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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, April 11, 2005

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 11, 2005

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

The House resumed from February 17 consideration of the motion that Bill S-3, an act to amend the Official Languages Act (promotion of English and French), be now read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly an honour and a privilege for me to rise today in support of Bill S-3 to amend the Official Languages Act by making part VII subject to the court remedies provided by this act. Initially, this bill was introduced in the Senate by the hon. Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier.

Allow me to begin by commending Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier on his tenacity and commitment to the Canadian official languages policy. Bill S-3 was the fourth bill introduced by the hon. senator, who had previously introduced Bill S-4, which died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued in the spring of 2004; Bill S-11, which died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued in 2003; and Bill S-32, which died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued in the fall of 2002.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contribution and extraordinary work of Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, who has always been a great defender of the rights of Franco-Ontarians and francophones outside Quebec.

I want to pay tribute to this citizen of Ottawa, who has had an exceptional career in the House of Commons and in the Senate. In addition to his work as an MP and a senator, and his involvement in the community, he was the Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie from 1997 to 1999. He is a role model for all Canadians, and we thank him for everything he has done for francophone and Acadian communities across Canada.

The official languages policy is rooted in the past and the present. People have spoken French and English in Canada for centuries and, I am proud to say, they continue to do so in every region of our vast land.

The modern era of the official languages began with the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, as the federal government attempted to adapt to new realities, particularly the Quiet Revolution in Quebec.

● (1105)

In 1969, in light of the recommendations in the report tabled by the commission, Parliament adopted the first Official Languages Act, which recognized French and English as the official languages of all federal institutions. This legislation required such institutions to serve Canadians in the official language of their choice.

The fundamental principles of the current official languages policy are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 and the Official Languages Act of 1988. This legislation has three main objectives: to ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada, and ensure equality of status, and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions; to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities and to encourage the acceptance and use of both English and French in Canadian society; and to set out the powers, duties and functions of federal institutions with respect to the official languages of Canada.

Part VII of this act also sets out the government's commitment to enhancing the vitality of francophone and anglophone minority communities and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

To do this, the Government of Canada seeks to collaborate with other partners to ensure the advancement of the official languages in Canadian society. This legislation makes the Minister of Canadian Heritage responsible for promoting a coordinated approach to the implementation of the federal government's commitment, in consultation with the other federal institutions, the other orders of government and the agencies representing the different sectors of society.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage is the one responsible for taking such measures as she deems appropriate to support linguistic minority communities by supporting the various groups that work for these communities and by facilitating the contribution of other organizations and federal departments to their development.

The Department of Canadian Heritage enters into agreements on official languages with the provinces and territories in order to enable them to provide minority communities with education in their language and services in English and French in the regions of Canada in which these minorities live, as well as enhancing opportunities for all Canadians to learn English or French as a second language.

The legislation also aims to promote English and French within Canadian society by providing support to the various groups helping to recognize and implement the use of both official languages, and to strengthen understanding and dialogue between Canada's anglophone francophone communities.

Look at the progress made in education. Recent statistics indicate that young people from linguistic minorities represent the same percentage of university graduates as other young Canadians, which was not the case 30 years ago.

● (1110)

Thanks to the support provided to minority language education, the Department of Canadian Heritage works to ensure full participation by both language groups in all spheres of life in Canada. Not only do these programs foster the vital cultural contribution of anglophone and francophone minorities, , they also give them access to economic development.

So the progress that has been made in francophone minority education has played a key role in reducing illiteracy and the number of school drop-outs, while increasing the rate of participation in post-secondary education.

Thirty years ago, not only was the quality and accessibility of French education for francophone minorities a major challenge, it was also a major obstacle to the development and survival of these communities across Canada. There has been a considerable change since then.

In 1982, official language minority communities won the right to be educated in their own language and, a few years later, the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed their right to run their own schools. We built schools, school-community centres, and colleges where there were none.

We worked with the provinces and francophone parents from one end of the country to the other. The economic value of quality public education in their own language for 1.9 million Canadians living in an official language minority community, cannot be underestimated.

The Official Languages in Education Program and the collaboration between the provinces, territories and the federal government allows more than 250,000 young people in official language minority communities to study in their own language in some 700 primary and secondary schools across the country.

All Canadians benefit from minority language education programs. Without them, as the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism pointed out, “these Canadians could not contribute fully to Canadian society”.

The Official Languages in Education Program helps fund a network of 19 francophone colleges and universities outside Quebec and supports 94% of anglophones in Quebec studying in English-language schools. These programs also allow 2.4 million young Canadians—more than 313,000 of whom are in immersion classes—to learn a second official language, which increases significantly the number of Canadians familiar with the French language and culture. Clearly, the education partnership works well.

Accordingly, the logical next step for Canadian Heritage as facilitator is to encourage its other partners to do more in order to help official language communities flourish.

The action plans the department puts in place must take into account the requirements of the minority official language communities and be formulated following consultation with them, so that departments and agencies include these considerations in planning their activities. The plans together with a report on the results achieved are submitted annually to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who then submits a report annually to Parliament on the realization of the government's commitment.

We recognize a lot of work remains to be done. For this reason, the government is currently implementing its action plan for official languages, announced on March 12, 2003, which adds $751 million over five years to the official languages budget and which will benefit all Canadians seeking better access to our rich linguistic duality.

Ambitious and realistic, the action plan truly provides new momentum for Canada's linguistic duality. A new accountability and coordination framework has been developed and will consolidate the Government of Canada's policy, administrative and financial activities. One of the desired effects is to have federal institutions implement the Official Languages Act in a concerted and consistent manner and to report more transparently to the public. This accountability and coordination framework is designed to show the Canadian public the seriousness with which the Government of Canada treats this important matter.

Let us return, however, to S-3. Given the importance of the proposed amendments to the Official Languages Act, we must take the time to examine all of the options open to us before we continue. This is a serious matter. The implications of amending an act are many, and all must be taken into account. Therefore, the aim of Bill S-3 is certainly the logical evolution of the Official Languages Act and the bill should not be taken lightly. It is important not only for official language communities across Canada, but for Canadian society as a whole.

● (1115)

[*English*]

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill S-3, a bill to amend the Official Languages Act.

My riding of Provencher, which is in southeastern Manitoba, has the largest francophone population in rural western Canada. It comprises about 15% of the population with communities such as Ste. Anne, La Broquerie, Ste. Pierre, Ste. Malo, Ste. Agathe, Ste. Adolphe, Otterburne, Lorette, Pine Falls, Powerview, St. George and Île-des-Chaînes, to mention some of them. The French language is thriving in Manitoba and, in particular, in my riding.

I would like to comment briefly on a May 1998 report written by provincial judge Richard Chartier on the operation of the province's French language services policy in Manitoba. The report was commissioned by the Manitoba Progressive Conservative government while I was the attorney general and our government committed to implementing that report. I am pleased to see that the implementation continues.

Judge Chartier's report is aptly titled, "Above All, Common Sense". It focuses on making bilingual services more readily accessible in designated areas of the province, including my area of the province. Judge Chartier's key recommendation was that community service centres be established to serve as outlets for government services. He said that the province could better meet the objectives of our French language service policy by making sure that our services in French were actively offered in those regions where our francophone population is concentrated.

In his report he wrote that it was important to try to find practical solutions that could be applied immediately, above all, solutions that made use of common sense. While the report does not have a direct application to Bill S-3, I believe we can learn from the principles contained in that report.

The major purpose of Bill S-3 is to make the commitment set out in part VII of the Official Languages Act binding on the government. Section 41 of the Official Languages Act commits the federal government to:

> (a) enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and
>
> (b) fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

The government has failed on both of those counts.

In 2004 the Federal Court of Appeal stated that "section 41 is declaratory of a commitment and that it does not create any right or duty that could at this point be enforced by the courts, by any procedure whatsoever".

In other words, the court ruled that section 41 of the Official Languages Act was a broad statement of principle and not an actual legal obligation. The court went on to say, "the debate over section 41 must be conducted in Parliament, not in the courts".

Bill S-3 addresses this ruling in two ways. First, it would add subsections requiring all federal institutions to take "positive measures...for the ongoing and effective advancement and implementation" of section 41".

Second, it would add part VII of the Official Languages Act to a list of specific sections of the act that are justiciable, which is contained in section 77. In other words, the bill would make it clear that if the government does not live up to its obligations under part VII of the Official Languages Act it can be taken to court and forced to fulfill those obligations.

As a general principle, I am supportive of legislation that holds ministers accountable to their commitments. However there remain concerns with the bill as drafted. The first concern with Bill S-3 in fact centres around section 41.

Provincial governments have complained in the past that this section of the Official Languages Act infringes on their jurisdiction. The Bloc Québécois made the same argument the last time this bill came before the House.

My concern is that making section 41 justiciable, that is allowing it to be subject to court action, would clear the way for court challenges that might result in section 41 and the rest of part VII of the Official Languages Act being struck down on the grounds that it was ultra vires or outside the constitutional jurisdiction of the federal government. This concern was raised in committee in 2002 by the minister of justice at the time.

● (1120)

My colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry has committed to working with the members on the Standing Committee on Official Languages to amend the bill, perhaps by adding a section that expressly respects the provinces and limits the federal government to its own jurisdiction assigned to it in the Constitution so that it fulfills section 41 of the act within its constitutional mandate.

The second concern involves another section of the Official Languages Act that is affected by the bill, section 43. While Bill S-3 seeks to make the government's commitment under part VII of the Official Languages Act more enforceable, it does not clarify the scope of those commitments. As a result, unless the bill is amended, it could result in a wave of court actions and the loss of parliamentary control over the nature, extent and, indeed, the cost of the government's official languages program.

Section 43 currently states:

> The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take such measures as that Minister considers appropriate to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society—

Bill S-3 would change the wording of section 43 to clarify that the heritage minister "shall take appropriate measures" instead of "shall take measures that the Minister considers appropriate". While it removes the minister's discretion when it comes to the general goal, the bill still leaves sections (a) through (d), the list of specific measures, totally up to the discretion of the minister.

What that means is that the minister does not have to do any of the specific things listed in section 43 but if someone were dissatisfied with the minister's performance when it comes to her or his very general objective, they could take the matter to court regardless of whether the minister takes any or all of the specific measures listed.

Now it seems totally backward to me to make the general obligation legally enforceable and the specific ones up to the discretion of the minister. This act needs to be clarified in that respect and give both the minister a clear direction and give the court a clear framework for deciding whether or not the minister is fulfilling his or her obligations.

I hope we can make suitable amendments to the bill in committee to make it more effective in meeting its goals. I will support the bill in principle and I will encourage my colleagues on this side of the House to do likewise, although they will be free to vote as they see fit since this is an item of private members' business. I think the intention of the bill is something that many members would consider to be reasonable and worthwhile.

I do want to say that if we approach this issue in a common sense way, the way that Judge Chartier did in Manitoba with his report, I think that we can continue to work together as two linguistic groups in this country, French and English, to ensure that the constitutional responsibilities that our governments have are carried out.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is of course with great pleasure that I rise today to address Bill S-3, an act to amend the Official Languages Act (promotion of English and French).

I would like to begin by referring to the promoter of this bill, former senator Jean-Robert Gauthier. I want to stress the work and dedication of former senator Jean-Robert Gauthier in the defence of francophone minorities and the promotion of their rights.

I also wish to sincerely thank my fellow Bloc Québécois members who addressed this legislation during the first hour of debate at second reading. I am referring, among others, to the hon. member for Repentigny and the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, who are both staunch defenders of the rights of francophone minorities.

This bill, which amends the Official Languages Act, was the fourth one tabled in the Senate by senator Jean-Robert Gauthier. He first introduced Bill S-32 during the first session of the 37th Parliament, then Bill S-11 during the second session and, finally, Bill S-4 during the third session. These three bills, which died on the order paper, were, for all intents and purposes, identical to Bill S-3.

The bill that is now before us primarily seeks to enhance the enforceability of the federal government's obligations under Part VII of the Official Languages Act. We are referring here to the federal government's commitment to enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic communities in Canada, to support and assist their development, and to foster the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society. We are talking about section 41, which would be amended to make it enforceable and thus provide guidance for its interpretation by the courts.

Bill S-3 also proposes to amend section 43 to read as follows:

> The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take appropriate measures to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society.

Finally, it is proposed that part VII be added to subsection 77(1) of the Official Languages Act. This amendment to section 77 would allow citizens to file complaints before the courts to ensure that the obligations included in Part VII are met.

In summary, the purpose of this bill is to clarify the responsibility of federal institutions to implement Part VII of the act and to adopt regulations for the enforcement process of the requirements provided in section 41 of the act. Furthermore, it requires that the federal government take measures to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society. Finally, it provides for a court remedy to challenge a violation of Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

As we have said already, the Bloc Québécois cannot support this bill in its current form. We believe Bill S-3 is incomplete and contains elements that do not reflect the linguistic reality of Quebec and Canada in confirming the implementation of identical measures in Quebec and in Canada. This situation would deny the distinct character of Quebec.

Indeed, under section 43 of the Official Languages Act, as amended by Bill S-3, the government shall advance "the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society". However, in Quebec, French is the very foundation of Quebec's identity in North America. Quebec is the only place on the continent where French can become the common language and the language of convergence and exchange of its citizens. On a continent where the overwhelming majority of people speak English, promoting the equality of use of English and French in Quebec would weaken the status of French in Quebec and in North America.

Another thing that must be kept in mind in this debate is that the Official Languages Act does not recognize the asymmetry of needs. Both minority linguistic communities in this country do not benefit from the same services. It is clear that the needs of the minority French communities are much greater than those of English speaking people in Quebec. The situation of French speaking people outside Quebec remains very alarming and uncertain in some regions.

● (1130)

Our political party has several times mentioned the notion that the Official Languages Act should recognize the asymmetry of needs. Unfortunately, Bill S-3 still does not reflect the importance of recognizing that asymmetry.

By the way, I should point out that the Bloc Québécois is not alone in proposing this approach. Indeed, the current environment minister and the Commissioner of Official Languages have said in the past that an asymmetrical approach should be taken to the official languages file.

Another major shortcoming of this bill is that section 43, as amended, could prompt the federal government to meddle in areas that are exclusively under the jurisdiction of Quebec. We all know how much the federal government, especially when it is led by the Liberal Party, has increased, year after year, its intrusions in jurisdictions exclusive to Quebec. Members will understand that the Bloc Québécois cannot support that aspect of Bill S-3.

The amendment to section 77 of the Official Languages Act, which gives citizens the power to turn to the courts to enforce the obligations listed in Part VII, also has many shortcomings. How can one explain the absence of precise criteria regarding results achieved by the federal government in the promotion of English and French? We believe that the absence of clarity could not only foster excessive recourse to the courts, but also encourage the central government to take measures in violation of the Charter of the French Language.

I would like to conclude my remarks by making two important points. Throughout this debate, it is obvious that the federal government, in and of itself, could feel obligated by Part VII of the Official Languages Act to ensure the development of minority French-speaking communities.

The problem, according to us, is not legislative, but political, one of attitude and conviction. Undoubtedly, there is a lack of leadership in the federal government with respect to official languages and this has been the case since the very beginning of the Official Languages Act. It is that lack of political will on the part of the federal government which has penalized francophone minority communities.

When a government cannot manage to enforce a piece of legislation that has been in effect for 35 years, and this legislation is disregarded with impunity in its own jurisdictions, departments, and public service, it is because this government does not have the political courage to enforce it.

Today, it is being suggested that making Part VII of the act enforceable could settle all the problems. Come on. As I just said, for 35 years, the federal government has not had the will to enforce the sections of the act that are already enforceable. Why would its attitude change overnight?

Our party is aware of the special difficulties French-speaking minorities have. Unfortunately, the federal government chose not to recognize their special situation. I want to emphasize that our position on Bill S-3 does not take anything away from our commitments to French-speaking and Acadian minorities in Canada. In fact, the opposite is true. Since 1994, when it made a formal commitment not to let down French-speaking Canadians and Acadians, the Bloc Québécois has been the political party in the federal Parliament which has most often raised issues that are important for French-speaking minorities.

On numerous occasions, we have pressured the federal government to raise the level of funding for French-speaking organizations. For example, we asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage to increase the funding for the Canada-communities agreements to $42 million annually to meet the request of the FCFA. Unfortunately, the government has still not responded favourably.

We also raised other issues such as the number of French-speaking Canadians at senior levels in the public service, the use of French at work, the requirement for Air Canada to provide service in French outside Quebec, and so on.

The Bloc Québécois has worked on all fronts and it will continue to do so.

● (1135)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like the other members who spoke earlier, I would like to thank Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier for Bill S-3.

Like a number of French-speaking people living outside Quebec, I am from a part of our country that, during its history, has welcomed European immigrants coming directly from France. In Windsor and the riding of Essex, originally, a major segment of the population was entirely French speaking. These people could go to French schools and speak their language anywhere: at church, in stores and so on. This was not a problem.

However, after the second world war, particularly because of the influences of the United States, the French language began to disappear in my riding. This continued until the 1960s, when we started to fight against the disappearance of French.

Whether from St. Joachim, Belle-River, Pointe-aux-Roches or La Salle, all members of the community began saying that they and the federal government had the responsibility to ensure that their children will be able to continue to speak French and to preserve the French culture.

[*English*]

As a result of that battle, a lengthy fight has gone on. To some degree, Bill S-3 addresses the problem with this government and, quite frankly, previous Conservative governments. Although they paid lip service to official languages policy and passed legislation, they were not prepared in spirit to enforce that legislation. It seems to me that this attempt by Senator Gauthier is to enhance the ability for us to do that, those of us who for the last 40 to 50 years have had to fight to protect the language and culture of the francophone community in English Canada in particular.

It is difficult to say whether we should support this legislation even in principle as opposed to telling the federal government to get serious and do what it is supposed to do. We recognize the legislative responsibility it has and it should do the same thing: "protect" and "enhance", as the existing language says, the rights of the francophone and anglophone communities to be able to use their language as they deem appropriate and as they desire to do.

In preparation for today, I was thinking about one of the stories from our critic in this area, who is from New Brunswick. He made a point at one of the hearings in the official languages committee about an individual who was speaking French in the workplace and was disciplined as a result of that by the federal government. This was an employee within the federal public service. In the last couple of years I think of the fight that the francophone community in Windsor and Essex had to lead to keep French services at the post office. Terminating those services was seriously being considered.

I will be the first to say that in a democracy people have to fight for their rights; it is that argument of eternal vigilance. I fully support that, but clearly there is a major responsibility here on the part of the federal government. The Official Languages Act should be sufficient at this point, given all the experiences we have had, but what happens so many times is that individuals, communities and groups of communities have to come together and fight in the courts, sometimes all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, just to have their rights recognized and enforced. Quite frankly, it is a role that has not been played to anywhere near a sufficient degree by our federal government.

This bill is going to make it easier to do that, but even though I recognize the need for this given the role the federal government has not played in enforcing the Official Languages Act, it still begs the question as to whether at this stage, in this millennium, after all the battles we have had, it is necessary to do this. I would like to think that at the end of the day the federal government will finally come to the table and enforce the legislation, because we keep running across situations where it is not doing that.

We expect that this bill will go to committee and will be addressed at that point, perhaps with some amendments, recognizing what I believe are very valid concerns on the part of the province of Quebec in terms of the potential intrusion into provincial responsibility in that particular province. I am hopeful that the bill might be amended to a degree that would satisfy those concerns. If it is not, my party will have to give serious consideration as to whether we will be able to support it.

With regard to the bill itself, the provisions that add responsibility to the minister in terms of the Official Languages Act, the amendments to section 41, seem to me to make good common sense. Perhaps this is a response to the member for Provencher who said that should be our guiding light.

● (1140)

I am not sure, given the history of his party, that this has always been the case on its part, but it should be in this case. Subclauses 1 (2) and 1(3), which Bill S-3 is proposing to add to section 41 of the Official Languages Act, would appear to us in the NDP to be appropriate amendments as a way of delivering a message to the government and in particular to the minister about their responsibility, and perhaps in a specific way. I am now speaking specifically of subclause 1(2), which is being proposed as a specific way to enhance the language and cultural rights of the francophone and anglophone communities in this country.

The third amendment to Bill S-3, which is to add part VII of the Official Languages Act to the list for which individuals or groups can in fact start court action, that is, take the initiative themselves, I have to say we have concerns about that. We believe the last thing this country needs is more litigation over the Official Languages Act. What we need is enforcement within the existing structure.

We have often talked about and were so critical of the Soviet Union having a great constitution protecting human rights because we knew that absolutely no enforcement was ever made of those constitutional provisions and the enshrinement of those rights. It is a similar type of situation here. I will not suggest it has gone that far. It is a halfway measure.

It always seems to be a halfway measure on the part of this government and in fact of previous governments. The government will push it this far and then it stops. Quite frankly, if one goes to francophone communities across the country one sees that halfway measures are no longer acceptable and they have not been for a long time. Whether the francophone communities are in my home county of Essex or right across the country, they are no longer prepared to accept that.

It should not be the responsibility of these communities to have to fight these cases to the degree that has been dumped on them, especially when it repeatedly seems that even if it is won at the first round, the federal government will appeal it to the highest court in the province and then to the Supreme Court of Canada. That conduct on the part of this government and previous governments has to stop.

If it is necessary for this bill to go through to stop it then perhaps we have to support the bill, but I would ask this government to seriously consider taking a more proactive position and to stop these appeals and enforce the Official Languages Act as it is enshrined now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, like most of my colleagues, I am pleased to speak on Bill S-3 to amend the Official Languages Act and promote English and French, a bill which is being sponsored in this House by my colleague. Members will recall that I was happy to support this bill.

I also want to thank Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, but differently than my colleagues have done. I grew up in this region and, to me, Jean-Robert Gauthier is an institution. My family is somewhat representative of the Francophonie in Canada, because my parents are Franco-Ontarians. They come from the St. Charles parish and grew up in the same area as Jean-Robert Gauthier. My father had the opportunity to see this great man, as an MP, do a truly extraordinary job as a politician not only for the francophone cause, but in everything that job entails.

Not only was it a childhood dream of mine to be standing here in 2005 as the MP for Gatineau, but I recall my father always telling me just how important it was for me to retain my integrity as Jean-Robert Gauthier did. He is a model politician who has always fought for what he believed in. I want to pay public tribute to him. We are proud to have had such a strong representative in the great history of the Liberal Party of Canada.

I was saying that we represent the Canadian Francophonie because my parents are Franco-Ontarians, and their three children, my brother, my sister and I, were born in Quebec and grew up there. People can imagine the dinner conversations we had when we—the three of us who had grown up here in the Quebec Outaouais—talked about the Canadian Francophonie. My parents experienced the major battles and fought alongside other families for the rights of francophones outside Quebec. People such as Jacqueline Pelletier and Roland Thérien are remembered for their roles in the epic battles of Franco-Ontarians. I salute all those who fight each day for this cause.

In these discussions with my parents, I often represented what the Francophonie in Quebec is about in such discussions. We are rather privileged in Quebec to live in an environment where the French language is legally protected, without denying that it is threatened because it is not the language of the majority on this planet we live on. When we value a language, we must ensure that it is maintained. When comparing the situation of French in Quebec to its situation in the rest of Canada at the time when I was growing up at home, I had a little difficulty understanding those we called Franco-Ontarians.

I understood a little better after I was elected and appointed to the Committee on Official Languages and had the opportunity, along with several of my colleagues in this place of all political stripes, to hear many representatives of this great family, the Canadian Francophonie. I was better able to understand the struggles I had heard about growing up, which I had difficulty understanding because I was not experiencing similar struggles in Quebec. I followed the debate on Bill S-3 and realized how important all this was when the official languages commissioner appeared before the committee and explained her role, the legislation and the fact that this act should be even more effective. It seems to me that was the essence of the amendment sought by the hon. Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier.

● (1145)

I would like to digress for a moment to clarify why I support Bill S-3. It is all well and fine to rise in support of a bill, to point out that we asked umpteen questions, that our party did this, that or the other, but what matters in the end is to make a decision that can really help.

When I see the official languages commissioner fully and unconditionally support Bill S-3, yet people oppose it for one reason or another, at such times I ask myself whether these people really represent the interests of the Francophonie. Hon. members will have gathered that I am alluding to the position of the Bloc Québécois. I have trouble understanding them in this respect.

This is, moreover, a far cry from what I was told in committee when I asked why the Bloc Québécois was refusing to support Bill S-3. I was surprised by their answer. I must admit that they did ask good questions in committee. Now is the time to make an important decision for the rights of linguistic minorities. I had trouble understanding why the Bloc was against the bill. At that time, the excuse they gave was that there was no funding tied to the bill. I have found the explanation my colleague gave just now to be perhaps a bit more representative of the Bloc and its constant sacrosanct fear of the big bad feds invading Quebec's jurisdiction.

It must be clearly understood that what we are talking about here is the federal institutions, so that is a pretty feeble excuse. It is a matter of enhancing the accountability of federal institutions as far as implementing that commitment is concerned.

As you know, the Canadian government is very much attached to the cause of 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. We cannot look at the Canada of today without acknowledging the importance of English and French in Canadian society.

I agree with some of my Quebec colleagues here that, if the treatment of our anglophone minority and its survival, its institutions and so forth is compared, there is no doubt, and I am very comfortable stating this, that we look after our minority very well. That does not mean that, as far as the federal government and federal institutions are concerned, we do not need to ensure that our anglophone fellow citizens receive services in their language of choice. That is what we are talking about, and that is why an effort must be made not to shift the debate to things that make no sense, as certain representatives of the Bloc have done.

We are talking about federal institutions. I think that an anglophone living off the beaten track somewhere in Quebec is also entitled to service in his or her language of choice when dealing with federal institutions.

As you know, the Official Languages Act of 1969 is the outcome of a long reflection on the situation in this country. The Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, which was struck in 1963, worked for seven years to produce a true portrait of Canadian society. Its conclusion was that Canada was undergoing a major crisis, the resolution of which required offering both major language communities new ways of co-existing. One of those ways was to make federal institutions bilingual.

My experience at the Standing Committee on Official Languages opened my eyes to many concepts having to do with linguistic minorities. The committee is currently doing a lot of work on the issue of using the official language of one's choice at work in the public service.

I want to take this opportunity in supporting Bill S-3, to say how important the concept of using the official language of one's choice at work in the public service is to me.

As I was saying earlier, I grew up in the greater National Capital region, in the Quebec Outaouais. I am amazed that we are still talking about this. It was extremely important for Senator Gauthier to fight like the dickens to advance the cause of linguistic minorities in this country. Thirty years later, we are still having the same discussion.

It is time to make a decision, to move forward on this issue and to stop using the lousy excuses we have heard for being against Bill S-3. At the Standing Committee on Official Languages I asked the Official Languages Commissioner whether she still supported the bill. Her clear and unwavering response was yes.

I too support Bill S-3. Of course, when we make changes to legislation as important as this, they have to be considered and we will do that in committee. However, just because we ask questions in committee does not mean we are working for linguistic minorities.

● (1150)

When it is time to make decisions that count—I am saying this to all Canadians watching us, especially Quebeckers—the Bloc is absent.

● (1155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The mover of the motion now has the floor for five minutes to reply and end the debate.

Orders of the day

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to once again take part in this debate today, to conclude the second reading stage of this bill.

I was somewhat disappointed to learn, from the speeches made by some Bloc Québécois members, that they do not intend to support this legislation at second reading. I find it hard to understand that. The next time people hear their questions on the treatment of linguistic minorities, they will have serious reservations. They will wonder, among other things, if Bloc Québécois members are serious when they ask such questions. In this regard, I agree with the comments made by the hon. member for Gatineau, who said that when it comes to taking action, the Bloc is not there.

There is still time to reflect on this. I would ask the House to unanimously pass this bill at second reading because, at this stage, we are voting to determine whether we support the principle of the legislation. If an amendment is necessary, I am prepared to entertain it. I said it before and I am saying it again today. The committee will be its own master. In the unlikely event where even this process does not satisfy some members, there will be a third reading stage allowing them to vote against the whole bill.

If we vote against the bill today, we are essentially saying that it is so bad that it cannot be amended. But that is not true. This is a good bill. On the one hand, it got the unanimous support of the Senate and, on the other hand, it got the full support of the Commissioner of Official Languages, as the hon. member just pointed out. I realize that the commissioner is not a member of Parliament. However, the vote at second reading, if it takes place today, will show that some members do not want to go ahead with this initiative. This is what it will mean.

I know a thing or two about parliamentary procedure. At second reading, we vote on the principle of a bill; we vote to support the principle of the bill and refer the legislation to a committee. This is what we will be asked to vote on in a few minutes, nothing else. A member cannot say that he will vote against this bill and that if it is improved on, he will then support it at third reading. This is totally contrary to the parliamentary procedure. Hon. members know that, or else they still have a few minutes to inquire about the appropriate process.

In the remaining few seconds, I would like to thank the great Canadian, Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, especially. It is he who introduced the bill many times in the other house. Each version failed or died on the order paper at the end of a session or a Parliament. None was rejected. This bill was passed unanimously by the other house before it arrived here. That does not mean that it is beyond amendment, on the contrary. We have the right to amend it and we retain that right. Amendments considered necessary by the government or members opposite will be proposed at the appropriate time. As the bill's sponsor, I am open to that.

The time has come to broaden the scope of part VII of the Official Languages Act and to give it the enforceability already dictated by some of the courts, in New Brunswick, for example. This has been mentioned. Curious though it may seem, the very MPs who say they might vote against the bill—and I hope they will change their mind —were critical of the government's appeal of the decision in New Brunswick.

• (1200)

Today, these members are appealing, to draw a parallel, the bill before us. Things are topsy-turvy. This is not the way to defend minorities. There is enough time, though, to do the right thing.

If the hon. members think that the bill is beyond repair, poorly drafted or something like that, I reserve their right at third reading to vote against it. However, now is the time for us to act as one to help this country's minorities. I call on all members to join together. We can do it, and I hope we will.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 13, 2005, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[*Translation*]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

> That this House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its Committees.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that not too long ago — that is two minutes ago — I had the opportunity to speak in this House. I am pleased to take part in this debate on the Standing Orders and procedure of the House of Commons.

As my colleagues know, I have the honour to chair the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This is a committee that I find totally fascinating. It is responsible for dealing with issues relating to electoral reform, the report of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Standing Orders of the House, and so on. Consequently, I am really pleased to take part in this debate and to lead it off today.

Before going further, it would be important to summarize the changes that have been made in recent years and to emphasize the elements that should be the subject of a more thorough examination.

In the 37th Parliament, the House made many changes to the Standing Orders following recommendations from the special committee on modernization, of which there were two editions. This committee was modelled on the one that existed in the United Kingdom at the time. The opposition House leader and I, who was government House leader, saw what had been done in the United Kingdom and proposed a similar model for Canada. The opposition House leader at that time was none other than the current Deputy Speaker of the House. We discovered together what that modernization committee was all about. We established a similar structure in Canada, with one significant difference: the minister and government House leader in Great Britain chaired the committee in that country, whereas we adopted a formula whereby our committee's deliberations were led by the Deputy Speaker of the House. Every decision had to be unanimous, meaning that if a particular proposal was not adopted unanimously, it was simply deemed to have been withdrawn. We discussed and included in our report only those issues on which there was unanimous agreement.

Here are some of our achievements.

First, the Leader of the Opposition may now designate two main estimates for consideration in committee of the whole. This change was made a few years ago, and one might think that it has always been so, but it has not.

Second, the regulations governing the admissibility of petitions were relaxed to allow members to present a larger number of petitions on behalf of their constituents. Many members were outraged to see our constituents very carefully prepare petitions and, then, if they contained a single incorrect word, they could not be laid before the House. There was something wrong with that. While maintaining proper decorum, we have relaxed the rules to enable us to present a larger number of petitions.

Third, the government is now required to respond to petitions within 45 days. This requirement did not exist previously. There had been a kind of black hole. When a petition was presented, the assumption was that the other members in the House were aware. If a member was not in the House for the presentation of petitions, he or she could read them in Hansard the next day. We know that the hon. members are very enthusiastic to read the previous day's record. But in the improbable event that someone had not read them, the petitions were gone; there was a black hole. Now, however, the government has to provide a response.

● (1205)

Other changes made during the 37th Parliament included, for instance, the creation of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and the Estimates, as well as the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Previously, the official languages committee was a joint committee. Now, it is a stand-alone committee, in that only members of the House sit on it.

There is also the procedure whereby committees elect their chairperson through secret ballot. Personally, I was opposed, and I still am. I find it somewhat unusual that, as parliamentarians, while we debate openly, we would vote secretly. Some likened a secret ballot to the process used by our voters. But our voters are not elected representatives; we are. In my opinion, we have a responsibility to make our votes a matter of public record.

The House adopted a code of conduct for parliamentarians, which will be administered by the new, independent Ethics Commissioner. Mr. Shapiro has become an officer of this House and will be in charge of administering the code of conduct.

[*English*]

The current Prime Minister has made democratic reform a priority. The government has tabled an action plan for democratic reform in the House of Commons as one of the first orders of business. We have made progress in implementing a number of reforms.

For instance, 70% of the votes are free votes for government MPs. At the risk of being a little on the partisan side here, I am sure the threshold for independent votes is not nearly that high on the opposition benches because they have a much more rigid party discipline and they do not quite reflect the interests of their constituents the way we do on this side of the House, but that is the way it is.

Committees are reviewing nominations to key appointments before they are finalized. Bills are routinely sent to committee before second reading. The reason the referral of bills before second reading is important is that if a bill is referred to committee subsequent to second reading, the amendments are limited to what is referred to as the scope of the bill. In other words, the amendments cannot go beyond the scope of the bill. Any amendment has to narrow the bill and cannot broaden its mandate. However, if a bill is referred to committee before second reading, both concepts work.

An additional $5 million has been provided for committee research. Maybe this is a good moment to talk about that because a number of us are presently looking at electoral reform. That is part of the mandate of the committee that I chair. I see another member of that committee. He and I and others have had occasion recently of touring a number of other countries to compare their electoral systems.

The staff we have is absolutely outstanding. Our committee clerk and our researchers are doing an excellent job, particularly on this committee. This committee is one that I know better than others because it is the one on which I work at the present time. I cannot say enough about the quality of assistance that we are getting from the table and the committee clerk and of course the library for the committee research staff. They are excellent. In the last Parliament when I chaired the official languages committee, it was the same. We had fine quality people.

What is necessary to be done now? We could do a number of things to modify some of the rules. I did an overview of some of the things done so far as a background for other committee members in order to speak to these issues.

I have one particular bone to pick and it is with respect to the concurrence motions in committee reports. They are now being utilized as a method of filibustering by the opposition. That is not normal. Also, concurring in a committee report is not supposed to replace the government order for a given day. That is nonsense.

For instance, there are even some motions which could be debated today. Today we are debating how to make the place more democratic and that may be stopped by someone who wants to allegedly debate a committee report instead of the order of the House. I hope that at the very least that will not be done today. I look forward to the contribution of all hon. members.

● (1210)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, I am quite impressed with the knowledge the member has of procedures around here. He has done a good job over the years in representing that part of the work.

I would like to comment on his very last statement. He said that he would like the opposition party not to have the ability to debate concurrence reports, yet the Standing Orders are there for that purpose. It seems that committee reports rot on shelves and most of the time they are never acted upon. The government never responds to say that it is agreeing on it.

Surely that is an application in the House the member would like to preserve for the time when he will be in opposition, which will be shortly.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, apart from the last statement with regard to the so-called time when I will be in opposition, I was in the opposition for many years around here. I sat from 1981 to 1984 at the provincial level at Queens Park and from 1984 until 1993 in opposition here. I have sat in opposition at one level or another longer than the hon. member has, but of course he has considerable service around here as well.

I did not say that we should not be able to concur in committee reports. What I said is that the present situation means that debatable motions to concur in committee reports have found their way to replacing the orders of the day. That is ridiculous.

There are government days. We know what they are. About one day a week is an opposition day and the opposition can choose whatever topic it would like to debate on that day. The unfairness in the present system is the government cannot tell the opposition what to debate on the opposition days, but the opposition tells the government what to debate on the government's day because if the opposition does not like the subject, the opposition cuts if off by moving a motion to concur in a committee report.

Voting on concurrence in a committee report is okay, but to say that the motion can be moved almost at any time and never on an opposition day and only on a government day is an abuse of the system.

If I deliberately moved concurrence in my report on the hon. member's opposition day and did it for about six consecutive weeks, I think I would hear about. That is the same thing that is happening now in reverse.

I do not know whether the hon. member will ever sit on the government side; that is for the electors to decide, and several years down the road who knows what they may decide. However, if they ever decide that is the case, I am sure he will come to the realization very quickly that this particular rule has been bent out of shape. That is the point I am making, not that concurrence in committee reports needs to be abolished. It needs to be fixed because it now has a definition totally different from the one that was envisaged when that rule was put in place.

● (1215)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my remarks in the debate today regarding Standing Orders by congratulating the Leader of the Opposition, who at the beginning of this Parliament negotiated a number of rule changes with which the House is now experimenting.

The first rule change altered the appointment and selection process of the Deputy Speaker and the other two chair occupants, and obviously that was of interest to you, Mr. Speaker, because you are one of them. Instead of the Prime Minister appointing the Deputy Speaker and the other two chair occupants, the Speaker now selects candidates and presents them to the House for ratification.

To improve debate, it was proposed that all speeches be followed by a period of questions and comments. Often members did not have an opportunity to question the most important speakers leading off debate on legislation. We also made all opposition motions votable.

Since the 1950s, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts was chaired by an opposition member. We now have opposition chairs for the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. We opened up vice-chair positions to other parties other than the official opposition and government.

We changed the way concurrence motions would be considered. We had this peculiar situation that caused a motion to concur in a committee report to become a government order. Committees could hardly be considered independent if the government controlled whether there would be a vote on a concurrence motion. We just heard a bit of debate about this change.

One of the frustrations when the House is not in session and when an issue arises where a government response is required, is that there is no parliamentary forum available to debate the issues and government accountability is left exclusively to press conferences and media scrums.

Standing Order 106 was amended to provide that within five days of the receipt by the clerk of a standing committee of a request signed by any four members of that said committee, the chair of the said committee shall convene such a meeting. That way, during a recess a committee could be convened and the minister could be invited to brief members and be held accountable.

The opposition, and in particular the member for Yorkton—Melville, were instrumental in reforming private members' business. We now have all private members' items votable, and that all members be given a chance to have at least one item considered by Parliament between elections has been essentially realized.

The one flaw is the ability of the majority on the procedure and House affairs committee to deem an item non-votable. These members were supposed to be guided by certain criteria that were designed to help them make a non-partisan decision. However, when Bill C-268, an act to confirm the definition of marriage and to preserve ceremonial rights, was deemed non-votable, it demonstrated that we could not expect this committee to make an impartial decision when faced with a difficult issue.

The committee majority decided, on the grounds that the bill was unconstitutional, that it ought not to be deemed votable. The real reason, I contend, was that the government wanted to avoid the embarrassment of voting on something controversial. Bill C-268 has been the only bill thus far in this Parliament to have been designated non-votable. I would recommend taking away the decision of the procedural appropriateness of private members' items from this committee and give it to the Speaker or to the House itself.

Secret ballot elections at committee were brought about by a motion from the former opposition House leader, the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

I have outlined the record of the Conservative Party on parliamentary reform in this Parliament in particular. I would like to now turn to the Prime Minister's record on parliamentary reform.

The 1993 red book, written by the Prime Minister, contains commitments to parliamentary reform and more openness to members of Parliament. After nearly a dozen years of Liberal government, we know what those promises are worth. I would suggest to the members of the procedure and House affairs committee, who will no doubt be taking note of the debate today, to consider the Prime Minister's record on parliamentary reform. I would recommend that they draft amendments to the rules that take the opposite position. In other words, if the Prime Minister is against something, then it must be a good idea.

For example, as finance minister, the Prime Minister set up many of the foundations that are outside the purview of Parliament's oversight and control. Therefore, I contend we should establish measures that bring them into the purview of Parliament's oversight and control.

● (1220)

On June 13, 2000, the Prime Minister voted against Bill C-214, an act to provide for the participation of the House of Commons when treaties were concluded. Therefore, the participation of the House of Commons when treaties are concluded must be a good idea.

On making crown corporations subject to the Access to Information Act, the Prime Minister voted against Bill C-216, an act to amend the Access to Information Act for crown corporations. Therefore, Bill C-216 must be necessary and should be implemented.

I think the House gets the idea.

I would argue that the concentration of power in the Office of the Prime Minister, which is at the root of much of our democratic deficit, has grown not lessened under this Prime Minister's watch.

The multitudes of government powers that ultimately rest with the Prime Minister are staggering. The exclusive monopoly over the central powers of government have even led the current Prime Minister himself, in his address to law students at Osgoode Hall in the fall of 2002, to state that the essence of power in Ottawa was "who you know in the PMO".

This leads me to the recent appointment of the Prime Minister's friend Glen Murray to chair the round table on the environment and economy. Despite a rejection from the environment committee and the House, Glen Murray continues in office. The opinion of the House is of no consequence. It is "who you know in the PMO".

His recent choices to fill the vacancies in the Senate were a slap in the face to the people of Alberta who elected their senators. The opinion of the people of Alberta is obviously not important to the Liberal Party. Again, it was "who you know in the PMO".

"Who you know in the PMO" has to go.

At our convention in March of this year we adopted a number of policy items regarding parliamentary reform.

In the area of fiscal management, a Conservative government would strengthen the internal audit and comptrollership functions of government, ensuring that programs delivery would match the intent of the program, spending would be measured against objectives and cost overruns would be brought immediately to the attention of Parliament. Would that not have been a good idea with the sponsorship program?

We would create the independent office of the Comptroller General who would report to Parliament with a mandate to ensure that the highest possible standards and practices of expenditure management would be enforced in all federal departments, crown corporations, agencies and foundations.

A Conservative government would restore the audit role of the Treasury Board. We would allow the Auditor General to table reports with the Clerk of the House of Commons when Parliament was not sitting and have them made public through the Speaker.

A Conservative government would ensure transparency and accuracy of and confidence in the government's finances by providing the Auditor General with full access to all documents from all federal organizations.

A Conservative government would ensure that senior officers such as the Auditor General, Chief Electoral Officer, Comptroller General, Ethics Commissioner, Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner would be appointed by Parliament and report to it.

We would restore democratic accountability in the House of Commons by allowing free votes. All votes would be free except for the budget and main estimates.

We would ensure that nominees to the Supreme Court of Canada would be ratified by a free vote in Parliament, after receiving the approval of the justice committee.

A Conservative government would support the election of senators. The Conservative Party believes in an equal Senate to address the uneven distribution of Canada's population and provide a balance to safeguard regional interests.

Where the people of a province or territory by democratic election chose persons qualified to be appointed to the Senate, a Conservative government would fill any vacancy in the Senate for that province or territory from among those elected persons.

We would consider changes to the electoral system.

We would establish a judicial review committee of Parliament to prepare an appropriate response to those court decisions, which Parliament believed should be addressed through legislation.

A Conservative government would seek the agreement of the provinces to amend the Constitution to include property rights as well as guarantee that no person should be deprived of their just right without the due process of law and full just and timely compensation.

We are committed to the federal principle and to the notion of strong provinces within a strong Canada.

A Conservative government would ensure that the use of the federal spending power in provincial jurisdictions would be limited, authorizing the provinces to use the opting out formula with full compensation if they wanted to opt out of a new or modified federal program in areas of shared or exclusive jurisdiction.

I am proud of the accomplishments of the Conservative Party of Canada in the area of parliamentary reform. We believe that the people of Canada and their Parliament matter when it comes to policy decisions. It is time we turned the page and recover from the embarrassment of this corrupt Liberal government.

● (1225)

However, to end on a positive note, with all the Liberal sham, Liberal corruption and Liberal broken promises, it is still a beautiful Parliament and an honour to represent the people Prince George—Peace River in it.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy listening to speeches of my colleague across the way. He and I have had opportunities to work together now for many years.

Needless to say, some of his speech went a little beyond the reform of the standing orders. Given that he did, I feel obligated to ask a question about it.

If I heard his remarks correctly, he said that he believed in an equal Senate. Could he elaborate on that? Does that mean an equal number of senators per region, which is roughly the formula now, or an equal number of senators per provinces, which means my province of Ontario with 39% of the population would have the same number of senators as P.E.I., with one half of 1%?

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that out of my entire remarks, which I would suggest the majority of them were a direct attack on the member's Prime Minister and his failure to address in any dramatic fashion the issue of what he terms the democratic deficit, the one area my colleague from across the way zeroed in on was the issue of Senate reform.

Nevertheless, since he did, I would be happy to discuss that. What I am referring to is the issue of equal Senate representation in the country to offset representation by population in the lower chamber, something I know the member himself is concerned about, so we have this balance in our Parliament.

He specifically asked whether that would be equality by province or equality by region. It is a good question. It is one with which I think all Canadians struggle, recognizing that any change to the present status quo, when it comes to the number of senators selected from individual provinces, would require a constitutional change, something I am sure the member is well aware of because I have heard him speak of that as well.

I do not know whether ultimately the goal would be equality by provinces or equality by regions. However, I would argue with the hon. member when he ways that we have equality by region right now. The present situation that sees us with four members of Parliament and four senators representing Prince Edward Island is an anomaly that needs to be addressed. That would require a constitutional change, something I think all parties are reluctant to go down that path right now.

What I was alluding to, as a long term goal or objective, is that we need to address reform of the upper chamber. I think that has become evidently clear to all members of Parliament from all parties. I want to state unequivocally that our party supports not only selecting senators from an elected list provided by the province, something on which Alberta took the initiative and did.

The Prime Minister and some of his cabinet ministers argue, and this is the term they use, that they do not support having Senate reform piecemeal. We hear that often. The member, I and the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which the hon. member chairs, are involved in looking at electoral reform right now. For the Prime Minister to have slapped the face of every Albertan who participated in that election, when they selected their choice for elected senators, by disavowing that and selecting his own senators to represent Alberta is absolutely shameful.

To try to use the argument that the government will not do it piecemeal, is a complete denial of what has taken place in other countries. The United States of America got to the position of having an equal Senate, piecemeal. It started out state by state, changing the rules to select their senators. That has been the case in many places around the world.

For the Prime Minister to suggest that we cannot accomplish this piecemeal is ridiculous. If he would have had the commitment to address the democratic deficit, which he tries to tell people he has, and appointed the selection of the people of Alberta to the upper chamber, then increasingly other provinces would have been encouraged to follow suit and we would have got to the position where we would have had an elected upper chamber.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons certainly do not make for a very exciting debate for those watching. However, it is quite an important moment in the context of the work we do here. It is important to adjust the Standing Orders from time to time and to make relevant recommendations.

Today I want to address the extremely important issue of royal recommendations. One of the problems we are currently experiencing in this Parliament has to do with private members' bills that require a royal recommendation. For those watching us, a royal recommendation amounts to an authorization by the government for bills involving a significant amount of money. In such a case, it is necessary for the government to make a decision.

For example, when an hon. member proposes an amendment to a bill that would result in a huge investment of hundreds of millions of dollars, this calls for governmental consideration and a royal recommendation.

However, the clerks of the House, especially in this Parliament, are called on constantly to interpret the meaning of or need for a royal recommendation for bills being introduced. I must say—to all the clerks of the House—the need for a royal recommendation is being interpreted much more strictly now than in the past. Now a royal recommendation is required for bills, motions or amendments identical to ones from the previous Parliament that did not require a royal recommendation according to the clerks.

I have the feeling that the clerks of the House are being very careful right now and are acting on behalf of the government and becoming, in a way, the government's supervisor. Allow me to give a few examples.

During the second session of the 36th Parliament, several amendments to Bill C-2 were debated and put to a vote at report stage. Among the amendments to this bill regarding the appointment of returning officers, Motion No. 25 proposed that returning officers be appointed through a competition and no longer be appointed by the government, but by the chief electoral officer, and so on. I will spare you the details.

My colleague for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord introduced Bill C-312, which sought to repeal the power of the governor in council to appoint returning officers and instead confer it on the chief electoral officer. In order for such an amendment to be made, the office of the clerk of the House of Commons required a royal recommendation. Such a recommendation is required when a parliamentary bill or motion commits substantial public funds. Repealing the power of the executive branch to appoint returning officers and conferring on the chief electoral officer the power to appoint such officers following a competition is suddenly considered by the office of the clerk of the House of Commons an undue expense requiring a royal recommendation. In my opinion, a mistake has been made.

● (1235)

Frankly, the clerks do an exceptional job. They unfailingly inspire our trust. They have never misled us. I am the longest-serving House leader here. I have held this position for 11 years and I have never once had reason to complain about a single clerk.

However, this new context of caution has led, in my opinion, the office of the clerk of the House of Commons to restrict the eligibility criteria for motions in the House to the point of excess. Now that motions can be passed on the basis of number, the opposition is no longer being allowed motions that were permitted a few months or years ago and for which no royal recommendation was required. In my opinion, such interference in parliamentary affairs and the work of MPs in this House is unacceptable.

Bill C-9 on regional development is another example of this. I must say that this is the straw that broke the camel's back. Our Bloc Québécois colleague called for, among other things, amendments to this bill, so as to better respect the Quebec government's priorities with regard to regional development. Consequently, he proposed the following amendment:

> *b*) enter into agreements with the Government of Quebec for the transfer to Quebec of federal funds allocated to regional development programs;

The member was not requesting that funds be added to regional development—although that would be desirable—but that provisions be made so that agreements between Ottawa and Quebec could make it possible to transfer available funds directly to priorities of Quebec, if there was such an agreement. There is nothing startling nor incorrect there. It does not add one penny. It merely says that funds will be spent differently.

The section of the bill reads as follows:

> —enter into contracts, memoranda of understanding or other arrangements in the name of Her Majesty in right of Canada or in the name of the Agency, including cooperation agreements and agreements related to distinct sectors of Quebec's economy;

The possibility of agreements is already provided for in the government bill. The members of the Bloc Québécois propose that such an agreement be concluded to provide for an automatic transfer of funds, without judgment or veto right by the federal government.

The clerks of the House of Commons tell us that a royal recommendation is needed. I no longer understand anything about what a royal recommendation is. We are not requesting that funds be added, we are requesting that they be used differently, that a different transfer mechanism be added.

That is what broke the camel's back. I must admit that I cannot accept such a thing. I understand the work of the clerks and their prudence. However, I would not want them to substitute themselves for the government, and I would not want the clerks of the House of Commons to feel that their profession is now to save the minority government in all circumstances.

I think that the clerks of the House must look at the definition of royal recommendation with an open mind. In the absence of change to the Standing Orders, I think that what was acceptable one year ago should still be acceptable today. The fact that the table officers give a new interpretation to the Standing Orders that tends to be favourable to the government seems to me to be a slow shift toward a partisan activity, namely, protecting the government.

I am glad to raise that issue today. I know that the clerks, who are very competent officers, will look at the issue. I consider that the royal recommendation is now given too narrow an interpretation. That interferes with parliamentary work and the hon. members and parliamentarians are suddenly prevented from doing the exact same work that they could do last year or two or three years ago.

That is why I would like a better definition of the royal recommendation. Marleau-Montpetit, which is a precious resource on authorization, does not help. The part on royal recommendation will have to be rewritten. The clerks themselves do not understand it. Maybe they should go back to Beauchesne, which is perhaps a bit clearer.

● (1240)

So, that part will have to be looked at and I invite the clerks to work on that. I particularly invite them to interpret the royal recommendation the way they did before we had a minority government. That is all we want.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened to the hon. member carefully and I will just address the matter of royal recommendations.

In my opinion, he has raised two very different issues. The first concerns whether a new method of appointing returning officers would or would not require a royal recommendation. It is, in my opinion, easy to draft a bill that would not make such a recommendation necessary, but as to how the bill of the hon. member or his colleague was drafted, I have not read it. It would, however be simple to draft it—or so I believe—to avoid the need for a royal recommendation. So that is a matter of debate

Of course, if it is stated that the Chief Electoral Officer shall have an office with such and such responsibilities, with employees and so forth, that would certainly require a royal recommendation. It would, however, probably be less obviously the case if the bill were to read something along these lines: "The Chief Electoral Officer shall ensure that individuals are appointed according to criteria of transparency" or something like that. That would satisfy the CEO and not necessarily mean any additional expenses for the government. It all depends on the wording. I do not want to scrutinize the work of the clerks here, but I can imagine that the wording would determine whether or not a royal recommendation was required.

In the second instance, the matter is far clearer. In our procedural manual—Marleau-Montpetit, I mean—it states clearly on page 711: "An appropriation accompanied by a royal recommendation, though it can be reduced, can neither be increased nor redirected without a new recommendation." This was, as usual, not something invented by Messrs. Marleau and Montpetit. They refer to Speaker Lamoureux's ruling of June 21, 1972. It is very likely that this would also be found in Erskine May if one did a search for it. This interpretation has, in fact, been in existence for at least 33 years. So I do not feel it is a recent interpretation. That is my opinion on the two matters, which I feel are two different things.

I would invite the hon. member's comments on this.

● (1245)

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Madam Speaker, it is not complicated, the same motion presented in the 36th Parliament, concerning returning officers, did not require that the table officers of the House of Commons to demand royal recommendation. It was the case in the last Parliament. However, they now require it for the same motion, which was recently introduced. There cannot be double standards, and this is why I say that the royal recommendation was demanded in a much more restrictive fashion.

Among other things, the clerk tells us that a royal recommendation is required, because the amendment which is mentioned previously was debated, voted upon, etc. Even then it did not require a royal recommendation. The fact is that those services indicate that his bill requires a royal recommendation because it takes projects away from the governor in council, which has the aim of changing the royal recommendation.

A royal recommendation is required when a bill involves the expenditure of substantial money. The member has said that the reason the table officers require a royal recommendation is that it involves taking powers away from the executive branch. If we can no longer deal with powers, or responsibilities, or money, it is time to close up shop, because we can no longer move motions.

The other reason they refused the royal recommendation is that the bill provided returning officers be appointed for a ten year mandate. A ten year mandate instead of a four or five year mandate does not imply additional money, because this money is related to the holding of a general election or not. This only means that the people are guaranteed to have a mandate for a longer period. The government says that this is why the royal recommendation is required. It makes no sense. I know that even my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott Russell agrees with me on this issue. I see him nodding.

Bill C-9 provided for entering the conclusion of contracts, memoranda of understanding or other arrangements in the name of Her Majesty in right of Canada. My colleague said that we would want to enter with the Quebec government into agreements providing for the transfer to Quebec of federal funds allocated to programs. When the bill mentions that the government gives itself the power to enter into agreements, arrangements, protocols, contracts, and that my colleague says that we would want to enter into agreements with the Quebec government, and that this requires a royal recommendation, there is something wrong.

I know that my colleague, who was a parliamentary leader for a long time and who knows me well, knows that I would not have raised these issues lightly and needlessly. These are issues that deserve consideration, because a mistake was made by the House table officers. Since they never made a mistake in 11 years, I would like them to maintain a perfect score before I leave this House and I would like to have the fondest of memories of them.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to rise in this debate given that this is the first one we have had on the standing orders since we have had a minority government, our first minority government in 25 years. It is interesting to look at it from in terms of some of the developments that have occurred. In effect, I believe Parliament has forced the Prime Minister and the government to respond to the democratic deficit in the House.

As we approached the changes in the standing orders that we were seeking as a party, we had certain guiding principles, which I want to address briefly. Our first guiding principle was that we were looking for a more efficient operation of the chamber and that delays and time wasted would be, as much as possible, a thing of the past.

We also wanted to elevate the quality of the debate in the House and that the contributions from all members on both sides of the House would be reflected both in the chamber and perhaps more important, because of the improvements we sought, improvements in their ability to do the work in committee where so much of the legislative process does take place and so much of the important changes occur at that level, or should, which has not always been the case in the past.

We also wanted to deal with the issue of government appointments. We believe this is a glaring failure of developing the democratic process up to this point and it continues even now. I am going to make more extensive comments about that in a moment.

Finally, we are looking to, as a chamber as a whole, facilitate individual members being able to bring forward in a meaningful way local concerns so that even though they may not be beyond that riding or perhaps the region, that they still are of some national significance and need to be brought forth in this chamber. We feel at this point we have not been able to accomplish that.

Let us look at what we have done. We have changed the nomination process for the deputy speaker and chair of the committee of the whole. It is no longer a partisan nomination. The name comes from the speaker that we elect at the start of the Parliament. This is definitely an improvement from the past situation where this position was simply chosen by the prime minister and, generally, when one looks at the history of the choices, it has been made completely based on political affiliation and, to some degree, straight patronage as opposed to looking at the ability of the individual and the respect that individual had from the House as a whole. We have made some substantial changes in that respect in this term of office.

We have also changed the standing committee structure. In this regard, one that we are particularly proud of from this end of the chamber is the women's committee. For so long we have not had a standing committee on women's issues. It is long overdue. We are looking forward to some of the work that will be coming out of that committee, in particular the gender analysis it is doing of government programs, something that again is long overdue.

We have changed the structure of the debate in the House to allow for questions and comment periods for almost all speeches. This has expanded the debate and it has become a more realistic debate. We would, however, say that there is one flaw that we have pushed for and have not yet achieved and that is to allow for more extensive questions about the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition when they give their opening debates on a particular bill.

We have made all opposition days votable. It never made any sense that we had not done this in the past. If the issue was important enough to take up the day of Parliament on opposition, that issue was important enough for all members to be given the opportunity to vote their position.

We have changed the provisions for the debate based on committee reports. We now have provisions for a three hour debate when the reports come back.

● (1255)

It is almost a travesty that when so much good work is being done at the committee level historically, when the work is reported back to the chamber it often gets ignored both by the chamber, on impetus from the government, and, more particularly, by the government. Now at least there will be a three hour debate on those reports, as needed, and there will be a vote on those reports so that Parliament as a whole will be given the opportunity to respond.

I make one caution. We have noticed that there have been a good number of concurrence motions on committee reports, some of which, quite frankly, we would say are frivolous and designed simply to take up the time of the chamber. We believe we need to review this at the committee level in order to see if there is some way of forestalling that abuse of the chamber.

I want to go to the one major failing that we feel has occurred in this Parliament in terms of expanding the democratic nature of Parliament, and that is with regard to government appointments. The member for Ottawa Centre from my party, a person with a long tradition in the House who had stepped away and is now back in the House, has prepared a proposal and we have begun to try to move it through the various committees. Up to this point more than five of the standing committees have in fact accepted the proposals that we as NDP members have put forward.

We said that if we are going to be doing something meaningful as members of Parliament about government appointments, we need to have some type of criteria. We have told each committee to establish a criteria as to how appointments are going to be dealt with. We have made it very clear that criteria must include merit; that the appointment has to be merit based as opposed to just a political party one happens to belong to or the person is a friend of the person making the appointment.

Finally, the process we are pressing forward with and getting some response from committees on is that the process would be reviewed on an ongoing basis, the appointments would be reviewed in some meaningful fashion and that information would be communicated so that there would be some transparency and some accountability to the appointment process.

I recently had the opportunity, along with the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, to be both in New Zealand and Australia to watch some of their debates. We attended their after adjournment proceedings, as they are referred to I think more formally, or what we call the late show. Originally, if we look at the history of that process, it was designed to expand detail and debate on issues that were asked in the House during question period. In fact, it has turned into being one individual member of Parliament making a set statement in the form of a short speech, a government member responding in the same fashion, and there really is no significant exchange of ideas.

It was interesting to watch question period in particular in New Zealand, and I had seen it earlier in Australia, where there was a much greater exchange. Real principles were being debated, real thoughts and issues were being transferred back and forth between the person asking the question and the government member, whether it was a minister or a parliamentary secretary responding. We believe it is possible to change our late show process to incorporate that so there is an exchange but it needs more work.

We also believe that if we handle that properly it would let us address the other issue that I had mentioned, which we do not believe we have been able to do at this point, which is to allow individual members of Parliament to bring forward local issues that are of particular concern to their ridings or regions. By expanding the scope of the late shows, it would allow us one opportunity to do that.

We believe that the minority government has had some significant impact on the orders and the way the House is operating and we look forward to working toward expanding that even more in the future.

● (1300)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Windsor for his very articulate statement around addressing some of the issues in the current Standing Orders.

He talked about the first ever parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women. The committee came about as a result of the minority government. We have noticed around the committee that we are engaged in a very active process with women's organizations across the country to identify the issues that are really important to women. One of the things that has come forward is the issue around core funding, which has been decimated over the last several years.

The member for Windsor talked about the fact that the good work of committees in the past has often been ignored and how, with the new Standing Order, there is an opportunity for committee work to come to the House and be voted upon.

I would like the member to specifically comment on the fact that oftentimes, even though issues do come to the House for a vote, we still need the political will to implement things like gender based analysis, reinstituting core funding for women's groups and doing a detailed policy and legislative analysis with a gender lens.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, on my colleague's question and comments, it is my belief that government can be influenced by committee work through government members sitting on the committee. If the committee is in fact functional and effective all the members of the committee both exchange and grow ideas, which are then transferred to each of their caucuses. I believe this very strongly.

I think that is why the setting up of the committee on the status of women was extremely important. As we increase the gender parity in the House over the next decade or two, and I am afraid it will take that long, I hope that committee will become more influential in all of the caucuses in the House, obviously including the caucus of the government of the day. I believe that the work and the analysis the committee members are doing and the particular analysis they are bringing to bear as women members of the House on government programs and policy will be shared and I hope will influence all members of the House and all caucuses in the House.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked briefly about the review of committee appointments. He will know that there are very many important appointments made each and every year. I wonder if the member would comment on whether or not it is practical given the constraints on certain committees and whether or not there might be some suggestions forthcoming on how committees can have the resources to do the job they should be doing.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, my Liberal colleague's question concerns an issue that I have addressed in my own mind repeatedly in regard to the ability of any committee to properly, effectively and efficiently review all the appointments that are within its purview.

I sit on the justice committee. I was told that on an annual basis we have somewhere between 500 and 1,000 appointments, I believe, including in the judiciary, the parole board and the Correctional Service. The list is almost endless.

Of course it is impractical for any committee, especially a committee of the nature of the justice committee, to even contemplate reviewing every single appointment. That is why we thought it was so important to establish criteria which would then be mandated for implementation by all of the civil service, by commissions or whatever is making the appointments. It would serve as a screen for us. As appointments come before us, we may very well want to check from time to time, and I think as a committee we should be doing that, to see if the process is in fact working and that merit is the test, not political affiliation or political patronage.

I just have one final point in response to the question and that is the question of resources. I have analyzed, and I think my party has done the same thing, the need to have additional resources in the way of staffing to assist the committee specifically on appointments. I think it has to be looked at as a way of making it possible for us as elected members to do a meaningful review of appointments, perhaps some specific ones but also more generally. I think we need some additional staff resources to do that.

● (1305)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 10 minutes is not long enough to talk about this important area. Let me go over it quickly.

It has been argued that Parliament has been abdicating its responsibility with regard to legislation, the reason being that much of our legislation includes references to regulations, which parliamentarians do not see during the normal cycle of legislation. They are in fact promulgated after the fact and often include policy initiatives which, had members known about them, might in fact have influenced their opinions on certain of the clauses, if not the bill itself. I wanted to raise that as a general concern and give a specific example.

In the last Parliament, the 38th Parliament, in the second session, the second half of Bill C-13 on reproductive technologies had to do with controlled activities. There were about 24 references to the regulations. Royal assent was given to that bill on March 29, 2004, over a year ago, and those regulations still have not appeared. They are very important to the functioning of the bill. The bill is very important to Canadians, yet those regulations are still outstanding. I would simply ask why. I think there has to be a sunset clause at some point in time, where, if regulations cannot be promulgated within a reasonable period of time, the bill must come back to the House and we must determine what the problem is.

I would also suggest, as a pre-emptive strike, that we should require all bills having references to regulations to include where possible draft regulations or at least a statement of intent of the regulations so that the members can have a reasonable opportunity to understand what they can expect in that bill.

I want to move now to report stage motions, on which I got quite a bit of experience during that same bill. These motions are opportunities for members who are not on the committee to have some input into a bill. Under the Standing Orders, members can put them in. If there are too many, the Speaker has the right under the Standing Orders to group them. Since each member only has 10 minutes to debate, on one grouping alone I had 13 report stage motions.

If every report stage motion is to be respected, it is not acceptable to have more than five report stage motions in one group, simply because how could anyone possibly describe their motion and make their argument as to why that motion should be accepted in such a short period of time? I think that has to be looked at. Under Bill C-13, there were something like 10 or 12 groupings. It does not happen very often, but in controversial bills it will. I just suggest that we have to look at this situation.

We also have to look at the timing. When a bill finishes at committee and is reported back to the House, report stage motions can happen very quickly. As members know, the transcripts from the committee are not available until several days, if not a week or so, after the hearing. Report stage motions are inadmissible if they have already been dealt with at the committee stage.

Therefore, members are spending all kinds of time drafting report stage amendments that will ultimately be thrown out because they were dealt with at committee. How can a member possibly know unless when a bill is reported the committee should also report all of the amendments that were proposed? Then we have to provide a reasonable amount of time for members to draft up their ideas, submit them to the Journals branch and get the proper form in hand, in both official languages, for review prior to signing off.

The current time under the Standing Orders is absolutely insufficient to allow members of Parliament to properly deal with report stage motions. I believe that if we are going to respect report stage motions as having legitimacy we have to amend the time and the arrangements with regard to report stage motions so they get the attention they deserve.

I also want to refer to a problem that occurred. It was a very serious problem. A motion that was passed at committee stage by the committee on a particular bill came to this place in a report stage motion. There was a government motion to reverse that motion. It had to do with having a 50% representation of women on a board related to reproductive technologies.

The debate was over on that report stage motion, at which time the Speaker's normal process is to say, “All those in favour of the motion will please say yea”, and “All those opposed will please say nay”. Then the Speaker is supposed to say, “In my opinion the yeas have it” or “The nays have it”, whatever is the case.

● (1310)

In this case, the Speaker in the chair at the time, Reg Bélair, did not indicate in his opinion who had it and then proceeded to say, “Carried”. A very important motion of the committee was overturned. There was no opportunity to deal with it in a proper vote, because the Speaker made a mistake. He thought he had said, “In my opinion the yeas have it”. That was not the case.

I rose on a point of order. He said, “No, I did. I called it. It is carried”. That was it. The next day I rose and, with the Speaker in the chair, raised the issue again on a matter of privilege. The Speaker said the person in the chair at the time had made his decision and it would stand. That was a very serious problem. I think there has to be a solution.

Let me suggest one solution. It would be that the Table have a running recording of the dialogue going on in the House, which could be quickly reviewed in the event that there were ever a question about who said what and when. We just cannot rely on hearing “go away” and count on the blues. Sometimes important motions die because mistakes are made. I simply raise it because it can happen, it did happen and it was a very serious issue with regard to this place.

Finally, there is the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Very often during routine proceedings the procedure and House affairs committee chair comes before this place and tables a report. Then, at motions, he stands and requests the unanimous consent of the House to concur in that report he has just tabled and no one has seen.

If that is the will of the House, that is fine, except that what happens if from time to time there is a substantive matter there that members have not seen? I understand that there are routine matters of changing people on committees or other routine matters that have to come forward, but what happens if there is a substantive matter that members have not seen? The point is, why should I be asked to give unanimous consent and even vote on a report that I have not seen? I think it is inappropriate to ask members to put themselves in that position.

In my view, to the extent that the procedure and House affairs committee has routine matters there should be an amendment to the Standing Orders that would make them deemed adopted on tabling, just as we have with other routine matters.

If it is viewed that all matters coming out of the procedure and House affairs committee have representatives of all parties at the highest levels, and if they are going to make the decisions on our behalf, then we might as well say any report coming from procedure and House affairs, once tabled in the House, is deemed to be adopted. We have to make that decision.

I know that the Lord's Prayer was deleted or eliminated from this place on a Friday by a report that was tabled and for which concurrence was obtained immediately during routine proceedings. I believe that sometimes there are items within the reports of the procedure and House affairs committee that members should be apprised of.

I also believe that if we could at least have those non-routine items here that there shall not be automatic concurrence given, that there should be a requirement for a concurrence motion to be put and to be debatable, like there is for any other standing committee. It is a standing committee and standing committee reports are debatable, but when I rose on one occasion to debate an item of interest in a report, I asked for debate on the motion to concur and was denied. The reason given was that it is traditionally not our practice.

I do not care about "traditionally not our practice". I care about what the Standing Orders are. The Standing Orders say that the reports of standing committees are debatable in this place.

One way or another we need to address the activities of the procedure and House affairs committee. I do not want to see someone sneaking into the House in the middle of debate, interrupting the House and asking for unanimous consent to adopt a report that was brought forward during routine proceedings.

Again, I find it absolutely untenable that members would be asked to vote on something and have no idea what is in it. We should not be interrupting the House if that is going to be the case and if that is the will of the House.

Finally, I have talked with many members about the activities that go on in the House and how we can improve the operations of the House and the productivity of members. I have also served on a couple of the committees on the improvement and the modernization of Parliament. I have found them very exciting, interesting and productive, but most members in this place do not get anywhere close to that. It is their whips and House leaders who are driving the agenda here.

● (1315)

I believe that other members in this place have a vested interest in how this place operates. They should have an opportunity. I would strongly recommend that the House leaders get together and provide for a broad consultation meeting where all members of Parliament would be invited to provide their input on how to make the House of Commons more productive.

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate. My particular interest in the Standing Orders is the business of supply. For most people supply means the estimates whereby Parliament votes the individual line by line budgets to the government in order to give it the authority to spend the money that has been authorized by Parliament, because until it gets that authority, the government cannot spend anything at all.

First, I would like to draw attention to a report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs from the 36th Parliament. It states in its opening statement:

> In the 35th Parliament, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs appointed a Sub-Committee on the Business of Supply "to undertake a comprehensive review of the Business of Supply, with particular attention to the reform of the Estimates and the processes and mechanisms by which the House and its committees may consider and dispose of them".

After considerable study and deliberation the subcommittee tabled a report with the committee in April 1997. The committee subsequently tabled the report in the House, but because of the pending federal general election the committee report was not examined in detail. It was subsequently tabled again in the 36th Parliament, I believe as the 51st report.

My interest in the business of supply and the estimates goes back a long way. I sat on that particular subcommittee. It had three general concepts of change.

The first one was that we bring in what we call program evaluation which emanated from a private member's bill in my name. It asked that every government program where it delivers services to Canadians be evaluated on a cyclical basis, for example, once every 10 years. Four simple questions would be asked. They would be simple but nonetheless fundamental questions so that we could really find out if the programs were delivering value for Canadians.

The first question would be, what is the program designed to do for us anyway? When I give speeches across the country people ask, "Are you not doing that already?" No we are not. What are these programs on which the Government of Canada spends money? What value are they providing for Canadians? That question needs to be asked.

The second question would follow from there. Now that we know what it is supposed to do, how well is the program doing what it is supposed to do? The third question would be, is it doing it effectively and efficiently? The fourth would be, in this complex world in which we live, is there a better way to achieve the same results?

Program evaluation is needed to keep the programs that the Government of Canada delivers focussed for the benefit of Canadians.

The second major recommendation was that we have a committee of the House of Commons on the estimates. We are not experts. There are very few experts on the estimates in the House. Therefore we needed a committee that would look at the estimates process much more rigorously than the other standing committees do. It was given a mandate to look at six or seven fundamental parts of the estimates which generally get overlooked.

First of all is statutory spending. We do not in the House approve statutory spending at any time other than the time we set up a program. For example, i believe that unemployment insurance was set up in 1947. At that time there was a clause in the bill saying it would get the money it needs. That was the last time Parliament voted any money to the employment insurance program.

Statutory spending needs to be reviewed on a cyclical basis. That was part of the mandate.

The other one was tax expenditures. These do not even show up in the financial statements of the Government of Canada. RRSP deductions, for example, are deductions from income tax. There is no revenue for the Government of Canada. There is no expenditure by the Government of Canada, but they are a major public policy. We need to look at that.

Crown corporations have been in the news this past year. They should be examined as well.

Non-statutory spending is what we vote on but we tend to gloss over. There is non-statutory spending, statutory spending, crown corporations and tax expenditures. Loan guarantees show up as one dollar items and we do not pay any attention to a one dollar item but when the loan goes bad and comes back as a $500 million item, by that time it is too late. We want to take a look at loan guarantees and a number of other things.

● (1320)

Today I want to talk about the estimates process.

Here in the House of Commons we have developed our system of motions, amendments to motions and subamendments to motions. We went through that with the Speech from the Throne, the budget debates and so on, but the process is hijacked when it comes to the estimates. We do not have a motion, amend it, and a subamendment. We vote on the subamendment first. We vote on the amendment second. We vote on the main motion third.

If I as a member of Parliament put in a notice of motion to reduce the estimates by a certain amount, be it a dollar or more than a dollar, that is not an amendment to the motion that gets voted on first. That causes the President of the Treasury Board to bring in a superseding motion to reaffirm the original expenditures. When that passes, my motion is out of order. The system is hijacked, and because the process is highjacked, parliamentarians ask why they should bother. The process has become a farce.

The estimates are tabled by the President of the Treasury Board in this House and they are referred to the committees. If the committees do not look at the estimates, they are deemed to have examined them and reported back without change. Because the committees look at the estimates, the House does not debate the estimates at all. The rules do not allow it.

The subcommittee on supply recommended that we make some changes to the Standing Orders. Among these were that committees be allowed to reallocate within a department up to 5% of the spending from one program to another program. That would be something for members of Parliament to get their teeth into. If they made these changes, they would table a report in the House justifying their position. It would not be done on a political whim. They would have to table their rationale for it. If they did that, the government would either have to object or bring in a royal recommendation allowing the change. If the government objected, it would have to present to the House its rationale for things remaining as is.

We would have the two sides of the argument, the committee saying there should be reallocation, the Treasury Board maybe saying to leave it as is, both with their reasons attached. Therefore let the debate begin, let Parliament be seized with the issue and let Parliament make the decision.

We also said that since it was a novel idea, that we re-examine it after two business cycles. I did not see it as revolutionary, but that report was tabled in 1997 and here it is 2005 and we are still working to get it implemented.

This is part of the democratic process. If the government of the day, which says that it wants to fix the democratic deficit, believes in fixing the democratic deficit, I would hope that it would endorse this report and accept these recommendations.

Remember that it was an all-party committee and the recommendations were accepted unanimously in 1997. For that reason the recommendations are legitimate. They are serious. They are there to improve the effectiveness of Parliament. They are there to improve the effectiveness of democracy in this country. It does not seem much to ask because as I said, the process has been hijacked and the process today is a farce.

On that basis I have here in both official languages the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which has already been tabled in this House. I ask for unanimous consent to table the report again in both official languages and have it referred to the procedure and House affairs committee, as it deliberates on these amendments to the Standing Orders so that it can have the rationale from the committee back in 1997 and it can understand what is going on.

Madam Speaker, I would ask that you seek unanimous for me to table in both official languages the report of the business on supply of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and that it be referred to the committee.

● (1325)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table his document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in the debate on the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. This debate gives parliamentarians an opportunity to reflect on the procedures that govern the House, to identify what works well and to identify possible areas for improvement. I would note that this debate comes, from our perspective, at an opportune time as procedural issues have taken on greater importance in the context of this minority Parliament.

I would also note that there have been extensive changes to the Standing Orders over the past several years. Therefore, it is useful for us to continue this process of reflecting on what improvements can be made to the Standing Orders. I would like to take this opportunity to briefly outline what changes have been adopted in recent years and to highlight areas where the government believes further examination and improvements are required.

The House adopted many changes to the Standing Orders during the 37th Parliament through recommendations by the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons. Many of the special committee's recommendations have served to enhance the procedures of the House.

For example, we have a consistent practice for House review and approval of the appointment of officers of Parliament.

The Leader of the Opposition can refer two sets of estimates to the committee of the whole for debate.

The House can require a 30 minute debate with the responsible minister on motions of time allocation and closure. I would note that the government has used time allocation or closure only once since it was sworn in some 16 months ago.

More take note debates are being held on matters of importance to members. From our perspective, this is a very useful tool where members can bring to their House leaders suggestions for take note debates that are of concern to members in the House, and the government and other parties can benefit from the discussion.

There has been a relaxation of the rules concerning the admissibility of petitions so that members of Parliament can table more petitions on behalf of their constituents. The requirement for the government to respond to petitions within 45 days is being enforced.

Other changes adopted in the previous Parliament include a new committee on government operations and estimates, and a new committee on official languages. All private members' business is now votable. Committees now elect their chairs by secret ballot. The House adopted a code of conduct for members of Parliament to be administered by the new independent Ethics Commissioner. This marks the first time since Confederation that the House of Commons has created a consolidated and comprehensive code of conduct that governs all members.

The Prime Minister made democratic reform a priority when he was sworn in as Prime Minister in December 2003. To underscore our commitment, the government immediately tabled an action plan for democratic reform in the House of Commons as its first order of business. The government has made a lot of progress in implementing this important plan.

Democratic reform initiatives in Parliament include: over 70% of votes are free votes for government members of Parliament; committees are reviewing nominations to key appointments before they are finalized; bills are routinely sent to committee before second reading so that committees have greater influence in shaping government legislation; an additional $5 million has been provided for operational and travel expenses of committees of the House; and the Minister of Justice has announced a new process for appointing judges to the Supreme Court of Canada.

● (1330)

The minority Parliament has also caused us to consider changes to the Standing Orders. Opposition party leaders presented proposals for changes to the Standing Orders in September. Since that time, the government has worked collaboratively with the opposition parties in making procedural changes to reflect the minority Parliament situation in a way that addresses the needs of both the government and the opposition parties. These are examples of the government's commitment to making this minority Parliament work.

For example, in October the House adopted changes to the standing orders to reform the committee structure to have more committees chaired by opposition parties; enhance Parliament's ability to keep the government accountable; establish new committees on the status of women and access to information, privacy and ethics, so that Parliament could give greater attention to these key issues; and establish a separate committee on aboriginal affairs, so that there is a focus forum on aboriginal issues in the House.

In February the House adopted further changes, such as ensuring motions to concur in committee reports come to a vote so the House can fully consider recommendations made by committees; making all opposition days votable, so that the opposition has more opportunity to itself hold the government to account; and allowing greater opportunities for questions and comments during debate to improve the quality of debate in the House.

This represents a very broad reform to the procedures of the House of Commons. For this reason these changes are now provisional and will lapse after 60 sitting days in the new Parliament, so that parliamentarians in the next Parliament will have the opportunity to review the impact of these changes and to adjust them as necessary.

There has also been a lot of focus in recent years on the procedures governing private members' business. In March 2003 the Standing Orders were changed on a provisional basis to make all private members' bills and motions votable. These provisional Standing Orders have been extended until June of this year and the procedure committee has been asked by the House to consider these Standing Orders this spring.

This procedural change has enhanced the ability of members to bring forward items for debate and for a vote in the House. However, this procedure also raises a number of questions which I hope the procedure committee can consider in its review of these Standing Orders.

For example, is there an adequate level of scrutiny of private members' items as there is with government bills both in House debates and in committees? Should a mechanism be established to address private members' items in areas that have been included in government legislation? Some recent examples would include the jewellery tax, the mandate of the Auditor General, and improvements to employment insurance.

There are finally financial implications of private members' items that require full consideration of the House. For example, tax relieving measures do not require a royal recommendation or a ways and means motion, even though the cumulative impact of these bills can have a significant impact on the government's fiscal framework.

Another area where the government would like to receive input from parliamentarians is on the estimates and their reporting process to Parliament. The 2005 budget confirmed the government's commitment to improve reporting in Parliament and committed the government to consulting parliamentarians on this matter. In particular, the budget stated:

> Building on these achievements the Government will...The blueprint will include the Estimates and related documents, government-wide reporting, ad-hoc reporting from many individual government entitie...Through these consultations, the Government will determine how best to provide parliamentarians with more timely, understandable and accessible information on program spending and results—

In closing, the government looks forward to the discussion in the House on the Standing Orders. As we have in the past, we will continue to work with opposition parties and all members of the House to ensure the Standing Orders continue to meet the needs of all members of the House.

● (1335)

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to believe that the government looks forward to a review of the estimates process, but I know very well that it does not. In fact, the deputy House leader from the government side just shut down the capacity for me to table an all party report dealing with the estimates that was tabled in the House in a previous Parliament. He was not prepared to accept it, so that it could be considered by the committee. So shame on him when he stands and talks about the capacity that the Liberals want to listen because they do not want to listen. They are forced to talk about some democratic changes because this is a minority Parliament. Otherwise, it would be business as usual, they would ignore Parliament, sweep it off the table, and they would continue on the way they want to.

The member talked about committee review of nominations. We just had a committee review of nominations. The government said that it would not listen to the wishes of the committee when it said that Glen Murray from Winnipeg would not sit on the environment review board. The Liberals said that they did not care what Parliament said, they will put him on anyway.

He bragged about committee reports at second reading. It means that debate is limited to three hours. That is why it is referred to committee before second reading, not because Liberals want to talk about the principle in committee, but because they want to shut down debate in this place.

The Minister of Justice talked about appointing judges. We had that fiasco here last summer with Supreme Court justices in, out, endorsed, and the government ensured the committee gave the endorsation the government wanted.

He talked about new committee chairs. That is because we asked for new committee chairs on this side not because the government volunteered them. We demanded them in a minority Parliament and we got them.

He talked about more petitions. When did the Liberals ever listen to any petition? Never. The idea of more petitions in the House is a joke when it comes to the democratic deficit.

I would like the deputy House leader from the government side to stand and tell us really what is on its mind when it talks about democratic deficit. I tend to think that if it had any chance whatsoever, it would ignore this place. That is why we have the problem we have today with the Gomery inquiry. That is why the Liberals have problems with corruption because they ignored this place and thought they could get away with it. Let him stand and talk about fixing the democratic deficit with some real integrity.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure in the last Parliament of sitting on the public accounts committee with the member for Edmonton—St. Albert. It was an interesting time in the history of that committee, which he chaired for many years. I learned a lot about public accounts from the member and I appreciate his question.

I am not as cynical as he is. I do not think that the Prime Minister and the government, in embracing the spirit of democratic reform, wanted to do anything other than make Parliament more relevant and have members of Parliament on both sides of the House have greater input both into legislation and into the policies of the government.

For example, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert mentioned the issue of judicial appointments. He referred to the exercise last summer as a fiasco. I do not share that view at all. I served on that ad hoc meeting of parliamentarians with colleagues from his party, the deputy leader, and the member for Central Nova. I remember that he participated in a very constructive way as did the justice critic, if my memory serves me correctly. We thought that exercise was a very useful way for parliamentarians to interact with the Minister of Justice before very important appointments to the highest court in the country were finalized.

The Minister of Justice made that process clear to us last summer. I regret that he would disparage that process because his colleagues who participated in what I thought was a very useful exercise in democratic reform last summer did not share that view. The Minister of Justice said at the time, as did the Prime Minister, that this was a temporary procedure because he was committed to responding to suggestions made by the justice committee that we should involve parliamentarians in these very important appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada.

That is exactly what the minister did last week. He outlined a process by which parliamentarians can have meaningful input into these important appointments. Increasingly, the Supreme Court plays a very critical role, not only in interpreting the Constitution of Canada, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but in interpreting legislation passed by the House. I thought it was a very important initiative and I do not share at all the cynicism of the member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

Orders of the day

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in this take note debate aimed at improving certain elements in the Standing Orders, which guide our work here in this House.

The committee on modernization has already done some serious and fairly complete work, in which our House leader, the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, participated. The committee was chaired by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who was the government House leader at the time.

Since the House consists of human beings, representing diverse regions, belonging to different parties, having a certain diversity of opinions, we owe it to ourselves to have Standing Orders to govern our proceedings that can, necessarily, change as well. In fact, the Standing Orders of the House of Commons cannot be set in stone for long periods of time.

That is why it would be a good idea to improve certain elements. I would like to focus on private members' business, since I only have ten minutes to outline our point of view on this issue, which has an impact on our party.

Previously, members names were drawn, and then they had to go before the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business to defend the votability of their bills. This aspect was seen by a number of our colleagues sitting on the modernization committee as being too dependent on the arbitrary decisions of the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business. I have sat on that committee and I agree with this, although each and every member of this subcommittee approaching it with good faith and common sense.

With respect to the question we had to answer, who are we to decide whether a particular bill should be votable or not, despite the fact that we had drawn up a list of fairly well-defined criteria?

We decided on March 17 and October 29, 2003, and on March 23 and October 29, 2004, to improve the procedure. We adopted sections in the Standing Orders called provisional Standing Orders. What we in the Bloc Québécois are asking for is simply that these provisional Standing Orders be made permanent.

Perhaps I should clarify for the benefit of those who are watching us—since we are dealing here with a rather technical aspect of parliamentary procedure—that the provisions in question are Standing Orders 86 to 99.

Under these new provisions, all bills or motions selected under private members' business are automatically votable. However, it would not have been appropriate to allow members of Parliament to bring forward just any kind of measure, not because we did not trust them but because we had to ensure that the bills considered by this House would follow certain basic principles.

We decided to create what I would call a minimal filter, by which all items are votable provided they meet certain criteria.

● (1345)

Here is the first criterion. Bills and motions must not deal with matters that are not under federal jurisdiction. Of course, we are here in a federal parliament, and until Quebec achieves sovereignty, as far as Quebeckers are concerned, certain matters will be under federal jurisdiction and others will be under provincial jurisdiction. In a sovereign Quebec, this will no longer be an issue since all matters will be under Quebec's jurisdiction. However, in the current system, we have to deal with matters that fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Second, this is a major point, and we have had the opportunity to dispute this with representatives of certain parties. Bills and motions should not violate, obviously, constitutional law, including the acts of 1867 and 1982 and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We must ensure that the bill is consistent with the charters. Would it be acceptable for an MP, whether in good faith or maliciously, to introduce a bill to restore discrimination based on language or skin colour, or to go backwards like some countries in Africa some time ago—such as South Africa with its Apartheid—or a situation similar to the one existing in various American states before the 1970s. The member could not say that it is his privilege to introduce such a bill. It would be totally unacceptable. The bill must comply with the requirements in the charter, particularly section 15 on equality rights. That is why we are talking about the civil marriage bill, but that is another debate.

The third requirement states that bills must not refer to questions already debated in the House to avoid redundancy. I will conclude quickly so as to mention the improvements whereby bills must not concern questions on the order paper.

However, once these requirements have been fully complied with, the bill can be introduced, debated in the House and voted on. One of the things the Bloc Québécois wants is for the provisional Standing Orders to be now deemed permanent ones.

However, there are various problems with the current system. Among those problems is the reference to similar items. Provisional Standing Order 86(5) seems to pose a problem because we realize that it indicates the following:

> The Speaker shall be responsible for determining whether two or more items are so similar as to be substantially the same, in which case he or she shall so inform the Member or Members whose items were received last and the same shall be returned to the Member or Members without having appeared on the Notice Paper.

The Speaker in this context refers to the Journals Branch.

We think this needs to be changed so that two similar items are not standing in the order of precedence. Currently, the problem is that a member can present 42 different items and, in a way, monopolize everything. If the member presents 42 bills and motions and we try to present ours, Journals could say the matter has already been presented. We have to make sure that once the member's item is selected, all the other items are dropped and become available to be presented by another member. Each member could introduce 20 similar items, for instance, but once one has been debated, the other 19 become available for other colleagues.

We could propose the following amendment, "The Speaker shall be responsible for determining whether two or more items standing in the order of precedence are so similar as to be substantially the same, in which case he or she shall so inform the Member whose items were received last and the same shall be automatically removed from the Notice Paper.

● (1350)

I also want to talk about the law clerks' interpretation of amendments to private members' bills or bills which table clerks still maintain involve appropriation. Many amendments are refused because they are deemed to require a royal recommendation. I know that my colleague, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, talked about this earlier today. We definitely must review Standing Order 79 on royal recommendation.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am sure people watching CPAC or from the gallery may be wondering why, when there are so many issues of considerable importance facing the country, we are spending this day talking about internal procedures?

It might be enlightening to them to know that today we are debating the Standing Orders, which are our rules of procedure and process in the House of Commons. They regulate debate, how it is conducted. They also regulate bills and motions, how they are handled, the votes and all these other things.

In fact, Standing Order 51 mandates that the debate must take place before the 90th sitting day of the current Parliament. Today, happens to be the 79th day. If we did not have the debate today, we would need to have it definitely within the next 11 days so we would meet that rule. That is one of the rules of the House. There are many rules that affect our debate.

In the few minutes I have, I would like to talk about some of the things that have struck me about how we do things around here.

One thing is not in the Standing Orders, but is a process. It has often struck me, particularly on Fridays, that we frequently finish the government business of the day before 1:30 p.m., which is the allocated time for private members' business to start. This also happens on some other days. Usually a member from the Liberal side will stand up and say, "Mr. Speaker or Madam Speaker", as the case may be, "If you seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 1:30 p.m.". I look at the clock and I see that it is one o'clock or quarter to one.

We have in the House a considerable challenge to have people give us the highest respect. Our Standing Orders, among other things, say that we may not even hint at any possible dishonesty of another hon. member. We would never tell a lie. Yet on those occasions, we unanimously agree to tell one. I have always thought that was an anomaly, even though what is in the Standing Orders is that notwithstanding any of the Standing Orders, unanimous consent always takes precedence over whatever they say.

As a matter of process, I wish that from now on the Liberal member, instead of saying that the Speaker would find unanimous consent for us to agree to something that is not true, would say, "If you seek it, you would find unanimous consent that notwithstanding that it is not yet 1:30 p.m., we will proceed to private members' business anyway". That would be a better way of putting it and it would be totally honest.

Nowadays Canadians are really searching for a higher degree of honesty, accountability and all those things from members of Parliament. It is a very trivial matter, but it is one that has occurred to me when I think about how we do things around here.

I have a couple of points also on private members' business, which are also covered in our Standing Orders. I am very proud of the fact that I was one of the instigators and instrumental in getting changes to the order of precedence for dealing with private members' business. Again, for those who are watching and who do not know how it works, members are chosen at random. It used to be that the names would be picked out of a hat for whose private members' business would be up for debate. Then those names would be put back. Over the 11-plus years in which I have been a member, it has annoyed me endlessly that members get up sometimes two or three times. In the now approaching 12 years, I have never once been chosen on that random list.

I am particularly unlucky. My colleague has advised me not to waste my money to buy lottery tickets. My level of luck is just so incredibly low.

● (1355)

We had the rule changed and I like it. Now, instead of having members chosen at random and names always being put back, the new version of the Standing Orders now says that all members will be put in random order and we work our way down the list. We do not re-scramble them until everyone has first been picked. This is based on what we used to do at camp. Nobody got seconds at mealtime until everyone had a first helping. I like that idea.

I luck out even on the new rules. The new rules state that all members are put in random order. I do not know where I am, but I am down around 280. Even though I have been waiting for three Parliaments, and I am now in my fourth, I still probably will not get my private member's bill up. I am so far down the list that this Parliament will collapse before I my name is ever drawn.

I would like to propose for consideration that those members who have been re-elected in a Parliament from the previous one and who in the previous Parliament did not have their names chosen be put in a random order list first and then everyone else in behind them.

The next thing I would like to talk about for a short length of time is the ringing of the bells. When it comes time to vote, and I will not go into detail, the bells are to ring either for 15 minutes or 30 minutes, depending on the nature of the vote and whether it was anticipated. Standing Order 45 explicitly says that the bells shall ring for not more than 15 minutes or not more than 30 minutes. We do not obey it. It says not more than 15 minutes, but I do not think I have ever seen a vote actually taken when the 15 minutes expired. When my hon. colleague from Wetaskiwin was the party whip, then that was pushed more strenuously. There is a very lax attitude toward this.

I think it would be useful to all members if the Standing Order was changed so that the bells shall ring not more than 40 minutes and not less than 20 minutes for the 30 minute bell so we have a margin, in other words. That means if it is a 30 minute bell, members would know they had to be in the House in 20 minutes. At any time after that, the vote could take place and at 40 minutes that is it, it is cut off.

The old Standing Orders used to say that the doors would be locked so members could neither leave nor come in late. We should do that so members who want to vote will be able to do in a timely manner, to be present and counted. It would not waste so much time for the rest of us.

Very often I find members bang their desks. I find that incredibly annoying. They should not do that. I have never done that in 11 years. It makes useless noise and shows disrespect. Members do that because they are impatient. They want the vote to start. I suggest that we have a limitation so members know where they are at.

Since I have a couple of minutes remaining, I hope to complete my comments after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[*English*]

CHARLOTTETOWN

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the city of Charlottetown will be celebrating 150 years of incorporation on Sunday, April 17.

This significant benchmark is being celebrated with a full year of events, which started on December 31 last year with a New Year's gala and will continue until New Year's Eve this year.

These events will celebrate the culture and history of the people of Charlottetown. Parades, fairs and exhibitions and a lecture series are among the planned events.

This Sunday a very special day of celebration has been arranged. Starting with a service and social at Trinity United Church, there will then be a re-reading of the Act of Incorporation at Province House and then a parade to city hall.

These festivities and events will continue throughout the summer, with events to appeal to any visitor, from our local tulip festival to the RCMP Musical Ride.

I invite all Canadians to visit Charlottetown this year and celebrate with us a tremendous year in the history of Canada's birthplace, the city of Charlottetown.

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ALASKA-CANADA RAIL CORRIDOR

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the city of Prince George for hosting last week's extremely successful Alaska-Canada Rail Corridor Conference.

Business and community leaders and government representatives from British Columbia, Alaska, Canada and the United States assembled to explore this exciting vision to establish a link between the lower 48 states and Alaska through the province of B.C. and Yukon territory.

Conference attendees welcomed the recent announcement that the Canadian federal government has finally agreed to come on board and join our U.S. counterparts in a feasibility study to determine whether an Alaska-Canada rail line is a practical initiative in the best interests of both nations. Once completed, this rail link would open access to the tremendous untapped mineral resources in northern B. C. and Yukon.

Along with the improvement of existing rail lines and redevelopment of the port of Prince Rupert, the vision of an Alaska-Canada rail line will build upon the reputation of B.C. and western Canada as a critical transportation gateway for all of North America.

* * *

UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada and the world increasingly view the United Nations Commission on Human Rights as a failure.

Tasked with the protection of human rights worldwide, its members now include Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe and even Sudan. Hypocritically, it fails to task these and other serious human rights violators. Instead, it criticizes Israel, the only place in the Middle East where Arabs have recourse to independent courts for alleged abuses.

On March 14, the Minister of Foreign Affairs alluded to the integrity problems of the UNCHR stating, “the credibility of the Commission on Human Rights, in particular, has been challenged”.

Even UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated last Thursday, “the commission's ability to perform its tasks has been undermined by the politicization of its sessions and the selectivity of its work”.

The UNCHR must reform. Its agenda should shift to thematic resolutions and membership should be granted only to countries with a good human rights record.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

SOCIÉTÉ D'HISTOIRE ET DE GÉNÉALOGIE DE SALABERRY

Mr. Alain Boire (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the aftermath of the various commemorations relating to Auschwitz, I would like to draw hon. members' attention to an excellent initiative taken by the Société d'histoire et de généalogie de Salaberry.

On February 16, this historical and genealogical society hosted a lecture on Ile Lalanne and its past links to Nazism in Quebec. The lecturer, historian Hugues Théoret, spoke of the pro-Nazi actions of the mysterious Dr. Lalanne, who used to live on an island on Lake Saint-François, close to Sainte-Barbe.

Dr. Lalanne funded the activities of Adrien Arcand, leader of the Quebec Nazi movement during the 1930s and 1940s, one of the darkest periods in human history. In 1941, a series of arrests put an end to Dr. Lalanne's activities.

I congratulate Hugues Théoret on his painstaking efforts. He discovered Paul-Émile Lalanne's records in the course of his 15 years of research on this subject.

If we are to ensure that such horrors are never again possible, our fellow citizens must be informed of what has happened in the past. We must be aware of history if we are to learn from it.

* * *

[*English*]

OSCAR ROMERO

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 24, 1984 in El Salvador, the life of Archbishop Oscar Romero was brought to an end by an unspeakable act of violence.

Archbishop Romero was the epitome of courage and integrity. He spoke out at great personal risk against economic and personal injustices that had combined to precipitate a devastating civil war in El Salvador.

As he concluded his homily in his church, he was brutally killed in front of those for whom he had worked so hard: the poor, the disenfranchised and the weak. In his own words that day he stated:

> One must not love oneself so much, as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and those that fend off danger will lose their lives.

Archbishop Romero took those risks and in so doing lost his life, but he also changed his country, his people and indeed the world.

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CANADIAN 4-H COUNCIL

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, across Canada, and especially in rural areas, 4-H is a part of growing up, a part of our heritage.

This week in Ottawa the Canadian 4-H Council will host its annual seminar on citizenship. This exciting event brings together 70 award winning 4-H members from across Canada.

I want to especially recognize Mitch Rolston of Delisle and Sarah Anderson of Sceptre. Through their outstanding achievements, they have earned a chance to experience an opportunity that only the nation's capital can provide. They will learn about the political system and their rights and responsibilities as Canadians. They will attend question period and will even hold their own parliamentary-style debate after hours of preparation. They will visit the Supreme Court and other Ottawa landmarks.

I am confident that this experience will leave a mark on them for their lifetime.

On behalf of the members of this House, I want to welcome them all to Ottawa.

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[*Translation*]

NEW HOMES MONTH

Mr. David Smith (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform my colleagues that April is New Homes Month. The purpose of this annual event, sponsored by the Canadian Homebuilders Association, is to inform the public about construction industry specialists and the goods and services they provide.

The month is also an opportunity to provide consumers with information that will enable them to make informed choices on housing.

As the federal body responsible for housing, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is the main source of reliable and objective information on housing in Canada, and it is acknowledged as an expert in this field.

Our housing must keep pace with our changing needs. CMHC is a source of information on home ownership, renovation and maintenance.

CMHC is committed to housing quality, affordability and choice. It plays a lead role in the creation of dynamic and healthy communities and cities.

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FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I affirm in this House that the federal government is abandoning the regions of Quebec, including the riding of Berthier—Maskinongé.

Its lack of solidarity in response to the numerous pleas for help from farm producers; its lack of cooperation in supporting cultural and tourist activities; its lack of support for the textile and apparel industries; and its lack of sensitivity to workers in refusing to overhaul the employment insurance system, implementing programs poorly suited to local realities, and rejecting the principle of fiscal imbalance, are all blatant proof that the central government has abandoned the regions of Quebec.

When will this government stop the hemorrhage in the regions of Quebec when it is swimming in budget surpluses?

S. O. 31

● (1410)

[*English*]

NUNAVUT SIVUNIKSAVUT

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nunavut Sivuniksavut is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. This exceptional post-secondary training program for Inuit youth has now added a second year to its program and is overseeing about 250 Nunavut beneficiaries who have completed this program.

The NS program taught in Ottawa has over the years evolved into an academic transitional year which teaches youth about the social and political road that leads to Nunavut and prepares them for future leadership roles. Young Inuit walk away more secure in knowing more about their own history and their rightful place in Nunavut, Canada and abroad.

I am proud that the Government of Canada supported this valuable program over the years. I would like to congratulate the NS program on 20 years of successful operation and for being part of preparing young Inuit for a great future in this country.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure members will be familiar with the farm aid concerts organized by Willie Nelson to raise money for cash-strapped farm families in the United States.

He got the idea from the original band-aid concerts where British and American rock stars banded together to help starving people in Africa. Perhaps that is where the Minister of Agriculture got his idea of how to deal with the Canadian agricultural crisis.

So far he has applied liberal amounts of band-aids across the land and done nothing to secure foreign markets for Canadian agriculture commodities and beef in particular. The agriculture industry is so plastered with band-aids that farmers look and feel like the walking wounded.

The role of government is to show leadership and to actively promote Canadians and their products.

The minister must act in the best interest of Canadian farmers instead of just plastering Liberal band-aids on Canada's farm crisis. He should know that band-aids may stop the bleeding but they do not cure the ailment. A long term solution is far past due.

* * *

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to those brave and courageous Canadians who fought side by side in the Battle of Vimy Ridge 88 years ago.

On April 9, 1917 our soldiers were to make history. The task before them was formidable. All previous attempts by allied forces to take this fortified ridge had failed.

General Byng, commander of the Canadian corps and later a governor general, would write:

> There they stood on Vimy Ridge, (on the 9th day of April, 1917.) Men from Quebec stood shoulder to shoulder with men from Ontario, men from the Maritimes with men from British Columbia, and there were forged a nation tempered by the fires of sacrifice—

The assault turned out to be the swiftest and most complete of the war. Within three days the battle for Vimy Ridge was fought and won by 100,000 Canadians who, for the first time in the great war, fought as a unified corps.

The cost of nationhood was high. In those three days there would be over 10,000 casualties and of those, 3,598 would lie forever on French soil. Their legacy of virtue and valour is one we will always appreciate. It is said that Canada was born on the fields of Vimy.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Terry Glavin, a leading expert on the devastation of salmon farming on the wild salmon fishing industry says, "In Quebec, it is about language. In British Columbia, it is about salmon".

Last month the British Society reported that sea lice from fish farms was having a devastating effect on wild salmon stocks. The David Suzuki Foundation says that this "study shows the link is undeniable and that the situation is even worse than we had imagined. We have a small window of opportunity to reverse this damage but the window is growing smaller and smaller".

In the fall, the Liberals en masse voted against conducting an inquiry into the B.C. fishery, once again refusing to admit that there are systemic problems that risk the entire industry.

It is time for the DFO to begin to take the west coast fishery seriously and take some proactive action to guard against further problems. As a first step, the DFO needs to put a halt to any expansion of open net salmon farming and ultimately end the practice entirely.

* * *

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I had the honour of laying a wreath at Canada's National War Memorial for those brave Canadians who took part in the attack on Vimy Ridge.

Eighty-eight years have passed since that cold, wet morning when all four divisions of the Canadian corps launched their assault. Thought by many to be impregnable, by that afternoon the Canadians had captured most of Vimy Ridge. I believe Lord Byng described it best when he said:

> There they stood on Vimy Ridge, (on the 9th day of April, 1917.) Men from Quebec stood shoulder to shoulder with men from Ontario, men from the Maritimes with men from British Columbia, and there were forged a nation tempered by the fires of sacrifice and hammered on the anvil of high adventure.

Said to be the turning point of the great war, some 3,600 Canadians were never to return, so in the warm Ottawa sunlight I laid a wreath and said a silent prayer of thanks to those who not only took Vimy Ridge, but they forged a nation in the process.

* * *

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

STADACONA PAPERS

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, a major paper company in my riding, namely Stadacona Papers, announced an investment of $44 million for the modernization of the facilities at its plant in Limoilou, in an attempt to maintain long term jobs and to ensure sustainable development.

While paper companies are going through some tough times, it is very encouraging to see this company make substantial investments in its plant, not only to remain a key player in Quebec's paper industry, but also to reduce by nearly 80% its greenhouse gas and air emissions.

The Bloc Québécois wholeheartedly supports the Kyoto protocol. I am delighted that a paper company from Quebec is taking initiatives that put it at the forefront of the industrial world in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

* * *

[*English*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal party spin doctors have been working overtime trying to minimize the impact of the sponsorship scandal by telling Canadians that the scandal is really not that bad and that opposition politicians have been exaggerating the extent of corruption within the Liberal Party. Therefore, in the interests of fairness and non-partisanship, it is only appropriate for me to quote a Liberal, the Liberal MP for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont to be precise. This is what he said on the weekend:

> The Liberal Party is seen as looking on the public trust as a vulture looks on a dying calf. Here we are, a G-7 country, acting like a northern banana republic. What country is seen as more politically corrupt than us at the moment?

He did not stop there. There is more. He also said:

> If you draw up a thing to make people want to vomit, this is it. This is everything to make you sick to the stomach. You can mumble the line, it's about a few people, but there's really nothing you can say.

I could not have said it better myself.

* * *

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week Canada celebrates the 20th anniversary of section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The equality section, as it is known, makes it clear that every individual in Canada, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, colour, sex, age, or physical or mental disability, is to be considered equal before and under the law. At the same time the Conservative Party

wants to turn the clock back on equality rights by denying same sex couples the right to legally wed.

As we celebrate the equality section of the charter, Canadians should look with pride to the Liberal government's civil marriage bill which ensures freedom of religion while respecting and defending the charter rights of all Canadians, not just those whom the official opposition feels deserve to be protected.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend we know that senior Liberals huddled to come up with new strategies to deal with the latest revelations of Liberal corruption. The Liberal member of Parliament for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont has already passed judgment on these strategies. He said:

> The Liberal Party is seen as looking on the public trust as a vulture looks on a dying calf.

If this is how Liberals now see their party, how are Canadians expected to buy any of these new spin lines?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us simply take a look at what the government has done.

The fact is that we are the government that cancelled the sponsorship program. We are the government that fired the heads of a number of crown corporations. We are the government that recalled the ambassador to Denmark. We are the government that has set out a number of lawsuits against 19 companies. We are the government that put the Gomery commission in place in order to find the answers that Canadians want to hear.

● (1420)

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the spin. Let us look at the real record.

Before the last election, the public accounts committee tried to get to the bottom of this. Every opposition party wanted to hear the testimony of Jean Brault before the election, but Liberal members worked around the clock and behind the scenes to ensure that testimony never became public.

Why did the government shut down the public accounts committee and shut down the testimony of Jean Brault before he could tell the truth about Liberal fraud?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at what the member for Edmonton—St. Albert, the chairman of the public accounts committee, said last week, “There are all kinds of rumours and innuendoes flying around about what is being said at Gomery. Why don't we wait until we get all the facts about what was said at the Gomery commission”.

I would urge the Leader of the Opposition to follow his advice, wait for all the facts, and wait for Justice Gomery to finish his work. Canadians can then have the truth.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House will note that at the first possible opportunity the Prime Minister shifted responsibility for answering to somebody else.

[*Translation*]

Last year, when Jean Brault's name began circulating at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Liberal members sitting on the committee, including the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, all voted against hearing new testimony.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he knew Jean Brault's testimony would implicate his party and that this is why he put an end to the committee's work?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, the answer is no, I did not know that.

Second, we are the ones—the Liberal Party, the Canadian government—who established the Gomery commission, precisely because we wanted to get answers.

If one looks at all the measures taken, one can see that we are the ones who cancelled the sponsorship program; we are the ones who fired the chairs of crown corporations who were at fault; we are the ones who recalled Canada's ambassador to Denmark; we are the ones who initiated proceedings against the 19 companies; and we are the ones who will get the answers and settle the issue.

[*English*]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office interviewed and hired all ministerial chiefs of staff including John Welch, chief of staff to the heritage minister. Mr. Welch was recently suspended with pay for taking $80,000 in sponsorship kickbacks from Jean Brault. Scott Reid, the Prime Minister's chief of communications, referred to his boss as the "wire brush that will scrub clean this stain on Canadian politics".

When the Prime Minister's Office interviewed Mr. Welch for the top job, did the wire brush demand that Mr. Welch come clean regarding his ad scam involvement or did he simply hold his nose and flush?

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that one would accuse somebody with only an allegation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Welch asked to be relieved of his duties in order to defend his reputation, and I agreed. He is on a two-month leave with pay, in accordance with Treasury Board standards, precisely to clarify the situation and restore his reputation. These allegations are based on a—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is clear as mud. My question is clear and simple and is for the Prime Minister.

Does he approve the despicable actions of the member for Brome—Missisquoi, who forced Jean Brault to hire the individual who, until very recently, was the chief of staff of the Minister of Canadian Heritage? Yes or no?

● (1425)

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that opposition members constantly discuss the testimony of Mr. Brault. Let us be clear about this individual on whom they are basing their case. Mr. Brault and Groupaction are facing action from the Government of Canada to recover $34 million. Mr. Brault is facing criminal charges before the courts for fraud. I think that Justice Gomery has more credibility than Jean Brault. That is why Canadians want Justice Gomery to complete his work and give them the real truth, not individual testimony.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has now studied Jean Brault's testimony. He knows that, between 1995 and 2002, through Groupaction alone, the Liberal Party pocketed at least $2.2 million of dirty money through all sorts of devious means. In the face of such serious revelations, the Prime Minister recognizes that he has "a moral responsibility to act".

My question is extremely simple. Since he has the moral responsibility, why is the Prime Minister not demanding the Liberal Party deposit the $2.2 million in tainted money in a trust fund?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): I have already answered this question any number of times. The Liberal Party has said from the start that it would reimburse any money it received inappropriately. We said that at the outset, and I repeat it again today.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we would not want it to take any chances. The Liberal Party has held three elections with dirty money, we do not want it to hold a fourth.

On Thursday, the Minister of Transport said in all seriousness that so much dirty money could never be found in the Liberal coffers, because it does not appear in the books. That is the very problem: it does not appear in the books.

Is the government not admitting that some of the tainted money turned up in secret funds, in short that it is not a matter of a parallel group, but of parallel accounting?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking the same question again. My reply is therefore the same.

I would simply like to ask the leader of the Bloc what he thinks of the remarks of Bernard Landry, who called Mr. Brault's testimony before the Gomery commission into question, and I quote, "I understand that he—Jean Brault—does everything he does in order to wiggle out of it". So he is not exactly the most credible person in this regard.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport stated that the alleged actions, the illegalities committed during the sponsorship scandal, were the work of a small parallel group.

However, when we are talking about the minister responsible for Quebec, Alfonso Gagliano, the director general of the Liberal Party's Quebec wing, Benoît Corbeil, very close friends of Jean Chrétien, his brother Gaby, full-time party organizers, how can it be a parallel group, when, clearly it is the very core of the Liberal Party of Canada?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about thousands and thousands of Liberal supporters throughout Canada; let us talk about supporters working in Quebec who are dedicated to their country and their party; let us talk about the presidents of the provincial and riding associations; let us talk about dedicated, honest individuals, people of integrity, who supported the government when it established the Gomery commission to find the answer to this situation.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, these ordinary supporters were misled by Liberal Party of Canada leaders. In addition to having paid bogus fees to senior Liberal Party officials, Groupaction also paid bogus salaries to Daniel-Yves Durand, Serge Gosselin, John Welch, Marie-Lyne Chrétien and Georges Farrah.

Are we to understand that the Prime Minister intends to ask the Liberal Party to refund the salaries paid to his cronies in the party as well?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party acted quickly to engage two auditors, in fact, Deloitte & Touche and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Both audits found that all contributions were receipted, handled and accounted for properly. These reports are in fact posted on the Liberal Party website and have been for some time. They have also been given to the Gomery commission, as of last December.

If there were any profiteers that operated below the radar screen of the officials in the Liberal Party, the Liberal Party, the government and all Canadians want those profiteers to be punished.

● (1430)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister stands alone, because apparently he is the only one who believes what he is saying. Although he has had the floor for 15 years, we have stopped listening, because pollution is on the rise, increasing numbers of children live in poverty and jobs are still being given to Liberal cronies.

Instead of making yet another empty promise, why does the Prime Minister not ask the Liberal Party to pay back the dirty donations from Groupaction to taxpayers now?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered this question. The Liberal Party is certainly prepared to repay all funds received inappropriately.

The leader of the NDP is talking about the situation in Canada. If we look closely, we see our government's initiative with regard to the national child benefit. If we look at the most recent budget, we see that we have again increased the guaranteed income supplement; that we want to move forward with the national child care program for young children; that we have reinforced social programs; and that we want to introduce new programs. This is what the Liberal government is doing.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): More broken promises, Mr. Speaker, just more broken promises, and Canadians are tired of it. The Prime Minister may think his biggest problem is the confidence in his government, but let me tell him that the bigger problem right now is confidence in our country, because Liberal corruption is putting far more of a criminal and corrupt face on federalism as a result of the Liberal Party.

What Canadians are looking for is not to see their money going into the pockets of Liberal friends instead of to the programs and assistance they need. What they want is simply a little bit of contrition, someone to say they are sorry and give them a refund. Will the money come back to the taxpayers or not?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the NDP member for Sackville—Eastern Shore said this on CBC radio:

> To be completely honest with you, what's going on in the House of Commons is nothing short of really quite sad. Everyone is just talking about the Gomery issue and everything else. We're not talking about seniors or veterans or children or families or the environment or anything else. We're just...trying to all score cheap political points on the Gomery trial and I think Canadians in general have had enough of this and we should focus on the issues that matter to Canadians and allow the Gomery process to happen.

That was from the NDP member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada financed its 1997 and 2000 elections on money stolen from Canadian taxpayers.

Government contracts went to ad firms that added Liberal Party workers to their payrolls. These workers did nothing other than campaign for the Liberal Party.

During this time the Prime Minister was Mr. Chrétien's hand-picked man, his number one man in Quebec. How are Canadians to believe him when he says he knew nothing about these arrangements?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the *Globe and Mail* editorial on April 9 said that "the public should reserve judgment until Judge Gomery has stitched all the pieces together and weighed conflicting accounts...The Prime Minister did, after all, shut down the sponsorship program as his first order of business and appoint the Gomery inquiry early last year after the Auditor-General issued" her report.

The fact is the *Globe and Mail* and Canadians realize that only Justice Gomery can get to the truth. They trust Justice Gomery to do that. That is why we support Justice Gomery, because Canadians deserve the truth.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Brault told Canadians when he testified that among the people he illegally put on his payroll was Georges Farrah, one of the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretaries.

Did the Prime Minister know that Mr. Farrah had a no-work contract for Groupaction when he appointed him as a parliamentary secretary? Where was the wire brush then? How did he escape those bristles?

● (1435)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that hon. member would be the last person in the House who should be asking questions about breaking financing laws for campaigns.

Even Bernard Landry, as the Prime Minister said earlier, does not believe that Jean Brault is credible. Yet it is interesting to hear the opposition treat one individual's testimony, Jean Brault's, as sacrosanct when the deputy leader of that party has referred to the Prime Minister's testimony as a sham.

I trust the Prime Minister of Canada more than Jean Brault. The Prime Minister has dedicated months to getting to the bottom of this issue, has taken real risks to do the right thing to get to the bottom of this issue for Canadians, and I trust him to do exactly that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Jacques Olivier is the mayor of Longueuil and a former federal Liberal minister. He gave Jean Brault the following advice, "Tag along with Corriveau, it will open doors for you". And what doors! Through his affiliation with Corriveau, Brault donated $1.4 million to the Liberal Party of Canada, in exchange for sponsorship contracts amounting to $61 million.

How can the Prime Minister continue denying the facts, when all his associates knew where to get dirty money?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again those members are commenting on one individual's testimony, testimony that has in fact been contradicted by other testimony prior and since. That is the point. One day's testimony and one witness's testimony can be and in fact is contradicted on an ongoing basis.

The only person who can get to the bottom of this is the judge that Canadians trust to do exactly that. What I ask the hon. member to do is exactly what Canadians want him to do and that is to let Justice Gomery do his work.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the transport minister describes high profile Liberal operatives Joe Morselli and Tony Mignacca as "political plumbers, acting behind the back of an unsuspecting party", yet they are published in pictures with former public works minister Alfonso Gagliano and other influential Liberals. It seems like the sewage is backing up.

By calling them political plumbers, is the transport minister trying to tell us that the real rot is much higher up in the Liberal Party?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear. If anybody was operating as profiteers below the radar screen of the Liberal Party, the Liberal Party wants those people to be treated strongly and to in fact see that justice is done and they face the full extent of Canadian law and are punished.

Let us be clear. In today's *National Post*, David Asper says:

> The melodrama of Question Period is only exacerbating all of this: Many opposition MPs want an election, which would have Canadians essentially put the government on trial...without even having the evidence at hand.

That is the point. Canadians want the evidence, the full truth, and that is why they need Justice Gomery's report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Gagliano, Corbeil, Renaud, Morselli, Corriveau, Chrétien, Bard, Pelletier, Bisson, Gosselin, Welch, Wiseman, Béliveau— Will the Prime Minister admit that the theory of a parallel group put forward by the ineffable Minister of Transport no longer holds water and that the sponsorship scandal was set up by the higher ups in the Liberal Party, themselves?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the guilty will be tried before the courts. The Prime Minister has appointed Justice Gomery, cancelled the sponsorship program, and instituted legal action against agencies to recover funds. We want Justice Gomery to complete his work.

[*English*]

The fact is that this Prime Minister deserves the respect of this House for working to get to the bottom of this issue. He is achieving great things on behalf of Canadians and we will get to the bottom of this issue because that is what Canadians want us to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not answering any of the accusations from all sides. By not answering, he is not denying anything. Why remain silent?

If all we are learning from the Gomery commission is untrue, what is stopping the Prime Minister from standing up and saying so?

● (1440)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are serious allegations, but not facts. There is no verdict.

[*English*]

The only way we are going to have that verdict, that result, is to wait for Justice Gomery to complete his work. We do not fear that verdict, because we want the truth. We are willing to support Justice Gomery until we have that truth because that is what Canadians deserve, the truth, and that is what our government, our party and our Prime Minister want as well, the truth.

Members opposite want to get to the polls. We want to get to the truth and that is what Canadians want.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his testimony this morning before the Gomery inquiry, Alain Renaud stated that the Prime Minister's riding assistant, Lucie Castelli, was on the Liberal Party finance committee along with himself and Jacques Corriveau, who is at the centre of the current mess.

How can the Prime Minister tell us that he knew nothing about what was going on in connection with the sponsorships, when his own riding assistant was on the finance committee, which was where all this was going on?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year, the Liberal Party organized a major dinner event, selling tickets to raise money. All parties did so at that time. Lucie Castelli was there to sell tickets—to my supporters, obviously. That is what she was there for, to sell tickets.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's riding assistant was on the Liberal Party finance committee with Alain Renaud and Jacques Corriveau. One of these has appeared in connection with the scandal, and the other is scheduled to, since they are at the heart of that scandal.

The Liberal Party's finance committee is where they came up with the gimmicks to finance the Liberal Party. How could the PM's constituency assistant sit on it without him knowing anything about this? This is improbable, incredible, unbelievable and ridiculous.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why we need to let Justice Gomery make his report. What the hon. member is saying is nothing but allegations, unfounded allegations, incomprehensible ones to boot.

Lucie Castelli sold tickets to the Liberal Party fundraising dinner in Montreal. What is she being accused of? This is exactly why we need to let Justice Gomery make his report, instead of listening to crazy statements like these.

[*English*]

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1998 Alain Renaud received over $65,000 for fake contracts: money for no work. He then turned around and made a $65,000 donation to the Liberal Party of Canada.

When asked about this money, Brault said, "I knew that the money was supposed to be funnelled to the Liberal Party". Will the Liberals return this dirty money to the taxpayers?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all the Liberal Party has been clear from the beginning that any funds that were received inappropriately will be returned to Canadians.

Beyond that, the hon. member quotes from the witness's testimony this morning. I think she should also quote that individual contradicting Mr. Brault's testimony from last week. If the hon. member is going to talk about this witness's testimony, she should refer to his contradictory testimony about what Mr. Brault said.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to insult Canadians with his non-answers.

The Liberal government demanded that Groupaction pay a $50,000 fake invoice to Groupe Everest. Groupe Everest then handed the $50,000 over to the Liberal Party. Groupaction was then again rewarded with more government contracts.

When will the Liberal Party return the dirty money to taxpayers?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal Party that engaged two auditors, PwC and Deloitte, to do a full audit of the books of the Liberal Party. That audited information has been provided to Justice Gomery. We are working with Justice Gomery's auditors to ensure that we get to the bottom of this. It is the Liberal Party that wants to ensure that any profiteer who operated below the screen of the Liberal Party is brought to justice and is punished appropriately

● (1445)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to wrap their scandal in the Canadian flag by claiming that the money stolen from taxpayers served the cause of federalism in Quebec. However, we just learned that one of their accomplices, Jean Brault, is an avowed separatist. He campaigned door-to-door for the Parti Québécois, and he and his wife even made financial contributions to the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois.

How can the Liberals justify their corruption in the name of federalism, while at the same time funding separatists with dirty money from the sponsorships?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear members now attack Jean Brault when a few minutes ago they were presenting his testimony as sacrosanct.

That is the point. Canadians trust Judge Gomery to get to the bottom of this. They do not necessarily trust individual testimony from someone like Jean Brault who is currently facing criminal charges, fraud charges and a lawsuit of over $30 million from the Government of Canada.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the truth. Canadians no longer trust the Liberal Party because of its corruption.

The minister and the wire brush Prime Minister keep telling us to wait until Gomery has done his report. Why then did they shut down the parliamentary inquiry last spring before it could hear from Jean Brault and 50 other witnesses? Why did he shut down Parliament before Judge Gomery had started, let alone finished his work? Is it not because the Prime Minister knew full well the kind of testimony that Jean Brault would give?

Why does he not admit that he knew all along about the culture of corruption in the Liberal Party?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has committed himself to get to the bottom of this issue. That is why he established the Gomery commission. That is why—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Calgary Southeast asked a question. He must have expected an answer, but I cannot hear a word. How can we possibly weigh how good the response or answer is unless we can hear it. The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services has the floor to give a response to the question. Whether it is an answer is another matter, but he has the floor and we will all want to hear it. The hon. Minister of Public Works.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. member to go outside the House and make that exact allegation because I bet that outside the House, without the privilege of Parliament that he is abusing here today, he would be less likely to do that.

Beyond that, the Prime Minister has worked assiduously to get to the bottom of this issue by ending the sponsorship program, by appointing Justice Gomery, by cooperating completely with Justice Gomery and by going after $41 million of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

* * *

SUDAN

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of International Cooperation. The humanitarian situation in Sudan is of great concern to Canadians and indeed the entire world. On January 9 the Government of Sudan and the SPLM signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Nairobi.

Today donor governments are meeting in Oslo to show their support for this peace agreement. Could the minister please inform the House of Canada's contribution to helping the people of Sudan?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important for the House to note that today the Government of Canada announced $90 million to alleviate the suffering of the people of Sudan. Of that money, $40 million will go to assist in international humanitarian efforts, another $40 million of the $90 million will go to help sustain the peace and the other $10 million is for people who are truly suffering and really need the help of this government. They will be working toward the peace building and all of the governance processes that are combined.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, only the arrogance of these Liberals, perfected over so many years, could express pride and righteousness even as they are awash in scandal and corruption.

In my riding of Vancouver East, as across the country, people are disgusted by the Prime Minister and the government's record. People are still breathing the smoggy air. They still lack affordable housing. They still cannot afford for their kids to go to school.

That is the real record here. Twelve years of broken promises now covered up in Liberal corruption. Now they have the gall to say that they want the respect of the Canadian people. What about the respect to the Canadian people? Just stand up and apologize to them for what has happened here.

● (1450)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the citation earlier from the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. I am very surprised at the statement just made by the hon. member. I would understand it coming from the Bloc and its cohabiting party, the Conservatives, that are only focusing on one thing.

This morning we had a very important meeting with a group of doctors in terms of the establishment of national benchmarks and accountability in terms of the health care deal. I am quite disappointed that the NDP, which poses as the defender of the smaller person and of medicare, did not stand up and want to talk about accountability—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is why we are here. We are talking about accountability. We are talking about the accountability of the Prime Minister, and the Liberal Party, who has yet refused to stand up and admit that he has failed the Canadian people, both in terms of corruptness and scandal, but also on all issues, whether it is health care, or housing, or child care or help for our cities. On all those issues, he has failed.

Let us talk about accountability. I ask the Prime Minister to stand up and be held accountable to the people of Canada.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member were as interested in these issues as she says she is, then she would go through the budget implementation bill, where she would see the increase in the GIS for senior citizens. She would see the money that will go into the cities to deal with the problems of housing and with the problems of pollution. She would see the whole issue of climate change and how it will be dealt with.

Then, if she went through the budget implementation bill, perhaps she would then stand up in this House and say why she and her party oppose the will of Canadians.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago the Prime Minister was challenging the member for Calgary Southeast to go and ask his questions outside the House. I think before he would do that, it would be an obligation of the Prime Minister to attempt to answer them inside the House.

Would the Prime Minister answer this question: Why did he and his government shut down the public accounts inquiry last year before it heard from Jean Brault?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we did not shut down the House of Commons committee. The fact is the Leader of the Opposition—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There is no rule in the House that a response to a question has to be one that the opposition or the person who asked the question wanted to hear. However, there is a rule that there be order in the House when someone has the floor because the person who has the floor has the right to speak and be heard.

I have recognized the Prime Minister since that choice is mine. He stood up to answer the question. He got the recognition. We will hear the answer. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Justice Gomery is in the process of carrying through the most extensive examination that has ever been held on an issue such as this.

The issue really is why will members of the opposition not let Mr. Justice Gomery continue with his work? Why consistently do they stand in the House and misrepresent testimony? Why do they consistently stand in the House and repeat testimony that has been contradicted? Why do they try to shut down—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Prime Minister a question about his own actions prior to the Gomery inquiry. He did not have the honesty and the guts to stand up and give us a straight answer to it.

[*Translation*]

I will repeat my question: Why did the Prime Minister and his government block Jean Brault's testimony before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts before the election?

● (1455)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was not the government that did that; it was the opposition.

[*English*]

What happened is a matter of record, but what the opposition—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order, please. Once again, it is obvious that there is disagreement regarding the answer. However, that does not mean the hon. members can interrupt an answer to a question asked in the House. The Prime Minister has the floor and we must listen to him.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister has the floor for the response to the question.

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee is a committee in which the opposition has the majority of the members. They control that committee. What they did, and they are afraid of the truth—

The Speaker: We will move on to the next question because the time has virtually expired.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give the Prime Minister another chance to answer this question. The Prime Minister tried to say that the opposition majority on the committee voted against hearing Jean Brault. There was no opposition majority. The Liberals controlled the majority at that point.

The question is, and let us not hide behind other people, why did the Prime Minister order the Liberal members to vote against hearing Jean Brault's testimony in public?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee is chaired by a member of the opposition. What he did was to allow the opposition members to filibuster to the point that the committee could no longer do its work. That is what happened. The chair of the committee through his ability to exercise that kind of control and the activity of the opposition in filibustering and refusing to deal with matters seriously made it impossible for the committee to work. That is why the majority voted to call it quits.

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the Prime Minister's problem. He keeps changing his story, depending on the day.

According to border officials, our current watch lists are so poor that updated information about terrorists and violent criminals at large does not show up on our system. It is not sophisticated enough to display relevant information simultaneously. It gets worse. Eight individuals identified by the FBI as terrorists are not listed as armed and dangerous on our lookout database.

While we cannot always access relevant data, U.S. border officials have complete—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

● (1500)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me speak generally to the concerns that the hon. member is raising. However, I have no intention of speaking or responding to assertions that have been made in the context of ongoing labour discussions between the CBSA management of our border agency and the employees of that agency.

Let me just reassure the hon. member that we have invested billions of dollars in protecting the collective security of Canadians. We have created the Canada Border Services Agency. This agency, now across many border points all along the border, at our seaports and at our airports, is in the business of doing the most sophisticated risk assessments with the most—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services has defended the creation of the sponsorship program as Canada's war effort against the so-called "evil Quebec separatists" and described those who took advantage of that battle to benefit personally or financially as wartime profiteers.

Does the Minister of Public Works and Government Services realize he is using the same line of defence Jean Chrétien used to justify the sponsorship scandal?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the program was aimed at strengthening the presence of the Government of Canada in the regions of the country, particularly during a unity crisis, but if profiteers took advantage of the laudable goals of this program to commit malfeasance against Canadians, then we want to ensure that they are punished and that the money is returned, as it should be.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just like former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services is wrapping himself in the Canadian flag to justify the Liberals' unspeakable behaviour in the sponsorship scandal.

Does the Minister of Public Works and Government Services realize he is dishonouring the flag by using such a line of defence?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that we are committed to getting to the bottom of this issue and ensuring justice for Canadians and, at the same time, retrieving money for the Canadian taxpayer. We are standing up for the Canadian taxpayer and we will continue to fight for federalism and a strong and united Canada.

I know she and I disagree on that but we in this party stand for a strong, united Canada with Quebec playing a vital role within that Canada.

* * *

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, do you want to know how bad it is? The Hell's Angels have called our Prime Minister a pirate on their website and he now has a parrot answering questions in the House.

While we cannot always get access to relevant information on our database, the Americans can access our information and we ask for it back.

When will the government stop compromising Canadians' safety and our reputation and provide proper resources, technologies and personnel for them to do the job to protect Canadians at our borders?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had not been aware of the hon. member's affinity for the Hell's Angels but if they knew how he felt about loyalty, I do not think the Hell's Angels would even take him.

The fact is that Susan Riley, in the Ottawa Citizen, said:

> The controversial testimony [of witnesses] is uncorroborated. You would think a lawyer and former Crown prosecutor, like [the member for Central Nova], would understand the dangers of leaping to conclusions on the basis of a partial, and possibly coloured, account of events.
>
> The prudent thing would be to await Judge Gomery's report as [the] Public Works Minister...keeps repeating....

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1505)

[*English*]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), I am tabling a certificate of nomination with respect to the Canada Post Corporation. This certificate would stand referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

I am also tabling a certificate of nomination with respect to Parc Downsview Park Inc. This certificate would stand referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

* * *

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am also tabling a number of order in council appointments recently made by the government.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table the government's response to 10 petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Health.

The committee has considered Bill C-206, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol, pursuant to Standing Order 97.1. Your committee recommends that the House of Commons not proceed further with the bill.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to move for concurrence in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

I will turn in a moment to the specific recommendations that the committee puts before the House but let me begin with an overview of the miasma which the government has created with respect to its handling of this matter.

The government's administration of the residential school file exhibits a degree of arrogance, mismanagement and ineffectiveness, which is shocking even by Liberal government standards.

In the time since 1998, when the Liberals made their statement of reconciliation and unveiled their action plan entitled, "Gathering Strength", their handling of this file has achieved two outcomes: they have spent over $600 million and they have asked Parliament in the most recent budget for an additional $160 million. In result, they have settled less than 2% of the known cases and, in so doing, they have set the survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, the Canadian Bar Association and the taxpayers of Canada all against them. What an achievement.

The residential school saga is a sad and disturbing period in Canadian history and it is a part of our history that we must come to grips with if we are to achieve healing and reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. That is why one of the critical recommendations in the committee's report involves the striking of a national truth and reconciliation process.

Incidentally, the government has ignored the requests of the survivors, the AFN, the RCAP or the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Law Commission of Canada and the Canadian Bar Association, all of whom have called for precisely such a public inquiry. To this very day, the government refuses to do so.

Here is what the Canadian Bar Association says:

> The negative consequences of removing Aboriginal children from their parents and communities and forcing them to attend schools where they were raised in "an atmosphere of fear, loneliness and loathing" and where they were forbidden from telling their ancestor and creation stories and from participating in traditional ceremonies and practices are still being felt today. Punishing children for speaking the language of their birth and ridiculing their cultural and spiritual traditions caused profound damage. Their identity, their sense of belonging and their self-respect were taken from them.

Carrying on, in the words of the Canadian Bar Association in its recent report, this is what we have inherited today in Canada as a result of this:

> In our view, there is a direct correlation between the policies of oppression and inequality of Canada's Indian Residential Schools, and the challenges Aboriginal individuals, families, their communities and their Nations continue to face in this country in 2005. With Aboriginal offenders representing 40% of Canada's prison population, with Aboriginal peoples experiencing the highest suicide rates in the country, with Aboriginal communities struggling to deal with poverty, substance abuse, and illness, it is clear that Canada has not yet faced the truth. "The effect of the Indian residential school system is like a disease ripping through our communities".

Regrettably, the government is not interested in truth nor in reconciliation. It is interested in tax and spend liberalism and bureaucracy, and it is to that subject that I now turn.

The House must understand first and foremost how much money the government has invested in this residential school strategy.

First is the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. In the time since 1998 when this foundation was established, it has been given $350 million by the Government of Canada and, moreover, in the 2005 budget the government proposes an additional $40 million for the foundation, bringing the total expenditure to close to $400 million.

Second, however, is the Department of Indian Residential Schools Resolution, yet another government bureaucracy invented by the Liberal administration in 2001. Since that time, this so-called department has gobbled up approximately $275 million in administration, expert costs, legal costs and bureaucracy.

● (1510)

In the 2001-02 fiscal year the department spent $42.5 million,of which only $13 million went to the victims. In other words, the victims received 30% of the money; the bureaucracy gobbled up 70%.

In the 2002-03 fiscal year the department spent $55.8 million, of which only $13.5 million went to victims. The bureaucracy's take increased to a higher percentage that year of 75%.

In the 2003-04 fiscal year the department spent $77.4 million, of which less than $16.5 million went to the victims.

We are now seeing the real benefits of Liberal bureaucracy and administration. We have now reached the point that a full 80% of the money which is expended is invested in bureaucracy. The victims get only 20¢ on the dollar.

In this most recent fiscal year, 2004-05, the department's estimates authorized expenditures of $100 million. We assume that all or most of that money has indeed been spent at this point in time.

Under a Liberal administration the waste will continue. For the current 2005 budget the Deputy Prime Minister has asked for an additional $121 million for this department which settled fewer than 100 cases last year.

In addition, not included in the costs of which I speak is the expense associated with hundreds and hundreds of lawyers within the Department of Justice who are employed on these files. Some estimates indicate that as many as 25% of the lawyers working for the Department of Justice spend time on the residential school files. Those costs, whatever they are, are buried deep in the Department of Justice figures.

In total since its inception this so-called department has spent $275 million of which the victims have received less than 20% to 25% of the money. Today it has the audacity to seek another $121 million.

What has been the success rate resulting from all of this? Again we must understand at the outset that the department of which I speak handles only a fraction of the residential school cases. Let us get the numbers straight. Approximately 150,000 students attended residential schools in the time between the 1940s and the 1970s. As of January 31, 2005 there are 85,975 former students who are still alive. This is the available pool of possible claimants.

Of a total of, let us say 86,000 people, a total of 13,396 former students have filed claims against the Government of Canada. The vast majority of these cases are in court. Fully 12,000 of the 13,000 cases are represented by lawyers and they are plaintiffs in class actions started in Ontario and Alberta.

The cases which this department is handling at an expense of $275 million are only 1,400 in number as of today's date. After a full three years of operation this department is handling less than 2% of the available pool of claimants and less than 10% of all of the cases which have been filed against the government at this point.

The Deputy Prime Minister calls this much vaunted ADR process the centrepiece of the government strategy. It is certainly the centrepiece in terms of cost. The reality of matters is that people are not using the ADR process of which the government is so fond. Perhaps they are dissuaded by the 40 page application which requires the assistance of experts to fill out, or perhaps it is the Liberal government's cultural sensitivity which is frightening them away.

For example, according to lawyers and claimants who are experienced with the system, the government spends approximately $20,000 per case to fight the small cases that involve $500 to $3,500 in compensation, and the government sometimes appeals those decisions.

● (1515)

The Deputy Prime Minister clings to this ADR process as her lifeline, describing it as culturally sensitive and holistic. In fact it has no supporters, other than her and those who are part of the administration. The survivors describe it as a demeaning process which revictimizes them. The Assembly of First Nations describes it as abusive. The Canadian Bar Association says that it is flawed and that it has failed both aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. The departmental officials will admit privately that it is flawed. Even the Ontario Court of Appeal in the Cloud decision offers little respect or support for the ADR process, which has cost all so much money.

The Ontario Court of Appeal criticized the ADR process as follows: "I do not agree that this ADR system displaces the conclusion that the class action is the preferable procedure. It is a system unilaterally created by one of the respondents in this action and could be unilaterally dismantled without the consent of the appellants. It caps the amount of possible recovery and, most importantly in these circumstances, compared to the class action it shares the access to justice deficiencies of individual actions. It does not compare favourably with a common trial".

Only the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada applauds the process. In the House on November 15, 2004 she said, "There is no mismanagement involved here". The facts are different. At committee on February 22, 2005 she said, "Our ADR approach is groundbreaking, culturally based, humane and holistic". All of the evidence that was put before the standing committee indicated the contrary without exception.

There is a way forward. There is a better way. There is a path which is outlined in brief in the recommendation of the standing committee. First, as a nation we must attack the challenge of restorative justice. That objective is not about money. It goes beyond reparation in a material sense. It focuses upon a national truth and reconciliation process, a national process, a public process which is comprehensive and respectful. It will be a process which heals wounds in a way that money does not, indeed, in a way which money cannot. This is precisely what other commentators, the Law Reform Commission, the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Canadian Bar Association and RCAP, among others, the AFN and the survivors have been calling for, for many years, denied only by the Liberal Government of Canada.

The difficult issues surrounding corrective justice or, put more simply, how much money does the government owe to those claimants who have sued the government, can also be resolved much more quickly than the current government is proceeding. Over 12,000 litigants are suing the Crown. They include three classes of plaintiffs: first, the former students; second, the siblings and parents of the former students; and third, the children and the spouses of former students. Their claims are based on breaches of duty which are characterized as breaches of treaty, breaches of fiduciary duty and negligence.

These issues are currently before the courts of Ontario and Alberta on an expedited basis. Over 90% of the claimants who now claim against the government have opted for this process. It seems obvious to us that the government should be aggressively engaged in court supervised negotiations to settle all of those claims. There are 12,000 claimants. They have legal counsel. They are aggressively proceeding in court with their cases. The courts are prepared to intercede. They have capable mediators and arbitrators. There would seem to be no impediment to resolving those cases through such a process.

Certainly many of these claims raise difficult legal and factual questions. For example, did every single person who attended residential school suffer, and suffer equally, at the hands of these institutions? What sort of duty did the government of the day have? Was that duty breached? Was it a treaty breach? Was it negligence? Was it a breach of fiduciary duty? Is loss of language and culture compensable in law? The Government of Canada will be answerable on all of these questions once some guidance is obtained from the courts.

● (1520)

I would also emphasize that the difficult cases involving sexual abuse, physical abuse and wrongful confinement must be dealt with in an expeditious manner. The current department and the current process have no credibility as an efficient, compassionate, culturally sensitive way to get to the bottom of these cases.

We must recognize that there have been less than 1,000 extreme circumstance cases which have been brought before the government at this point. It is unclear to all of us how many such cases exist, but it is very clear that it should not cost $275 million to resolve less than 10% of them.

We do not need a separate government department. We currently have other mechanisms in the Government of Canada. The Indian Claims Commission of Canada deals on a daily basis with issues involving breaches of fiduciary duty and treaty rights. There are other bodies that have the requisite financial experience, independence, expertise and credibility among aboriginal Canadians to get to the bottom of these cases. Why would we not consider expanding, for example, the mandate of the commission to resolve these difficult cases in an expedited way?

The net effect of all this is that the current approach which is being followed by this administration is not working. It is horrendously expensive. This program at this point in time is well into an expenditure of $600 million of public money, somewhere in the $700 million quadrant in fact, and we are not seeing the results. Less than 2% of the cases which are known to exist have been resolved.

In sum, the Liberal administration of the residential school file has been a complete disaster from every conceivable human or public policy perspective. The recommendations of the standing committee in respect of which we moved concurrence set out an alternate path. We urge and implore the government to take the measures outlined in our report seriously and to move forward.

● (1525)

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Calgary Centre-North is very committed to this issue and has worked tremendously hard on it. Quite frankly, without his commitment this issue would not be on the floor right now.

Maybe the hon. member for Calgary Centre-North could explain to the House the process which finally led to our debating this issue on the floor today. Was the government party in support of talking about this issue in the House?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend has made an excellent point. The member has been very aggressive in putting this matter forward. He has led the House in respect of issues surrounding fairness and equity for aboriginal veterans. He has led the House on that issue, his motion having been approved by the House. As the vice-chair of the standing committee he has exercised real leadership in ensuring that this matter is before the House today.

The long and short of it is that it was through the cooperation of the opposition parties which are represented in the House and their common efforts that the fourth report was approved by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. It was approved without the support of the Liberal members. It was achieved only with considerable effort on the part of the opposition parties to craft and arrive at recommendations which we could all support and which were brought before the House to get the debate on the floor of the House of Commons.

One thing was very clear. The Liberal members did not want to see this issue in the House of Commons. They did everything they could to make sure that it died at committee and that it was never brought before the House.

Last week when speaking on another matter, I quoted one of the western world's most famous jurists, Justice Brandeis, whose expression was, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant". That adage applies in respect of this matter. What we have to do is shine the light of day on this horrific mismanagement of taxpayers' money.

We have to shine the light of day on the attempts by members of the Liberal government to do everything possible to avoid being accountable on this matter, to avoid repairing and dealing with the healing that aboriginal Canadians require on this issue, and their attempts to avoid any sort of public inquiry, any sort of national truth and reconciliation process, their attempts to continue to jam this into a bureaucracy which at this point has expended in excess of $600 million and has achieved virtually no success.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to some of the remarks here and, with respect, there are a few things wrong with the picture that the MP presents.

First of all, if he is the defender of this issue, which he says he is, and no doubt he feels strongly about it, why was he unable to convince his colleagues on his side of the House to make that the subject of an opposition day?

I have to wonder why he had to bootleg it on the tail end of a day in which we are supposed to be discussing improving the rules of Parliament and hijack the orders of the day in order to replace it with this.

Another member asked earlier today, what procedure was used? We were not born yesterday. The hon. member parked a motion on the order paper to move concurrence in a committee report and then moved it on a government day when we were discussing a more cooperative spirit in this House to improve the rules.

There is something wrong with the sincerity across the way here. Either that or there is a total lack of knowledge of the rules of this place, how they are supposed to work, and how they are supposed to make them better.

What we have and what we should have is the debate that we all said we would have today in improving the House rules, not a hijacked process. If this issue is serious, as the hon. member says it is, he should have made it an order of his party by using one of its supply days instead of hijacking the process and the reason why the rest of us came to debate something totally different today.

● (1530)

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, this matter was put before the House in the way that it should be put before the House. There was a standing committee report. This report was passed in due order according to the proper procedure by the standing committee and brought before this House.

As a member I have moved concurrence, as is my entitlement. There has been no attempt to keep this House away from any other order of business. I would say to my hon. friend and the House that there is ample time to return to those other matters.

I am sure the hon. member is not suggesting that this issue, which is probably the most important issue among aboriginal Canadians in terms of their relationship with this country, is one that should not be on the floor of the House of Commons in a debate where all members of this House have an opportunity to speak.

The consequences of the residential school problem have rippled through our society. There are those who know more about this than myself, who link it to the high rates of suicide, to some of the dysfunctionality that we see in some of the communities, to the incidences of social problems, poverty, and to the levels of incarceration.

These are problems which are very important to us as Canadians. I for one see no reason why those issues should not be on the floor of the House of Commons today and subject to debate.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell raises a very good point. If it was a priority, it was not a priority enough for the opposition to put it into its allocation of time. I have a question for the member for Calgary Centre-North. I wonder why he is clinging onto a motion that does not have the support of the Assembly of First Nations. Would the hon. member comment on that?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, what has been put before this House is the report of the standing committee. It represents the consensus that existed at that time among the members of the standing committee. It is a motion which builds in part upon the work of the AFN and the Canadian Bar Association and the reports which they put forward.

It builds as well upon the five days of dedicated time that the standing committee devoted to this issue and considered all of the evidence which the standing committee heard at that time, including the evidence of victims, individuals with experience with the process, the healing foundation, and including participation not only from victims but from their legal counsel. All of that has been put in the mix, including what we heard from the Deputy Prime Minister, who came and spoke to us about this particular program. The result is the motion that was put forward by the standing committee and which is before this House today for debate.

It may be that many of the stakeholders who take part in this issue do not support each and every one of those recommendations. Those recommendations reflect the wisdom of the standing committee put before this House.

● (1535)

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I think I should get back to the hon. member. First, he is saying that we are debating the contents of the report today which of course is factually incorrect. We are debating the motion to concur in the report. We are not debating what he said we were.

Second, the parliamentary secretary was quite clear in saying that it is not even supported anyway.

Third, and more fundamentally, if the hon. member actually believes what he says, why was he unable to convince even a critical mass of Conservative MPs to make this an order of the day for their opposition day?

Then they say they do not get to choose their own opposition day. I wonder who does choose their opposition day. Is it some lobbyist some place, if it is not them?

Mr. Jim Prentice: With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, there is no obligation on the part of any of the opposition parties in the House to dedicate their opposition days to the debating of concurrence motions. It is preposterous to suggest that is what we have to do to concur in a standing committee report. My hon. friend knows better than that.

This is a concurrence motion where the House is being asked to concur in the report of the standing committee. It is before the House in a proper manner for debate and that is why we are here.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Calgary Centre-North should keep up with things and check his facts. It is true that this was a motion that was concurred in committee; however, Liberal members argued against it because it did not have the support of the Assembly of First Nations. In fact, there was another motion, as the member knows full well, by the member for Winnipeg Centre which I think made a lot more sense. The Assembly of First Nations does not like this particular motion. The AFN is the one that is affected and it does not like it for a number of reasons.

It does not like it because the motion recommends terminating the current ADR process. The Assembly of First Nations believes that the ADR processed should be repaired and not terminated.

The motion recommends that the process be handed over to the courts to supervise and enforce. The Assembly of First Nations believes that the first nations must negotiate the settlement with the assistance of the courts if required.

The motion recommends a partial truth commission involving survivors only, whereas the AFN recommends a comprehensive truth commission involving governments and churches.

The motion is silent on a need for an apology. The Assembly of First Nations calls for a full apology.

The motion is silent on the administration of a reconciliation payment. The Assembly of First Nations insists that the administration be through a first nations entity.

The motion is silent on the need for a reconciliation. The Assembly of First Nations sees reconciliation as the rationale for the entire compensation package.

Therefore, the very people that this motion is supposed to be representing, supporting and helping, are not supporting the motion.

Here we are in the House debating something that does not even have the support of Canada's largest and perhaps most influential group of first nations peoples.

The alternative dispute resolution process for victims of sexual and physical abuse at Indian residential schools is unfairly represented in this motion as well. The so-called fact-finding by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development was undertaken to provoke drama and headlines, not to learn, not to understand, and not to bring realistic solutions for individuals who were harmed as children attending Indian residential schools.

This motion represents the worst of all worlds: uninformed or intentionally misleading political notions built on the hopes of abused aboriginal people in our country.

Former residential school students and their families deserve more than this and we must not let them down. Simple compensation will not make up for the evils we know that happened. Adding up the cost and dividing it by 86,000 people will not fix the problems that we face as parliamentarians, as leaders, and as Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The most difficult challenge is to accept that there are no easy answers to the various questions raised by this institutional system. No action, be it a program to heal the wounds, a forum on truth and reconciliation or compensation, will successfully close this dark chapter of our history.

For the country and the government, the effects of the Indian residential schools represent an exceptional problem which requires innovative and realistic solutions.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Lawsuits against the government filed by more then 11,000 former students still remain. Unless we continue to vigorously implement an alternative dispute resolution approach, it will take forever to move these existing cases through the traditional courts. It will cost much more than what we will spend using other avenues.

The motion would have us believe that the alternative dispute resolution process has sprung from nowhere. How insulting to the many individuals and organizations from across Canada who have put many years into creating a workable and approachable system.

The government's approach has been developed in concert with the input of hundreds of former Indian residential school students and other important stakeholders, such as the churches. The alternative dispute resolution process is the result of listening, not to political whimsies and short term expediencies but to the vital visceral desire to put the past to rest with dignity.

Former students are seeking options to waiting years for the courts and options for validating their experiences. They seek financial support for personal and community healing because of the widespread effect of damaged lives. They seek spiritual support and they seek to have their loved ones with them at a hearing. Together, we are seeking options for cross-examination on details that may have taken place 50 years ago. We all want to avoid isolation from friends and family.

Clearly, our challenge has been and continues to be to find a timely, safe, and effective option for former students to settle their claims. We need a holistic approach, one that facilitates access to justice and that treats former students as humanely as possible.

All Canadians expect their government to be accountable. Former students themselves have called for a credible process to validate their experiences and to educate Canadians about what happened to them. These are complex cases, usually involving many parties. It takes time and resources to appropriately address these claims.

The motion would have us run away from our responsibilities. Resolving the legacy of Indian residential schools must address not just compensation, but the longer term need for healing and for reconciliation. This is all part of the program and the support system. This is all well in progress as we speak.

The motion before the House would have us abandon the alternative dispute resolution process that has been so carefully developed and which continues to be the subject of ongoing refinements. It would have us abandon the some 1,200 former students who have put their faith in this process and whose hearings will take place over the coming months.

We are receiving on average 20 applications to the alternative dispute resolution process each and every week. We cannot abandon these people and this process. Rather, we should be asking why, to date, over 1,400 former students have chosen this process to pursue their Indian residential school claims.

What is the alternative dispute resolution process? What sets it apart from the courts? First, we recognize that we are approaching fragile individuals who have suffered more in one lifetime than we would like to know. They need to be believed. If they have the strength to come forward, the system has to support them. Hearings are private affairs and only the adjudicator can ask questions.

What kind of support is provided to former students, whether they choose the ADR process or litigation? There are crisis lines, mental health workers, traditional support, and travel money to attend a hearing, so that there is a loving family member or friend to lean on.

Former students are encouraged to retain legal counsel to advise them on completing their application and undertaking the process. The government pays legal costs that would otherwise come out of former students' pockets. We know of former students who, despite our efforts, have suffered by telling their stories through the ADR process.

● (1545)

We cannot undo the pain they suffered by examining their past. We all regret the suffering, and health supports are in place and available to offer ongoing support to former students during these times of crisis.

We continue to fine-tune the alternative dispute resolution process. We know that we must look at every possible way to further streamline the process. We know that more can be done and will be done.

This is not enough. We are working with our partners and other stakeholders on further innovation. We asked the Assembly of First Nations for its views and we received solid ideas that are now under active consideration.

We need to open the door to redress for more than the victims of sexual and physical abuse. We are working with the Assembly of First Nations and other partners on an ongoing and regular basis to examine the ways suggested by the Assembly of First Nations report to acknowledge the impacts of Indian residential schools on former students.

The alternative dispute resolution process may not be for everyone. However, it provides a respectful, honourable and more expedient option for former students who suffered sexual and physical abuses and it presents a strong option to using the courts.

This motion before us would have us believe that, based on its first year of operation, the alternative dispute resolution process is a dismal failure and that it and the thousands of people engaged in seeking redress, healing and reconciliation should be abandoned. That is what this motion is saying.

I have strong evidence to the contrary. The Honourable Ted Hughes, chief adjudicator for the alternative dispute resolution process, wrote to me last week and described the performance of the adjudication secretariat. He reports that his adjudicators have delivered 150 decisions and that another 100 files are at the hearing stage. The total value of these decisions now amounts to over $6 million.

Mr. Hughes grants that there may not have been unanimous satisfaction with the ADR hearings process, but he also makes clear that the level of dissatisfaction is nowhere near what the committee would have us believe.

Mr. Hughes goes on to say:

> I sincerely believe that the measure of satisfaction with which the efforts of the Adjudicators are being met far exceeds the negativism that the Committee's Report projects. I have no doubt that the 'positives' of which I speak will continue to grow as we deliver the 1,000 decisions expected of us in the current fiscal year.

This process is not failing. It is not perfect either. That is why we are in active discussions with the Assembly of First Nations and our other partners to take a serious look at how our approach might be improved or supplemented.

We are not cowering in the face of criticism. We are not prepared to be hijacked by wavering political interests. Most important, this government is not prepared to turn tail and abandon thousands of former students and all the work done to date.

[*Translation*]

Also, we fear neither change nor improvement. We are honouring our commitments and accepting our responsibilities. We are dealing with the consequences of our actions and will continue working with our critics to find the best solutions possible for the thousands of former Indian residential school students.

● (1550)

[*English*]

I challenge all members of Parliament to examine carefully their own thinking on this motion. I challenge them to understand that undoing the wrongs of a century cannot be achieved overnight. I challenge them not to abandon the aboriginal victims of abuse and our responsibilities to them and to all Canadians.

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question regarding the supposed efficiency of this program.

On the ADR itself we have information showing that $125 million has been spent. Less than a million dollars has gone to actually compensating survivors. We have information showing that for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada only $1 goes to compensation for every $4 spent on administration.

For this program, even if it were running as well as the government has wanted it to from the beginning, half of the budgeted cost goes to administration. How can this possibly be seen as an efficient program? Maybe it should not surprise us. This is from the party that brought us the gun registry and the sponsorship scandal. Perhaps the hon. member would comment on that.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member wants me to comment on the gun registry, which is actually demonstrating very clearly that it does have a significant effect on gun homicides and suicides in Canada. In fact, law enforcement officers are making about 2,000 inquiries a day on the gun registry system. These are front line officers who obviously know what they are doing and they are getting some value out of it.

However, I am sure the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River really wanted me to comment on the residential schools issue and the alternative dispute resolution process. The member has raised a valid point. I know that he has been engaged with this file.

The reality is that in starting up a program like this we had to define the parameters. We had to work with first nations people. Staff had to be brought in. Lawyers had to be engaged. Program people had to be set up. A program like this cannot take off from a flying start. We cannot tell a department or a group of people that we are going to do something today so they need to start reviewing the files tomorrow.

The criteria had to be established. What would the process be? How could it be made understandable to people in terms of their culture? They might have a different way of thinking about this type of thing.

There was some lead time. I would like to characterize it this way. We look at the chart, which starts off slowly, but then once the infrastructure and the mechanisms are in place it starts to take off in a sort of exponential way.

Just comparing the numbers from the outset gives an artificial view of what is actually happening. As the Honourable Ted Hughes said, they are starting to deal with these claims in a very expeditious way and there is a lot of interest in the process.

I would just ask the member to give it a chance. If he were to ask the same question next year and there had been no significant progress and the expenditure on claims had not started to move against the infrastructure costs and the staff costs, I think he would have a valid point, but I would submit that it is too early in the process right now.

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to follow up on that very question, it would seem to me that the best way to judge whether the program has been successful or not is to judge the amount of money which has been spent on this so-called government department in the last four years and determine what percentage of that money went to the claimants and what percentage went to the bureaucracy.

The problem I have with the explanation given by my hon. friend, which is that we need to wait because the program is starting to bear fruit, is that the numbers actually support the contrary conclusion. If we compare the government's fiscal expenditures with the amount of money spent in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, the amount of money that goes to bureaucracy is actually increasing, not decreasing.

We are not reaching the point where there are any efficiencies. In those four years, the amount of money going to victims actually decreased from 30¢ on the dollar to 20¢ on the dollar. We are actually getting less output from the system, not more.

Let my give my hon. friend a comparison. In 1988 this country dealt with the circumstances involving the Japanese Canadian experience. An agreement was signed offering redress for injustice during and after the second world war. That entire program, which was administered by a Conservative government, opened and closed in five years. Within one year the government processed 17,500 applications. Over 65% of the applications were processed and closed within the first 12 months.

By comparison, this program, which is now into its fourth year, has spent $275 million, plus the healing foundation money, and has resolved less than 2% of the cases. How is that a success and why should we wait?

● (1555)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, this is not unlike the Conservative Party's approach to the Gomery inquiry. Every day there is a new bit of information, so those members jump on it.

The Conservatives are not really interested, but we are in this for the long haul. They cannot pull out statistics from one year or another. We all know that it takes time to validate these claims.

I am absolutely amazed that the members of the Conservative Party would suggest that all people need to do is fill in a claim form and send it to Ottawa, where it will just be validated and a cheque will be sent to them. This is the same party that stands up in the House day in and day out looking for accountability and good financial management systems, but on the other hand it says to just send in a claim form.

The problem we have is that a lot of these cases go back many years, so some of the people who allegedly committed these terrible things are not around. The Assembly of First Nations has proposed that we forget all that and just say that the fact a person was at a residential school qualifies the person, period, and we would just pay the person a lump sum. I must say that the government is looking into it, but the problem might be that it is just so exorbitantly expensive. I do not know. The government is working with the Assembly of First Nations on it.

There is another problem I raised at committee, which the others did not really deal with. We know there are many members of the first nations who went to residential schools and had a very positive experience. What are we going to do? Are we going to cut them a cheque as well? Admittedly there might not be tons of these people around, but there are some who speak quite highly of their experience at residential schools.

Rather than doing what the Conservative Party always does, which is just pick out a statistic here and there, I say to stay in this for the long haul, be concerned about the first nations people and listen to the Assembly of First Nations.

An hon. member: How about taking some responsibility?

Hon. Roy Cullen: The Assembly of First Nations does not support this motion. Surely that is enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): That last part was very difficult for me to hear, so we will assume that everything was okay and the vocabulary was fine.

We are still in questions and comments. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, the member for Calgary Centre-North, asked a very straightforward and direct question based on the fact that a very few per cent of claims have been settled. The administrative costs are at somewhere between 70% and 80%, just enormous. He is looking for some answers.

The hon. member opposite got up and tried to somehow relate this to the sponsorship program, which is surprising, to say the least, and then went on to say that it was the Conservatives, it was the opposition.

My question is quite simple. Based on the facts and based on the gut-wrenching testimony we heard at committee, which was that people have been trying for a long time to get any type of satisfaction and have been told that they do not qualify or that the abuse was acceptable abuse at that time and in those days, when is this government going to stand up and take one ounce of responsibility for some of these wrongdoings? When is it going to show an ounce of humility and admit that it made a mistake, that something is not working?

Why does the government always want to pretend that it has this divine right and everything it does is right? It is incredible that the member has the gall to stand in this House and try to suggest this is somehow like the sponsorship program.

I ask the member to show some humility. I ask the member to show an ounce of responsibility and show our first nations people some respect. Let us start fixing these problems instead of trying to blame everyone else.

● (1600)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I guess the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands was wandering through the crocuses blooming this weekend and forgot to read or study the fact that this motion is not supported by the Assembly of First Nations.

If he had actually listened to what I had to say, he would have heard that I acknowledge and the government acknowledges that we need to do more work on the alternative dispute resolution process. We need to streamline it. That is precisely why this government asked the Assembly of First Nations to review it and come back with a set of recommendations. That is why the motion proposed by the NDP at committee made some sense to us.

This motion does not have the support of the Assembly of First Nations, for the reasons I rattled off. Perhaps the member did not hear that.

I find it astounding that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands would talk about humility. I am not sure that he is the person who would teach this House or Canadians a lot about that.

Nonetheless, this is a serious matter. The government is seized with it. We acknowledge that work has to be done to improve this process. That is precisely what we are doing. When the member wanders through the crocuses next weekend, I think he should read some of the literature on these motions as they are presented to the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary (Louis-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I was dumbfounded by the last remarks of the Liberal member. I have never heard remarks as serious and fabricated in response to a question.

This is certainly no way to convince me to support him in what he is proposing. The member attended the committee meetings. He heard as well as I and the other members did all that was said against the current process. He heard from individuals, seniors and aboriginal organizations that this process should be completely changed. Every stakeholder without exception, government officials excluded, found that the approach did not make any sense and that it was imperative to bring in changes as soon as possible, so that seniors who were in residential schools in their youth can receive what they are owed and were promised.

It is my understanding that this government's preferred approach or strategy is to drag any investigation out, so that—as was the case with the veterans—those concerned disappear and die before having obtained what they wanted.

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness came to the committee. We told her all that happened and conveyed to her all the criticism from the public, but she just kept repeating that there was no problem, that all was well, and that we should let her continue operating the same way, that spending would increase but that the money for these poor people would never be there.

The committee unanimously decided this would be what we would be tabling, and that is what we are doing today. I resent this attempt at convincing us to drop this motion or to oppose it, when we, in the committee, have already voted for it.

As you no doubt know, Mr. Speaker, what this motion states is consistent with our study and our decision. The committee considered the written and oral evidence presented.

Former students of residential schools met with us and explained that there were major problems that needed to be resolved in order for the process to work. Witnesses included the hon.Ted Hughes, Chief Adjudicator of Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada; the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and Minister Responsible for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada; Mario Dion, Deputy Minister Responsible for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada; and the Canadian Bar Association. The committee took particular note, in formulating the recommendations below, of the written and oral evidence of the former students and the representatives of former students and survivors' organizations regarding their personal experiences in the residential schools and in the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada alternative dispute resolution process.

● (1605)

The witnesses were compelling for their candour and integrity about their experience as inmates in the residential school system and fair, frank and persuasive on matters of public policy.

The committee came to the inescapable conclusion that the alternative dispute resolution process is an excessively costly and inappropriately applied failure, for which the minister and her officials are unable to raise a convincing defence.

Specifically the ADR process is a failure becauseit is strikingly disconnected from the so-called pilot projects that preceded it. It is failing to provide impartial and even-handed due process. It is not attracting former students to apply in credible numbers. It provides grossly inadequate compensation when, grudgingly, it does so. It excludes too many of the some 87,000 remaining former students from eligibility. It is proceeding too slowly, allowing too many former students to die uncompensated. It is an arbitrary administrative solution that is vulnerable to political whim.

Many former students do not trust the process. There is no satisfactory evidence in the numbers that the program is working.

The committee took note of the consistency of the former students, the AFN and the CBA on five points. First, the necessity of compensation for those former students who are able to establish a cause of action and a lawful entitlement to compensation process. Second, the necessity of keeping the compensation referred to above separate and apart from compensation for sexual and severe physical abuse. Third, the absolute necessity for a settlement process that includes direct negotiations with the former students and the vigorous protection of their legal rights during the negotiations. Fourth, the wisdom of a court-approved, court-supervised settlement that is transparent, is arrived at in a neutral manner and cannot be tampered with politically. Fifth and last, the necessity of a settlement that is comprehensive and final and relieves the government of future liability.

The committee took note of three recommendations by former students and their groups:the need for continued financial support of healing processes, with a greater degree of local direction and personal self-direction on how that healing is to be achieved;the need for a respectful national forum and the urgency for prompt compensation, reconciliation and healing because former students are elderly and on average some 30 to 50 die each week uncompensated and bearing the grief of their experience to the grave.

The reconciliation payment should start with a base amount for any time spent at a school—for example, $10,000—and add an amount for each year at a school—for example $3,000.

The committee regrets the manner with which the government has administered the Indian Residential Schools Claims program and recommends that the government give consideration to the advisability of government taking the following steps. First, the government should take all the actions recommended hereafter on an urgent basis, with consideration for the frailty and short life expectancy of the former students.

Second, the government should improve the Indian Residential Schools Resolutions Canada Alternative Dispute Resolutions Process. It should also engage in court-supervised negotiations with former students. It should ensure that the courts have full and final discretion with respect to limitations on legal fees.The government should expedite the settlement of other claims involving aggravated circumstances.

In order to ensure that former students have the opportunity to tell their stories to all Canadians in a process characterized by dignity and respect, the government should cause a national truth and reconciliation process to take place in a forum.The government should also ask the Auditor General to conduct an audit of the Indian Residential Schools Canada Dispute Resolution Process from its creation to its winding down.Finally, the government should respond publicly in writing to the Assembly of First Nations report.

● (1610)

Other than Government of Canada employees, everyone who testified condemned the ineffectiveness of the alternative dispute resolution process. The only thing the government succeeded in doing was implementing an ineffective and very costly structure.

After all this criticism, the minister appeared before the committee to say that there was no problem and that everything was going extremely well. What a joke.

Here is what the aboriginals want: first, a lump-sum payment for former students; second, an apology; third, an Amerindian agency to administer the payment of funds to former students; and fourth, a commitment to reconciliation.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, for whom I have a fairly quick question.

In fact, the Assembly of First Nations does not accept the motion presented in the House today. Does that not bother the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent?

● (1615)

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Mr. Speaker, every effort has been made to have it bother me. The Liberal Party has put on all sorts of pressure to have it bother me. Everyone has tried to set us against one another.

This morning, I met counsel for the AFN to explain to them why I, as an MP and an aboriginal, considered it important to have Parliament vote in favour of today's motion, thus forcing the government to take it into account.

So much effort has gone into getting me to reject this motion that I no longer believe the intervenors who really wanted us to give up and then wander around with vague promises that would never be kept.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the speech by my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, which was better than any I have heard to date, clearly outlined the true wishes of first nations and he pointed to three key points that would satisfy him.

His first point was that all students at residential schools be provided with blanket universal compensation without being questioned on whether they had been abused. We assume they were abused because they were deprived of family development for a decade.

His second point was that he would only be satisfied with a formal apology from the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. That is a key element.

In his third point he identified a truth and reconciliation process so that both sides could heal.

Does my friend from the Bloc Québécois recognize that the motion put forward by the Conservative Party does not contain those elements? However we do have an opportunity to move forward with a motion that would include all three of those components. Would he prefer to support a motion that had the three elements that we cite as primary?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I will always be in favour of the ideal. No doubt about that. It would have been ideal if all of that had been included.

However, as I think we can come back to this later, and it is my intention to do so in order to include the elements mentioned, it was more important for me—and the matter was considered seriously—to have Parliament vote in favour of some settlement for the whole issue of residential schools than to include everything in the initial considerations.

My personal choice was to have a vote on this motion, to set out what the government must do and what it promised to do and to have us work together in committee to complete the file.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I seldom attend meetings of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, but, fortunately, I was there when this particular topic was discussed.

When one of our colleagues from the Conservative Party spoke, I found that this colleague was very conservative regarding the cost of administering this program. He talked about $1 for every $4. But the fact is that, at that meeting, it was demonstrated that every $1 paid in compensation costs $35.

Every day, I am surprised by the demagoguery of the governing party, which, against the will of Parliament, has always stubbornly defied Parliament and acted contrary to promises and agreements made with the other parties in this House. Take Mirabel and EI for example. On the whole, the amount of blustering before the House of Commons is increasing.

In this respect, I wonder—and my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent can confirm that this is what was said at committee—if it would not have been better, from the start, to put the money in the hands of an administration that is familiar with the problems experienced in the residential schools and those experienced even today by the Innu, who are sent thousands of miles away to pursue an education. The same is true for other aboriginal people, whether Cree, Naskapi or Algonquin. They are sent thousands of miles away from home. That is almost like living in an orphanage: they are at the mercy of strangers; they lose their customs and language; they are taught other religions than their own, and it is mandatory.

On this, I will ask my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent if, really, the best would not have been to establish an aboriginal committee to administer a program designed to compensate aboriginal people.

● (1620)

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I think that, given the right opportunity, the Assembly of First Nations will succeed in playing that role because, ultimately, the first nations are familiar with this issue.

Obviously, they have to be given a real opportunity to make a decision, instead of simply being consulted. If that happens, it is clear they will achieve the results that the Bloc member is hoping for.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by way of starting, I am pleased that this issue is before the House of Commons where I believe it properly belongs. I believe the terrible legacy of Canada's Indian residential schools is our greatest shame as a nation. There has never been an injustice on this scale or of this magnitude in the country.

In spite of a national consensus that there should be compensation and reconciliation, the overwhelming majority of the money set aside to compensate victims so they can get on with their lives is being burned up in legal fees and bureaucracy. There is some confusion over the figures. Some say by a factor of 4:1 that more money is spent on bureaucracy than compensation. Some say that it is 35:1. All we need to know is that the money is not going into the pockets of the victims so they can rebuild their lives.

I wish all members could have heard some of the testimony in our committee.

I intend to share my time, Mr. Speaker, with my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I cannot get out of my mind one elder who came as a witness to the committee. She was an 88-year-old woman named Flora Merrick. She ran away from her residential school when she was nine years old to attend her mother's funeral. When she was caught, she was beaten black and blue and locked in a room for two weeks.

I will not dwell on how horrific this is and the state of fear in which these children lived, except to point out that when she filed a claim under the ADR process for a $3,500 maximum, the government spent $30,000 to oppose that claim, to call her a liar. Then when she was awarded $1,500 as a settlement, the government appealed it. It is going to spend another $30,000 to appeal this lousy $1,500 settlement for Flora Merrick. This is truly outrageous. If Canadians could hear this, I think they would be standing with us today calling for a just reconciliation and compensation program for the Indian residential school victims.

I cannot support the motion for concurrence put forward by my colleague from the Conservative Party. I believe the report of the committee, which he has moved concurrence in, fails to grasp the necessary elements of reform for this compensation program.

The standing committee had put in front of it a motion by myself, which essentially was that the Assembly of First Nations' recommended action to solve the Indian residential school situation. That motion contains three elements that I believe are necessary for us to begin to move forward.

One is fair and reasonable compensation in an expedited process, which is blanket lump sum compensation. In other words, no more wasting money trying to prove these victims are lying. This money should go into their pockets.

Eligibility for compensation should be based on the fact that someone was there. We accept that being torn from the bosom of one's family for 10 years in a row and denied one's culture and language in itself is abusive. We do not need to know how many times one was sexually abused or what size the stick was with which that a person was beaten. Those details do not matter because being forced to retell those stories re-victimizes the victims. Enough is enough. We should put the money that was set aside for compensation into the hands of the victims. This would be the first element and it is lacking in the motion put forward by my colleague from Calgary today.

● (1625)

The second element is a full public apology by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. Aboriginal people will settle for nothing else. They want an apology. They remind the House of Commons that the government of the day made a formal apology to Japanese Canadians. It has made formal apologies to other victims for reprehensible things former governments did.

As I started by saying, in this case there is no greater injustice in the history of Canada than the history of the Indian residential schools. We want and they want the Prime Minister of Canada to stand in the House of Commons and admit that what was done was wrong. This is not included in the motion we are debating today, as put forward by my colleague from the Conservative Party.

The third element that must be a part of any package to reform the Indian residential school situation is a truth and reconciliation process so that even though the compensation would be lump sum and universal, there would be an opportunity for people's stories to be told so both sides could begin to heal. I do not mean just the victims telling their stories. The churches want to tell their stories. The government wants to tell its stories. Non-aboriginal people who feel sick to their stomachs about this situation want their feelings to be heard. That is the path toward healing and toward true reconciliation. This element is absent in the motion my colleague from the Conservative Party would ask us to vote in favour of today.

I urge my colleagues in the House of Commons to vote down this motion because those other elements which I have raised are within grasp. The motion that I put forward in the standing committee, I now have information that it has the support of the government, of the ruling party. We can get all those three key elements in a motion adopted by the House of Commons. That is why the Assembly of First Nations, the elected leadership of first nations around the country, is asking us as members of Parliament to vote against the motion put forward by the Conservatives today, to stay strong and to keep fighting for a new resolution with the key elements we have identified here today.

I believe we owe it to this issue to do it right and to do it right the first time. This is simply an interim measure. I compliment my colleague from the Conservative Party for what he did at the committee. When it was clear my motion did not have support, he moved another motion which kept the issue alive and it brought the issue into the House of Commons where it properly belongs. However, let us not settle for half of the loaf when the whole loaf is available to us.

Let us not put in place a problematic resolution and motion when we can put in a motion that leads toward healing. One of the elements of the motion we have before us today is problematic in that it calls for simply abolishing the alternative dispute resolution system. Our point, and the point of the Assembly of First Nations, is we want to correct the alternative dispute resolution system, not abolish it. What about all those people who are halfway through the system now, who are 80 and 90 years old, who have been waiting for years for justice? We cannot just cut that program off willy-nilly with nothing to substitute for it. I urge colleagues to keep that in mind.

The motion put forward by the Conservatives recommends that the process be handed over to the courts to supervise and enforce. There should be some judicial oversight, but we do not want to put it strictly into the hands of the lawyers, some of whom are charging a 30% contingency fee for all settlements. That is a mistake. Oversight, yes, but handing it over strictly to that outside third party is wrong.

I urge colleagues here today that when this comes to a vote, to vote against it and vote in favour of a package that more accurately reflects what the leadership of first nations is asking us to do. That is the way to move forward to heal this historic injustice.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ) Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his position he has taken in the House on the motion introduced by the hon. member from the Conservative Party.

However, I want to understand one thing. It seems to me that, in life, we have to take small steps and I think that the Conservative Party's motion, which has been supported by the Bloc Québécois, was a small step in the right direction. It seems that the hon. member wants to leap too far and too fast.

Perhaps I am mistaken, but does he not believe that it would be better to start with one step in the right direction as suggested by the Conservatives and supported by the Bloc?

I am asking him this question because, in my riding, there are people who suffered terribly in an Indian residential school in Saint-Marc, near Amos. They have been waiting for years for even the slightest hint of a resolution. Many of these aboriginals, who are Algonquin Anishinabes, have died and yet the waiting and the delays continue. So it seemed to me that the Conservative Party's motion, seconded by the Bloc Québécois, was very interesting and a step in the right direction. I want to ask the following question: does the member not believe we should take the first step in the right direction, even if it means following up later with the proposal by the hon. member?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, if I honestly believed that the motion put forward by the Conservative Party would expedite settlements or even act as a stepping stone to a lasting resolve I would support it but I actually do not believe that.

Now that we have had time to carefully read the motion crafted by my colleague from the Conservative Party, it is actually a step backward. I am very concerned that some of the language in it is detrimental to the entire issue.

I would much prefer to adopt the report of the Assembly of First Nations, which was crafted by experts in the field, that went beyond first nations people. These experts included university professors, a former judge, a professor of law from the University of Quebec and people with backgrounds in human rights. Fifteen or 20 people crafted the proposal on how we move forward in the compensation for abuses at residential schools. That is the model we should be implementing.

My fear is that if we were to adopt the motion put forward by the Conservative Party today we would be one step further away from this satisfactory resolve, which is in fact the motion that I put forward at the committee. If we vote down the Conservative Party's motion, tomorrow morning we can begin debate at the Indian affairs committee and finish the motion I started, which is this book. That would bring us toward a resolve. It has expedited plans where people will get money in their pocket more quickly.

I do not believe the motion put forward by the Tories does that.

● (1635)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre is absolutely right. The motion on the floor today is actually counterproductive. It does not have the support of the Assembly of First Nations for the reasons that I enunciated earlier. For example, the motion says that the courts should take it over, whereas the Assembly of First Nations wants first nations people to be involved. First Nations people want to see a much stronger approach to reconciliation and healing.

I have a question for the member for Winnipeg Centre concerning one thing that concerns me. The scenario I worry about is that people might take the attitude that since the motion is on the floor of the House today we should all support it. We would then rush back to committee, deal with the motion by the member for Winnipeg Centre and then we would end up with two motions. In my mind, that does not seem to be very productive.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my fear is that by passing the motion put to us today, we would actually be lowering the likelihood that we would get around to the full comprehensive reformation package that needs to be put forward at the committee. I am fearful that we may jeopardize the bigger picture by going for this lesser picture.

I point out that the motion put forward today by my hon. colleague is long on preamble and very short on the actual recommendations. It says all the right things in the preamble about how frustrated we are with the status quo but when it comes to the actual recommendations to change the practice it falls short of what the leadership of first nations, the churches, the NGOs and other human rights advocates across the country are asking us to do in their report, the one I suggest the House of Commons should adopt.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also rise to oppose the motion.

A number of aboriginal people who live in my riding of Nanaimo —Cowichan are asking for justice to be done. They want justice done today in an even-handed, fair and open manner. Part of what we are talking about is the fact that we have seen millions of dollars spent with very little money going to the survivors of residential schools. This is an absolutely shameful condition in this day and age.

One of the bands from my riding is the Penelakut people who live on Kuper Island. The website is vancouverisland.com. The website talks about some of the experiences of the people from Kuper. The website says:

> Kuper Island has a rather dark side, with a sobering history of oppression at the hands of church and state in Canada. For almost a century, hundreds of Coast Salish children were sent to the Kuper Island Indian Residential School. The school opened in 1890, operated by Roman Catholic missionaries and funded by the Department of Indian Affairs.
>
> Between 1863 and 1984, at least 14 residential schools and 10 boarding schools operated in British Columbia, more than any other Canadian province. For almost a century, all school-aged First Nations children in the province were targeted by government agents for removal from their homes to these schools to assimilate them into the European and Christian cultures.
>
> Children who went to residential school suffered a loss of culture, identity, language, family and more.

This speaks to the ongoing tragedy that continues to play out in our communities today. Aboriginal peoples are asking us to come to the table and settle this shameful affair in an honest, upright and forthright manner.

We also have a number of aboriginal communities that have worked with the aboriginal healing fund. This fund, unfortunately, has been off again, on again and currently there is some additional money in the aboriginal healing fund but the process by which aboriginal communities could actually access it has not always been entirely clear to the aboriginal communities.

If we are truly committed to a healing process in our communities, it is absolutely essential that we ensure not only that survivors of residential schools have access to just compensation but we also ensure that the community as a whole can continue with that healing process. It is not only the children who went to residential schools who are suffering. It is their brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, and it is their grandchildren who are continuing to suffer as a result of the residential school system.

The Cowichan people in my riding who speak the Hul'qumi'num language are struggling to keep their language intact. They are struggling to ensure that the elders have the support that they need to pass on that language which is directly tied to their cultural identity. It is absolutely critical that we not only do this compensation package but that we also continue to support aboriginal peoples in maintaining their culture and their language because it is very much a part of their identity.

The member for Winnipeg Centre pointed out that there were a number of things that needed to be in place to ensure appropriate compensation. One of the key factors in the discussion is the fact that the AFN has specifically put forward a proposal and it is absolutely essential that the AFN is at the table as a meaningful partner in determining how compensation will be determined and paid out. The AFN is the elected representative of aboriginal peoples and if it is calling on us to implement a particular process then I think it is incumbent upon us to make sure that we are not only consulting but actively listening to and engaging the AFN in how this is unrolled.

The AFN is asking us to take a look at fair and reasonable compensation in an expedited process, which includes lump sum payments.

● (1640)

When the AFN asks the Canadian government to stand up with a heartfelt apology to the aboriginal people and asks for a truth and reconciliation process which will allow for healing, it is absolutely essential that we honour its request.

This healing is not only for aboriginal communities but also for those of us who live side by side with aboriginal communities, so that we can work together and live together in a way that is productive and healthy for all members of the community.

Far too many aboriginal people live in desperate and dire poverty. Too many aboriginal people struggle with not only poverty but education, alcohol and drug abuse. We need to ensure the healing process is in place, so aboriginal people can take their rightful place in Canada as partners in our communities.

I urge the House to defeat the motion. I urge the House to send this back to committee and support the motion put forward by the member for Winnipeg Centre and supported by the AFN. Let us carry on this conversation in partnership with the AFN. Let us ensure that aboriginal people in Canada are here as rightful participating citizens. I encourage the House to defeat the motion.

● (1645)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I see a need to return this to committee where we can hear the recommendations and enforce the recommendations that the AFN has talked about. My riding of Skeena—Bulkley Valley is similar to my colleague's riding. It is made up of over 30% of first nations who are a vital part of our communities.

Oftentimes residential schools are seen as a thing of the past and not relevant today. They are seen as having affected only first nations people. The importance of the full participation of first nations in the economy and the culture of my riding has been growing, but there is always a feeling that they are being held back, a feeling that they are not achieving their full potential and full blossoming within our communities, culturally, economically and socially.

My colleague mentioned the staggering numbers with respect to aboriginals in regard to alcoholism and suicide. These numbers are absolutely off the charts. These proud and strong people have suffered for many generations. The honour of the crown has often been spoken about and first nations seek the honour of the crown to be represented and held forth. It has not been so for many decades.

One of the important aspects of the motion brought forward by the member for Winnipeg Centre seems to be truth and reconciliation. Some people need to have a process by which they can bring forth their grievances in a public forum and have them reconciled through the truth. This has been done quite successfully in a number of other countries. I wonder if the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan could comment on this.

I wonder if she could also comment on the importance of having first nations more fully involved in our communities. Could she also comment on the impact this has on both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in her riding?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member's questions raise a number of other issues.

At the present time a team of young individuals is walking across Canada raising the level of awareness around suicide prevention in aboriginal communities. This is just one element. We have not even mentioned the abysmal rate of youth suicide in aboriginal communities.

There is a significant number of young people under the age of 25 living in many of our aboriginal communities. They are the future of these communities. If we do not find a way to institute a truth and reconciliation process that would allow for broad based community healing, then not only our aboriginal communities but the whole of Canada will lose out on an enormous resource.

Nearly one-third of Manitoba's young people under the age of 25 are first nations people. If we do not find a way to work with first nations communities and allow this healing process to happen, then we are going to lose another generation. It would be absolutely shameful if we allowed that to happen.

First nations communities bring so much to the face of Canada in terms of industry, culture, language and arts. They can provide much for our communities. We must find a way to work with them to ensure that they reach their full potential on their own terms.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for her contribution to the debate. One of the items that troubled me somewhat in the whole committee process was the very abbreviated time that we had to discuss some very serious issues. We had the senior adjudicator, the hon. Ted Hughes. He came to the committee and he was there for seven minutes. There was not enough time to give him a proper opportunity to speak to the committee and for the committee to respond.

Also, I was surprised that the churches, which are very much involved in this whole process, were not invited to the committee to speak and interact with committee members. I wonder if it would not be a good idea to maybe send this back to committee, have a more fulsome discussion with more witnesses, and then deal with the matter at that time.

● (1650)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the issue regarding residential schools has been around for many decades. To think that we can exclude people who participated in the residential school process, whether it is first nations people or churches, is really narrowing the scope of coming toward a productive and meaningful solution.

It would seem only right and just that this matter be returned to the committee and that other people be involved in this discussion, and that we have the Assembly of First Nations actively involved in this discussion to ensure that the solution that comes forward is actually going to meet the needs and interests of aboriginal people.

It is essential that aboriginal people are involved in this discussion. It is essential that the people who were involved in residential schools are at the table. Otherwise, how could healing ever happen in a meaningful way?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Child Care; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to take part in this debate today.

Earlier today I mentioned that I am not at all pleased with the procedure that was used to get to this point. We should have shortened another debate on another topic. I am not saying this topic is not important. I will come back to the reason why I think this is not a good procedure to use in a matter of such high importance. In any event, the House has been prevented from considering an item on the orders of the day on which we all agreed, and that was to discuss parliamentary reform.

What the hon. member for Calgary Centre-North is asking us to do today is to approve a parliamentary committee report. The French term describes quite accurately what we are being asked to do, approve, in other words, give our approval to or vote in favour of the committee report. Since the hon. member proposed that we approve the report of the parliamentary committee, we can assume he intends to vote in favour of it.

And there we are, being asked to approve this report. If the hon. member wanted us to adopt this measure, in other words, to approve of the merits of the report's content rather than adopting the report itself, then this should have been put to a debate in this House another day, specifically on an opposition day under business of supply.

Furthermore, the report tabled before the House shows that the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, after holding hearings on the effectiveness of the government's alternative dispute resolution process, was not able to study this complex issue in depth. Specifically, it seems apparent that the committee, and certain members opposite in particular, were not truly interested in studying the issue of Indian residential schools properly. The parliamentary secretary told us that, in reality, we are talking about a seven-minute speech by the Chief Adjudicator, Ted Hughes, former judge and former ombudsman. This is not a very good briefing on which to base a report like this.

Neither does it appear that the members—again, I mean those on the other side—had any interest in understanding the process involved. What is more, the hearings the committee held were incomplete. It met only five times. Now we are served up this very cursory report we have before us at this time, and are being asked to approve it. That is what the hon. member has moved.

If we were to end the debate immediately after my speech and to move on to the division tomorrow, or at some other time agreed to by the whips, I would be interested in knowing whether the member would vote in favour of the motion he has himself proposed to us today. What leads me to ask that question? I have a letter in front of me that was personally signed by Phil Fontaine.

[*English*]

● (1655)

Phil Fontaine is the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. In the letter that he sent, he says:

> Please find attached our comments on the report from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. We have serious concerns about the proposed motion for the following reasons:
>
> The motion recommends terminating the current ADR process. The AFN believes it should be repaired, not terminated.

It is against that clause of the report. I have the fourth report in front of me. It says, in recommendation two, that "The Government terminate the Indian Residential Schools Resolutions Canada Alternative Dispute Resolutions Process". That is the long name of it. The aboriginal community, through its organization, the Assembly of First Nations, is against it. Do we still want to vote for this thing? They are against it.

I will continue reading from Chief Fontaine's letter. He says:

> The motion recommends that the process be handed over to the Courts to supervise and enforce.

That is recommendation three, and I have it in front of me as well. He says further:

> The AFN says First Nations must negotiate the settlement with the Court's assistance for enforcement, if required.

Again, it is another recommendation with which the Assembly of First Nations does not agree. The AFN goes on to say:

> The motion recommends a partial truth commission involving Survivors only, whereas the AFN recommends a comprehensive truth commission involving the government and churches.

That is also a precise recommendation, and I have it in front of me. That is recommendation four. Again, AFN does not agree with that one. Why are we debating concurring in a report where the representative organization does not agree with seemingly any of it? He goes on to say:

> The motion is silent on the need for an apology. The AFN calls for a full apology.
>
> The motion is silent on the administration of a reconciliation payment. The AFN insists that the administration be through the First Nations entity.
>
> The motion is silent on the need for reconciliation. The AFN sees reconciliation as the rationale for the entire compensation package.

The hon. member is asking us to concur, in other words to adopt a report with which the Assembly of First Nations, through its chief, is telling us not to agree. He says further:

> Although the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) does not support the motion as presented, we are pleased to see both the Committee and the House of Commons engaged on this most important, urgent issue.
>
> The AFN tabled our report with the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. Our report has been endorsed by the Chiefs of Canada, the Canadian Bar Association, Residential school survivor groups and the Consortium of lawyers representing class action suits on this matter.
>
> The federal government should accept the AFN approach as it is modest, fair and just.

I do not know whether the federal government accepts totally what the AFN is suggesting. I have not asked the minister about that, but I do know that the approach proposed by this committee report goes against what the AFN wants us to do. If it does not want us to do this, why are we even asked to agree with the committee's report? Clearly, that is not what the community wants. It does not mean that this issue is not important. It is very important, but the group does not want this approach to deal with this problem.

● (1700)

The committee report is flawed, and not according to me. That does not make any difference. According to the aboriginal community, the report is wrong. It identifies most recommendations as being recommendations that it cannot support.

The letter continues:

> We therefore, seek your support to secure all party support of our comprehensive approach which will achieve reconciliation and justice.

It does not want the approach proposed. Now that the hon. member knows this, which I do not know if he knew it at three o'clock earlier today when he proposed the motion, why does he not just withdraw the motion and we will get back to the debate on the order of the day? I am sure the House would give its consent.

The aboriginal community does not want this. Whether under Standing Order 108(2) the committee wants to continue to discuss this issue, the committee can decide and hopefully it will. It will not go away. It is important. There are other approaches that are proposed.

Meanwhile, we are being asked as members of Parliament to concur in the report and the Assembly of First Nations says that the report is wrong, that it was not done properly, that it came out with the wrong conclusions and that it should not be supported. Therefore, why are we doing this? Clearly, it is not because the AFN is asking us to do it. It says it does not support the motion.

I have not consulted the parliamentary secretary, but for my part if the hon. member were to stand and seek unanimous consent to withdraw his motion for concurrence, I would give it and we could go back to the order of the day. He can contact Grand Chief Phil Fontaine and everyone else and then develop something else, but not what is in the report. It is not in agreement with the aboriginal community.

The hon. member who proposed the motion said that it desperately wanted this to be done. He was even quite hostile with me earlier in the day, when I said we should not debate this and we should get back to the order of the day. He said that this was so important that it had to be debated right now. If it does have to be debated right now, we will have to vote against that which the hon. member has asked us to vote. That is the way it is.

An hon. member: The story of your life.

Hon Don Boudria: It is not the story of my life. That is nonsense. I was reading the comments of the Assembly of First Nations on how it feels about the motion. It does not matter whether I agree or not. It matters that this is not the approach that it says is the right one.

If it is not the right approach, let us cut this out. Withdraw the motion, go back to committee, or contact the chief, or contact the committee chair, she is a very accommodating person, and arrange to debate the issue again, if that is what hon. members want to do. I do not sit on that committee. I chair another committee, but it is still a very important issue.

Because it is important it does not mean we should concur in a report that the community itself does not want. That is the way I see it.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

What I am proposing is that the member quite simply withdraw the motion to adopt the report now before us. We could then debate the motion that was on the order paper, as we were originally meant to, and then return to the consultations in question.

In my opinion, it is obvious that the hon. member certainly did not consult the AFN before proposing this motion today. Had he done so, he would have been told that the federation was not in support of it, that it was not in favour of the report. Yet the member proposed this motion.

Did he contact the group opposed to the report, or did he not? I have no idea. I know the result because I have the information in front of me.

There is another solution to this. I would like to move an amendment to the hon. member's motion.

[*English*]

I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following therefore:

"that the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, presented to the House, be not now concurred in but that it be referred back to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for further consideration."

I submit that to the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The Chair will take the request from the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell under consideration.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member went on at great length saying that the Assembly of First Nations had responded to the standing committee report, which we are now debating in the House as there is a motion to concur in that report. I want to point out a few facts.

I agree that the Assembly of First Nations has asked for additional things that are not in the committee report. However, I want to point out that the people who are making claims, who were subjected to abuse in the residential schools, are coming forward as individuals. Although we listened carefully to the input from the Assembly of First Nations and to the testimony of all witnesses, the report we are now debating concurrence in was brought forward by the standing committee and was sent to this place by three of the four parties in the House. I want to clearly point out that the Conservatives, Bloc Québécois and NDP all voted in favour of the report at committee. I accept that had the report been drafted by the Assembly of First Nations, it would likely have been different, but that is not the case.

As the member well knows, the committee is the master of its own destiny. It heard witnesses, as individuals, at great length. Clearly, what we heard was some of the most riveting testimony that I had heard as a member for seven years. The system is failing miserably, where 70% to 80% of the costs are eaten up in administration. Something like 1.5% of the claims have actually been resolved through the ADR. It is another unmitigated disaster.

Sadly, the people who have been subjected to the most horrific abuse, of which I have ever been aware, are very elderly. If we do not act quickly, they will never see any compensation. I submit that this report is put forward in good faith to deal with a lot of these issues. I acknowledge the member and his concerns of the AFN. It is not exactly what the AFN would ask for but it goes a long way.

● (1710)

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I do not deny that three of the four parties in the House did agree on the report at committee. Several speakers have mentioned that earlier today. That is fine.

The fact still remains, though, that perhaps because the committee did not hear enough witnesses, perhaps for other reasons, but whatever the cause of it, on the recommendations, it is not that they do not go far enough, or it is partially that; I will concede to the hon. member that on some of the recommendations the last three points Chief Fontaine's letter are about that. They are about the shortcomings of the report, but that is a different issue.

I am concerned about the first three points, where the recommendations say the opposite of what the AFN believes. The fact that the report is incomplete I suppose is an argument in which someone could say, "We could not put everything in the report. We put what we felt was important. Some people may think it should go beyond that and maybe it does not".

That is true for the last three items in the chief's letter, but for the first three, and I will go back to them, the first point is:

> The motion recommends terminating the current ADR process. The AFN believes it should be repaired, not terminated.

In other words, it is the opposite position: not.

The second point states:

> The motion recommends that the process be handed over to the Courts to supervise and enforce.

It is actually even stronger than that if we read the actual recommendation. It continues:

> The AFN says First Nations must negotiate the settlement with the Court's assistance for enforcement, if required.

In other words, it is again the opposite.

The third point states:

> The motion recommends a partial truth commission involving Survivors only, whereas the AFN recommends a comprehensive truth commission involving government and churches.

What we have in those first three is not just that the AFN thinks it is incomplete. It is that the report of the committee, which we are asked to adopt, or to concur in, in other words, adopt today, is the opposite of what the AFN wants. I think that is the point that is important.

That is why I say to the hon. members to send it back to the committee. I proposed the motion to the House to do that: that the report not be concurred in and that it be referred back to the committee. The committee can look at these additional points. Maybe it will want to produce an amended report and bring it back a second time. Maybe it will abandon the thing altogether, I do not know, but this does not enjoy the agreement of the aboriginal organizations, and not just the Assembly of First Nations.

As Chief Fontaine says:

> Our report has been endorsed by the Chiefs of Canada, the Canadian Bar Association, Residential school survivor groups and the Consortium of lawyers representing class action law suits on this matter.

All these people seemingly do not agree with the report as presently drafted. I have proposed an amendment. Let us carry that amendment on a voice vote, send it back, and the hon. members then can improve it. These are not my words. They are the words of Chief Phil Fontaine.

As for the amendment I have proposed, I do not know if the Chair is prepared to rule on whether or not it is in order. Hopefully it is. If it is not, then perhaps by unanimous consent, of course, we could do it anyway.

● (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The amendment has been ruled in order. It is acceptable.

We are now on debate.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague. I know that the government has now amended this motion. I want to speak to the entire issue in general, which I believe is within the scope.

I am pleased to rise in favour of the concurrence motion. I am opposed to the amendment.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Are we not debating the amendment?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Yes. We are now on the amendment to the original motion.

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, I believe we are in debate on the amendment. With reference to my friend, obviously the amendment is to send this back to committee. I want to speak to the merits of the original motion, because that is what I believe in and is obviously why I cannot support the amendment. I will go back to the reasons why I believe we need to vote on this now.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The point is that we are debating the amendment. All the speakers who get up at this point need to speak directly to the amendment, it seems to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): We are debating the amendment, but the debate is the debate.

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on debate on the amendment to this motion, an amendment which I do not support because I believe the original concurrence is what we need to do.

Before I proceed, though, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the hon. member for Calgary Centre-North, who has tirelessly pursued justice for aboriginal peoples. At a recent Conservative Party convention he spoke passionately about these very issues facing us today. He has travelled across this country, he has visited many reserves, and he has not turned away from the terrible conditions faced by these first nations people.

Passing this motion will show that this place wants to help as well. The rampant alcoholism and drug abuse on today's reserves, the destruction of family and the high suicide rates: many of these findings are at the very root of the residential school system.

Residential schools ran in Canada for over 140 years, starting in 1840. They took a terrible toll on native culture and native self-esteem. It is hard to imagine. Physical and sexual abuse were common. Parents of children were routinely denied access to them. As designated wards of the state, the children had no rights and no recourse for justice. It is time for this House to give them justice. That is why I believe we need to support this motion, unamended.

I was at the committee. I heard the testimony at first hand. I have a lot of it here, but I do not have a lot of time to read it to members. I will read just a little of that testimony from individuals who came forward to share with us why the system is failing them so miserably and why they want to see the system scrapped.

This is the testimony of Ruth Roulette, a granddaughter of Flora Merrick. I will quote a section of her testimony:

> I attended the Portage la Prairie residential school from 1921 until 1932. In all my 88 years, I have not forgotten the pain and suffering I went through while at residential school. Being separated from my loving parents and family at five years of age and enduring constant physical, emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse still haunts me. I was punished for speaking my own language and was always frightened and scared of what the teachers and principals would do to me. It was like being in a prison.
>
> During my stay at Portage la Prairie residential school, I witnessed the injustices of beatings and abuse of other children, some whom were my siblings. We were treated worse than animals and lived in constant fear. I have carried the trauma of my experience and seeing what happened to other children all my life.
>
> I cannot forget one painful memory. It occurred in 1932 when I was 15 years old. My father came to Portage la Prairie residential school to tell my sister and I that our mother had died and to take us to the funeral. The principal of the school would not let us go with our father to the funeral. My little sister and I cried so much, we were taken away and locked in a dark room for about two weeks.
>
> After I was released from the dark room and allowed to be with other residents, I tried to run away to my father and family. I was caught in the bush by teachers, taken back to the school and strapped so severely that my arms were black and blue for several weeks. After my father saw what they did to me, he would not allow me to go back to the school after the year ended.

This next sentence is the most telling part:

> I told this story during my ADR hearing, which was held at Long Plain in July 2004. I was told my treatment and punishment was what they called "acceptable standards of the day".

That was Ruth Roulette's testimony about how the dispute resolution process we are now debating referred to what she went through. She was locked in a room for two weeks so that she could not attend her mother's funeral. After trying to run away she was beaten so severely that she was bruised on all four limbs.

She was told as she was going through this process that those were "acceptable standards of the day". That is the system we are talking about.

● (1720)

This system is failing aboriginal people miserably right across the country. So far, the government has spent $275 million, according to its own records, and it has asked for another $121 million in this fiscal year alone. It has resolved less than 100 cases, less than 1.5% of the more than 13,000 seeking compensation.

It is no wonder it is taking so long if we look at the bureaucracy involved. The government is into building empires. The Liberals are into ensuring that all their friends are employed. After spending hundreds of millions of dollars, how could only 1.5% of the cases have been resolved?

I was at committee and I heard the testimony of those individuals. It was the most gut wrenching testimony I have heard in this place in seven years. Any committee member present would tell us that.

In good faith the committee drafted a report and brought it forward to address some of the solutions. Yes, we believe that the entire process should be scrapped. It is failing miserably. The government has now moved an amendment to the motion. It wants to send it back to committee.

The foot dragging, the bureaucratic delays and the settlements are shameful. Most of those people are very elderly. Time is running out. Thirty to 50 of the former residential school students who are trying to get compensation die every single week. We cannot afford delay. We cannot afford to send this back to committee for another study.

There is a solution, which is to look at it and to fix it. A number of things need to be done. We need to scrap the alternative dispute resolution, the ADR. The Auditor General needs to review the whole ADR program and find out just what went wrong and when. While she is doing that, we must negotiate fair, efficient and comprehensive resolutions to all residential school claims, including the class action suits before the courts.

With the amount of money that is being spent on the administration of this process, something like 70% or 80%, we should just pay out these claims, the ones that can be substantiated, if we can go through a very simple process right now. These people are forced to fill out an application form that is 61 pages long and they need a 64 page guide just to interpret it, to try to get a claim of somewhere between $500 and $3,500.

The government has failed first nations people miserably in this country. The Government of Canada created a terrible legacy with the residential school program, one for which our society needs to answer today, not create further delays, not send it back to committee for further study. That is a pattern that we see from the government side.

Some would say that much has changed and we now live in a more enlightened society and that this could never happen again. It is true. Let us prove it today by supporting the unamended motion, by defeating the amendment. Saying yes to the committee's report would be the first step in justice for the first nations people.

I ask all hon. members to look at this very carefully and think of the individual first nations people who came to our committee who faced these horrible atrocities. They deserve justice now, not when the government is ready

● (1725)

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has been very involved in this issue.

The amendment to the motion recommends that we send this report back to the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee for further study.

As the vice-chair of that committee I can say that the amount of time we allocated even to hear the witnesses that we heard was something that the governing party opposed. The governing party had a major problem. We extended hearings by another day and the governing party was furious about it. The Liberals did not want that to happen.

I can just imagine what the reaction would be from the governing party at the aboriginal affairs committee now that its own members are recommending that it go back. Would there by any more hearings? Absolutely not. It is a ploy to kill the issue. It is a ploy because the government does not want to talk about this issue. It does not want to deal with it. I think everybody on this side of the House knows that.

● (1730)

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. He was on the steering committee fighting to have this issue brought before Parliament and the committee.

There is a pattern evolving. We saw it in the sponsorship program. When we started to get to the truth on some of the information at the public accounts committee, the government knew exactly what was coming. It was not a government scandal. It was a Liberal Party of Canada scandal. The Liberals knew the details. They knew the people involved. They fought tooth and nail to crush anyone coming forward.

The Prime Minister made sure there was an election before Mr. Brault could testify. The same thing happened here. The government was absolutely in full damage control mode. It had the resources and the lobbying. It did not want this to come before the committee.

Why did the Liberals not want the committee to talk about the ADR? Members from the New Democratic Party and members from the Bloc will tell us why. They know this system is failing the aboriginal people in Canada miserably. It is an unmitigated disaster. Hundreds of millions of dollars are going into a sinkhole with no results. There is no accountability.

When $200 million or $300 million is spent on a program and 1.5% of the claims are settled in that many years, when 70% to 80% of that money is spent on administration, I would be embarrassed too. I would want to run away and hide.

As a further delaying tactic the Liberals are saying, "Let us send it to the committee and have a study". That is the most shameful position that a government could have.

Only a month or two ago the government fought tooth and nail against the Conservative Party because its members said they were getting calls from aboriginal people across the country who want to talk about this, that the system is failing them and that people are dying and they are not getting justice.

Now the Liberals suggest they want to send it back to the committee in good faith. It is no different from the sponsorship program. There is a parallel. They try to hide everything they know is wrong. Why do they not come clean? Why do they not stand up and acknowledge that this is an unmitigated disaster and that they have absolutely failed first nations people miserably in this country?

Let us try to work together to see if we can bring these people justice, the ones who have only weeks or months to live and who deserve that justice, as opposed to sending it back for some lengthy delay, some long study. The Liberals should stand up and show some leadership and direction on this file. Their only solution is to send it back to committee.

I would be embarrassed if I were a member of that party.

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to the motion.

Unfortunately the motion has been amended because the government does not want to deal with this issue in the House. The Liberals have done everything they could to try to stop the motion from getting here. An amendment has now been introduced to send this back to committee so the government will never have to deal with it again. Once it gets back to committee, the Liberal members on the committee will fight tooth and nail to ensure that we never talk about this issue again. The Liberals did not want to talk about it in the first place. They pulled out every stop they could think of to try to stop it from ever being discussed.

I can imagine the reaction of Liberal members of the committee if the amendment recommending to hear further witnesses passes. I can just imagine the reaction of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, who was infuriated that we had one extra day of witnesses. I am sure she would be thrilled to hear that her colleagues are pushing for more witnesses at committee so they do not have to deal with it here in the House.

The motion is to concur in a report which came forward from the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee. We held three days of hearings on this issue.

This issue is incredibly important in my constituency. I represent the riding of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill which is in northern Saskatchewan. It is a huge area, approximately 58% of the province. My riding has 108 reserves, the most of any riding in the country. I probably represent if not the most, then close to the most, aboriginal people of any member of Parliament.

Many of my constituents attended residential schools. Many of them contacted me throughout the course of our committee hearings. They contacted me not to say we should send this back to committee for further hearings. They contacted me to thank the Conservative Party, the Bloc and the NDP for their support in bringing this to the House and for their support of the original motion in committee. Those people are very thankful that somebody is paying attention to the issue. They are very thankful that somebody is pointing out the disgrace of this program.

There are two major themes which are problematic with the ADR. They centre around the lack of efficiency, both financial and administrative, and the government's claims that this is a humane and holistic program. All the evidence that we saw in committee and all the evidence I have seen in my riding would prove otherwise.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Preparedness talked about some people having positive experiences at residential schools. To be very blunt, I have not heard that from one single person in my constituency. There may be some, but I have not seen any evidence of people having had positive experiences at residential schools.

Let us look at the whole concept of residential schools for aboriginals. The government literally grabbed young children from their families, incarcerated them in a school from the time they were five years old until they were 17 or 18 years of age. Not only that, but the parents lost legal guardianship over their own children. Legal guardianship passed to the Government of Canada. These children became wards of the state despite the fact they had loving families who were more than willing to raise them in their own homes. This was an abysmal program and the ADR is doing nothing to rectify it.

● (1735)

From an efficiency point of view, at least $275 million has been spent on the alternative dispute resolution program. Less than $1 million of that $275 million have actually gone to compensating victims, which is about .35% that has gone to administration and overhead. This program makes the gun registry look like a paragon of efficiency.

Approximately 87,000 or so of the individuals who attended residential schools are still with us. Of those 87,000, less than 1,200 individuals, or 1.5%, have actually applied to go through the ADR and, of the 1,200 who have actually applied, less than 100 have actually been settled. The program has been running now for over a year and a half. At this rate it could literally be hundreds of years before these claims are all resolved, which obviously will not happen because the survivors of residential schools are passing away at a very rapid rate. By some estimates, 50 survivors a week are passing away without ever having been compensated and, quite frankly, without having any rectification or apology for what happened to them.

Let us look at this application process. The application itself is a form that is very thick. It is 60-plus pages long. The guide is even longer than the form. I have three university degrees, including a law degree, and after going through the form I would have needed somebody to help me fill it out. I cannot imagine how somebody from a northern reserve with little formal education and English as a second language, if spoken at all, could fill these things out. The process itself is so daunting for people. I think that is reflected in the fact that only 1,200 people have actually filled these out.

I will go back to the forms for a second because I want to make one point. The government has actually had to hire government employees, or what we call Orwellian form fillers, to help people fill out these forms. We have heard horror stories about these form fillers not actually putting forward what these individuals have suffered.

We also have a system where the government has actually hired private investigators to look into the claims of individuals who have brought forward complaints through this incredibly complex process. The government is spending $5 million more, not to compensate these people but to investigate whether what they are saying is actually true and to try to track down the individuals in question who it claims may not have actually been involved in these things, most of whom have been dead for decades.

The priorities of the government and the priorities involved in this program are so skewed that it can only be rectified by scrapping this program and coming up with something that will actually work. We have put forward something that will actually work. We put forward eight points, which were supported in committee by all three opposition parties, and obviously fought tooth and nail by the government, the centrepiece of which is to get rid of the ADR process and put in place a court supervised process with negotiations to have court approved and enforced settlement compensation for survivors of residential schools.

I think that is the direction in which we have to go. The direction in which the government is going is leading us and the survivors nowhere.

● (1740)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that my colleague from Churchill River truly cares about this issue because we sat through that experience together at the committee and listened to life-changing testimony. I do not think that is overstating things. We should put in perspective that we only had a couple of days of testimony. There are many more stories that we never heard. Therefore I fully accept all the points that my colleague from Churchill River made.

What I do not understand though is why the motion that his party has put forward does not address the very points that he raised. For instance, if he believes in lump sum, universal, blanket compensation for all victims so that they do not have to be revictimized by the application process, then why will he not support a motion that calls for blanket, lump sum compensation?

The motion he has put forward specifically does not. It is very careful not to. The *Globe and Mail* made it clear that the Conservative Party's motion did not call for blanket universal compensation. It stated that the motion calls for scrapping the alternative dispute resolution system but asks for nothing to be put in its place. It does not call for an apology from the Prime Minister. It does not call for a truth and reconciliation process. It only talks about having a process where the survivors can tell their story.

As much as I would like to agree with my colleague on his entire speech, I can only say that his observations are correct and I share his concerns over what we heard collectively as a committee, but I am confused as to why he is defending a motion that falls short of the very points that he has identified as being necessary to provide justice and reconciliation.

● (1745)

Mr. Jeremy Harrison: Mr. Speaker, as the member for Winnipeg Centre mentioned, he sat through the testimony as I and other members of the committee did which really was incredibly moving testimony from witnesses who obviously invested a great deal of courage in coming forward to tell their stories.

Flora Merrick, one of the witnesses who came forward, told an incredibly moving story, a story my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands referred to earlier.

The one thing on which I do agree with the NDP member is that the ADR process is deeply flawed as it stands right now. I am, with all due respect to the hon. member, quite surprised that the position of the NDP now is that the ADR process can be fixed rather than scrapped. I have to say honestly that was not the impression I had received prior to today. I may have had a mistaken impression but I think it was buttressed by the fact that both the New Democratic Party and the Bloc voted for this motion at the committee level. I understand that may have been to get this into the House where it does rightfully belong, which is what the hon. member said in his speech earlier, and I agree with him.

However I am quite surprised that the position is now that the ADR process should be changed rather than scrapped.

I think our process, the process put forward in the committee report, which I am happy to see is supported by my colleagues on this side, would deal in a comprehensive way with the residential school issue. We are talking about court supervised, court approved, court enforced settlements with residential school survivors. From the evidence I heard at the committee, it was asked for by survivors and I think it will deal with it.

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, which is an important riding with a long name.

The hon. member has led the way in the House in fighting for justice for aboriginal people in two respects: first, with respect to recognition and fairness for aboriginal veterans; and second, with respect to fairness for the victims of the aboriginal residential school system. He has done so diligently in this House and as the vice-chair of the standing committee.

However, in doing so, he has had to continually overcome problems with the governing Liberals. They fought him tooth and nail in terms of his efforts to make sure aboriginal veterans were recognized. They also have fought him tooth and nail in terms of trying to see some sort of justice for the survivors of the residential school fiasco.

I wonder if the member has any comments on his experience with the governing Liberals and the steps he has had to take on behalf of his constituents to remedy these injustices.

● (1750)

Mr. Jeremy Harrison: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the kind words from my colleague from Calgary North Centre, who is doing an excellent job as the critic on aboriginal affairs for my party and is somebody who I look forward to being the minister of aboriginal affairs in a short while.

I just want to address very briefly the issue of aboriginal war veterans. It is something that passed in the House last week and which was supported unanimously by all opposition parties. I, quite frankly, do not know what the government has against aboriginal war veterans. I thought it was quite disgraceful for the Liberals to stand en masse and vote against recognizing the historic injustice that was done to aboriginal war veterans, which they did. Not only that, they did not want that to go to committee or to be brought forward onto the floor of the House of Commons. The veterans affairs minister asked me to withdraw that motion. These are not the actions of a government with any compassion for or understanding of aboriginal people in this country.

The fact that the Liberals are trying to send this motion dealing with the ADR back to committee where it will die, is another indication of the total lack of respect and understanding that the government has for aboriginal Canadians.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am standing to support the amendment that has been moved, which is to give the committee another opportunity to look at the issues that have been raised here on the floor of the House, and that deal with the whole concept and process of an alternative dispute resolution approach.

I have been following very carefully the comments that have been made by colleagues on both sides. I make the observation that we have had an extremely contentious process in committee. Out of that process has come a report from the opposition. What seems incredulous to me is that this is a report that purports to do the best thing for those who have suffered the tragedy associated with residential schools. Those of course have been represented by our first nations.

We also have a very clear indication that not only does the Assembly of First Nations feel that there is very strong tenets within the alternative dispute resolution that bears further exploration but there also is, as has been pointed out, at least one other opposition party that feels that there are strengths, or at least parts of an alternative dispute resolution process that would help to come to grips with many of those issues that have come out of the committee's deliberations.

Here we are again debating an issue that came out of a process where there was not a clear consensus. This is clearly one of those kinds of issues where we ought not to be seen, nor should we be doing something that in a patronizing or paternalistic way is neither accepted in substance by the first nations people, through this report coming from the opposition, nor on the other hand should we be closing the door to a further consideration of some of the issues that have been raised. That is the reason why the amendment has come through in the manner in which it has.

It would be my position, and I say it with some degree of hesitation, because to the greatest extent my knowledge of those issues related to our first nations people has been through my attendance at the aboriginal affairs committee mainly through the last term. I have been following, though, the debate in this House today.

The report before the House shows that the hearings held by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on the effectiveness and the government's alternative dispute resolution process failed to study this complex issue in a truly meaningful way.

I cannot help but bring forward again the observation or the inference that is drawn from that. It seems that the committee for whatever reason did not really explore the alternative dispute resolution to the extent that it should have and could have.

● (1755)

It also seems that some of the members were not as interested in a real understanding of the alternative dispute resolution because many of the stakeholders that came before the committee, I am told, were also interested in working to improve that particular approach which, I might add, is a work in progress.

The committee, with the momentum and the focus provided by mainly the opposition, actually undertook a series of very quick hearings. One could suggest that there was not an absence of bias in those hearings into what is an extremely complex and important issue. It is a very important part of our history, which is the experience that so many of our first nations people, too many, had with the Indian residential schools.

At best, the hearings held by the committee in February were incomplete. That is clear from a simple review of the list of witnesses called to testify at these hearings. At worst, the hearings had the ring of political bias, a bias at the expense, though, of a real understanding or a real study, a genuine attempt to understand not only what happened at so many residential schools but also to understand the work that has been taking place subsequently over the past number of years to address this terrible legacy.

I am told that the committee heard from several former students who were displeased with the process. Let me be clear, we recognize on this side that both criticism and discussion are necessary parts of a developmental and innovative approach to resolving this issue.

For this reason, last year the government provided specific funding support to both the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Bar Association, two extremely legitimate organizations, which together would examine the ADR process and offer up their views. If there were no bias, if we were totally objective, would we not have wanted to hear from those two organizations?

It is noteworthy that the analysis and study by both the AFN and CBA was undertaken over the course of several months, in stark contrast to the six hours devoted to hearings by the standing committee. The standing committee also heard from the National Consortium of Residential Schools Survivors Counsel, an association of lawyers with significant investments that they had made in time to litigate against the government. We did not hear from them.

As I said a few moments ago, criticism and discussion are a necessary part of an innovative approach, but are dissenting voices the only voices that merit attention? The government is aware that no process is perfect, but the more than 1,400 applications the ADR process has received to date are surely a sign that this process is taken as a real, viable option for a growing number of former students who have taken it up.

The ADR process continues to receive more and more applications each week. Its adjudicators continue to render decisions, the total of which now stands at almost $5 million. These decisions are made within 30 days of a hearing taking place and the hearings have taken place in private homes, at other locations in communities of former students, and in some cases, in hospital rooms.

● (1800)

I state that because the inference or the implication has been made that the process is very *ex parte,* that it goes on in confusion and in environments that are not accessible and so on. That is not the case. Health support is available to former students who may be in crisis. The funding is also provided for support persons to attend the hearing with the former student.

That is how the alternative dispute resolution is happening in practical terms. These are clear indications that the ADR process has much merit and the committee would know this if the hon. Ted Hughes, who was the chief adjudicator of the ADR process, would have had the opportunity to address the committee for more than a meagre 10 minutes.

This is really revealing I am afraid. Mr. Hughes had barely started his presentation when the hearing of February 22 was adjourned. He graciously offered to return to complete his testimony at the committee's convenience. The question is: was he taken up on the offer? Unfortunately not. I cannot imagine why because several committee members, including I believe two of our colleagues from the Bloc, made it clear that they wished to hear the rest of the presentation. But it never happened.

As I have stated before and has been stated in the House, the government is working closely with former students, representatives of the churches and other stakeholders, in particular the Assembly of First Nations, to examine ways in which the reconciliation and healing of the terrible residential school experiences of many aboriginal Canadians can begin.

This is difficult and important work. The government and many people are working together to both streamline the existing process as well as to explore other ways to reconcile the legacy of residential schools. It would be an understatement, and I believe that all sides agree in this respect, that far too many aboriginal Canadians and their families in turn suffered as a result of their experiences at residential schools. On this point, I am sure that all colleagues agree.

Therefore, we need to take the time and make the effort in as expeditious way as possible to appropriately and in a fulsome manner address the legacy of Indian residential schools. This means continuing to work with former students and our other partners and stakeholders to find ways to improve the processes that we have in place, and to consider the ways that they may indeed be supplemented.

This does not mean throwing out all of the work that has already been completed. This does not mean abandoning the more than 1,200 former students who have taken the time and the immense effort to complete an application, as has been pointed out, to the alternative dispute resolution process and whose hearings will be taking place over the coming months.

We must not truncate this process and leave these people adrift in terms of what we already have instituted. The government will not abandon these people and it will live up to the commitment to offer a supportive, safe and timely process which is an alternative to the courts. The government will continue to foster debate and discussion. If this amendment is approved, that process will continue in committee and the government will continue to work with partners and other stakeholders.

● (1805)

On behalf of the government, I will state unequivocally that the government will not and cannot support the report that has been put before the House through the opposition.

It is the government's opinion, I think shared by other parties in the House, that the report is the product of a hasty and superficial study by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Accordingly I will be supporting the amendment that would send the report back to the committee for further attention and study.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I support the idea of my colleague from the Liberal Party, the chair of the environment committee, that this issue be sent back to committee and that we move a fulsome motion to accurately reflect the plan of Assembly of First Nations, he does a disservice to the debate by trying to soft sell how bad the current system is.

Any objective observer would concede that the current system is a catastrophic failure. The government is spending millions of dollars trying to paint victims as liars. What we are proposing is a lump sum compensation package where eligibility should be based on the fact that a person was there.

If someone was a student or a prisoner in one of these residential schools, in my view that person is eligible for compensation. I do not care how many times a person was touched or by whom. I do not care how big the stick was with which the person was beaten. I am not going to make people relive the horror of abuse they went through. Compensation should be based on the fact that a person was a student in one of those horrible institutions. To hear my colleague soft sell it does a disservice to the whole debate.

I am here to suggest that we should be voting against the motion for concurrence put forward by the Conservatives. The member and I agree on that point, but we certainly do not say that the status quo is in any way acceptable.

What we should move forward with is a three part recommendation that mirrors the report of the Assembly of First Nations, which calls for: first, lump sum blanket compensation to all victims so the $1.7 billion, which the Canadian people set aside for compensation, goes into the pockets of the victims; second, a full apology from the Prime Minister of Canada in the House of Commons to acknowledge this stain on our Canadian history; and third, a comprehensive truth and reconciliation process not just for the survivors to come forward to tell their stories but for both sides of this shameful piece of our history to begin healing. This would mean non-aboriginal Canadians, the churches and the government agents who put in place these horror stories.

Would my colleague, the chair of the environment committee, agree with me that the status quo is an abysmal failure and that what is necessary are the three steps I just outlined, as proposed by the Assembly of First Nations and the experts who wrote this report?

● (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House. The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The vote stands deferred until tomorrow.

* * *

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today from constituents in my riding with regard to marriage. The petitioners pray that Parliament pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of presenting quite a number of petitions with thousands of names from Ontario, Alberta and B.C. on the issue of marriage.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that the majority of Canadians believe that fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament, not the unelected judiciary. They support the current definition of marriage as the voluntary union of a single man and a single woman.

They ask, therefore, that Parliament ensure that marriage is defined as Canadians wish and petition Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including invoking section 33 of the charter if necessary, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman. All these petitions are of the same nature.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to present petitions signed by 200 Canadians. The petitioners pray that Parliament pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

● (1815)

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to present, on behalf of my constituents of Yellowhead, three petitions with thousands of names with regard to the definition of marriage. The petitioners are very concerned at the unintended consequences of marriage and they want the definition of marriage to remain as being between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my petitioners state that marriage is the exclusive domain of Parliament and its upholding of the traditional definition. They ask, therefore, that Parliament define marriage in federal law as being the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour of presenting three petitions this evening.

The first is on behalf of a number of citizens of Regina, many of whom are in my riding of Palliser. These petitioners wish to call to the attention of Parliament that this honourable House passed a motion in June of 1999 that called for marriage to continue to be recognized as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that the definition of marriage is the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament.

These constituents petition that Parliament pass legislation to recognize the institution in federal law as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

The second petition is very similar to the first. These constituents petition Parliament to define marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

The third petition, also pursuant to Standing Order 36, is on behalf of a large number of citizens from Moose Jaw in my riding of Palliser. The petitioners wish to call to the attention of Parliament that they recognize the importance of the special role of traditional marriage and family in our society.

These petitioners call upon the justice minister and Parliament to do everything within their power to preserve the definition of marriage as being the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the sequence of events was changed somewhat today, I was unable to present a report from committee involving the change of a committee member, I believe a member of the Bloc Quebecois, which is one that we normally adopt routinely.

If the House is willing, I seek unanimous consent to present the 31st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and I should like to move concurrence at this time.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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[*Translation*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 98 and 110.

[*Text*]

Question No. 98—**Ms. France Bonsant**:

> With respect to the Canadian Learning Institute: (*a*) what is its mandate; (*b*) what is its address; (*c*) what activities has it undertaken since its creation; (*d*) if applicable, what is the total amount of funding allocated to it by each department since its creation; (*e*) what have its expenditures been for each fiscal year since its creation; and (*f*) if applicable, what funding has it allocated to projects, specifying the organizations and programs, and for what purposes?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), the Canadian Council on Learning, CCL, was awarded a Government of Canada grant to support evidence based decision making in all areas of lifelong learning, from early childhood development, through adult and workplace learning and beyond. The independent, not for profit council will inform Canadians regularly on Canada's progress on learning outcomes, and will promote knowledge and information exchange among learning partners.

In response to (b), the CCL's office is located at 50 O'Connor, Suite 215, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6L2.

In response to (c), the CCL has moved from a transitional board of directors to a full board, has established an office in Ottawa, and has hired staff, including its president and CEO, Dr. Cappon.

> Since his appointment in October 2004 Dr. Cappon has conducted consultations with key players in the learning community.

> CCL has developed a plan to establish five knowledge centres organized around the themes of early childhood learning; adult learning; work and learning; aboriginal learning; and health and learning. One knowledge centre will be located in each of the country's five regions. the knowledge centres will be geographically distributed but nationally networked.

> In addition, CCL is currently in negotiations with the Council of Ministers of Education Canada to conduct joint work on structured learning with the Canadian Education Statistics Council.

> CCL is also partnering with Statistics Canada on a project to improve the infrastructure for reporting on learning indicators

In response to (d), the CCL was provided with a one-time conditional grant of $85 millions. The principal and interest of the grant are to be spent over a five year period from 2004-05 to 2008-09. The grant is governed by a funding agreement between Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the Canadian Council on Learning.

In response to (e), it is estimated that CCL will expend approximately $1.67 million in the 2004-05 fiscal year, the first year of the grant.

In response to (f), as part of its mandate to develop an integrated plan-Canadian set of indicators that measure progress on outcomes across the continuum of lifelong learning, CCL has identified specific areas where better data sets are required. CCL has provided $397,000 to Statistics Canada in 2004-05 for a project to improve the infrastructure for reporting on learning indicators.

Question No. 110—**Mr. David Anderson**:

> What was the name of the company commissioned by the Canadian Wheat Board to hire Avis Gray to the position of Senior Advisor, Government Relations, and what were the names of the other candidates considered for the position?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is not involved in the day to day operations of the Canadian Wheat Board, CWB. Consequently it does not have in its possession the names of the unsuccessful candidates, or the applications of any of the candidates. The CWB has advised that it hired the Toronto based executive search firm Ray and Berndston to lead the recruitment process and that this firm prepared a short list of five candidates which was forwarded to the CWB. The CWB has further advised that four members of its senior management team participated in the interview process which culminated in the decision to hire Avis Gray.

With regard to the four candidates who were unsuccessful, the CWB does not propose to release these names publicly. Candidates who are seeking a position, whether in the public or the private sector, make their applications with the expectation that their names, and any other information they choose to include with their applications, will be held in confidence.

* * *

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 87 and 91 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 87—**Mr. Tony Martin**:

> With respect to variations among jurisdictions in the application of the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS): (*a*) what mechanisms are in place to ensure equal support for all Canadians regardless of their place of residence; (*b*) where a province or a territory applies a benefit reduction (clawback) to a family's NCBS, does a family still receive, in any case, the same level of overall income support; (*c*) how does the government ensure that provinces and territories invest proceeds from any clawbacks in programs that are complementary to the NCBS; (*d*) by province and for each of the last five years, how have provinces reinvested any proceeds from clawbacks; and (*e*) how many families who see a clawback of their NCBS from a welfare benefit fit into one of the following categories, and for each category, what percentage does it represent of the total number of families receiving the NCBS: (i) working but not earning enough money to qualify for welfare top-up, (ii) disabled or unable to work, (iii) caring for a disabled child under the age of 6 years, (iv) caring for a baby under the age of 1 year, (v) living in a homeless shelter unable to find affordable housing, (vi) paying more than half their income on rent, and (vii) relying on food banks in order to feed their children?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 91—**Mr. Jim Prentice**:

> With regard to the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada Alternative Dispute Resolution process (ADR): (*a*) what were the original ADR projections, including annual projections, that led to the Government conclusion that the ADR would take seven years at a cost of $1.7 billion to resolve some 12,000 cases; (*b*) including the estimated budget with any administrative costs versus compensation, what are any updated ADR projections regarding the number of cases expected to be resolved; (*c*) are any performance reports available on the ADR process; (*d*) what information is available relating to the total actual cost of the ADR program to date including: (i) a breakdown of the cost of the program by category (i.e. adjudicator costs, administrative costs, government lawyer costs, government case manager costs, travel expense, other expenses, amount spent on compensation, etc.), (ii) the total cost of the Model A process to date (including a breakdown of administrative costs versus compensation), (iii) the total cost of the Model B process to date (including a breakdown of administrative costs versus compensation), and (iv) the average administrative costs for each Model A and Model B settlement along with the average settlement information; and (*e*) what information exists relating to the following ADR costs: (i) the amount spent on adjudicators to date, including cost per hearing, (ii) the amount spent on case managers to date, including cost per hearing and any information relating to the need for a case manager to be present at every adjudication, (iii) the amount spent on government lawyers to date, including cost per hearing, (iv) the amount spent on investigations to date including any information relating to the need for investigators to be involved in Model A hearings, and (v) the amount spent on form fillers to date?

(Return tabled)

[*Translation*]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[*English*]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

The House resume consideration of the motion.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will have to hurry to get to everything I want to say in the few seconds I have left.

Earlier I was talking about votes. The next thing I want to say about votes is that our Standing Orders should be changed to allow, under exceptional circumstances, the ability of a member of Parliament to register his or her vote in important votes in the House of Commons even though they may not be present physically.

I am sure that all of us remember an important vote that was held, and I am not sure if it was the previous Parliament or just before Christmas. Lawrence O'Brien, who subsequently passed away, loyally came here under great duress because of physical circumstances to vote as was his duty as a member of Parliament. We have a number of members even now who are facing that same thing.

I would like to propose that our Standing Orders be changed so that a member who is woefully ill or has other such problems may, perhaps via his or her party whip, register that vote for those occasions only. It would have to be one at a time. In that way a person would not be disenfranchised because of something that would be totally out of his or her control.

I know that my time has now elapsed. I have about four more things that I would like to cover. If there is unanimous consent, I would be prepared to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): We are now in the questions and comments period for the member.

The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask the member a question. I was disappointed that our Bloc colleagues did not want to hear what he had to say, but I would certainly be interested in the other three or four points that he wanted to make. I wonder if he could begin to expand on some of those.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member should not be making such comments. Let us assume that there are many people in this House and that they are all interested in the debate. This is why we should continue. Accordingly, the hon. member should withdraw his remarks.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Cypress Hills—Grasslands has the right to ask a question of another member in this House and ask him for the remaining amount of his comments. That does not violate anything in this House. He has that right.

Furthermore, the time that we are wasting discussing this should not be taken away from the member. He should be allowed to finish his comments. Mr. Speaker, I hope you will see fit not to deduct this time from him.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say that it is the privilege and the right of the hon. member to ask a question. The issue I raise, however, is his remark about our refusal earlier to grant unanimous consent, saying that we were not interested.

Members can reread the debates. I to not want to deny him that right, but I would like him to withdraw his allegations against me after my refusal to give unanimous consent.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The point from the Bloc Québécois whip has been heard. The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to this week. If we are this sensitive on Monday, it will be interesting to see what transpires throughout the rest of the week.

I would like to ask my colleague if he would be willing to elaborate on some of the points that he thought were important to this discussion. I look forward to hearing that right now.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Standing Orders, the next item I had which I think ought to be considered for change is the method of election of chairs and vice-chairs in committee.

I was always intrigued with this when I first came here. When it came to election time, instead of having a slate from which to elect as we do in every other election, in committees we were not permitted to do that. Even when we elect the Speaker here there is a slate of all the candidates and we can choose which one we are voting for. In committees we are not permitted to do that. One person says, "I nominate X", and then the vote is yes or no on that one person.

I would rather have a slate of candidates, a slate of everybody who is willing to be there, and let the committee choose the chair and the vice-chairs based on a slate. Then of course we would have runoff elections if necessary, if no one has a clear majority. To me, that would be a more reasonable way of electing chairs.

The way it is now sometimes for the candidates who have expressed their willingness to come forward, only the first one nominated gets a chance to be considered. I think there is a huge flaw in that. I know the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell would probably take exception to this. I am not sure, but I would sure like to hear his comments on that sometime as well.

The last thing I would like to have in the Standing Orders is on the Speaker's reluctance to intervene when there are problems in committees. Several times I have had a problem myself where there have been clear violations of ordinary rules of democracy. This was in a previous Parliament, not the current Parliament, where the chair actually declared passed a motion that had been defeated.

That occurred in a clause by clause of a bill. The committee chair said, "Shall clause 38 pass?", or whichever one it was that we were on, and not a single person said yes. I and my colleague on the committee said no and the chairman said, "I declare the motion passed". It was so opposite to the way a democracy is supposed to work when the chair declared that something had passed when in fact the only response in the committee was a negative.

I remember reporting that to the House. The Speaker of the day said that committees can do whatever they want, that they are masters of their own fate. I think they should be, but within the rules of democracy. When there is such a blatant and obvious violation of a simple vote, then the Speaker should be able to intervene in order to make sure that the rules of democracy are kept.

That completes my remarks. I have one more brief comment. We have had this step of a bill being referred to a committee before second reading. I remember when that first came in. It sounded like such a fine idea that all of the committee members could work together to fine-tune the first draft of a bill so there would be a better opportunity to get a good bill.

Unfortunately, within the party politics of the committee, that simply served to take away the debate time in the House. I think that is something that has to be revisited. If we are going to do that, fine, but then that should be added as another stage in the bill.

In other words, if it should be referred before second reading, when it comes to second reading then the debate on second reading should be exactly as it is now, with further referral to a committee. In other words, we should add an extra step because of the fact that the politics involved sometimes prevent real input into the formation of the bill.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1830)

[*English*]

CHILD CARE

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak today to an issue that is extremely important and close to the hearts of many Canadians, particularly those in my riding. The issue of a national day care program has become paramount, especially to me since the birth of my first grandchild just three weeks ago.

On February 15 the Liberal government voted down a motion by this party to reduce taxes for lower and modest income Canadian families and giving new funds for child care directly to parents. It read:

> That the House call upon the government to address the issue of child care by fulfilling its commitment to reduce taxes for low and modest income families in the upcoming budget, and, so as to respect provincial jurisdiction, ensure additional funds for child care are provided directly to parents.

In doing so, the Liberals did the unthinkable by voting against stay at home parents. That vote was a slap in the face and an insult, in particular by the social development minister who insinuated that the only reason parents stayed at home with their kids was out of guilt.

The main point I want to make here tonight is that this is about choice and fairness. When a child is born the choice of how that child is raised should be made by the parents, not the government.

The Conservative Party of Canada recognizes that parents, not the federal government, are in the best position to determine which type of child care best suits their family. We know parents would benefit from direct assistance.

The Liberals are discriminating against these families by pouring money into child care for working parents but giving no breaks to stay at home parents. An example of this is the fact that summer camps are tax deductible for working parents but not for stay at home parents.

The Conservative Party will continue to support all existing child benefit programs and introduce broad based tax relief that would directly benefit parents and allow them to make their own choices about the care and nurturing of their young children.

In fact, at our recent national policy convention in Montreal the following detailed and comprehensive policy was ratified:

> The Conservative Party of Canada recognizes that parents are in the best position to determine the care needs of their children, and that they should be able to do so in an environment that encourages as many options as possible, and in a manner that does not discriminate against those who opt to raise their children in family, social, linguistic, and religious environments. We also recognize that the delivery of education and social services are provincial responsibilities under the constitution. We believe that support should go to all parents and families raising children, especially to lower and middle income parents. All existing levels of support will be maintained and improved if necessary.

The Liberals have been promising Canadians a national child care program for over 10 years. However, after broken promise after broken promise, they have finally put forward a plan that is not workable. They have failed to provide any information about how they intend to achieve this. They are willing to spend billions of dollars without a proper plan and risk creating another huge Liberal bureaucracy.

The key details, including how flexible the system can be, how to hold provinces accountable and how many child care spaces will be created are yet to be determined. This has the potential to set records of waste and mismanagement. We can think of the gun law.

A Conservative government would ensure that parents who need the money most would receive the most assistance and that parents would be given the resources they need to make the best choices for their children. This is extremely important, especially in the rural areas where a majority of children are babysat by family, friends or a local babysitter.

A Conservative government would protect parents from being forced to send their children from the cradle to an institution at a very young age.

My wife Darlene and I made the choice that she would stay home and raise our boys. That was our choice and that is the way it should be. I would like my son and his wife to have that same choice with their daughter. I want them to be able to have the same financial benefit as any other parent, regardless of whether they choose to work away from home or stay at home to raise my granddaughter.

A family like theirs and the thousands of others across this country should not be penalized for deciding to raise their children in the early years of their development. The government should be ashamed that it is not honouring its throne speech promise to reduce taxes for lower and modest income Canadians.

● (1835)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am also a mother of two daughters.

The Government of Canada recognizes that parents play a very important role in raising their children. We are dedicated to helping them meet their responsibilities. We understand that the right mix of investments by governments and other partners can support parents and ensure that communities, workplaces and public institutions work together in a way that supports families with children.

[*Translation*]

The need for child care services is very real for Canadians, for reasons of economics, lifestyle or self-sufficiency. Many parents would prefer to stay home to raise their young children, but that option is often not a reality in today's society. There is one thing that the opposition is always forgetting, which is that 70% of children aged six months to five years live in families where both parents work or study, or where a single parent works or studies.

For these parents in particular, early childhood education and child care is a necessary and valuable choice, an option that can provide parents with the assurance that their children are growing up in a healthy and safe learning environment focussed on development.

As a result, the Government of Canada has made a commitment to provide parents with choices, and access to quality childcare and early childhood education facilities has become a real choice for parents.

This is a priority shared by all governments in Canada. At their meeting in Vancouver on February 11, the Minister of Social Development and his provincial and territorial counterparts reached consensus on the urgent need to put such programs in place throughout the country. All administrations were actively involved, because all of us, regardless of level of government, know that this is a choice our constituents want and need.

On February 23, 2005, the government announced it would invest $5 billion over five years. Of this amount, $700 million is available now for 2005-06, to fund the early learning and child care initiative, which will be developed in collaboration with the provinces and territories. As we continue our work on the final agreement, we will ensure that the provinces and territories have the flexibility they need to establish programs that best meet the needs of their citizens and that respect the common values to which the federal, provincial and territorial ministers agreed in November 2004.

In response to those for whom “choice” means a child-related tax break, it is important to note that the government's new commitment to early learning and child care is in addition to existing direct benefits and services for parents, which we have designed to ensure that all children have the best start possible in life and that families get the support they need, no matter what their circumstances or the choices they make.

In fact, through the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement, the Canadian government is already providing billions of dollars in income support directly to low- and middle-income parents. This is something the opposition constantly forgets.

The total combined investment in the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement is $7.7 billion. Contrary to what the member already said, families where one parent decides to remain at home can also take advantage of early learning programs funded by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, under the agreement on early childhood development and the multilateral framework on early learning and child care.

[*English*]

I would like to say—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Order. The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I believe I heard the parliamentary secretary say that she has two children of her own. I am not sure of their ages, but I would find it very surprising if she and her husband would voluntarily give up the right to choose how their children were raised. Further, I would be surprised if she would give up the right to equal treatment by the government regardless of what that choice was.

If the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development or other Canadian parents decides that both parents want to join the workforce and hire a friend, a relative, a local day care or, heaven forbid, a government bureaucrat to raise their children, or if they choose that one of them will stay at home to raise their children, if she is honest with herself, and I have no reason to think otherwise, I am quite sure that she would agree that she would want that choice to remain.

Let us do what is fair and right for the benefit of our future generations. It is all about choice.

● (1840)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, we are offering exactly that, real choice. My children were one and a half and three when I started out in the House, as a matter of fact.

The investment that we made in the Canadian tax benefit which will reach $10 billion by 2007 gives for the first child a maximum of $3,243 and a supplement of $239 to stay at home parents for each child under seven years old. That choice does exist at the present time.

All the opposition party is offering is $320; $320 is all a $2,000 tax break means to parents. That is what it is offering to parents at the moment. That is not a choice. It is politically expedient to say, “Let us have a tax break”, but that is not a real choice.

The real choice is on this side of the House. In fact we are offering tax breaks for low and middle income families. At the same time we are offering to those who choose to place their children in day care another choice. It amounts to $5 billion over five years. The provinces have agreed that we are going in the right direction.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise as a consequence of the response from the Minister of National Defence regarding the treatment of soldiers injured during the line of duty as members of joint task force 2, Canada's anti-terrorism unit. It is important to have the federal government go on the record to officially recognize that a problem does exist.

The Minister of National Defence's initial assertion to the House on February 2 that there was no problem other than some silly paperwork that may or may not be getting done is clearly unacceptable to Canadians. I was shocked, and I know many serving members of the Canadian military were, to find out that there was a problem with pensions for veterans and to hear the minister dismiss those concerns as a silly little political football to be kicked around by the government when accountability is called for.

Let me assure all currently serving members and veterans of Canada's armed forces that as long as one individual is denied benefits to which he or she is legally entitled, there is a problem and it must be fixed. I take the concerns of all veterans seriously. I would hope the Minister of National Defence would do the same.

Injured soldiers should not have to beg for their pensions. It is an absolute disgrace that a soldier who is disabled in the line of duty would be denied a pension, yet this has been the case for soldiers who are members of joint task force 2. As a result of the cloak of secrecy that the Prime Minister has placed on all activities of JTF2, its commanders are afraid to report injuries because they fear they are being charged under the Official Secrets Act.

While the government will not admit that recruitment efforts to the military have consistently fallen short, I am not surprised that potential recruits would be unwilling to serve if they thought they would not receive due consideration if injured in the line of duty with a special unit like JTF2 or in a special operation.

The effective date of entitlement for a military pension is usually the date of application. There is an agreement between the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs to share medical information once a privacy release has been signed by the soldier. In the absence of any paperwork confirming that a soldier was in service at the time of injury, there is no documentation to confirm the injury even occurred.

When I asked my question in the House, there were JTF2 veterans who were being denied a disability pension for injuries received while being members of the Canadian armed forces. This problem has been going on for years and will only get worse, which reflects the element of danger associated with the war against terrorism.

A part of the solution may be the suggestion to designate all JTF2 activity as special deployment operations. This designation would allow for an injury to be reported without the need to provide details of the operation in which the injury occurred. By establishing a date of injury, the injured soldier would be able to establish a disability claim.

I find the government's insensitivity to the plight of the disabled veterans shocking. It is a problem that has been going on for years. This problem affects other soldiers than JTF2. Any soldier on a special deployment operation that the government refuses to acknowledge will find themselves in a similar situation.

During World War II soldiers who were used for chemical warfare testing were denied disability pensions. The government refused to admit to the Canadian public it was involved in that type of activity. In the absence of any documentation and a seal being placed on evidence by labelling it an official secret, most of those individuals died never receiving any compensation for being used as guinea pigs to test chemical weapons. It is shameful that more than 60 years would pass before some attempt would be made to remedy the wrongs done to Canadian soldiers by their own government.

● (1845)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has raised this issue before and I responded to her very clearly the last time these questions were asked. I am very surprised that she is asking this question again because we have made it crystal clear that there is not one person in the government, and I would dare say the House, that does not support our veterans. The government has gone to great lengths to make it very clear that we support them completely. We have put a number of innovative solutions forward to do just that.

The member has raised a particular situation with JTF2 members. I want to answer her question very directly so that there is no ambiguity whatsoever with respect to this response.

In 2001 we put $100 million toward JTF2, doubling the unit's capacity. In the most recent federal budget we put in an extra $2.8 billion for equipment. Some of that will go toward increasing the number of JTF2 members and also for new equipment.

I want to deal with the issue directly with respect to JTF2 operations and those who are disabled in the course of their duties.

We know that JTF2 is subject to stringent security. That security is there to protect their lives here in Canada and overseas because they are involved in highly secretive matters and this is done for their protection. That is clearly not an obstacle to their getting the benefits that they are due.

We have made it very clear that JTF2 members are entitled to exactly the same support and health services as other members. In fact, their duties and their activities are not obstacles to that happening.

The two ministers, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Veterans Affairs, made it crystal clear that any person who sustained an injury in the course of his or her duties would receive those benefits in a very quick fashion.

In early 2001 we put forth the Centre for the Support of Injured and Retired Members and Their Families which will provide for confidential support and administration to injured members, veterans and their families. I want to make it very clear, as I did before to the member, particularly for those veterans who are listening, that any current or retired member of the JTF2, any veteran who has any issues with respect to benefits and who does not think he or she is receiving them, should contact the Centre for the Support of Injured and Retired Members and Their Families.

I also want to speak to the issue raised by the member with respect to those who were involved in chemical weapons testing. On February 19, 2004 we announced a $50 million recognition package for those members, for whom we have great respect and are deeply, profoundly thankful for the sacrifices that they made. So far more than 500 members have accessed this package. It is a $24,000 recognition package and does not affect the person's ability to receive other pensions and benefits.

To any members who are involved in this program, please call 1-800-883-6094 if you have not received any benefits under this and you were part of the chemical weapons testing that was a part of our military from the 1940s to the 1970s.

All of us are deeply proud and deeply grateful for the work that our Canadian Forces members do for this country day in and day out. I want to make it particularly clear to those members of the forces who are watching and to the member across the way that the government is committed to supporting them. Any JTF2 members who have any problems should contact the centre or contact me as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. I will make sure that your concerns are dealt with. So far we have not heard from any members who have not received the benefits that they ought to have received.

● (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): May I remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that he is to address his comments to the Chair.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the former DND ombudsman, André Marin, and the work done by his office in investigating the complaints concerning chemical testing during World War II. That report by the ombudsman certainly played a role in the program that was announced to compensate those veterans, as the program was announced at about the same time that the ombudsman's report was released.

History has a tendency of repeating itself. In this case, let us not repeat the 60 years of inaction that occurred with a different group of veterans. When a country has a secret elite military force controlled by the Prime Minister with no effective parliamentary oversight, people do fall through the cracks. This sort of thing will happen. I look forward to full disclosure as a resolution to this issue.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat and make it clear that the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and representatives of JTF2 have met. They have been assured that any information required by Veterans Affairs does not compromise the security requirements of JTF2. Said another way, if there are any concerns whatsoever, the Department of National Defence will make it very clear to Veterans Affairs, without any disclosure of any secret information, that any JTF2 members are eligible for benefits and that those members did receive their injuries in a service-related accident or activity as part of their duties.

I also want to say, as another piece of good news, that the Minister of Veterans Affairs will very soon be releasing information concerning a new benefits package for our veterans, which I think will be very helpful and exciting for them.

It is our duty to support our veterans. The Government of Canada supports our veterans. We will continue to work hard for them and do a better job in the future with their input and by working together with them. We will at least in part give to them the security that they desperately need.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.)

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