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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 4, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 4, 2006

The House met at 3 p.m.

[English]

Prayers

• (1455)

• (1625)

[English]

OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Her Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the Senate.

Accordingly, the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned:

The Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to report that, the House having attended on Her Excellency the Governor General in the Senate chamber, I informed Her Excellency that the choice of Speaker had fallen upon me, and in your names and on your behalf, I made the usual claim for your privileges which her Excellency was pleased to confirm to you.

* * *

[Translation]

ORDER PAPER

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that, at the request of the Government pursuant to Standing Order 55(1), the Chair has ordered the printing of a special order paper giving notice of two government motions.

I therefore lay upon the table the relevant documents.

* * *

OATHS OF OFFICE

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-1, An Act respecting the Administration of Oaths of Office

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

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when this House did attend Her Excellency this day in the Senate chamber, Her Excellency was pleased to make a speech to both Houses of Parliament. To prevent mistakes I have obtained a copy, which is as follows:

*HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE,
MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN*

As the representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I am honoured to welcome the newly elected members of the House of Commons on the occasion of the opening of the First Session of the Thirty-Ninth Parliament of Canada. Canadians rejoice in the coming eightieth birthday of Her Majesty later this month, and in her more than fifty years of service as Queen of Canada.

Since my appointment as Governor General of Canada, I have had the privilege of meeting women and men who each and every day, and each in their own way, reaffirm their attachment to this vast land that we share and where people from around the world have found a home. Women and men of ideas, conviction and action who have an abiding sense of responsibility, solidarity and commitment to their neighbourhoods, to their communities and to their country. And I am moved to see just how strong and vibrant a country we are.

I have been particularly struck by the words of our young people and by their wealth of ideas. Young people who are looking to carve out their place and be heard. The new generation of Aboriginal entrepreneurs who are creating new opportunities. Young people in our Canadian Forces who, through their extraordinary efforts, offer a promise of hope for the oppressed. More than ever, our young people represent not only the promise of a brighter future, but also the vitality of our present.

I have met with people from our two great linguistic communities and I can attest that our linguistic duality is a tremendous asset for the country. Similarly, Canadian artists from all disciplines have confirmed to me just how important creative expression is to the health of a democratic society.

And I have heard from Canadians who feel they often lack a voice. Women who are victims of violence. Families newly arrived in Canada who seek to contribute to our society and our country's collective well-being.

Opening of Parliament

Listening to citizens from all walks of life has strengthened my already deep conviction that we are living in a country where everything is possible, where each of us is free to follow his or her dreams but also has a duty to help build our country and prepare it for the challenges that lie ahead.

BUILDING A STRONGER CANADA

On January 23, the Canadian people elected a new government. The Government is honoured by the responsibility it has been given for managing the affairs of our great country.

Canada is uniquely blessed in the strength and diversity of its people and regions. Through hard work, foresight and good fortune, we have come together to make our vast country one of the most successful the world has ever seen.

The distance we have travelled is remarkable. A country once perceived to be at the edge of the world is now at the leading edge of science, business, the arts and sport. Whether it is on the podium in Turin, on the rugged hills of Afghanistan, or in the bustling markets of Asia, Canadians demonstrate time and time again that they are leaders.

The Government is proud of what Canadians have accomplished so far, and is inspired by the country's bright prospects. It believes in the capacity of Canadians to seize the enormous opportunities before them and build an even stronger Canada, striving for excellence, anchored by enduring values, and infused with growing confidence that they can make a difference at home and in the world.

In support of building a stronger Canada, the Government's agenda will be clear and focused. It will clean up government, provide real support to ordinary working families and strengthen our federation as well as our role in the world.

TURNING A NEW LEAF

Canadians have chosen change. They want a government that treats their tax dollars with respect. A government that puts ordinary working people and their families first. A government that is accountable.

This Government has been given a mandate to lead the change demanded by the Canadian people.

Leading change in a minority Parliament means working together. To this end, the Government will look for shared goals and common ideas that will help Canadians build a stronger Canada.

It is time to turn a new leaf.

BRINGING ACCOUNTABILITY BACK TO GOVERNMENT

No aspect of responsible government is more fundamental than having the trust of citizens. Canadians' faith in the institutions and practices of government has been eroded. This new government trusts in the Canadian people, and its goal is that Canadians will once again trust in their government. It is time for accountability.

To restore this trust, the first piece of legislation the Government will bring forward will be the Federal Accountability Act.

This omnibus legislation and the associated Accountability Action Plan will change the current system of oversight and management by strengthening the rules and institutions that ensure transparency and accountability to Canadians. The legislation will ban institutional and large personal donations to political parties; it will ensure that positions of public trust cannot be used as stepping stones to private lobbying; and it will provide real protection for whistle-blowers who show great courage in coming forward to do what is right.

The Government will strengthen the capacity and independence of officers of Parliament, including the Auditor General, to hold the Government to account. It will increase the transparency of appointments, contracts and auditing within government departments and Crown corporations.

Effective checks and balances are important, but they are not enough. The trust of citizens must be earned every day. The Government will work to earn that trust.

HELPING ORDINARY WORKING CANADIANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

This Government believes that Canadians pay too much in tax. The Government's tax plan will, over time, reduce the tax burden on all Canadians.

To this end, the Government will reduce the Goods and Services Tax by one percent. Cutting the GST will help all Canadians deal with the rising cost of living, put money back in people's pockets and help stimulate the economy.

Cutting the GST is the best way to lower taxes for all Canadians, including low-income Canadians who need it most.

The Government will continue with a responsible approach to lowering taxes for the benefit of Canadians and the Canadian economy, including a further reduction of the GST to five percent.

TACKLING CRIME

Canadians have always taken pride in our low crime rates. Safe streets have long characterized Canada's communities—from villages to towns to cities. Safe communities allow families and businesses to prosper.

Unfortunately, our safe streets and healthy communities are increasingly under threat of gun, gang and drug violence.

This Government will tackle crime. It will propose changes to the Criminal Code to provide tougher sentences for violent and repeat offenders, particularly those involved in weapons-related crimes. It will help prevent crime by putting more police on the street and improving the security of our borders.

It is equally important that we prevent criminal behaviour before it has a chance to take root. To this end, the Government will work with the provinces and territories to help communities provide hope and opportunity for our youth, and end the cycle of violence that can lead to broken communities and broken lives.

*Opening of Parliament***PROVIDING CHILD CARE CHOICE AND SUPPORT**

Strong families ensure a bright future for Canada. The most important investment we can make as a country is to help families raise their children.

This Government understands that no two Canadian families are exactly alike. Each has its own circumstances and needs. Parents must be able to choose the child care that is best for them. The Government will help Canadian parents, as they seek to balance work and family life, by supporting their child care choices through direct financial support.

In collaboration with the provinces and territories, employers and community non-profit organizations, it will also encourage the creation of new child care spaces.

ENSURING CANADIANS GET THE HEALTH CARE THEY HAVE PAID FOR

Canadians have paid their taxes to support our system of public health insurance. But all too often, they find themselves waiting too long for critical procedures. That is not good enough. It is time Canadians received the health care they have paid for.

The Government will engage the provinces and territories on a patient wait times guarantee for medically necessary services. This guarantee will make sure that all Canadians receive essential medical treatment within clinically acceptable waiting times.

A health system that is timely and sustainable will require innovation. The Government will support and enable innovative approaches to health care delivery consistent with the principles of a universally accessible and equitable public health care system embodied in the Canada Health Act.

A CANADA THAT WORKS FOR ALL OF US

One of Canada's greatest strengths is our federal system of government. The founders of our country had the foresight to build a flexible federal system that would accommodate our diversity and build upon the unique strengths of the different parts of our federation.

To remain strong and effective, our federation must keep pace with the evolving needs of Canadian society. Building on the work begun in the last Parliament, this Government will seek to involve parliamentarians and citizens in examining the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions. At the same time, it will explore means to ensure that the Senate better reflects both the democratic values of Canadians and the needs of Canada's regions.

All too often, the strength of our federation is compromised by jurisdictional squabbles that obscure accountabilities and prevent governments from working together in the best interests of Canadians.

This new government will take a new approach. It is committed to building a better federation in which governments come together to help Canadians realize their potential. To this end, the Government will respond to concerns about the fiscal imbalance and will work to

ensure fiscal arrangements in which all governments have access to the resources they need to meet their responsibilities.

The Government is committed to an open federalism that recognizes the unique place of a strong, vibrant Quebec in a united Canada. It will work with the government and legislature of Quebec in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration to advance the aspirations of Quebecers. In the international community, Canada is stronger when we speak with one voice, but that voice must belong to all of us. In a more interdependent world, decisions on international issues increasingly affect not only countries, but also individuals, communities and regions.

This is why the Government will facilitate provincial participation in the development of Canadian positions that affect areas of provincial responsibility. The Government recognizes the special cultural responsibilities of the Government of Quebec and will therefore invite Quebec to play a role in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. By harnessing the diversity of experience and expertise found within our federation, we can present a strong, united and confident voice to the world.

CANADA - STRONG, UNITED, INDEPENDENT AND FREE

Canada's voice in the world must be supported by action, both at home and abroad. Advancing our interests in a complex and sometimes dangerous world requires confidence and the independent capacity to defend our country's sovereignty and the security of our citizens.

The Government will work cooperatively with our friends and allies and constructively with the international community to advance common values and interests. In support of this goal, it will build stronger multilateral and bilateral relationships, starting with Canada's relationship with the United States, our best friend and largest trading partner.

More broadly, this Government is committed to supporting Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world. In this regard, the Government will support a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, a stronger military and a more effective use of Canadian aid dollars.

Just as it honours the past efforts of our veterans, the Government stands firmly behind the vital role being played by our troops in Afghanistan today. The dedicated Canadians in Afghanistan deserve all of our support as they risk their lives to defend our national interests, combat global terrorism and help the Afghan people make a new start as a free, democratic and peaceful country.

CONCLUSION

The Government's clear and focused agenda reflects its commitment to Canadians. It will not try to do all things at once. Instead, the Government will work diligently to make tangible improvements that contribute to stronger families and safer communities, and a stronger country.

Opening of Parliament

During this Thirty-Ninth Parliament, the Government will be bringing forward fiscally responsible budgets and a legislative program that will achieve the results that Canadians expect from their elected representatives. In this work, it will rely on the support and counsel of a dedicated and professional Public Service. In turn, it will give the Public Service the leadership and tools it needs to excel in the service of Canadians. Recognizing the important role of parliamentarians, members of Parliament will be asked to conduct comprehensive reviews of key federal legislation, including the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Bank Act. The Government will act in Parliament to offer an apology for the Chinese Head Tax. Significant international treaties will be submitted for votes in Parliament.

Over the course of its mandate, and starting with the clear priorities set out today, the Government will work diligently to build a record of results. It will promote a more competitive, more productive Canadian economy. It will seek to improve opportunity for all Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples and new immigrants. It will work to improve the security of seniors. It will take measures to achieve tangible improvements in our environment, including reductions in pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

This Government recognizes the unique challenges faced by those who make their livelihood from our land and oceans in our vital natural resource and agriculture industries. It will take action to secure a prosperous future for Canadian agriculture, following years of neglect. It will respond to short-term needs, create separate and more effective farm income stabilization and disaster relief programs and work with producers and partners to achieve long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

Together, the Government's actions will ensure Canada's future success.

With the efforts and contributions of members from both chambers, the Government looks forward to making this Parliament work for the benefit of the Canadian people.

Members of the House of Commons:

You will be asked to appropriate the funds required to carry out the services and expenditures authorized by Parliament.

Honourable Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Commons:

May Divine Providence guide your deliberations.

● (1630)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC) moved:

That the Speech from the Throne delivered this day by Her Excellency the Governor General to both Houses of Parliament be taken into consideration later this day.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

TRIBUTES

CANADIAN FORCES

The Speaker: There have been discussions among representatives of all parties in the House to pay tribute to those Canadians who have lost their lives in Afghanistan since the last such tribute in the House on November 24, 2005.

[*Translation*]

I ask all members to rise for a moment of silence.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

* * *

[*English*]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the following members have been appointed as members of the Board of Internal Economy for the purposes and under the provisions of the act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act, Chapter 32, *Statutes of Canada, 1997*, namely: Mr. Nicholson and Mrs. Skelton, members of the Queen's Privy Council; Mr. Hill and Mr. Preston, representatives of the Conservative caucus; Ms. Robillard and Ms. Redman representing the Liberal caucus; Mr. Guimond representing the Bloc Québécois and Ms. Davies representing the New Democratic Party.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the business of supply be considered at the next sitting of the House.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, the House shall meet on April 10 and 11, 2006; the order of business shall be as provided in Standing Order 30(6) for a Monday and Tuesday; and that when the House adjourns on Tuesday, April 11, 2006, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 24, 2006, provided that, for the purposes of any Standing Order, the House shall be deemed to stand adjourned pursuant to Standing Order 28.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

INTERIM SUPPLY AND ESTIMATES

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

*The Address***SPEECH FROM THE THRONE***[English]***ADDRESS IN REPLY**

The House proceeded to the consideration of the speech delivered by Her Excellency the Governor General at the opening of the session.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be dividing my time with one of my colleagues.

I would like to begin by thanking the Governor General for graciously reading the Speech from the Throne. Her delivery was superb.

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your re-election to the House. I have no doubt that you will continue as the fair and impartial Speaker that parliamentarians and Canadians alike have come to know and respect.

[Translation]

I would like to officially thank the citizens of my constituency, Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, particularly the farmers, Franco-Ontarians, seniors, young people and families, and everyone who placed their trust in me.

[English]

I am very honoured that they have placed their trust in me and in our government. It is a great honour and privilege to stand here as their MP and to represent them in the House.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Prime Minister for having asked me to move the motion on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

[Translation]

I am honoured to address the House today in reply to the Speech from the Throne, which confirms our government's commitment to get Canada back on track by putting the needs of ordinary Canadians first.

[English]

Our government will be a government that delivers real results for all Canadians, be they families with young children, seniors who have worked hard to build this country, or young people just starting out. Simply put, the government will work for all Canadians, and ours will be a government of focused priorities. The priorities we will move on in the months ahead are the priorities of Canadians.

[Translation]

For example, introducing the federal accountability act will give Canadians the government they deserve, a government based on openness and accountability. Once adopted, this legislation will forever change how the federal government functions.

[English]

It will eliminate undue influence by banning businesses, unions and other organizations from donating to political parties and candidates.

Motion No. 2

1. Notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, on Wednesday, May 3, 2006, at fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings then in progress and shall put forthwith and successively, without debate or amendment, every question necessary to dispose of any motion relating to interim supply and for the passage at all stages of any bill or bills based thereon; and

2. Notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, for the purpose of considering the Main Estimates or any supplementary estimates in the year 2006, Standing Order 81 be amended as follows:

The first paragraph of Section (4) be replaced with the following:

"The Main Estimates to cover the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, may be tabled and be deemed referred to the appropriate committees on or before April 25, 2006. Each such committee shall consider and shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the same back to the House not later than November 10, 2006, provided that:";

Section (4)(a) be amended by replacing the words "May 1" with the words "October 2, 2006" and the words "May 31" with the words "November 10, 2006";

Section (4)(b) be amended by replacing the words "May 31" with the words "November 10, 2006" in the two places they appear;

Section (8) be amended by replacing the word "June" with the word "December";

Section (10)(a) be replaced with:

"Fifteen sitting days shall be allotted to the Business of Supply for the period ending December 8, 2006, provided that eight shall be allotted before June 23. These fifteen days are to be designated as allotted days. No more than one fifth of these days shall fall on a Wednesday and no more than one fifth thereof shall fall on a Friday.";

Section 14(a) be replaced with:

Forty-eight hours' written notice shall be given of opposition motions on allotted days, motions to concur in interim supply, main estimates, supplementary or final estimates, to restore or reinstate any item in the estimates and to oppose any item in the estimates.";

Section 17 be deleted;

Section 18 be amended in the first paragraph by replacing the words "June 23" with the words "December 8, 2006" and by adding, throughout the section, after the words "Main Estimates" the words "and the Supplementary Estimates"; and

3. Subject to the provisions of this Order, the business of supply shall otherwise be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 81.

This motion has also been published on a special Order Paper and is available for all members.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be appointed to prepare and report lists of members to compose the standing and standing joint committees of this House; and that the committee be composed of Gary Goodyear, Jay Hill, Joe Preston, Tom Lukiwski, Karen Redman, Scott Reid, Marcel Proulx, Marlene Jennings, Michel Guimond, Pauline Picard, Stephen Owen and Yvon Godin.

•(1635)

[Translation]

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

*The Address**[Translation]*

It will prevent insiders from using their connections to lobby the government by prohibiting ministers, ministerial staff and senior political staff from lobbying for five years.

[English]

It will clean up the way federal grants, contributions and contracts are awarded by giving the Auditor General the power to conduct a complete review.

We are also going to deliver long overdue tax relief for all Canadians by cutting the GST from 7% to 6%, and eventually to 5%. Never will this government make the mistake of seeing taxpayers' money as its own. Canadians work hard to provide for themselves and for their families, and they deserve a break on their taxes so they can keep more of their hard-earned money.

● (1640)

[Translation]

We will also make Canadian streets safer by tackling crime and targeting those who create chaos in our communities.

This includes drug dealers, gangsters who endanger people's lives with illegal weapons, and sexual predators who attack our children.

We will ensure that those who commit serious crimes are severely punished.

[English]

This government is also going to move ahead with its promise to provide a helping hand to all Canadian families with young children, as opposed to the current discriminatory system that funds only one form of day care, ignoring the needs of many parents. As the father of five children, I am well aware that there is no one size fits all solution to child care, and so too does this government. Our choice in child care allowance will provide Canadian parents with the flexibility they need to make the child care choices that best fit their unique circumstances and needs.

Our plan will also create 125,000 new day care spaces over the next five years, which will be to the benefit of many Canadian families.

In short, under our plan, no Canadian family will be overlooked.

[Translation]

Our government will work to ensure that Canadian families receive the timely medical care they need.

Average Canadians have no choice but to rely on the public health care system, a system that is widely appreciated throughout the country and that must be protected and improved.

For many years, Canadians have agreed that every person, regardless of his or her financial situation, should have access to medically necessary services. This government could not agree more.

[English]

What we will not accept, however, is Canadians suffering, and in some cases dying, because timely treatment is not available. That is

why this government will work with the provinces and territories to develop a patient wait times guarantee, to ensure that Canadians get the timely treatment they deserve.

[Translation]

Once in place, this guarantee will ensure that people who cannot receive timely treatment nearby can obtain it elsewhere at the government's expense.

[English]

In the months ahead, these will be our priorities: open accountable government, tax relief, cracking down on crime, choice on child care, and a better public health care system. These are our priorities because these are the priorities of Canadians.

Before I conclude, I would like to discuss an issue that is of particular interest to me: our Canadian Forces. I am honoured to have been able to serve our great country by devoting 20 years of my life to the military and to defending Canada. Our men and women in uniform are the finest in the world. Their dedication, professionalism and courage make them a source of great pride for Canadians across the country. Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to be part of a government that is committed to doing what is right for these brave men and women.

Our government will turn the tide of neglect. We will ensure our military has the personnel necessary to defend Canadian sovereignty and to carry out our peacekeeping responsibilities around the world. We will provide soldiers with the equipment they need to carry out their duties. We will restore Canada's influence on the international stage. Finally, we will ensure that veterans, those whose sacrifices are responsible for the Canada we know today, are treated with the respect they deserve by introducing a veterans bill of rights. This government will stand up for our military men and women because they bravely stand up for Canada each and every day.

Let me conclude by saying that I am very excited about the months ahead, for our government is committed to delivering positive change on the issues that matter most to Canadians.

● (1645)

[Translation]

This is why I am so pleased to be working with my colleagues in government and with members of the other parties to build a better Canada.

I am therefore delighted to move that the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I move:

To the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada:

May it please Your Excellency:

The Address

We, Her Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the House of Commons of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament the Liberal government passed a budget that reduced income taxes from 16% to 15% on the first tax bracket and also increased the personal exemption by \$500. The savings to the average Canadian family making \$60,000 with two children was about \$400.

My question for the member is this. The government has now proposed to reduce the GST by one percentage point—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1650)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga South has the floor.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, what the government did not explain to Canadians, was what a 1% cut in the GST would mean to this average family. That family would have to purchase \$40,000 of taxable goods to get the same tax savings, which it will have to cut to pay for this unholy GST cut.

Does the member agree that a family making \$60,000 could not spend \$40,000 and does he understand and admit that companies may not even pass that savings on to those consumers?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on being the first to ask a question within this 39th Parliament.

As I mentioned in my speech, this is a very exciting time. We are at the beginning of a new session with a new government, and we are all here to work together to ensure that the priorities of Canadians are addressed. We as a government want to work with MPs from other parties. We also need to recognize, however, that on January 23 Canadians voted for change. They voted for a change in government, for a change in the manner in which the government conducts itself and for a change in policies.

Each of us here knows that Canadians have voted for change and so we cannot have it both ways. We cannot on the one hand acknowledge that Canadians want change, but on the other not want anything to change. This is what we see in that question. There are parties that do not want change. They want their policies advanced as if there had been no election. Our government's priorities were presented to Canadians during this past election and Canadians voted in favour of the government and of these priorities.

In response to the member's question specifically, under the previous government the GST burden on ordinary, hard-working Canadians doubled from \$15.9 billion to \$31.8 billion. Canadians want some of their hard earned money back.

[Translation]

The Speaker: We could perhaps go on to the next question. The hon. member for Windsor West has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member's maiden speech, as well as his 20 years of

service in the armed forces of Canada. It is a very commendable attribute that should be recognized.

I would like to talk about the federal accountability act that has been proposed by the government. I have two specific questions to ask.

The first question is about freedom of information and whether he will agree with specific legislation that opens that up to all Canadians.

The second question is about banning floor-crossing in the chamber and whether he will support the NDP bill to stop it, a practice of which Canadians have grown very tired.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's question on ATI, a standing committee will be investigating access to information and will be looking at the legislation that surrounds it. We want Canadians to have more access to an open and accountable government.

With respect to floor crossing, we are going to move ahead in this Parliament. We will be working together as MPs from different parties and will be examining that issue when it arises. Until that time, I defer that question.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today in the House to second the motion for an Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Before I get started, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for this honour.

I would also like to thank Her Excellency the Governor General for her eloquent delivery earlier today of a very important speech, important because this document will guide the government's actions in the coming weeks and months.

For months now we have been clear on our priorities.

We will clean up government and make it more open and accountable by changing the way the system works.

We will reduce taxes by cutting the GST. The Liberals think the tax is unholy. We do not.

We will strengthen Canadian communities by cracking down on violent crime, gangs, drugs and illegal guns.

Rather than playing favourites, as happens on the current federally funded day care system, we will ensure every family with young children is a winner by providing them with the financial assistance they need to buy the child care that best suits their requirements.

Finally, we will address the serious problem of wait times for medical treatments by introducing a patient wait time guarantee.

The Address

As members know, I represent the riding of Lethbridge in sunny southern Alberta. This riding runs north, including my home town of Picture Butte, west to the world famous Waterton Lakes National Park, south to the U.S. border and east past Coumts and on to the beautiful Sweet Grass Hills.

While my riding does have a large number of urban dwellers who live in the city of Lethbridge, a lot of my constituents are rural residents, living in small communities and on farms and ranches, constituents who for many years have complained, and quite rightly, that the federal government was not listening to them or taking their concerns seriously.

That is why I am standing in this House today, to tell my constituents and all small town and rural Canadians that from this point on their concerns will get a fair hearing, as was demonstrated in today's throne speech that addresses many issues about which they are concerned.

As someone who farms and who has spent their life in rural Canada, I know the challenges faced by those who make their living off the land. So, too, does this government. Rural Canadians are an honest, hard-working lot. They love their country and are proud of the unique communities in which they live. They work hard, they save money, they believe in strong families and they live by the rules, and so does this government.

This government is fully committed to changing the way business is conducted in Ottawa and cleaning up the mess left after years of corruption.

Rural Canadians live by the rules and they expect politicians in Ottawa to do the same. We agree with them, which is why we will be bringing in the new federal accountability act which would give Canadians, rural and city dwellers alike, the clean, open and accountable government they want and deserve.

It is also a fact that many rural Canadians find it a challenge to put food on the table and to pay the bills. They want the money they do earn to go as far as possible, which means they do not want to see it taxed away by some free-spending government. That is why I am delighted to see the commitment to drop the GST from 7% to 6% and eventually to 5%. This measure should go a long way toward lowering the high cost of raising a family and running a farm or a ranch.

Crime and violence are not restricted to big cities. Therefore, it is natural that my constituents want Ottawa to crack down on crime. The throne speech makes it clear that this is exactly what the government will do. We will do it by helping to put more law enforcement officers to work policing our communities, by untying the hands of police and justice officials so they can do their jobs and by ensuring that individuals who do serious crime do serious time.

Rural Canadians consider the family to be the bedrock of society and want to see it strengthened, which is what we intend to do by fostering greater choice in child care. This is critically important in rural communities where almost no one lives next door to some federally funded day care. It is important that parents in these communities get the help they need to find the child care that makes sense to them and fits into their daily lives. That is why the Speech from the Throne proposes paying \$1,200 per year to parents with a

child under the age of six. This money can be used to pay for any type of child care they like such as public or private day care, a neighbour or a relative. It is whatever works best for them.

• (1655)

Finally, rural Canadians, like all Canadians, are worried about how long it takes to get vitally important medical treatment. They see people waiting and suffering, often for months, for necessary treatment or surgery. They cannot figure out why it takes so long when shorter wait times are what the taxes they pay should be providing to all Canadians. We intend to address this by working with the provinces to negotiate patient wait time guarantees, similar to the ones developed by the province of Quebec. Under this program, those patients who cannot get necessary treatment within a reasonable period of time will be able to go to a private clinic or a publicly funded clinic in another jurisdiction, with the cost being entirely covered by the government insurance plan.

We have a series of long overdue changes that will make a big difference in the lives of all Canadians, including those living in rural or small town Canada. These changes will be especially welcome in the west, where many of us have felt alienated and ignored by governments that in the past took no notice of our needs or desires, a state of affairs that led to the popular slogan "The West Wants In", which is why I ran for election in 1977: to bring a western voice to Ottawa.

We finally have a government that is listening to western concerns, which means that now the west is in.

It is for this reason that I am pleased to support and second the motion proposed by my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, and I congratulate him on his first speech. It is not an easy time to do that, but he did a marvellous job.

We have gone through the process today of the throne speech and all the things that surround that so we can do one thing: we can get started on the important task of standing up for Canadians wherever they live.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is absent from this throne speech is a vision for the advancement of francophone and Canadian arts and culture, as well as for a bilingual society.

My question for the member is this: is the government therefore telling Canadians and the House that it does not intend to comply with the Official Languages Act or the action plan for official languages, more specifically the commitment to put in place positive measures to promote French and English as minority languages, in Canada and in Quebec respectively?

The Address

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, as we have noted many times in the last month and today, this speech focuses on the five priorities of the government. It does not say that these are the only issues that will be dealt with.

The issue the member raises is an important one. We have been on record over the years as to what our position is on that. We have a strong cabinet. We have a strong minister in charge of heritage and culture who has indicated that she wants to promote that throughout Canada. The French language is one of the founding languages of this great country, and bilingualism is something this party supports. I believe we will continue to do that in the days to come.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my two Conservative colleagues for this reply to the Speech from the Throne.

The manufacturing sector throughout Canada—and especially in Quebec—currently faces intense competition. It is experiencing productivity problems, with respect to emerging countries in particular. Over the past two years there have been massive layoffs, especially of workers 55 and older. The Speech from the Throne does not indicate any concern about this within the new Conservative government.

My questions are for my colleague. Am I to understand that the Conservative government is not concerned with increasing competition and providing the tools to allow companies—in the manufacturing sector in particular—to cope with these emerging countries? Have the Conservatives changed their minds about employment insurance reform and helping older workers? These two items were not included in the Speech from the Throne.

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, productivity in Canada is a concern to everyone and has been for quite some time. We, as a party in the past in opposition, have questioned the government constantly on what it would do about productivity, the high taxes that employees and employers face and the negative aspect of people bringing in investment from outside Canada. We addressed it in our campaign.

I again refer to the throne speech which outlines the five priorities that we will deal with between now and the summer break and we want to get those through. On the issue of productivity, the ability for employers to offer proper jobs and for those 55 and over, I think there is a place in Canada for all people who want to work productively.

We brought through measures such as tax breaks for businesses. We brought through a measure for improving access to apprenticeship positions. We proposed these things in our campaign and we will continue to work toward them.

We have the basis here in Canada. We have a great nation with all the natural resources and human resources we need. All we need is a government that is focused on bringing that competition full turn and making us a mover and shaker in the world, and I believe we are on the verge of that happening.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. I would also like to congratulate the member who made his inaugural speech and the member who was re-elected.

I note that both of those members made a big point of talking about the first order of business of a new government, the accountability act. I want them to know that in Vancouver on Sunday hundreds of people walked for democracy because they believe in accountability, accountability that, first and foremost, needs to come from their member of Parliament, the member for Vancouver—Kingsway.

I would like the member to answer to the contradiction of a member crossing the floor and betraying his voters when the government says that it believes in accountability for all members of Parliament. How can that be allowed to happen?

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I can remember when the present leader of the New Democratic Party made an open offer to anybody in the House to walk across the floor and join that party. For that party to stand now and make such a huge issue of this is absolutely wrong.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you can hear the enthusiasm with which the Liberal Party supports my role in moving adjournment of this debate. In accordance with the usual tradition and customs, and seconded by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(On motion of Mr. Graham the debate was adjourned)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5.09 p.m.)

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