House has, or has not, confidence in the government;

motions expressly declared by the government to be questions of confidence;

implicit motions of confidence, that is, motions traditionally deemed to be questions of confidence, such as motions for the granting of Supply...motions concerning the budgetary policy of the government and motions respecting the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On the one hand, the opposition parties believe the government has lost the authority to govern. Yet the motion suggests that they want the government to continue to govern for another month and a half, a kind of a time-release capsule of non-confidence.

Supply

How can ordinary Canadians not conclude that the motion by the NDP, supported by the other parties, is an attempt to sacrifice hundreds of years of parliamentary tradition at the altar of political opportunism?

They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say they want to pass the government's legislation to implement tax reductions and make energy relief payments to vulnerable Canadians and to pass the supplementary estimates, all matters that indicate confidence, and then tell Canadians the government lacks the confidence of the House of Commons.

● (1620)

The confidence convention lies at the heart of our system of responsible government. In fact, it is the basis for the legitimacy of any government in our system of government.

The leader of the official opposition said on May 10 that the confidence of this chamber is the only democratic mandate the government has. If opposition members truly believe that the government has lost the moral authority to govern, they should take responsibility and act on their principles by defeating the government. They should not be playing games and subverting constitutional principles.

This government will continue to have the confidence of the House until such time as it is lost in a real vote on a clear question. Until such time, the government continues to have the right to govern and to implement its agenda.

There is far too much bravado, posturing and testosterone in this House. I do not intend to add to it, but I want to say this. The Prime Minister has made a direct commitment to Canadians to call an election within 30 days of the final report of the Gomery commission. All of us here have known this for months. I think it is a position that most Canadians support and frankly, that most Canadians expect.

Through today's motion the opposition is asking the Prime Minister to break his promise to Canadians. The Prime Minister has recently confirmed that he will stand by his commitment. Canadians have a right to have all the details from Justice Gomery before we go back to the polls. Given that Justice Gomery will submit his final report on February 1, the Prime Minister's commitment means that we will have an election in March or April anyway. It could mean as little as a month's difference from the timing of this motion.

We also know that Canadians do not want a premature election. By contrast, today's motion proposes that the election take place in the dead of winter. In their rush to have an election, are opposition members not concerned that a winter election might lead to significantly lower voter turnout rates, especially among the elderly, those with physical disabilities and those who go elsewhere in the winter?

The last time we had an election in February was in 1980 and voter participation declined considerably. In May 1979 the participation rate in voting was 75.7%. That declined to 69% in February 1980, then rose back up to 75% in the September 1984 election.

What does not help either is what Canadians see every day in the House, the games, the name calling and the public assassination of people's characters. It does not exactly lead Canadians to go out to vote. Each of us needs to accept some of that responsibility as well.

The Prime Minister promised Canadians that an election will be called within approximately three months. We also know a majority of Canadians support that commitment and do not want an early election. This is all about having an election four to eight weeks earlier than what the Prime Minister has promised and what he has stuck to.

The real question is, whose interests are being served? The answer of course is that the opposition members want a premature election to serve their narrow, partisan self-interests. This motion is therefore no compromise at all.

The government has already stated it cannot support the motion. To do so, the Prime Minister would break his promise to Canadians. In the meantime, our government will continue to move forward to implement its agenda on tax cuts, on energy relief, on unanticipated surplus legislation, on wage earners protection, health care, and so on. It is an agenda I have been proud of and will continue to be proud of.

I realize the opposition could and likely will defeat the government in the coming weeks on a vote of non-confidence. That is entirely legitimate in the parliamentary democracy in which we serve, particularly in a minority situation, but if the opposition members decide to defeat the government, that will be their decision. The opposition parties will therefore have the responsibility to justify to Canadians why we are having an election that nobody particularly wants, particularly when we already have a commitment from the Prime Minister that we will have one in the spring.

There will be a responsibility on the opposition as well to justify to Canadians why important measures could not be passed.

On September 9, 2004 before Parliament resumed following the 2004 election, the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the NDP proposed a series of changes to the rules of the House, changes they argued at the time had to be adopted as soon as the House resumed. One of the proposals included ensuring strict adherence to what constitutes confidence, explaining, and I quote from the statement agreed to by the three opposition leaders:

● (1625)

Only the final vote on the Speech from the Throne, the final vote on the Budget, global votes on the Main Estimates and votes explicitly identified as questions of confidence be considered as such.

On September 10, 2004, the Leader of the Opposition further stated:

I would not want the Prime Minister to think he can simply fail in the House of Commons as a route to another general election. That's not the way our system works.

I think most Canadians will see this motion and all of the feigned outrage for what it really is: political opportunism wrapped in sanctimonious language. It is not just government members who feel this way. I want to quote a couple of sources from my hometown paper, *The Chronicle Herald* in Halifax. An editorial it put out recently referred to this:

For [the leader of the NDP's] sugar-plum motion has all the constitutional force of a letter to Santa Claus.... [The leader of the NDP] doesn't want to wear the downside of a real non-confidence vote in November. But he does want the political upside—the appearance of decisively seizing the moral high ground and bringing down the... government in the wake of the Gomery report.

He wants to have his plum pudding and eat it, too. So he says he has no confidence in the Liberals, while his motion merely wishes them away.

On November 9, speaking about this proposed motion when it was first aired during the break week, *The Chronicle Herald*, which is a great newspaper but it is not a Liberal newspaper, stated:

In the meantime, [the leader of the NDP] has some explaining to do. His official reasons for triggering a winter election, as opposed to the spring one the Liberals have already promised, are spurious at best. The Liberals are no more corrupt than they were in May, when [the leader of the NDP] stayed their execution in exchange for \$4.6 billion more in social spending. In fact, since Justice John Gomery released his findings on the sponsorship scandal, there is less justification to bring down the government over corruption charges...[because] the...Liberals have been [completely] cleared of any wrongdoing.

The Globe and Mail recently referred to this and stated:

Judge Gomery reasonably exonerates [the Prime Minister], who was finance minister during the sponsorship years, of “any blame or carelessness or misconduct”.... Once [he] became Prime Minister two years ago, he behaved honourably and quickly. He shut down the sponsorship program immediately. When the Auditor-General's report became public, he set up the Gomery inquiry and said that those who had broken the rules, the law and the public's trust would pay.

It goes on to say:

[The Prime Minister] deserves great credit for letting Judge Gomery loose on this...affair.

There is way too much political bravado in the House. I do not stand here today daring the opposition to bring us down. I would rather spend Christmas with my family and I think most members feel the same way. I believe most Canadians think that the Prime Minister's timing, which he stated in May and has stuck to ever since, makes sense. The decision of the Prime Minister to forgo his constitutional right and power to call an election and instead committing to one within 30 days of the release of the final Gomery report I think is the biggest compromise in the history of Canadian politics.

This motion is a facade. It is a hoax. It is about one thing: control. The opposition parties are now entrenched. I know some members of the NDP know that as well and do not particularly like where they are headed, but it is where we are all headed right now. Once again, politics trumps policy and the useful work that could be done here will be sacrificed. That is the shame of it.

Let me close by quoting a wonderful Canadian whose wisdom is beyond repute, the great Newfoundlandler Rex Murphy who said, “The leader of the NDP calls this a common sense compromise and he is right. It compromises common sense”.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague opposite.

Supply

During oral question period this afternoon the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food lost his cool and said it was the Bloc Québécois that would prevent a delegation of MPs from attending the WTO meeting from November 28 to December 5, in Hong Kong. It seems that we are the ones who want to have an election. I think it is Quebeckers and Canadians who want to have an election. That is my first point.

Second, I have been here for three years now and for three years I have been listening to the government say it is going to resolve the softwood lumber issue. For three years the Bloc Québécois and the opposition have been giving the government advice in order to make progress on this issue and resolve it. However, again today, the minister said it would be done soon. Third, on November 27 and 28, the first nations meeting would not be compromised and, four, the funding would be approved.

I believe the government has a good alternative for resolving all these issues before an election. If we refer to the motion by the New Democratic Party on this opposition day, it reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, during the week of January 2, 2006, the Prime Minister should ask her Excellency the Governor General of Canada to dissolve the 38th Parliament and to set the date for the 39th general election for Monday, February 13, 2006; and

That the Speaker transmit this resolution to Her Excellency the Governor General.

My colleague could still spend Christmas and New Year with his family. I would like his opinion on this. I believe it is a good alternative for everyone.

• (1635)

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, this kind of alternative is no alternative at all.

The motion we are debating today so that we can avoid the spectre of a Christmas election would just as effectively be reached if we had a motion that in the opinion of the House, Christmas for this year happened on May 13 instead of on December 25. That is as realistic. That does not change the fact that Christmas is coming. If the election started the first week in January, people would still be campaigning at Christmas anyway.

I am very impressed by one comment that my colleague made. He said he thought it was Canadians who wanted an election right now. He is wrong about that. If an election comes, that is fine. We will all do our campaigning. At the end of the day, it probably does not matter to Canadians as much as those members think it does, but Canadians would rather have an election in the spring. I know that the people in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour think the Prime Minister's proposal for an election in the spring makes a lot more sense.

We are talking about somewhere between four and eight weeks' difference to give Canadians what they want. They want a chance to see the final report of Justice John Gomery and the work that he did. Then they can make their decision and we can go to the polls. That makes a lot of sense to me.

Supply

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not agree with much of the address given by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, but I did enjoy the delivery.

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and other Liberals have said that it is in Canadians' interests to get the second Gomery report because the Prime Minister promised all the details of the Gomery inquiry would come out. That was very disingenuous, given that there will be no new details, no new facts, no new pronouncements in Gomery part 2.

Gomery part 2 is about recommendations to ensure what the Liberal Party did to this country will not happen again. Part 1 was about what the Liberals did, how they did it, and what they did with the money. Believe me, people will have that right in front of them whenever the election is held. To argue that Canadians need Gomery part 2 in order to have the whole picture is not accurate at all. It is not the point.

My question for the member is regarding the opposition days. The member and others have gone out of their way to say that the opposition has a constitutional means to put the question of confidence through non-confidence motions on opposition days. Fair enough, but it has to be underscored and people have to remember that the government has control of when those opposition days happen. The government chose to delay them and moved them later into the session. Why? Because it would bring us right up against Christmas if we tried to hold a non-confidence vote.

How can the hon. member suggest that the opposition has all the rights it needs to bring down the government through non-confidence motions when the government moves our opposition days into a time period when it would obviously run into Christmas? How can the member—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I must give my hon. colleague about a 9.8 on delivery. I do not think he needed the microphone to ask the question.

He talked about a number of issues. I cannot get to them all because I do not have time, but let me talk about one.

He asked why we have to wait for the second Gomery report. He might have asked that last year. I did not hear anybody complaining in May or June when the Prime Minister suggested that we should have both reports. Justice Gomery is working away right now. Is his work not valuable now? Are his recommendations not worthwhile to Canadians? I think Canadians think they are. Canadians want to know what Justice Gomery has to say. They have faith in Justice Gomery. Justice Gomery did his work when he brought forward the fact-finding piece of his job exonerating the Prime Minister of any wrongdoing or carelessness.

Canadians want to know what the next step is and how we should fix this. I suspect one of the reasons those members would like to go to an election is that some of the recommendations have already been implemented by this government.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my colleague's speech with interest. He reflects the mindset that has prevailed ever since this government has been in power. It has never accepted its minority position.

A minority government has to take the opinion of the House, and therefore of the other parties in that House, into consideration. Today, a practical solution has been proposed which would mean no election over the Christmas period. The only ones against that today have been the Liberals. Theirs is the only party that has voiced opposition to the proposal. All others are in favour.

We know that people need to see a change in government. In Quebec in particular, they want to see some sanction exercised on the behaviour of the Liberal Party of Canada. They will make their voices heard in the election held before, or after, the holiday season depending on the Liberal government's sense of compromise. That government, its Prime Minister in particular, is behaving as if it were still a majority government, and as if it would rather bang its head on the wall than listen to others' points of view.

When it comes down to it, are the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of Canada not acting this way out of fear of losing power? Public opinion, particularly in Quebec, is strongly in favour of returning the Liberal Party of Canada to the opposition.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I did not sense a question in my colleague's remarks, but this gives me a chance to comment on the timing. I think the question of when we have an election matters to Canadians. As I said, it probably matters more than the extent to which they would actually be involved in an election. Most Canadians are not that involved. I do not think they want us knocking up their doors on Christmas Eve. They do not want us cluttering up the airwaves with the kinds of attack ads we have seen from the opposition parties in election campaigns recently. I do think it matters to Canadians.

What if we had not had a proposal? What if the Prime Minister of this country had not said to Canadians that he was telling us when we are going to have the next election, that he knew he had the right to call the election when he wanted to but he was giving up that right because he thought it was important enough to tell us that within 30 days of the release of Justice John Gomery's report we would go to the polls? He has given us that option.

People do not understand why we have to go through this whole process for four or six weeks, this political partisan rhetoric in this House. I think Canadians trust Justice John Gomery. Canadians want to know the truth. They want to know the final story and so does the Liberal Party.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Medicinal Marijuana; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence; and the hon. member for Langley, the Environment.

Supply

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address the House today on a very important motion. I wish to advise the House that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

This is one of the more important things that we will debate during the time and life of this minority government, for the simple reason that we are trying to find an agreement on when we can hold the election. Nothing can be more important to the life of a Parliament than its ending, because at that point, of course, all stops.

That is the whole issue. We are trying to prevent the grinding down of the House to the point where nothing happens. We will quickly get to that point if we do not find an agreement. We are almost there. We now have the Conservatives, the Bloc and the NDP in agreement through a process of compromise. It has been stated by MPs from each of those other two caucuses and our caucus that everybody indeed gave a little. It is the nature of compromise. For the most part, it is what makes Canada tick.

Here we are, in the most Canadian tradition, three-quarters of the way to a compromise that would meet all the requirements that everyone has, at least to the point that they could live with it. Everybody gets their main points and gives a little on a few other things.

The Gomery report was mentioned by the previous speaker. Our compromise today allows that to come out. People will have the Gomery report, part two, even though I would say with all due respect that I could not imagine members of a caucus in the House saying that they are going to disagree with any recommendation that Justice Gomery makes in part two. Notwithstanding that, it will still come out prior to election day. The Prime Minister said that was important. We disagreed with him on his point, but the compromise provides that part two of Gomery will be in the hands of voters before they go into the balloting booth. That meets one of the government's requirements.

More important, this compromise allows us to get through a number of bills that we have all agreed need to get through the House. As an example, I will mention Bill C-55. Again, it is not a perfect piece of legislation, but thanks to the work of my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, there are things in there that are definitely going to benefit working people. We are prepared to see that it gets through.

Now, with the amendment to it, I would hope that we are not going to get bogged down in voting procedures, but I hear that is possible. That would be a shame. It is an important bill. With the minor amendment, to which the government has agreed, we definitely will have moved the yardsticks forward, at least notionally.

It does not, however, address the issues that are contained in Bill C-281, the workers first bill. Again, it was introduced by my colleague from Winnipeg Centre. This is the bill that in the case of a bankruptcy takes pensions and puts them to the top of the list so that workers and the decades of work that they have done are not lost and they are the first ones to receive whatever money might be available afterward. The banks, the suppliers and the government right now stand in line ahead of the workers. Bill C-55 does not do what Bill C-281 would, but it will make some improvements if the common

sense compromise that the opposition is putting forward today passes that bill.

Another example is Bill C-66, the energy rebates. I do not imagine there is anybody in the House who is opposed to the notion that we would try get some relief to those individuals and families who are in most need given what is happening to fuel prices and the fact that we are heading into a Canadian winter. That bill can pass under this compromise. There are two other bills that are equally important to other Canadians. I will not get into the details. They will pass the House under this compromise.

• (1645)

We might ask ourselves why it is not happening. I would have to say it goes to the same reason why there was a Gomery report in the first place and why there is a rage across the land. It is the arrogance of the current governing Liberal Party. It is pure arrogance.

The Prime Minister of the day does not have the support of almost two-thirds of Canadians and almost two-thirds of the House, yet the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party believe that under their culture of entitlement they are entitled to govern as if they were almost imperial. They are there and there they shall stay, they believe.

All we are asking is for a little humility and a little compromise and for them to recognize the fact that even though they have been driving around in the limos for a dozen years without a break, in the last election the party that is currently in power was not returned with a majority. The people of Canada sent that party a message. The problem is that the Prime Minister will not listen to that message. He will not listen to Canadians. He will not listen to other parliamentarians. He will not listen to anyone except other Liberals and their strategists, who, by the way, are still doing quite well in Canada, thanks very much.

Notwithstanding Gomery, and I am not suggesting there is anything wrong, but boy it did raise the eyebrows when we saw another article today about another contract to Mr. David Herle, who is with Decima Research, to do work for the recent mini-budget.

I will just say parenthetically that what is interesting is the fact that the limit for having to go to tender is \$25,000. Under that, contracts do not have to go to tender. Is that not interesting? It is pure coincidence, I am sure.

I am absolutely certain it is a mere coincidence that even though \$25,000 is the limit, Mr. Herle managed to just tuck underneath at \$23,112. Therefore, there was no need to bother going out to ask anyone else if they might want some of that work. The government can continue to give it to whom? To the key strategist for the Liberal Party of Canada. It does not stop.

The Prime Minister and the Liberal Party ask what the difference is. Eight weeks, they say, and they ask why the opposition is getting all cranked up about this. We are very concerned about continuing to give the keys to the Challenger jets and the limos and all the other perks and tools of office to a party that clearly is prepared to use Canadians' money for their own partisan purposes. We want to bring it to a halt. We think that Canadians want to bring all of this to a halt, but we will let the election decide that part of it.

Supply

It has been mentioned that this is somehow unconstitutional, that we are doing this horrible thing to the traditions of Parliament, that it is terrible what we are doing in breaking with tradition and almost being illegal in what we are doing.

First of all, let us make the record very clear. It has already been mentioned that a challenge to this motion was placed this morning. By whom? Let us ask ourselves who would challenge it. Oh, right, the Liberals. They challenged it and tried to deny this motion even coming to the floor. The Speaker ruled that it was entirely in order. Nothing that we are talking about right now vis-à-vis this motion is out of order.

As for the issue of the constitutionality of what we are attempting to do, I am not a parliamentary expert, but I was the Deputy Speaker in the Ontario legislature and I have some notion of how the rules of Parliament run. I have to say that when the Prime Minister stands up and makes a public commitment to a particular date or time period for an election, that is all it is. He does not have to follow that. The Prime Minister can change his mind any time he wants. There is nothing to hold him to that. There is no constitutional trigger, no legal lock-in, to this position. It is just that the Prime Minister has said that he is going to have this election sometime in the early spring.

All we are asking is that it be recalibrated. All we are asking is that the Prime Minister stand up and say that in the interests of Parliament, out of respect for the minority Parliament Canadians sent here, out of respect for the need to get these bills through, out of respect for the first ministers conference with the aboriginal leaders, out of respect for all those things, he is prepared to revise the date on which he would call the election, at which point he will trigger his constitutional authority and ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and issue the writs for an election. That is all.

● (1650)

It is not a big parliamentary deal, but it does seem to be a big personal deal for the Prime Minister. We are asking, we are imploring, we are pleading, and we are demanding that the Prime Minister of the day respect the majority of the House and the majority of the country. We are demanding that the Prime Minister give us an election timeframe that we can all live with, that is fair to everyone, and gets the important business of this House done. That is a good common sense compromise.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my colleague's very passionate speech. In fact, we could hear him even unmiked in the lobby. In connection with his remarks, "It's not a big deal, we plead with", I am drawn to ask my colleague a question.

People are being described as lacking moral authority. I am a new MP and I am hearing remarks that are completely off the wall from some of my colleagues in this House. It is a serious thing to say a government has lost moral authority. At the same time they say, "not right away, we are just putting you in the *Dead Man Walking* category". That is the context. However, they lack the courage to put a gun to its head to bring this dysfunctional Parliament to an end.

In my opinion, the speeches are rather hypocritical. They say that there is a fine agreement here and there, but we are good enough to adopt certain bills, which are not as bad as all that, coming from a Parliament and a government lacking moral authority. The remarks are both hypocritical and contradictory.

I would like to hear from my colleague on this. How can they be prepared to support the bills of a government that has no moral authority? How can all that simply be put to one side. I am curious to hear what the member has to say.

● (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member taking the time to listen. At least the member said she heard me in the back lobby. The question though is whether other members were listening. That is the real issue. They may hear, but are they listening?

The member's question basically was asking me if I am a hypocrite by virtue of the nature of what I said. My answer would be that if there is any hypocrisy happening here, it has to be around a Prime Minister saying that one of his most important priorities, one of the sole purposes for him wanting to be the Prime Minister, is to address the democratic deficit. Then, by the same token, he turns around and denies, in a minority Parliament situation, an opportunity for all of the caucuses to work together in the interests of Canadians. To me, that is the final definition of hypocrisy.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his comments. They are quite appropriate to the situation.

The Prime Minister says he wants to govern this country. In my riding, I have three major issues: a forest industry that is in very serious trouble, an agricultural situation that is absolutely depressing, and Saskatchewan quite literally is getting the short end of the stick by a mile and a half on equalization.

I would suggest to the Minister of Finance that he should probably talk to a real estate lawyer and do a basic statement of adjustments to find out how phoney his math is on this issue in that province.

Where is the Prime Minister? What is the Prime Minister doing? He says he wants to govern the country. He is in South Korea. That is, I believe, the 14th international trip by the Prime Minister in the space of 12 months. He wants to govern and I wish he would govern. We have pressing issues in my riding, desperate issues that need to be addressed by the government, but what is the Prime Minister doing? His urgent priority is to go to South Korea.

I wonder if the member opposite could provide some commentary about the Prime Minister's interest in dealing with the issues that are really important to Canadians in this country and really address—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for taking the time to rise and ask the question.

All of us remain totally perplexed by the messages that come out. On the one hand, the government House leader and the Prime Minister continue to say they want to get something done. They want to work with Parliament. As the member has noted, they want to continue governing. What better opportunity, in a minority situation, to actually sit down with the leaders of the opposition party and try to come to an agreement?

The history has been that the ministers each of us have been dealing with have been fairly good about giving us briefing sessions on what they are doing. However, there has never really been a mindset on the part of the Liberals, as government, that they no longer can make whatever decisions they want by virtue of the imperial rule that a majority gives them. They have never really understood that in a minority government, they have to work with others. They have to get along with the other kids in the playground.

There has been no desire on the part of the government to work together. Is it any surprise? If I had a concern going into this, one of them would be that the Liberals might actually look more agreeable than they have been all along and turn the tables, but they could not even step down from their arrogance long enough to see that.

• (1700)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the member for Hamilton Centre for sharing his time with me and I want to begin by echoing something that the member said.

One of the elders from the Cowichan tribes in my riding has expressed a concern over the years about how often we talk and how we do not listen. He said, "I know you can hear me, but are you listening?" In the great tradition of Parliament, we have often thought that this was a place for debate, discussion, the exchange of ideas and thoughts, and sometimes for compromise.

I want to put compromise in the context of the kind of language that is important for parliamentarians to bring to this discussion. According to the Oxford English dictionary, compromise is a coming to terms or arrangement of a dispute by concessions on both sides; partial surrender of one's position for the sake of coming to terms; the concession or terms offered by either side.

It seems that is what we are talking about when we talk about compromise today. We are talking about various parties coming together and coming up with a solution that will work for all Canadians, not just for one particular group who are desperate to hang onto power for however many days they can do that.

In the tradition of other great parliamentarians, I want to quote from Lester B. Pearson's Nobel acceptance speech. This is a good reminder of the kind of tradition that we have the opportunity to bring here, the kind of discussion and debate that we could have the opportunity to engage in. Mr. Pearson said:

In his response to the situations he has to meet as a person, the individual accepts the fact that his own single will cannot prevail against that of his group or his society. If he tries to make it prevail against the general will, he will be in trouble. So he compromises and agrees and tolerates.

It seems to me we have 37% of the House unwilling to compromise. We have 37% of the House unwilling to tolerate the kind of discussion that brings another view to the table, that says

Supply

there are important issues before the House right now that we want to clear up. There are important issues such as Bill C-55, Bill C-66, and the first ministers and aboriginal meeting next week.

These are important issues that we are willing to stay at the table and work together on to ensure that these issues are passed satisfactorily for Canadians. This is an opportunity for the House to demonstrate its goodwill in meeting the needs of Canadians.

Let me briefly speak about Bill C-66. We are coming up to wintertime. We have snowflakes falling in Ottawa as I speak. This is an important bill to ensure that Canadians who are the least advantaged and who are at most risk in our world have access to the benefits that are available under Bill C-66. I would urge all members to look at this very good compromise solution that has been offered by the NDP and work hard together to pass this important piece of legislation.

We have heard much talk over the last several months about democratic deficit. We have heard the Prime Minister talk about how important it is for the government and for all parties to look at electoral reform. The member for Ottawa Centre put a very good proposal before the House. We thought we had a commitment to move forward on electoral reform that would make a difference on how each and every one of us behaved in the House, and how each and every citizen was represented in the House. Have we had any action? None. We are still waiting for that process to be put in place.

The reason I specifically wanted to talk about electoral reform is because the very premise of having electoral reform, a proportional representation system in the House, would mean that every one of us would have to come to the House with a willingness and a tolerance for compromise. It would be the very foundation of working together around a collaborative consensus kind of a way. It would be the very foundation of ensuring each and every Canadian voice was heard when members voted.

• (1705)

It would be the very foundation of working together around a collaborative consensus kind of a way. It would be the very foundation of making sure each and every Canadian voice was heard when they voted.

We have had a Prime Minister who has thumbed his nose at electoral reform. He has thumbed his nose at the democratic deficit and it appears that he will thumb his nose at this very sensible compromise that the House has proposed, a compromise that would allow us to clear the business, avoid a holiday election, avoid Liberal campaigning at taxpayer expense in January and have us go to the polls in February. That seems like a very excellent compromise.

I want to talk a bit more about electoral reform and how important it is for the House to address this democratic deficit. Many of us are very well aware of the fact that only 65 out of the about 300 seats in this House are held by women. We know from studies that have been all over the world that electoral reform increases the equality of representation in our democratic systems. Again, we had this opportunity to do this. Have we had any action? Absolutely not. The Prime Minister has not said one about moving forward on these kinds of initiatives.

Supply

In these last days, whether there is other action that happens over this next couple of weeks or whether we reach our natural conclusion in the middle of December, we have heard much talk over this last couple of days about how the sky is falling. We have heard much talk from the government, the Liberal benches, about how if we do not do this the world will come to an end and if we do not do that the world will come to an end. The Liberals have been around for 12 years and all of a sudden, with a few weeks left in the sitting of the House, all of this business is going to be done at the very last minute. I am shocked.

The Liberals have had 12 years to get on with this kind of business. We have had 18 months for the Liberals to get on with this kind of business and we still wait.

Today I met with the National Farmers Union and they were talking about the kinds of issues that must be taken care of in the next 10 days. I asked them how long the discussion had been going on. It has been eight years that we have been talking about these very important issues for farmers and in the last week the deal is coming very close to fruition.

What has been happening for the last 7 years and 51 weeks? All of a sudden the deal is coming to a conclusion. What a miracle. Of course it is just before Christmas and perhaps miracles do happen at this time of year, but it seems like there are so many miracles that are happening all of a sudden.

It is beyond belief that the work that could have been done over the last 12 years has not been accomplished. We still do not have enough affordable housing in the country. We still have women who do not qualify for employment insurance. We still have women who are living on substandard wages because of the Canada pension plan that does not recognize their needs. We still have farmers who do not have a decent income. We still do not have any resolution to the softwood lumber issue and many other issues, such as the BSE. I could go on and on about the failure of the government to meet its commitments to the Canadian people.

Why would we now not come to this compromise solution that would allow us to finish the business that is currently before the House, go into an election that misses the Christmas period and give Canadians a chance to talk about the kind of government they want, the kind of solutions that the NDP brings forward, of government that truly puts the interests of Canadians first.

We talk about the common sense compromise which is actually predicated on the fact that people are willing to come to the table and talk to each other. It is predicated upon the fact that we listen to people in a meaningful way and that we are willing to take our agendas and park them at the door to really work on solutions in the interests of all Canadians.

● (1710)

However we can see that is not been what has been before us. I would urge all members of this House to support the motion that is before the House today so we can give Canadians an opportunity to see the business concluded, enjoy Christmas with their families and then call an election in January.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. The member is one of the people with whom I had my first interview when I arrived here in Parliament. We had in fact both just been elected in the last election on June 28, 2004.

I remember some of the things she said, and some of the similar things I said. Since we had not had a minority government for a quarter of a century, we thought that this was a splendid opportunity for this Parliament to work cooperatively together.

There has been cooperation. I am somewhat surprised at the tenor of her speech. She seems to be telling all Canadians, incorrectly, that the government is refusing to compromise because it is refusing to go along with this game proposed in the NDP's motion. As far as I know, the NDP succeeded in the spring in getting certain budgetary principles across to the government. So there have been compromises in this Parliament. There have also been less positive moments, on the other hand. There have been exchanges in which things have at times been said that are, I hope, regretted.

I have a question to ask my colleague. Is it not true that the compromise that we would like to see here is based not so much on substance as strictly on a question of procedure?

It surprises me that this would come from the NDP, the New Democratic Party. There seems to be a desire to impose on us new rules as far as democracy is concerned, in fact, the way in which a Parliament ends. From what I have always understood—and she may wish to correct me on this—there were two ways to achieve this. The government could decide when the election would be called or, in the case of a minority government, the opposition parties would lose confidence, they would simply declare that they had lost confidence and were leaving.

Is this apparent desire to invent a new procedure not rather an attempt to conceal the fact that, on the NDP side, they want to go to an election, but they lack the courage to do so immediately?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I need to say that compromise does not only happened once. Compromise is an ongoing process where parties can learn to work together as issues emerge.

When we are talking about substance versus procedure, the Prime Minister already talking about an election date in the spring. Circumstances have now changed somewhat. We can now revisit that and compromise as new information is provided to the House by the second Gomery report. This would be an opportunity to take a look at this new piece of information. If the situation has changed it would give Parliament an opportunity to suggest a new election date in the spirit of compromise.

We have talked about health care over the last couple of weeks. We offered up a compromise solution but the Liberals would not come to the table in a meaningful way to save health care. We want to stop the creeping privatization of health care. It was just another way of not having that kind of thing happen.

When we talk about a minority Parliament and the opportunity to make it work in a different way, all parties must come to the table for that happen. It means that we must be willing to dialogue in a different way and that has not happened. That is why we have ended up in the situation that we are in today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for my colleague across the aisle.

It is amazing to see how afraid the Liberal ministers are these days. First I saw the Minister of Foreign Affairs afraid that he would not be participating in the WTO meeting. Then the Minister of the Environment is afraid that he will not be going to the conference on the environment in Montreal. The Prime Minister is also afraid—the great Prime Minister who travels. The last time that a Prime Minister travelled like this, his name was Brian Mulroney, it was in 1984, and we all know what happened. Judging by the way the Prime Minister is travelling, there could be change in the air.

I would just like to ask my colleague: if these ministers are so worried and nervous, would the normal thing not be for them to accept the NDP proposal and keep to their program, do their work, and allow Quebeckers and Canadians to have a good holiday season. We will be waiting for them afterwards, to defeat them.

• (1715)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Order, please. It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

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

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the vote be deferred until the end of government orders on Monday, November 21.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The vote is deferred until Monday, November 21 at the end of the time provided for government orders.

Private members' business

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Does the House agree to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

The House resumed consideration from October 27 of the motion that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (promotion of French and English), be now read the third time and passed.

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill S-3.

Whereas the government has flip-flopped and hesitated with regard to ways to help the francophone and Acadian communities develop, the Bloc Québécois has long supported francophone communities outside Quebec. For example, the Bloc Québécois urged the federal government to recognize the unique situation facing francophones living in minority situations and to take emergency measures to counter assimilation and foster the development of francophone and Acadian communities.

Over the years, the Bloc Québécois has also filed complaints with the Official Languages Commissioner about the treatment of francophones in the Canadian forces, Treasury Board's failure to ensure that numerous federal institutions comply with the Official Languages Act, the right of amateur athletes to practice their sport in their own language and, finally, Air Canada's obligation to provide service in French outside Quebec.

In all these files, the commissioner demanded that the institutions in question take the necessary measures to fulfill their obligations to serve Canadians in both official languages. In my opinion, those obligations go without saying.

The Bloc Québécois has intervened and taken positions in favour of Canada's francophones on a large number of issues. Specifically, we have pressured the federal government to increase funding for francophone organizations, to have regional news in French or RDI broadcast in the western provinces and to have the government adopt a genuine development policy for francophone and Acadian communities.

When the Bloc committed itself in 1994 to defending the interests of the francophone and Acadian communities in Ottawa, it also expressed Quebec's desire to continue this mission when it becomes sovereign. It did so by proposing a reciprocal mechanism in Canada, so that each can verify respect for the rights of the francophone minority in Canada and the anglophone minority in Quebec.

Private members' business

In our opinion, the Official Languages Act, in its current form, already included all the mechanisms that the federal government needed to ensure the development of minority official language communities. However, after years of cuts in the funding of official language communities and a decline in the use of French among the francophone population of Canada, the federal government finally acknowledged that action was necessary to promote the development of the francophone and Acadian communities.

The Action Plan for Official Languages tabled by the government in March 2003 had a budgetary envelope of \$750 million over five years. It should, we hope, be sufficient to support the development of the francophone and Acadian communities. The Action Plan, however, is not a panacea, as was also noted by the Commissioner of Official Languages in her report published on October 19, 2004, especially insofar as the Liberal government has not made a sufficient effort with regard to the plan. The plan is still, moreover, being implemented slowly. Unfortunately, the Liberal government's lack of political will has penalized the minority official language communities.

Our Liberal colleagues have on numerous occasions raised the argument that Bill S-3, to amend the Official Languages Act, applies only to federal institutions. Unfortunately I feel compelled to tell them that our reading of Bill S-3 differs from theirs.

Even though we are aware of the importance of this bill for minority francophone communities, we proposed a series of amendments at the committee stage. What we in the Bloc Québécois wanted was to preserve Bill S-3 in its current form for francophone communities in Canada, but to limit its territorial scope in such a way that the new obligations would not apply to Quebec.

This amendment to Bill S-3 appeared reasonable to us in the Bloc Québécois, since it would have allowed us to preserve the linguistic peace that Quebecers have been able to achieve and thus to prevent the new obligations introduced by this bill from plunging Quebec into a new conflict over language. Unfortunately, as is sometimes the case, to our great dismay, the Bloc Québécois' amendments were deemed out of order by the clerk of the committee.

What were these concerns? We had some concerns about the judicial scope that might be established by the passage of Bill S-3. I would like to discuss this aspect briefly.

● (1720)

Among other things, section 43 of the current act states:

The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take measures to ensure the advancement and the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society and ... may take measures to—

Hon. members will note that “Canadian society” as used here covers more than “federal institutions”.

Some examples of this are given in paragraph (d):

encourage and assist provincial governments to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities generally and, in particular, to offer provincial and municipal services in both English and French and to provide opportunities for members of English or French linguistic minority communities to be educated in their own language;

One thinks immediately of examples where there may be some grounds for fearing interference in areas under the jurisdiction of

Quebec and the provinces. We know that it does not always go down well with the government in power, but when there is reference to municipal services, these are clearly under Quebec jurisdiction. As well, education is also, as far as I know, still under Quebec jurisdiction.

Here is something a bit more serious. The federal government is required to get results as far as implementation of the various regulations under this legislation is concerned. It is supposed to encourage and cooperate with the business community, labour organizations, voluntary organizations and other organizations or institutions to provide services in both English and French and to foster the recognition and use of those languages.

Our fear is that some group, for instance, could take the federal government to court some day for not doing enough to make companies offer services in both languages, or that a group like this could take an employers association or a labour organization to court for not necessarily providing services in both languages. In my view, these questions are much more a private matter.

In general, for example, speaking of labour organizations, they already have translation naturally where services are provided in both languages.

There was a fear in Quebec, therefore, that the linguistic peace that has developed over the last few decades could be disturbed. We do not interpret that, of course, in the same way as the government.

We recognize, however, that it is essential to protect the francophone minorities outside Quebec. The federal government has often failed in this regard.

I can understand why the various associations to defend francophone rights and communities, whether in Ontario, Alberta or the other provinces, are demanding that Bill S-3 be passed and find it necessary. As I was saying earlier, the federal government has failed all too often to defend the rights of our fellow francophone citizens outside Quebec.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier, we still have some concerns about the implementation of Bill S-3, if it is passed. Rest assured, though, Mr. Speaker, that the Bloc Québécois and the people of Quebec hope that they are wrong. After we finish reading Bill S-3, we will try to make sure that we are wrong. We hope we are wrong. We hope that the passage of Bill S-3 will not upset the linguistic peace currently prevailing in Quebec and that it will apply solely to federal institutions.

I will conclude by adding that we understand very well how necessary Bill S-3 is for francophones outside Quebec. However, we think it was unfortunate that we could not get the requirement for a territorial restriction adopted in committee, which would have ensured that Bill S-3 did not apply to Quebec.

Private members' business

• (1725)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to address Bill S-3. This is a bill that will give the act some teeth, as they sometimes say. At last, minority communities in Canada will be able to rely on part VII of the Official Languages Act to make their arguments, now that the act has certain powers.

I would like to begin by extending sincere gratitude to Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier. This is a person who has defended the cause of minorities in Canada. It was my good fortune to work with him on the official languages committee. He is someone who was respected here in Parliament. Jean-Robert Gauthier deserves to be thanked publicly, as I am taking pains to do tonight, and from the bottom of our hearts. Thank you, Jean-Robert. On behalf of minorities, on behalf of Acadians, on behalf of anglophone minorities in certain regions, and on behalf of francophone minorities throughout Canada, thank you, Jean-Robert.

You have been tenacious, Jean-Robert. I am using your first name because I believe I can do so on the strength of the friendship we formed in the course of fighting for minorities. You hung in. In 10 years, four bills were tabled in the House of Commons, and all were defeated. It is sad to see the government say that it respected minorities, that it respected the Official Languages Act, a statute that was passed 35 years ago, and do that.

Sections 41, 42 and 43 in part VII of the Official Languages Act speak of promoting the official languages in Canada. However, every time minority communities have gone to court to affirm their rights, the government has chosen to appeal.

In one very recent case, Marie-Claire Paulin and the Société des Acadiens et des Acadiennes went to court because she could not be served in French in New Brunswick, Canada's only officially bilingual province. The other party in the case was a federal RCMP detachment. The Société des Acadiens et des Acadiennes went to court and won. I was very disappointed to see the Department of Justice, which is there to ensure that justice is respected in this country, and the RCMP, which is responsible for enforcing our national laws, our Canadians laws, decided to take the case to the appeal court.

Ideally, Bill S-3 will put an end to federal government spending on taking our communities to appeal court when they win important cases like that one. These are major cases. The government's excuse is that the federal Department of Justice is going to court because the Government of New Brunswick pays for the RCMP's services. It therefore does not have to comply with federal law.

Imagine the precedent that will set. Instead of promoting our two official languages, the government is changing its mind.

Consider this. We were forced to complain to the Commissioner of Official Languages in order to defend our two official languages in Canada, that is, English and French.

• (1730)

If the government wants to post a job in Canada on the Internet, it translates the English into French by machine. It is a scandal. It is incomprehensible and has no resemblance to the original offer.

Today, they want to offer a service in 12 languages in Canada. I am not looking forward to seeing the machine translation. Whatever the case, they are going to do it and I hope they can.

In the meantime, part VII of the Official Languages Act pertains to only two languages, and each time communities take a matter to court, the government appeals and thus spends taxpayers' money. That is in fact what happens.

This week I saw our colleague, the sponsor of this bill. He was very moved to learn that Bill S-3 would finally be passed by the House of Commons. I want to thank all the political parties, which agreed to pass this bill. We cannot even imagine how much good it will do for the communities.

People are afraid that more people will go to court. That is not true. In fact, the law will be strong and have teeth. The government will have to comply with this legislation. It can no longer claim that section 41 of part VII is not enforceable. It can no longer go to court and argue before the judge that he can not make a given ruling because part VII and section 41 are not enforceable. That is what it does at the moment.

If the government respected the country's two official languages, it would honour the judges' decisions and would not appeal. Hopefully, Bill S-3 will strengthen the law, put an end to court appeals and provide respect for the country's two languages, English and French. That is the aim of S-3.

We can hope the Senate gives rapid consideration to Bill S-3, as it submitted it to the House.

As for the concerns of Quebec, as raised by the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, the bill proposed amendments to sections 41, 42 and 43. These amendments were done away with, however, with the exception of the one to section 41, which deals with federal institutions. The intention is to provide services to the population in both official languages. If one really believes there are two official languages in the country and that this refers to federal institutions, then there is no reason today to be having to continue to fight to get them respected. That is precisely what Bill S-3 will accomplish with section 41.

My colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier has referred to the possibility of legal proceedings against the associations and unions. That was not the idea. We wanted to ensure that the government would help the unions if they needed federal funds and that the federal could promote official languages. That was the intent.

For example, in my province, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour asked for federal funding to help hire translators in order to provide translated documents to organizations. Bill S-3 as submitted to the House of Commons applies to federal institutions but that is not what is covered by section 43. Only section 41 would be executory.

Private members' business

I would once again like to thank all the political parties and Jean-Robert Gauthier. He did a superb job and before he retired, passed on something that will help the minority communities. I also thank the bill's sponsor, who will speak for five minutes to bring the debate to a close, for introducing S-3 to the House of Commons. It is a good bill for all communities, both anglophone and francophone.

• (1735)

Our citizens must be served in the language of their choice, once and for all.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to address my colleagues in the House of Commons on Bill S-3 on which the Standing Committee on Official Languages has reported. I also have the pleasure and immense privilege of sitting on this committee. If there is one thing I want to remember about this Parliament it is the passing of the committee recommendations on Bill S-3.

Part VII of the Official Languages Act of 1988 states the federal government's commitment "to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society". The purpose of Bill S-3 is to amend the Official Languages Act (promotion of English and French) and to enhance the accountability of federal institutions as far as implementing that commitment is concerned.

Allow me to state the Government of Canada's unequivocal commitment to promote the country's linguistic duality. The French and English languages, and the populations speaking those languages, have shaped Canada and helped to define its identity. Canada's linguistic duality is therefore ingrained in the very nature of our country. Over the past few years, the government has clearly indicated that it is fully committed to the values and principles of our official languages policy.

As indicated in recent throne speeches, the government has reaffirmed the value of Canada's linguistic duality and has made a commitment to promote the vitality of official language minority communities, namely by implementing its official languages action plan. This plan shows to what extent the political commitment in the Official Languages Act is taken seriously by this government.

• (1740)

[English]

The action plan is the new road map for Canada's linguistic duality. The government is firmly committed to implementing it fully and to achieving the ambitious goals set out in it.

One of the most crucial components of the action plan is the accountability and coordination framework. The objective of this framework is vast and its range is great to ensure that the official language dimension appears in the design and implementation of public policies and government programs. The accountability and coordination framework states the responsibilities of each federal institution under parts I and V of the Official Languages Act and it contains the implementation modalities regarding part VII, with which Bill S-3 is concerned.

For example, it specifies that federal institutions must make their employees aware of the government's commitments and the communities' concerns, identify their policies and programs that have an impact on the status of the two official languages and on the development of the communities, consult these communities and take their needs into consideration, et cetera.

[Translation]

In short, the government's commitment and actions are directly in line with the aims of Bill S-3, namely encouraging federal institutions to do more to support linguistic duality in Canada and making them more accountable in that regard. This government therefore supported Bill S-3 on second reading. It also indicated that it is in favour of sending the bill to committee so that there can be a closer examination of the potential consequences of amending a statute as fundamental as the Official Languages Act.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages has completed its work and reported its findings to the House of Commons. As we know, the committee feels that the wording of the bill can be improved and therefore proposed a number of amendments to Bill S-3. With the amendments it proposed, I think that the committee struck a fair balance between the risks of language focusing on the obligation to produce results on the one hand and the very legitimate desire to see the government's commitment translated into concrete actions on the other. Allow me to explain. If the bill were to have passed without amendment in the original form it was in when it was tabled in the Senate, the Bloc and others feared that it might have a significant impact on federal-provincial/territorial relations.

The wording proposed by the committee avoids that situation. Despite all that, unfortunately, the Bloc still opposes the amended Bill S-3.

[English]

The committee also is recommending integration of a clause which states that the implementation of the federal commitment respects the jurisdictions and the powers of the provinces. There is no reason to oppose the amendment, but it is important to remember that an amendment such as this merely reiterates an already well established principle.

In reality, under Canadian constitutional law, Parliament can only adopt laws for activities which fall under federal jurisdiction. The powers and obligations of federal institutions are always exercised in accordance with respect to federal and provincial jurisdictions. However, the Conservatives, as usual, like to speak and say nothing new.

[Translation]

Despite the conservative redundancy, I will support the amended Bill S-3 for one reason only: because it will protect our anglophone and francophone minorities.

In the same vein, I would like to reassure those in this House who are afraid that passing the bill may weaken the status of the French language in Quebec. In that regard, the case law, in particular Supreme Court of Canada decisions in cases involving Quebec, is crystal clear. Language rights must be interpreted in light of the linguistic context and dynamics of each province.

Private members' business

[English]

Bill S-3, as amended by the Standing Committee on Official Languages, reinforces the Official Languages Act. If Parliament adopts it, the responsibilities of federal institutions will from now on be legally binding, which means they can be the subject of legal recourse. The governor in council will have the power to determine, through a regulation, how execute those obligations.

[Translation]

Many anglophone and francophone communities in Canada have been waiting a long time for a stronger commitment from the federal government. I call on the members of this House to support them unequivocally and to vote in favour of Bill S-3.

In closing, I would also like to thank Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier from the bottom of my heart for his tenacity—God knows how tenacious you have to be here—the MP for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his convictions, francophone communities throughout Canada and the anglophone community in Quebec, and more specifically the anglophone community in my riding of Gatineau, which guided me throughout the process of passing Bill S-3.

I thank them for their dedication to making Canada the extraordinary country it is.

• (1745)

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill S-3. I want to recall right off one of the founding principles of the Conservative Party of Canada, which is the “belief that English and French have equality of status, and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada”.

Furthermore, article 91 of our statement of policy provides that

the Conservative Party believes that Canada's official languages constitute a unique and significant social and economic advantage that benefit all Canadians.

It also provides that:

(i) A Conservative government will support the Official Languages Act ensuring that English and French have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada.

It provides as well, that:

(ii) the Conservative Party will work with the provinces and territories to enhance opportunities for Canadians to learn both official languages.

Bill S-3 amends the Official Languages Act to make it easier to enforce the government's obligations under part 7 of the act. In other words, the bill forces the government to honour commitments set out in part VII of the Official Languages Act.

Part VII provides as follows:

The Government of Canada is committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society

Bill S-3 adds a provision whereby, within the scope of their functions, duties and powers, federal institutions shall ensure that positive measures are taken for the ongoing and effective advancement and implementation of the Government of Canada's

commitments and that cabinet “may make regulations...prescribing the manner in which any duties of those institutions under this Part are to be carried out”.

In 2004, the Federal Court of Appeal decided that:

—Section 41 is declaratory of a commitment and does not create any right or duty that could at this point be enforced by the courts, by any procedure whatsoever.

The court concluded, “The debate over section 41 must be conducted in Parliament, not in the courts”.

The bill follows up on that decision by making Part VII of the Official Languages Act justiciable.

Initially, there were concerns about the bill infringing on provincial jurisdictions. I am pleased, however, to say that the Conservative Party fought to have the addition to clause 41 of the phrase “within the scope of their functions, duties and powers”.

This amendment clarifies the fact that Bill S-3 will not encroach upon provincial jurisdictions and also demonstrates the deep desire of the Conservative Party of Canada to comply with the Constitution as well as our respect of provincial jurisdictions. That amendment was adopted during the clause-by-clause study in the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I would like to point out the excellent work done by my colleague, the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry and commend all the Conservative members on the committee for their efforts in getting that amendment passed.

There is a growing feeling that the Liberal official languages action plan has not had much effect. In fact, when the progress report was tabled in the House of Commons on October 27, 2005, we learned that over 75% of respondents felt that it had had no significant effect. Interestingly, in her annual report, Commissioner of Official Languages Dyane Adam indicated that, two and one-half years after the plan was tabled, only 20% of the \$720 million had been paid out to minority language communities, despite the crying need.

• (1750)

The Conservative party believes that the failure of the action plan demonstrates the need for Bill S-3, which will oblige the government to meet its obligations as far as official languages are concerned.

In conclusion, our party is proud of having brought in the amendments protecting provincial and territorial areas of jurisdiction. The Conservative Party also believes this bill will help clarify the federal government's responsibilities as far as Canada's linguistic minority communities are concerned.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill S-3. I have an Acadian name. The Bourgeois come from Caraquet. There are also Bourgeois in Tracadie, New Brunswick. My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst spoke earlier about the Paulins. I do not know whether he was talking about the Paulins from Caraquet, but in any event, there are some Paulins in my family. My family also has some Pauls in Manitoba.

Private members' business

As you can see, I am well aware of the difficulties these families and friends have faced in terms of protecting their language, French. In fact, the Pauls in Manitoba speak more English than French, while the Paulins favour French.

That is one reason it is important for me to speak today. I also want to thank Senator Gauthier for his work and the battle he waged for several years to achieve official language equality in Canada. Unfortunately, this did not happen. The official languages commissioner seems to be making an effort. She got a substantial increase in her budget, which is now some \$750 million. We presume she could do more for francophone communities outside Quebec to be respected.

The Bloc Québécois has examined Bill S-3 thoroughly. We realize our position might suggest that we are letting down francophone communities outside Quebec, but that is not so. This bill is dangerous for Quebec since—as our colleague from Gatineau mentioned—it makes it an obligation for federal institutions to enforce part VII of the Official Languages Act. Regulations can be made prescribing the manner in which any duties under part VII are to be carried out.

However, the member did not mention at all—unless I am mistaken—that it also requires the government to take measures “to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society”, while providing the right to apply to the court for a remedy, permission to contest an alleged violation of part VII.

I note that the problem lies in the provision whereby the government is required “to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society”.

The Bloc has examined the bill carefully. We realized that Canadian society is defined as a list of areas in which the Minister of Canadian Heritage should take measures in education, provincial services, health, social services and municipal services. These areas are under Quebec's jurisdiction, exclusively. We already have legislation in Quebec to protect our anglophone minority. Here is an example.

A few years ago, I was the president of a CLSC, a local community services centre, and Quebec legislation on health requires all CLSCs and hospitals to set aside a portion of their budget to provide service in English to anglophones.

• (1755)

It is in the legislation. We have already thought about our anglophone minority. It is a shame the other provinces have not followed suit. They have not tried to help francophone minorities any more than necessary.

The Bloc Québécois is against this bill because it wants to protect itself. We in Quebec are the leaders of Canada's francophonie. Francophones outside Quebec are following in our wake. Many times the Bloc Québécois has helped and defended them and many times have we taken their requests into account. I am proud that we did.

One of our colleagues who has left this House, the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, staunchly defended the Acadians by

asking the Queen of England to issue an apology for their deportation.

The Bloc Québécois' support for francophone communities outside Quebec is unfailing. However, we cannot support them if that means losing our own strength as Quebeckers and francophones. Accordingly, we cannot vote in favour of this bill, which will weaken us.

If the Bloc Québécois and Conservative amendments for ensuring this protection had passed, we could have voted in favour of this bill. Unfortunately, it is not possible.

We are distressed about this, given the work put into this by Senator Gauthier and the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, but the Bloc Québécois must protect Quebeckers and their language. Perhaps another time we could be in favour of this bill if it included the amendments we want.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the few minutes that are left to join the debate on Bill S-3 that comes to us through the Senate. I notice that my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst spent a good part of the introduction of his remarks complimenting, recognizing and paying tribute to the sponsor of this bill, Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier.

I too would like to recognize Senator Gauthier's contribution but in the same context I would like to recognize the contribution of my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. I say to the House without any fear of contradiction that the rights of the francophone minority outside Quebec has no greater champion than my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, who has worked tirelessly since he has been here to emphasize the Official Languages Act and the importance of it. Even anglophones like myself have come to recognize, through his hard work, just how important language is to culture and culture is to the Canadian fabric and how this act plays such an important role.

In recognizing my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, I would like to point out that it is not just his colleagues in the NDP who recognize his contribution. Internationally my colleague has been honoured with recognition from the Francophonie and has been made a chevalier of the Francophonie, which I think is an honour that should be recognized. It was given to him in Vienna recently and this is something he will wear all of his life as an honour and a recognition.

In the same spirit of recognition of those who are champions of this issue, in the province of Manitoba, where I come from, the former NDP government in the 1980s made a very bold step, although not quite as bold as the province of New Brunswick which is officially bilingual and the only official completely bilingual province. Roland Penner, when he was the attorney general of the NDP government in the 1980s, took a very courageous step to demand equal French language rights in all matters of justice. All laws and legislation, the courts and especially the criminal justice system had to be available to the francophone minority in Manitoba in both official languages. This step in fact cost the NDP the government in those years, which is why I say it was a bold step.

Private members' business

I put it to the House that Roland Penner was a visionary because Manitoba is a better province today. At no point in time will we have a case like Marie-Claire Paulin who tried to get service from the RCMP in her home province of New Brunswick, an officially bilingual province, and was not served in the language of her choice. No one should have to go to court to be served in one's first language, one of the two official languages in Canada, certainly not in New Brunswick and, I am proud to say, not in the province of Manitoba because of the courageous action of visionaries early on.

I am happy to stand today as an anglophone from Manitoba to fully endorse and support Bill S-3, which will give teeth to the laws pertaining to official languages in this country. I recognize the importance of the rights of the francophone minority outside Quebec. I am proud that the House of Commons has come to some consensus and spirit of cooperation to make sure this bill passes in this 38th Parliament.

● (1800)

[Translation]

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to speak in the House on this bill and to indicate my support. I am pleased to see this much support, although it is pity there is not unanimity. Nevertheless, it is good to see how it is moving along, and a great tribute to Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, who has been the champion of francophones outside of Quebec, for linguistic minorities, including Quebec anglophones.

There was a time when this could not have been imagined. A time when we could not have imagined this country having official languages legislation. Certainly we went through some bad times in Nova Scotia.

I would also like to pay tribute to another senator from a rather long time ago, my grandfather, who entered political life in 1907. At that time, it was forbidden in Nova Scotia to teach in French. The French-speaking communities could not educate their children in French.

A priest of the day, Father Blanc, or maybe Father Daignault—I stand to be corrected—had written a text called *Voyage à travers le Canada*. In those days, he could not put his name on such a book. A number of copies were made and it was used in all the Atlantic provinces and even in the United States, in French schools, even though it was banned. That is what the children were taught from. If the school inspector came, they had to put it away and get out an English textbook. The same book was used for six years, so they came to know it off by heart.

Time moves on and things change. Now, thanks to the Official Languages Act, and thanks to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we have education in French in our communities. We have an Acadian school board in Nova Scotia like the other provinces do. There have been many other changes too. Father Léger Comeau of Nova Scotia—unfortunately also deceased— would have loved to have been around to see it. He was involved in all the discussions on the Official Languages Act when there was talk of lawsuits to advance the cause. He devoted his life to that. He would be delighted to see it.

There are also people like Denise Samson, with whom I worked. She has also passed away. She spent her entire life working in Acadian communities to further these causes.

It was good. We had the Official Languages Act, with sections 41 and 42. I remember that, at the time, I was volunteering with the Acadian Federation of Nova Scotia. I was taking part in the FCFA's work along with the member for Ottawa—Orléans. We saw the consequences that this legislation would have. It was good. It was there, it was declaratory. It stated that federal institutions must serve the linguistic communities and must ensure their social, cultural and economic development. The will was there but not the powers. If a department did not make progress, there was no way to force it to recognize that fact.

I think that this is Senator Gauthier's fourth attempt. He has shown remarkable tenacity. We thank him for it and we are happy that he is here to see this achievement. Thanks to his efforts, we are finally here. The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell worked hard, as did all the members of the committee, and I thank them. We are now at the point where cabinet will have to adopt regulations in order to ensure enforcement of this legislation. All the departments will have to truly respond to Canadians, because it is justiciable and executory. Canadians can rest assured that the Official Languages Act will be enforced across the country.

That is important to me. It is important for francophones in Acadia, for example, but also for anglophones in Quebec, who are entitled to services and can go to court if they are not provided. It all depends on good will. I do not know if this happens, but we were given the example of Mrs. Paulin in New Brunswick. In my riding, I saw an RCMP call centre move from a bilingual community to a unilingual community. Are they going to be able to maintain those services there? It seems to me that if they had wanted to follow perhaps not the letter but the intention of sections 41 and 42 of the Official Languages Act, they could have kept this centre in the bilingual Acadian community to enhance the vitality of that community. It did not cost any more. However, it was easier for administrative reasons. People preferred to be in a larger community, so it moved.

I am not sure—lawyers will tell us—but if we could have applied Bill S-3, perhaps we would have had some recourse. We certainly will have recourse in future cases.

● (1805)

I have seen cases in our human resources development centres, now called Service Canada, where several jobs involving direct service to the people of these communities were transferred to larger towns instead of being kept in the communities.

In Acadia, especially in Nova Scotia, Acadian communities are in rural areas far from the big centres. We are always fighting a major battle against assimilation. We know that if the community wants to maintain its linguistic vitality, it is important for it to have cultural, economic, and educational vitality and more.

Adjournment Proceedings

I am thrilled to support this bill. I am very pleased with all the cooperation we received to get it to this stage. Even though it took four attempts, we finally made it. I would like the hon. members from the Bloc Québécois to reconsider and support the bill. It would be good of them to let it get through the House. It would be in keeping with the spirit of Parliament to do so.

Once again, I want to thank Senator Gauthier and the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for all their work.

• (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Resuming debate. The mover of the motion now has the floor for five minutes to reply and close the debate.

The hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is rather ironic. Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, for whom we all had great respect, introduced as his last bill before leaving the Parliament of Canada, Bill-S-3, to amend the Official Languages Act. If things proceed as we might hope, it is highly possible that this will also be the last bill on which I will myself have occasion to work prior to leaving this Parliament.

Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier and myself are both francophones from outside Quebec, and specifically Franco-Ontarians. I am in fact of Quebec stock, since I was born in Quebec with one Franco-Ontarian and one Quebecois parent. I am nonetheless a Franco-Ontarian through and through.

I grew up during the post-Regulation 17 era in Ontario. The member, my colleague from Nova Scotia, referred to a period when the teaching of French was prohibited in his province. That was also the case in my province. Admittedly, I was not attending school at that time, but I was able to recognize its vestiges. It was practically impossible to attend high school in French, except at sectarian schools, when I was going to school. My children, however, were able to attend elementary school, high school and university, even do a Master's degree, in Ontario entirely in French, thanks to section 23 and the legislation we had. Today, we are in the process of passing new legislation so that my children's children can have an even brighter future. As I mention frequently, I am a grandfather.

In conclusion, in addition to adding my own thanks to the hon. Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, I would like to thank all my colleagues. Sometimes we were in agreement, sometimes not. All in all, however, I think that it is the wish of all those to whom I have spoken that the circumstances of those who live in minority communities should be improved.

I would like to clarify that part VII, which becomes enforceable, is justiciable. Not only section 41, but also sections 42 and 43 can be used as the basis for launching a court proceeding. This is the possibility we are giving ourselves today. I am not worried that this will result in millions of cases being brought before the courts. However, it is no bad thing if a case is brought from time to time, as happened with section 23. Remember the school management issue. It is not inherently bad if it happens from time to time, just not often.

On the other hand, the Government of Canada will have to do everything it can to avoid being taken to court. That enhances the accountability throughout the entire system and makes it better. The

minority communities are the ones who will emerge victorious, of that I am convinced.

[*English*]

Again, I want to thank my colleagues as this may very well be the last piece of legislation on which I will work prior to my retirement. I have a hard time using that word, but I guess I will have to get used to it some day.

I thank my colleagues on all sides of the House for their support on this bill, which hopefully I will get in a minute or two. I thank them in advance for their generosity not toward me, although that is appreciated too, but more important, toward those we are called upon to serve.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1815)

[*English*]

MEDICINAL MARIJUANA

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here tonight to follow up on some questions I had asked the minister earlier this year in regard to the government run marijuana grow op in Flin Flon, Manitoba.

This is a facility that is in a base metal mine far underground in an abandoned part of the mine in Flin Flon. There are, shall we say, deep concerns about the nature of the operation. Also there are recent developments in the medical uses of marijuana-like substances but without the medical harm.

My question for the minister is twofold.

First, if we have to grow the material, would it not be cheaper to do it on surface in a secure location? There are many other locations other than underground. I worked in a mine. Before my accident I was a geological engineer and I can tell members that the logistics of going underground are not simple. If the government is compelled to grow the material, would it not be more efficient and cheaper to do it on surface?

Adjournment Proceedings

Second, there have been developments in science. There is a new substance on the market called Sativex, which provides all the medicinal benefits but without the harm of smoking. There is evidence that smoking marijuana is more toxic than cigarettes. The government on one hand is trying to curb smoking, but on the other hand is allowing people who are obviously in medical need to smoke, so there is definitely a contradiction there. The Cancer Society has major concerns about smoking marijuana, as do numerous other organizations. In fact, marijuana has about 50% more carcinogens than tar in unfiltered tobacco.

I would ask the member, first, if they have to grow the stuff, are there not cheaper places to grow it, and second, have the alternatives like Sativex been looked into?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as to where the medical marijuana is grown, I know it was reported in the media some time ago that the cost was in the area of \$24 million, but the cost is actually in the range of \$5 million or \$5.7 million for five years. It is a study phase. It was important that it be a secure location. It was done on a competitive basis as to where the location would be and that was the site that was selected.

Perhaps there could be better ways to do it in better locations that would be less expensive. What is important in the meantime is that we are learning as we are doing this. The product that is grown there is tested a lot. It is grown without using chemicals. It is tested to make sure that the product that is produced is consistent in its THC levels. It is distributed at a very inexpensive price to people whose doctors have said that they could use it and they do not have the ability to grow their own.

This keeps those people from being caught and having to buy it on the black market from crooks who might be growing it. The RCMP have stated that pesticides are often used in marijuana grow operations. These products are very risky. There are fluctuations in the levels of THC. It is very important that it be standardized with all the lab work and testing that is done.

The member raised a question regarding Sativex. I am very pleased that product has made it to the market and it has received its approvals. What should be understood is that Sativex has not yet been approved for all uses for which medical marijuana could be used, but in time it may be and other products may be as well. It is very useful for people suffering from multiple sclerosis, for pain due to nerve damage, as it alleviates that pain. However, that represents only about 20% of the people who have been authorized by their doctors to use medical marijuana.

I would agree with the member that if such products in the future could replace the medical marijuana on the market, it would alleviate a lot of other concerns and problems. In some instances there might be some abuse of the privileges of growing the product and it does cause some concern as to the quality of the product available to the medical marijuana users. At present the best way would be to continue with this type of activity while waiting for the approvals and the tests to be done for Sativex or other products that may appear on the market and be approved for other ailments and diseases, or that may be required by the other 80% of the people who have had their approvals.

● (1820)

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that alternatives are not being ruled out. There is a case to be made that there is abuse of the substance and that there are very negative health effects to smoking marijuana, particularly over a long period of time. There is also the fact that the medical use of marijuana may be sending mixed signals to other members of our society, in particular our younger and more impressionable citizens.

The member did highlight a wide range of numbers, between \$5 million to \$24 million to produce this product. Perhaps the members from B.C. are more able to answer this, but it seems that growing marijuana can be done at a much cheaper way in a much safer location.

I wonder if the member could comment on any price reduction.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, once again to clarify, I said that the media had reported that the cost was in the range of \$24 million when the cost of the contract is, I believe, \$5.7 million.

In the future if we decide that the government is going to provide for the production of this marijuana perhaps there would be better alternatives. This was done on a tendered basis to find the most appropriate way to do it on a test basis.

I would signal that I am in 100% agreement with the member that we have to use caution and make sure that people are always on their guard against the overuse or abuse of any medication, whether it be prescription, non-prescription, or in this case medical marijuana. They all carry great risks. It is important that they be used properly and in accordance with the physician's directions and that we keep them out of the hands of children.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if anything demonstrates the reason that the government cannot be trusted by the Canadian people it has to be the government's record when it comes to military procurement and, more specifically, helicopters.

As senior minister for Jean Chrétien, the Prime Minister, who was finance minister at the time, was closely associated with every action, program and announcement of the now discredited former Liberal prime minister. The Prime Minister, as Jean Chrétien's finance minister, wrote all the cheques and slashed all the budgets.

Today the Prime Minister is telling Canadians that either his eyes were closed when he was asked to sign the cheques to Liberal Party ad men in the sponsorship fraud for non-existent work or his signature was being forged on the cheques to his Liberal Party cronies. The fact is that the Prime Minister's eyes were open and he knew exactly what he was signing when the cheques were cut.

If the Liberal Party actually believed in Parliament, democracy and ministerial and political accountability, every Liberal MP who was a member of the Chrétien government, particularly if he or she had been a member of his cabinet, would have resigned the moment Justice Gomery delivered his report on November 1.

Adjournment Proceedings

It was as a member of the Chrétien inner circle that the current Prime Minister wrote the Liberal red policy book for the 1993 federal election.

It is not by coincidence that the only promise that was kept from the 1993 campaign was the one that scrapped the purchase of a new search and rescue helicopter to replace the then 40-year Sea King.

What was not in that red book, which we now know was part of the hidden agenda of the Liberal Party, was the plan to slash billions of dollars from the defence budget.

Canadians, however, are still paying the GST and free trade continues to bring prosperity to Canadians.

There is no way the Prime Minister would not have known the consequences of cancelling the contract to purchase the search and rescue helicopters. There was a financial cost of over \$800 million of taxpayer dollars and a human cost in the lives lost which is still being paid today.

This issue is very important to all Canadians because as a result of Liberal Party political interference in the military procurement process, the helicopters that are in use today are ill-suited to the demands that are being placed on them. Since that decision was made by the Chrétien government and his finance minister to play politics with helicopter purchases, pilots have lost their lives. More pilots will lose their lives until the government stops playing politics with our military and implements a fair and competitive bidding process that is open and transparent.

When I asked the Minister of Defence in this House about his decision to scrap the competitive bidding process and go to sole source purchase of the Chinook helicopter, the minister denied that this was taking place, or the decision to go to sole source procurement had not been announced yet. If the Liberal Party had not already made the decision to sole source the Chinook helicopter, why is a picture of it on the Liberal Party's political website under the heading "Defence"?

Chinook choppers have not been part of the Canadian helicopter fleet for over 10 years, when the few remaining Chinooks Canada had were to sold to the Dutch government. By having a picture of a Chinook helicopter on its political website, the Liberal Party is clearly favouring one helicopter over any other source.

While I might be tempted to observe that the government's defence policy is perennially 10 years out of date to match old photos, as a result of the Earncliffe lobbying scandal and the personal ties of that lobbying firm to the Prime Minister, Canadians have every reason to be skeptical of any excuses by the Liberal Party that the picture of the Chinook helicopter on its website is only coincidental. That picture makes the political statement that the decision has been made.

The Minister of Defence asked that he should sin first or, in layman's terms, get caught lying before being criticized.

• (1825)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to set the record straight for the member across the way who knows full well what has taken place with respect to our procurement and our

objectives to meet the needs of the men and women who serve so nobly and bravely for our country.

Let me first state a number of our key priorities. The first is to ensure our armed forces personnel get the material they need when they need it. The second is that it is affordable to the taxpayer and that the taxpayer receives good value for the money that they have entrusted us to spend wisely on their behalf.

The defence policy statement clearly states our objectives in these areas. I am glad the member mentioned the helicopter issue and heavy lift capabilities that we are trying to acquire. It is part of a much larger package of fixed wing heavy lift capabilities we are trying to pursue. This is under the umbrella of the \$13 billion we have budgeted over the next five years. It is the largest increase for our military in the last 20 years.

I also remind the member that this year's supplementary estimates include an additional \$1.3 billion for our forces, making the total for this year \$1.8 billion. Where is it going? It is going toward equipment, maintenance, operations, training, care and wages for our service personnel. That is responsible spending of the taxpayer money.

With respect to the fixed wing and procurement, our objective is to have a procurement process that is transparent. We would like to ensure that it is clearly done in an open way. Does it mean that at times we will not go to go to sole source? No. At times we will and we will do it when it makes sense to do it under the guiding principle that our forces get the equipment when they need it.

Will we pursue an open bidding process when, as a matter of principle, we know only one particular piece of equipment is required by our forces? No. We also will try to ensure that the equipment we buy will be either purchased or made in Canada, but not always. Again, getting back to the fundamental principles of ensuring that our armed forces receive the equipment they need when they need it.

This is a much larger part of our plan as articulated in the international policy statement. We are making the investments not only in equipment, but also in training, personnel and care for our armed forces personnel.

I encourage all those people who are watching tonight to take a look at our international policy statement. I encourage them to look at the defence capabilities and at our plans for the future. We encourage people to give us input into how we can make that better. However, we have turned a corner. It is not the end. It is a down payment in the future of our forces and our ability to move forward with the goals and objectives that we want to pursue for our country and Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1830)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the evidence is there for Canadians to see. It is time to be truthful to Canadians. More particular, considering the fact that Canadians observed Remembrance Day ceremonies last week and in the spirit of the Gomery inquiry into the Liberal Party corruption, it is time the minister came clean with the Canadian public regarding helicopter purchases.

The government has in the past been warned about the problems of not using an open and transparent, competitive bidding process. In the 1998 report of the Auditor General into the purchase of major capital equipment for Canada's military, the Auditor General was particularly critical of projects that were fast-tracked or sole sourced, such as the Griffon helicopter and the Coyote. He observed that when the procurement process is fast-tracked or sole sourced, important tests and evaluation steps were often not completed and problems were only discovered after a particular piece of equipment had been put into service.

As a consequence of discovering the limitations of a piece of equipment while it is being used, lives are being put at risk. There is no doubt an element of desperation by the military to forgo the normal process of capital purchase acquisition as a consequence of years of neglect of military equipment. However, safety should not be compromised to provide equipment that should have been replaced long ago.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that there are some fundamental principles to which we adhere. First, the procurement process is open, fair and transparent, and we take pride in the integrity of that process. Second, we prefer a competitive bidding process, but as I said, does it mean we will not sole source at some time? No. We will sole source when it makes sense for our armed forces to receive the equipment they need.

The men and women who serve our country are abroad in dangerous situations. Will we go through a belaboured process that will extend the time before they get the equipment they need? No. We will not extend the process unnecessarily. We will not compromise their lives. We get the equipment they need when they need it.

We will not let bureaucracy hold up the acquisition of the essential equipment they need. Their lives and work are of paramount importance to them. It is our responsibility as a government to ensure their lives are protected to the best of our ability. It is something that we will continue to pursue to the maximum of our abilities. It is our responsibility and duty as the Government of Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here this evening to ask a question of the government regarding the environment, which may or may not be important to some people. For ours and our families' health, children, parents and grandparents, the environment issue is one of the most important issues with which we need to deal. It is one of the burning items which I have worked on over the last year.

I would like an explanation as to why the government has not dealt with the many environmental issues that are important to Canadians.

For six years I was actively involved in fighting SE2. The local government along with the provincial government in B.C. fought SE2. The federal government, from the former environment minister to the present one, were absent on this issue. There was no federal government presence in the fight on SE2.

SE2 is an electric generator plant located in the Seattle, Washington area which provides energy to the United States. This plant would have pumped tonnes of pollution into the Fraser Valley airshed, and the federal government did nothing. It was asked numerous times over the last six years to help us fight this issue. The good news is that through the help of the local and provincial governments in B.C. and Conservative members of Parliament, SE2 was defeated, but with no thanks to the federal government. Why did the government not fight this? It was the federal government's responsibility.

Why did the government not fight against Devils Lake? Why does Canada have the worst environmental record of the G-8 countries? Why have we had growing pollution levels over the last 12 years of this Liberal government? Why do we have untreated contaminated sites? Why do we still have raw sewage being dumped into our ocean? I asked that of the former environment minister yesterday and he said that was Liberal policy. He said that it was good environmental practice to dump raw sewage into our oceans.

Why do we not have any international air quality agreement with the United States for western Canada? We have an agreement for central and eastern Canada. Is that part of the western alienation policy of the Liberal Party?

Will the government please explain why it does not stand up for the environment?

•(1835)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's comments are much broader than the question originally posed. First of all, it is nice to hear the member from the Conservative-Alliance finally recognizing the importance of the environment. Given that, I guess a death bed confession is better than nothing. The fact is that the member's party has not even recognized the science when it comes to climate change.

Our government is the one that brought in project green, the greenest \$10 billion budget in Canadian history, and the most aggressive plan of the G-7 in terms of dealing with climate change. The party over there denies Kyoto and an international role for Canada. It is this Minister of the Environment who has in fact been very engaged in ensuring leadership as we lead up to COP 11 and MOP 1 in Montreal. We are going to demonstrate to the world not only what Canada is doing but working collaboratively with others to ensure that it is a global responsibility.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would point out to the member that on the issue of sumas energy 2 the Government of Canada, through the Department of the Environment, provided necessary information and scientific data. In the end, as the member quite rightly pointed out, the National Energy Board turned down the application. Sumas energy 2 appealed it, as was its right and again it was denied. So, I am not really sure what the issue on sumas energy 2 was because we provided the information. Presumably, that assisted in the decision which was no.

I know the hon. member. I am sure he likes no because that is what he wanted and that is what was delivered. The fact is that we certainly do not have any lessons to learn from the Conservative-Alliance on the issue of the environment.

We are dealing with, for example, wind energy. We are almost at the cusp now of dealing with the commercialization of wind energy in this country. The removal of over 90% of sulphur in gasoline is ahead of the United States. The move toward ensuring that we have renewable energy sources in the country is extremely important.

I am very proud of the fact that the Minister of the Environment, the government and the Prime Minister have taken the leadership role, both at home and abroad. We have the technology fund to promote green technologies in this country. We have the partnership fund to work with the provinces and territories because unfortunately, environment is not purely a federal issue. It is municipal as well as provincial.

As a former president of the Federation of Municipalities, I can tell the member that I know lots about the Fraser Valley. I know lots about the issues there. I have dealt with municipal politicians in that region over the years. I can tell him that I applaud the cities in the Fraser Valley for the work they have done.

At the end of the day, if the issue is sumas energy 2, we provided the necessary information. It was no the first time. The appeal came and it was no the second time. To suggest that the federal government was not involved and was not a player is absolutely factually incorrect.

However, on the issue of the environment, I am hearing from the member and congratulate him on recognizing the health issues regarding the environment. It is something that members in his party and at committee do not recognize on a daily basis. Maybe the member should join our committee because he is a little more

enlightened, at least on that aspect, than some other members that I have heard, which is disappointing, I must say.

• (1840)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the parliamentary secretary has shared with us, but the fact is that the SE 2 hearings first went through EFSEC and the federal Government of Canada was absent. That was the first step of fighting against SE 2. Then it went to NEB and the federal government was absent.

We have a problem with our environment. We have pollution filling the air. Carbon dioxide is a problem. It is an issue which we need to deal with, but the federal Liberals are ignoring the tonnes of pollution that are being pumped into our air. It is only the Conservative Party that has a record of fighting for clean air. We want to have a made in Canada plan to clean up the environment. The Liberal legacy will indicate a shameful 12 years of not dealing with the environment. Why not?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, it is because of the policies that I announced and the fact that in 2003 the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley Regional Districts forecasted emissions that would be going down. It is because of the policies of the Government of Canada.

To suggest for a moment that we support the issue of raw sewage, let me give an example of what the government has done. When it comes to the national infrastructure program to support cities like Halifax to stop the raw sewage going into the sea, it was our government that supported that.

It was the Conservative Party government that for 10 years opposed the national infrastructure program. It lay dormant for 10 years. It is the Liberal government that brought in the national infrastructure program and it is this government that helped in dealing with Halifax and sewage. It is the city of Victoria that is polluting the sea. It could step up to the plate. We have a program, a program no thanks to the Conservative Party.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

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