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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

MAIN ESTIMATES, 2006-07

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting estimates of the sums required for the service of Canada for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to be here today and to have transmitted to you the message of the Deputy of the Governor General.

* * *

• (1005)

[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the parliamentary seminar on Africa, Partnership Beyond 2005: The Role of Parliamentarians in Implementing the NEPAD Commitments, in London, U.K., October 19 to October 22, 2005.

* * *

MEMORIAL CROSS ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-226, An Act to provide for the issuance of the Memorial Cross as a memento of personal loss.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Winnipeg for supporting and seconding the bill. I also want to thank Lieutenant Pat Jessop and Mr. Tom Waters very much for their support of the bill.

What the bill would do is that when a soldier, air force or a navy personnel, or someone within our armed forces, dies in the line of

duty, we issue the Memorial Cross or the Silver Cross to the mother or to the wife of that soldier.

What happens if a woman is killed in the line of duty? Her husband and her father would not have received the Silver Cross because it is based strictly on the fact that a woman, either the wife or the mother, would receive it.

We believe that it is time to modernize this medal and also present it to husbands and fathers. We believe that they grieve equally. We believe it is time to modernize this.

I do remind the House that this is something that nobody wishes to receive. In the end a person would have had to have lost a child in the service of his or her country. I believe it would show honour, sacrifice and dignity to all members of the family if husbands and wives, fathers and mothers equally received the Silver Cross in honour of their loved one's sacrifice to our glorious country.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I again stand in the House and have the duty to submit a petition on behalf of many people in Canada who stand in solidarity with undocumented workers being deported. I will continue to file petitions on their behalf until a just and humane solution is found to this issue.

COPYRIGHT ACT

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians across the country with respect to the Copyright Act. The petitioners wish to properly recognize the careful balance between the rights of creators and the rights of the public, including viewers, readers and listeners.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to ensure generally that users are recognized as interested parties and are meaningfully consulted while proposed changes are made to the Copyright Act and to ensure, in particular, that any changes at least preserve all existing users' rights.

Government Orders

•(1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC) moved that Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, for seconding this landmark piece of legislation.

On January 23, Canadians elected a new government because they wanted change. Canadians said loudly and clearly that they wanted an open, honest and accountable government. They want their taxpayer dollars spent wisely and well.

I am proud of the efforts of my Treasury Board colleagues; my cabinet and caucus colleagues; the government House leader; my hard-working parliamentary secretary, the member for Nepean—Carleton; the many public servants across government led by Susan Cartwright; and the policy specialists and legal drafters who worked so hard to get the bill prepared for Parliament. I am also very proud of the leadership that the Prime Minister took in making big commitments and delivering to Canadians.

I am equally proud to see the bill go forward for second reading as the first item of business after the throne speech. The federal accountability act is about moving from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. It is about making everyone in government more accountable to Canadians.

It has been said before by my leader, the Prime Minister, and I will say it again. As Conservatives we believe in public service, both in the ideal and in the institution. As Conservatives we believe in entrepreneurship and free spirit and we celebrate the critical role that the private sector and the profit oriented business play in the generation of wealth in the country.

However we also understand that our success as a nation depends on the critical role that must be played by government, especially by our national government. We need an effective federal government that is capable of getting things done for ordinary working Canadians and their families.

The goal of the federal accountability act is to improve the level of trust that Canadians have in their government and in their elected

officials. We know that we have a long way to go to rebuild the public trust that was so egregiously violated by a slew of scandals that culminated in the Gomery commission.

A recent poll measured the level of trust that Canadians have in different professions. I am not surprised that at the top of the list were firefighters, nurses and farmers but politicians placed dead last right behind used car salesmen. We need to make real and concrete actions to address this problem head on and I believe that relationships are based on trust, and the federal accountability act is about rebuilding that trust.

Our government, the Prime Minister and me personally, believe and recognize that a strong and effective government requires strong and effective public servants. Already our government has brought a new approach to its relationships with the public service and it all starts with respect. Let me be clear that neither the Prime Minister nor any member of this caucus have blamed public servants for the political scandals that engulfed the previous administration.

[Translation]

The plan we are putting in place today for the Federal Accountability Act is comprised of several important components. We want to reform the financing of political parties, strengthen the role of the Ethics Commissioner, toughen the Lobbyists Registration Act and provide real protection for whistleblowers.

My colleague, the hon. parliamentary secretary, has worked hard on this. As members of Parliament from the national capital region, we are well aware of our public servants' need to be protected when they report certain situations.

We want to strengthen the access to information legislation and the power of the Auditor General. This is all very important.

•(1015)

[English]

These supports for whistleblowers are particularly important, and this is not to blame public servants. As we have seen far too often, members on the other side do. Because no public servant—

Mr. Derek Lee: Get out of here. Stick to the issue.

Hon. John Baird: It happened three times. Three times when I spoke on the federal accountability act, three Liberal members got up and blamed the public service. The blame game is over when it comes to our public service. I say for members opposite that no public servants woke up one day and dreamed of and decided how they would funnel money to the Liberal Party in Quebec. Those were political actors, not bureaucratic actors. No public servant had an interest in that. Those were political scandals. They were not bureaucratic scandals.

Mr. Derek Lee: You don't know what you're talking about. Go back to Queen's Park.

Government Orders

Hon. John Baird: It is very clear that the Liberals still do not get it. One of the members from Kitchener, one of the members from Scarborough and the member from Markham got up in this place and were bashing public servants, and I can tell members that workers in the capital are noticing that.

An hon. member: Why do they not like public servants?

Hon. John Baird: What have they got against public servants?

I am looking forward to members opposite having a chance to speak on this legislation because Canadians know where we stand on accountability and they want to know where the Liberals stand too.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I hope those members will get a chance to speak. It is very interesting.

In drafting this important piece of legislation, we were very mindful of two important factors. First, we did not want to establish more red tape, more bureaucracy and add to the increasingly significant web of rules. Many of the new offices created in our bill simply replaced or strengthened the independence of existing ones, while many of the new rules are more simple, straightforward and, we hope, more effective.

Second, the government does not want a bill that stifles innovation, nor do we want to create a culture in the public service that is overly risk-averse. In running an enterprise with a budget approaching one-quarter of a trillion dollars, we must always recognize that human beings are not infallible. It is true in business, it is true in the voluntary sector, and it is equally true in government.

I want to say how fortunate we are in this country to have an Auditor General like Sheila Fraser. The Auditor General is a national hero.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. John Baird: I should say for the record that I believe it was the member for Winnipeg Centre who started the clapping.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Baird: The Auditor General is a national—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I wonder if members of the official opposition could keep in mind that we have a question and comment period after speeches so that they can make their remarks at that time. Perhaps we could listen to the hon. minister and not engage in this sort of form of barracking that we pledged ourselves not to do at the beginning of this Parliament.

Hon. John Baird: The Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, has uncovered some of the most egregious violations of financial mismanagement this country has ever seen. Canadians are very lucky to have her on the job, working hard for them.

[*Translation*]

We want to strengthen the new powers vested in the Auditor General to enable her to inquire into the use of funds that individuals and organizations receive from the federal government.

We will be legally required to subject contribution programs to ongoing corporate review. We will also establish an independent blue-ribbon panel to identify barriers to accessing grants and contributions programs. That is very important.

[*English*]

There are a lot of methods about election financing. We believe that money should not have the ear of government, and the federal accountability act will help take government out of the hands of the big corporations and the big unions and give it back to ordinary Canadians. Our act will limit donations to \$1,000 a year. It will ban contributions by corporations, unions and organizations.

I believe the primary concern of our debate on this subject should be what we can do to increase the transparency of the political process so that Canadians can feel more confident in the integrity of our democratic system.

The changes I discussed about whistleblower protection are real. The men and women of the public service deliver important programs and services each and every day, services that touch the lives of Canadians from coast to coast. A key component in our legislation provides real protection for whistleblowers. Public servants who expose criminal wrongdoing and wasteful spending should have the full confidence that they will not face reprisals for standing up and doing what is right.

Allan Cutler spoke up and helped expose the Liberal sponsorship scandal and he lost his job. This type of action is wrong. This type of action will no longer be tolerated by the Government of Canada. The government will provide real protection for whistleblowers by giving an independent officer of Parliament the power to stand up and protect those who blow the whistle on wrongdoing.

Bill C-11, which was passed by the previous Parliament, was inadequate, insufficient and light. Federal public servants told the parliamentary secretary and they told me that they wanted real protection, not someone within the executive branch but someone who was more independent to stand up to fight for them. Bill C-11 was going downhill fast in the previous Parliament and it was only at the last minute that the previous government caved in to some modest demands. We are giving a real voice to those who wanted stronger whistleblower protection. All public servants should congratulate and thank the parliamentary secretary, the member for Nepean—Carleton, for those efforts.

The level of trust Canadians have in their government is directly related to the degree to which they feel there is equitable access to decision makers in government. To help maintain the trust of Canadians in government, it is important to know that lobbying is done in an ethical way.

Government Orders

We believe that two principles are important in this regard. First, people should not get rich bouncing between government and lobbying jobs and, second, lobbyists should not be allowed to charge success fees, whereby they get paid only if they deliver the policy change or the grant their clients want. That is why our government will extend the ban on lobbying activities to five years for former ministers, their aides and senior public servants. We will also ban success fees.

Plus, we will create a new commissioner of lobbying with the power to investigate violations and enforce the rules. Our proposal is to take this out of the executive branch, out of the Treasury Board, and make this commissioner an officer of the House so that all Canadians will know that this commissioner has genuine independence from government.

We also want to deal with some changes to the access to information laws. Canadians deserve better access to government information. The Government of Canada belongs to the people and the government should not unnecessarily obstruct access to information. We are absolutely committed to making government more open while balancing legitimate concerns for personal privacy, commercial confidentiality and national security.

We will change access to information legislation to promote a culture of increased openness and accessibility. Our reforms will extend this law to include seven crown corporations, seven agents of Parliament, and three foundations with \$1 billion budgets created under federal statute, organizations like the CBC, Canada Post and the Privacy Commissioner's office. We remember our friend Radwanski and the Radwanski affair in the previous government. These reforms will go further than any government has gone in Canadian history.

We also want to take additional steps to further reform the access law, in collaboration with parliamentarians, Canadians and stakeholders. I have had the privilege of meeting on a number of occasions with John Reid, the Information Commissioner. I look forward to receiving his advice and his input and seeing if he can help strengthen our bill and if he can contribute to the draft bill and discussion paper. We look forward to working with him. He is a champion for access to information and Canadians should consider themselves lucky to have him on the job. We will ask Parliament to consider even more reforms and will report back with additional measures.

There is another important issue I would like to raise before concluding. Our goal, our commitment, simply put, is to make government more accountable. As I said at the outset, government also needs to be effective and efficient, not bogged down in a web of rules that prevents individuals, organizations and even small businesses from doing business with the federal government and prevents public servants from doing their jobs effectively.

• (1020)

The message of the web of rules created in haste by the previous government has been heard. For example, I heard a story from the Auditor General who told me of a charity, a non-profit group, that received a \$5,000 grant and now has to complete a 75 page contribution agreement. That is 75 pages for a \$5,000 grant; we would probably have to spend \$10,000 to administer a \$5,000 grant.

No charity should have to go through 75 pages of rules, regulations and red tape.

We want strong and effective measures of accountability, but this should be based on what is good value for the taxpayers and what is fair and reasonable for all involved. We hope to come back in short order to deal with that.

I also talked to a small businessman who has 13 employees and who bid on government work. The good news is that he won. He sharpened his pencil and put in a low bid with the one confidence that he at least could expect to get paid in short order by the federal government for the work his firm did.

Six months of invoice passing, contacting the government eight times looking for payment, and he still does not have his payment. Because of the web of rules put in by the previous government, this small business person simply cannot afford to do business with the Government of Canada any longer. We want to strengthen this and fix that problem for small business people and for the hard-working public service. We will be making an announcement in short order to address this challenge.

The changes I have highlighted today focus on fixing problems, on rewarding merit, on achieving value for money, and on building more honest and more effective government. To instill confidence, the government must be open and it must be more accountable. It must ensure that Canadians and parliamentarians have the right controls in place and it must provide them with the information they need to judge its performance.

Confidence is all about trust and the trust we place in our elected officials and public service employees to act in the best interests of Canadians. That trust must be earned every day and it starts with making government more accountable.

The measures I have highlighted today signal a dramatic change in how federal politics and the federal government will work in this country. When the Prime Minister made this announcement, he said that this will change how business is done in Ottawa forever. I agree. We would all like to see speedy passage of this important piece of legislation.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the President of the Treasury Board. I listened carefully to his speech. I will ask him a question about the last part of it, in which he encouraged the members of the House to pass this bill without delay.

I know that the Government of Canada has been considering the idea of enacting legislation on transparency, responsibility and accountability for several years. I will come back to this a bit later. A voluminous bill comprising approximately 317 clauses has just been tabled.

Government Orders

I hope that the minister will give the legislative committee he plans to create all the time it needs to undertake a suitably rigorous examination of this important bill. The Bloc Québécois has no intention of using stalling tactics to delay passing this bill. My comment is in no way meant to delay the process. The Bloc also wants a bill to be passed, but we want it to be effective and efficient, and we want it to meet expectations.

Will the President of the Treasury Board give the House of Commons legislative committee sufficient time to study the bill rigorously, to hear as many witnesses as necessary to improve it and to ensure that it meets the requirements exactly?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear colleague from Quebec for his comments and questions.

Of course, the hon. members on this side of the House wants to work with all House members, to ensure that this bill puts effective measures in place.

I would like to see this bill go to the committee in order to get the opinion of experts and members from each party, including the official opposition, the Bloc and the NDP.

It is very important to take the necessary time. The Canadian public was consulted during the 57 days of the election campaign. Our fundamental policy during the election campaign was obviously accountability and what can be done to clean up the federal government.

Other things were also important. Take, for example, Mr. Gomery's hard work, the work accomplished by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, and the work of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

My colleague from Nepean—Carleton said that members of the 38th Parliament worked for two years on bill C-11, An Act to establish a procedure for the disclosure of wrongdoings in the public sector, including the protection of persons who disclose the wrongdoings. Considerable work has already been accomplished, but it is important to take the time to work on this bill in committee.

Furthermore, I read that my New Democrat colleague from Winnipeg made a very good point in a newspaper, namely, that establishing these measures before our return to our ridings for the summer break would be appreciated by the Canadian public.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on the bill, which is such a weighty matter before the House in both substance and ideas. I have two central questions for the hon. member with respect to how his government intends to enact the bill.

First, in calling it the accountability act, one would imagine that accountability to voters would be of pre-eminence in the government's mind, that the sacred trust we hold in the act of voting in an election has some merit and meaning for the new government. Yet when I cast through the 317 clauses, I cannot find one that addresses the notion of floor-crossing, the notion of accountability to the constituents and voters, who cast their ballots, in that most sacred act. Could the minister comment on its noticeable absence? It seems

to me that if one wants to be accountable and wants to present an accountability act to the Canadian people, who we all intend to serve in this place, why is that absent?

The second issue is around fiscal accounting. There is the creation of a number of officers, offices and positions within government. How much will this cost? How much has the government accounted for and put aside for the implementation of the act and what are the Canadian taxpayers expected to pay for its implementation?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, with respect to those individuals who change their political stripe, this was not part of the campaign document. It was not part of the federal accountability act that the now Prime Minister presented on November 4. There has been some debate in this place and in the country on the issue. I did see the then leader of the opposition appear on a CBC national town hall meeting saying that he did not support such a measure, so he certainly did not change his position.

I do not personally support such a measure. I think members of Parliament, hopefully on rare occasions, may come to a conclusion they could best serve their constituents. At the end of the day, they are accountable on election day, as we all are, for all choices that they make.

I know it was part of Mr. Broadbent's plan, and I have a great deal of respect for that individual. He is a man of great character. I did though remember, when he was leader of the NDP, that a fellow by the name of Robert Toupin crossed the floor to the New Democratic Party. He did not mind it back then when it happened to him. I just point that out for the benefit of the House.

With respect to how much the fiscal accounting will cost, the price of accountability is priceless. These measures hopefully will save money, not cost money.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the President of the Treasury Board. There were a couple of points I was a little confused about and perhaps he could clarify them.

I understand the Conservatives want to ensure that civil servants and parliamentarians, who later earn a living or a fortune as lobbyists, do not abuse their positions, but there are reasonable limits that can be put on that. We could argue whether five years for a sitting member of Parliament is right or not. However, why are there not the same kinds of limits for people who have previously worked in the offices of opposition members and who are now members of cabinet? What about members of Parliament who were on the opposition benches before, like Deborah Grey, and who are now lobbyists? What about John Reynolds who now uses the title of privy councillor, some culture of entitlement thing?

When we speak about ethics, I remember the opposition said that they were completely against trust funds. I read now that \$3.5 million would have been transferred to trust funds, to be announced later by the governing party. Perhaps the President of the Treasury Board could explain that to us.

Government Orders

The President of the Treasury Board also mentioned the Gomery commission. When I sat on the public accounts committee, I heard Mr. Guité and other people talk about advertising contracts and the methods by which they were done in the Mulroney days. We, as a governing party, chose to look at those days when we were in power. Perhaps the governing party now will look at those days to see how advertising was managed under Mulroney.

• (1035)

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, when there was a concern about Mr. Mulroney, the previous government undertook some investigations and ended up having to write a \$1 million cheque to Mr. Mulroney and issue an apology because there was nothing there.

What happened is quite interesting. The Liberals had to write a cheque for \$1 million that had been stolen from the Canadian people and funnelled to Liberal campaign and political operations.

The member asked about a certain individual. I know the member's government had to write a cheque to Mulroney for \$1 million because there was nothing there, while we know there was something running afloat in the previous government.

The member opposite asked a question about lobbying. It was interesting to hear the member for Saint John make an interjection. He himself was a lobbyist. We are putting a five-year ban on those who worked in government. If the member opposite wants to extend that to opposition staffs, if he thinks it is so important, I would encourage him to make an amendment to the bill and include his own staff.

Let us make it retroactive for the Liberals who worked in the previous government, if the member opposite is saying the bill does not go far enough and we should regulate people who serve in opposition. We are not even proposing to regulate members of Parliament, only those who serve in the executive branch. If the member wants to take this to the legislative branch because he feels it is not going far enough, by all means he should bring forward amendments. However, if I were a betting man, I would suggest it will not happen.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise today to speak to the accountability bill before the House.

First, on behalf of the official opposition, we support the bill. In saying that, I would like to reflect on a number of points.

One is that many aspects of the bill are simply incremental to and build on the many accountability mechanisms that were put in place over the last 10 years by the former Liberal government. While we all believe that these important areas of public policy and trust constantly evolve to deal with new contexts and challenges, we see much of this act in that realm and we will work hard in the House and in committee to support the legislation. Where there are gaps, we will suggest amendments to fill them. Where there are technical deficiencies or ways that we can suggest it can be done better, we will propose those amendments. I hope all members of the House will come together in an appreciation of the public's insistence on high levels of trust and accountability in government, both in the public service and in the political realm.

With respect to that, I would like to quote from Mr. Justice Gomery in his fact finding report of November 2005. As we all take forward this important task of ensuring that issues of public governance are done in an accountable and forthright way, we should remember one his key conclusions:

Canadians should not forget that the vast majority of our public officials and politicians do their work honestly, diligently and effectively, and emerge from this inquiry free of any blame.

This was following perhaps the most comprehensive and lengthy inquiry in Canadian history. It certainly was comprehensive in terms of the amount of material covered, the number of witnesses called and the access to otherwise and previously inaccessible documentation such as cabinet minutes. We have the overwhelming vote of confidence by Justice Gomery in our public system, politicians and public service.

As we go ahead, I think we should keep that very closely in mind, particularly when we think about comments made in the House about the accountability act, such as those of the President of the Treasury Board, on April 11, when he said it was "the toughest piece of anti-corruption legislation ever tabled in Canadian history". I am sure that is so, but what it suggests is the rising of the temperature in the House to have Canadians somehow believe that government in Canada, governance in Canada, is corrupt and that it is an Al Capone-type klepto state and we have to rush in and save the day, like those brave firefighters who are in town today talking to many of us. It is simply hyperbole.

We definitely have to deal seriously with all these issues, as we have been, and constantly improve them, and we will work hard to ensure that is done. However, we should not go over the top. It is a disservice to our public service and it is a disservice to our democratic process to suggest that large numbers of politicians or public servants are corrupt. Justice Gomery did not find that.

Canadians, and all of us in the House, have a treasured governance in our country. Canada is highly democratic, it is efficient and it is respected around the world for its principles and its practices. While we can all make them better, we must remember the base that we are building on is a very high one.

This is a very large bill. It is omnibus legislation. It has been described by the President of the Treasury Board as highly comprehensive, and it is in terms of the broad scope that it covers. It could be probably in three or ten bills, but it is in one. As we go through our careful work in the House and in committee to consider improvements, gaps, amendments that might be necessary, we should remember that one of the features of omnibus legislation is that when we are trying to look at too much at once, things can slip through that may be unintended or may be unbalanced in the way they present themselves to a certain problem.

• (1040)

Particular care is needed in committee with expert assistance and with civil debate to make sure this legislation is the best it can be and that things are not overlooked.

Government Orders

The bill is a continuation in an incremental way of many of the things that were established by the last government. Mr. Justice Gomery's inquiry was one of the most important things done in modern history in terms of an inquiry into the activities of government.

I quote again from his November 2005 report as follows:

Let me also suggest that a system of government that would impose upon itself a searching inquiry by an independent commissioner, armed with the authority to compel the production of incriminating documentation from the public administration and able to subpoena witnesses from every level of society, with a far-reaching mandate to investigate and report on matters that could prove to be embarrassing to the Government itself, is proof that our democratic institutions are functioning well and objectively. There are very few countries in the world where an inquiry commissioner has the power to summon the sitting Prime Minister and his predecessor, to be examined under oath concerning their administration of public affairs and their involvement in what is publicly referred to as a scandalous affair. The fact that the Inquiry has been held demonstrates that in this country persons at even the highest levels of government are accountable for their actions, not only to Parliament but also to the citizenry.

That is an important thing for all of us to keep in mind. That is from the Gomery inquiry, one of the most searching in history, and it was implemented by the previous Liberal government.

Two years ago the previous Liberal government introduced the most sweeping, breathtaking in its scope, political finance reform legislation in the history of Canada, and I would suggest even in the experience of democratic parliamentary systems around the world. The legislation passed through the House. It reduced the ability of corporations, unions and other associations to donate to political action only \$1,000 a year. It was absolutely breathtaking legislation. To go further as this bill would do and ban them altogether would be another significant incremental step, but going from an unlimited amount to \$1,000 per corporation or per union was where the huge step was taken. We will debate and discuss the value of going the extra step of \$1,000 and people will have different views on that. It is certainly not on the same scale as the breathtaking changes that were made in the Liberal political financing legislation.

I noticed in this large bill that while political finance has been addressed with respect to unions, corporations and other associations, it does not address third party advertising. We recall that the current Prime Minister was the head of a small but quite vocal organization called the National Citizens Coalition. Of course that was very litigious in its way to ensure that those types of groups which bear an eerie and dangerous similarity to the political action committees, the PACs, in the United States, and we know the election financing chicanery that goes on there. That absence bears a troubling resemblance to what goes on in the United States. I hope that during our discussions in the House and in committee we might address that absence.

The bill deals with lobbyists. It is a further step over the last 10 years of constant evolution of the Lobbyists Registration Act, the role of the Registrar of Lobbyists, the appearance before committees to discuss issues around lobbying. In many ways the suggestions regarding lobbyists in this bill are very helpful. They are certainly in step with everything the government has been working toward.

As was mentioned by my colleague previously, there is again an imbalance. Lobbyists have to be considered carefully. I take the President of the Treasury Board at his word when he says he wants

to stop people from using positions of influence in the governance system—and we are not just talking about members of government, but in the governance system—to make money as lobbyists to get, I suppose, improper influence. We have to look at the balance of what is being suggested and see whether there may need to be some additions.

● (1045)

There are two glaring omissions in the lobbyist provisions of the bill. For example, one is that a former lobbyist of, say, the defence industry comes into government to a position of great influence over the major area of procurement that the government has, and is now the Minister of National Defence. We have to think that through carefully to see if there is something missing there. It is hard to imagine that person not having more potential at least for the appearance of improper influence than a previous minister of national defence now out of office, out of government and out of influence, I would suggest. We have to be careful.

The second gap is with respect to people in the former official opposition, now the government, who were senior people with influence. The chief of policy to the leader of the official opposition, now the Prime Minister, is a registered lobbyist and represents companies in the telecommunications industry, the transportation industry and the financial industry, all of which are very concerned and are pressing for legislative changes. We have to be careful that we meet the objective that is so eloquently espoused by members in government but perhaps not quite evident yet in the bill.

We are very pleased to see that whistleblowing legislation has been continued. Our previous government introduced this legislation. It was in committee. It was constantly being amended and improved. I think that is a very good thing, but we have to be careful as we create new and more officers of Parliament that we not simply take everything out of the public bureaucracy and put it into an independent commissioner. We cannot have a third force operating here. As we look at the whistleblowing legislation carefully with members of government we will have to make sure that we are not taking roles away from the public administration which must in the first instance work well, such as internal channels of communication and complaint.

The public administration has to be able to work using a broad range of information, all of which will not be evident to every single public servant who may well see wrongdoing where it does not exist because he or she is not aware of all of the facts. We have to have effective internal channels so as to build the protection for people who in good faith—and I appreciate that good faith is mentioned in the bill about 10 times and it is critical to whistleblowing legislation—go outside the system, outside the internal controls and do so in good faith. They should also do it with full information and we need internal channels to make sure that is done.

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The reach of both the Financial Administration Act and the Auditor General's jurisdiction has been extended in this bill and I think that is a very good thing. It is something this party started after the Auditor General's report before the Gomery reports. I think that has been done to some extraordinary length, but we are seeing in this bill further expansion. We must be careful to ensure that the freedom of information or access to information requirements are properly circumscribed, so that journalistic freedom in the CBC for instance is not affected by the CBC being brought within this perimeter or trade secrets and other issues of confidentiality perhaps because they are under investigation not being brought directly into the public sphere.

We should understand that the previous Liberal government brought in wide-ranging automatic release of information around all contracts over \$10,000 which must be posted online. All ministerial expenses must be posted online. This is a continuation of something that we started and which we think is important.

• (1050)

It is being suggested that the Ethics Commissioner and the Senate ethics officer be merged in the bill. There may well be issues of great efficiency, administrative flexibility and cost savings in that, but we have to hear from our colleagues in the other place. They had some very significant debate. I recall a debate where a particular concern was expressed by many Conservative members of the other place. We have to look to our colleagues there for advice on how that might offend their sense of the independence of the other place from the executive branch of government. We will have to look very carefully at that. We must not show disrespect in this House for the other place.

The code of conduct is being legislated. This is the code of conduct that was introduced by the Liberal government and then further enhanced by the Liberal government. It is now being put into legislation through Bill C-2. That is probably a good thing.

It was made even clearer that it was a good thing after the recent defection of a Liberal member of Parliament, the member for Vancouver Kingsway who moved into the cabinet of the Conservative government. While we have had debate previously in the House about floor crossing, it has not been in the context of such an immediate and dramatic change.

We need to have a careful look as we legislate the code of conduct and listen carefully to the independent Ethics Commissioner's review and commentary on that situation where he felt that the spirit, if not the letter, of the code of conduct was broken. He invited Parliament to consider how we might deal with that sort of situation in the future. Therefore, we should be seized of that in the House and in committee.

I want to talk a bit about the director of public prosecutions. There was some confusion in the then opposition ranks between the leader, now the Prime Minister, and the deputy leader, now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the election campaign over what this office was to do, what role it could play in such things as the sponsorship issue. There seemed to be some confusion between them and now we see it in the bill. It sounds to be something a little different than what was suggested by the Prime Minister when he was electioneering.

Let us look at this carefully for a moment. We know the federal government has only a limited prosecutorial role in terms of the administration of criminal justice and the taking forward of prosecutions in this country. We will have to look very carefully at whether we need a whole further layer of bureaucracy called the department of the director of public prosecutions.

The bill is quite accurate and effective in the rules put around prosecution in the federal government and by the prosecution service as part of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General, or the Minister of Justice as Attorney General. It is quite useful to put in there two important things. In fact, they come almost word for word from the Crown Counsel Act in British Columbia with which I and some other members of this side are quite familiar.

It gets to the real nub of the issue, and that is to ensure that there is not even the appearance of political interference between the Attorney General who has a dual political role of being Minister of Justice into the prosecution decisions. The Attorney General is of course the chief law officer of the country and must have overall responsibility for prosecutions. To ensure that there is not even the appearance of improper influence it exists in the bill, and I think the wording is good. It comes from the B.C. act that the Attorney General can intervene on prosecution policy generally and on any individual prosecution, even to take it over but he must do it in writing, giving such instructions, and those must be gazetted, perhaps delayed until the end of a trial. I think that is a good provision.

Where I think we go too far, and which we must discuss, is whether that is unnecessary further bureaucracy. I have heard no concern expressed about the prosecution service within the Department of Justice, or frankly, the actions of the RCMP and working with them.

• (1055)

However, it is important to understand as well that in the sponsorship affair, and prosecutions continue, the federal prosecution service is not involved. It is the prosecution service of Quebec and it is the Sûreté, not the RCMP, which is doing the investigations and support.

In conclusion, the official opposition is very pleased to work hard with the government and with other opposition parties to make this act the best it can be. Let us get it to committee to hear experts. Let us fix it if there are things that can be done better. Let us add things if there are some gaps. Let us not add unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and review to a public service that is already, in the Auditor General's words, very well regulated with a lot of rules. In the sponsorship case of course some rules were broken by some people, but as Justice Gomery said, very few.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make one very brief comment in response to his concerns about layers of bureaucracy and then I would pose a question to him.

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First of all, he should know that this accountability act, which is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history, will not create new layers of bureaucracy. Rather, it would use existing machinery and activate that machinery. For example, with respect to the director of public prosecutions, we are not going to create an entire new bureaucracy. We are going to carve out the existing infrastructure which is found within the Attorney General's Office. We are going to make it more independent.

We believe that throughout the sponsorship scandal there were not enough prosecutions under federal statutes of those parties who were involved in the scandal. The hon. member should know that we are not talking about creating new bureaucracy but rather creating a more independent machinery and activating a machinery that already exists.

Second, this law would create the most independent protection for whistleblowers that I know of. It would give an independent tribunal the ability to restore the whistleblower and discipline someone who has punished that whistleblower through the use of a tribunal of judges who would be comprised when needed. I wonder if he supports that independent role of order power for the commissioner's office in his tribunal in the narrow cases when whistleblowers need protection.

• (1100)

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do and essential in any effective whistleblower legislation would be three things: first, an internal mechanism for complaint, concern and discussion, so that things can be handled if there are misunderstandings and they can be fixed quickly. Second, good faith is required and I think we all agree on that. We do not want people being mischievous intentionally or unintentionally, but it has to be in good faith. Third, we must have a commissioner, a tribunal, however it may be composed and we will be talking about what could be most efficient, that is independent of the administration that it is investigating. That is a base rule for independent officers of Parliament.

I would suggest that we will have to discuss very carefully, and I know the member who asked the question has some special expertise and interest in this, the question of offering rewards for whistleblowers. It strikes me as being somewhat antithetical to the idea of raising the ethical standards by paying people to snitch. Rewards are there sufficiently, so I look forward to discussing this and perhaps hearing some expert opinion on where that has been used elsewhere and whether it has been effective or not.

However, in terms of the first issue of further layers of bureaucracy, there are so many new offices. For example, a procurement office, when in fact the Auditor General said that there have been great increases in the improvement of that. She also said with respect to public polling and advertising in her October 2003 report: "For the most part, we found that the federal government was managing public opinion research in a transparent manner and with adequate controls". So whether we need another office, that is fine, we will want to look at it carefully. There are about five or six new offices, new layers, which may be absolutely essential, but we would want to carefully discuss with the government their utility.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my learned colleague for his speech. My party has designated me its Indian and northern affairs critic. Since the President of the Treasury Board is present in the House I will also take this opportunity to put my question to the hon. member who has just spoken.

How will this bill apply to the first nations? It is an important matter for debate. We have been told this bill would apply to first nations and that all funds paid to first nations must be accounted for. Will that be the responsibility of the department that will verify if the funds are properly allocated and spent, in accordance with established criteria? Or, in the opinion of the hon. member, will the Auditor General be able to do internal audits among the first nations as she does in other locations?

If my colleague has examined or studied the bill in depth, I would ask him to answer that.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and if it was not out of an overabundance of respect for the member and the time that was passing, I would have addressed this in my opening remarks. I think it is an extremely important question.

The bill would extend the reach, as I mentioned, of the Auditor General into further crown corporations and trusts, as well as its application to first nations as a group that receives money in any way, contributions, grants or contracts from the federal government.

The member raises an extremely important point in that first nations are another order of government. They are constitutionalized. There are many first nations governance agreements across this country already, modern treaties. There are not enough and we hope there will be many more. First nations have a special status constitutionalized in our country that is being respected and relationships are being negotiated.

It will be extremely important, as we in committee and in the House of Commons look at this legislation, that we ensure we consult with and hear the views of first nations leaders to ensure that any intrusion into their governance rights is within their agreement and understanding, and is as minimal as possible, subject to the need to ensure that public funds are expended properly.

However, I observe that provincial governments are not included in the ambit of this bill. If I were a member of a first nation, I might properly ask the question: Why should we be brought within it when provincial governments are not? That might raise my level of concern.

• (1105)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member brings great credibility and integrity to the House. It seems to me that in the somewhat self-congratulatory tone that was taken in terms of the previous government's actions on accountability, we are having this debate because of the reprehensible actions of the previous government. We had scenes in Quebec that led Canadians to disparage the will and direction of the nation that were done on behalf of his party and it needs to be recognized in this debate.

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I have a specific point with respect to this bill. It concerns the lobbyist aspect in which lobbyists are meant to note and keep track of meetings and phone calls, but omits one of the most common forms of communication in this place and others, which is e-mail through BlackBerries and other means. I wonder if the intention of the government is true to actually have some exposure and transparency in the way that lobbyists communicate with members in this place. Could he comment as to why something like e-mail has been left out of the mix?

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I will resist the temptation to answer on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board. That is a question that will be properly put in committee, first of all, to see which type of communication should be kept as a public record and what technology or what form of communication should be covered by the bill. It is certainly an important question in terms of achieving the effect of the bill when it is finally amended to address this issue in the most effective way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, to speak on Bill C-2, the first legislation introduced in this 39th Parliament.

Before becoming a member of Parliament, I was a teacher—perhaps this is why I explain bills like a teacher. I would like to back up a little and see how Bill C-2 came to be, where it comes from and whether the Conservatives contemplated and produced it during the fifty or so days of the election campaign or whether the bill comes from a deeper source in our recent political history.

Ten years ago, in December 1996, in the report entitled “A Strong Foundation”—also known as the Tait report—the Task Force on Public Service Values and Ethics recommended that:

—the Government and Parliament of Canada should adopt a statement of principles for public service, or a public service code...There must be means, consistent with public service values, for public servants to express concern about actions that are potentially illegal, unethical or inconsistent with public service values, and to have those concerns acted upon in a fair and impartial manner.

This report, submitted 10 years ago, led to a Treasury Board policy on the internal disclosure of information concerning wrongdoing in the workplace. Commonly called the policy on the internal disclosure of information, it was created five years ago on November 30, 2001. Things change very slowly.

Two years later in 2003, the government, acting through Treasury Board, developed the values and ethics code for the public service. It came into effect and is now part of the public service terms and conditions of employment. On September 15, 2003, in his first annual report for 2002-2003, the public service integrity officer recommended legislation applying to the entire federal public service, including Crown corporations, on the disclosure of wrongdoing.

Still in 2003, in its thirteen report called Study of the Disclosure of Wrongdoing (Whistleblowing), the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates recommended that the federal government pass legislation to facilitate disclosure.

In 2004, we were presented with Bill C-25, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. It died on the order paper when the House was dissolved in 2004. On October 8 of the same year, Bill C-11, the

Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, was introduced. It was introduced in October 2004 and consideration in committee was finished by June 2005. The bill was considered in committee for nine months. This explains my request to the Treasury Board president that he take the time to study the bill.

There was a code of conduct under the previous government. There were rules, there was a bill, there was enough legislation to guarantee transparency, accountability and responsibility.

Before the Bloc Québécois lends its support to this bill, it is important to emphasize that in November 2003, the Auditor General said during her press conference and during her appearance before Mr. Justice Gomery, that the previous government had broken all the rules. It simply disregarded them. The new Conservative government must really understand this message: there is no point establishing cleaner, whiter, more visible guidelines when first and foremost it is a matter of observing the existing guidelines.

• (1110)

It is not just a matter of making new rules. That is the important message we got from the Auditor General.

In my opinion, this bill does not say enough about that. The existing rules have already been broken by the previous government.

The most important question for the public is: how can we ensure that the government will obey these new rules? The formula has been reviewed and improved. Many existing parameters were reviewed and improved. Nonetheless, what guarantee is there for our opposition party and the public that this government will obey these rules?

In her November 2003 report, and when she appeared before Justice Gomery, the Auditor General did not indicate that new rules were needed. She told us that the existing rules needed to be obeyed, as do any new rules. Before indicating that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle and the philosophy behind the bill, it is more important for us to indicate that the Bloc Québécois wants to go further to ensure that these rules, contrary to the existing ones, will be obeyed by the current government.

There is another equally important aspect. I endorse the comments, questions and concerns of my colleague from Papineau on the poor translation of the title of the accountability bill.

Allow me to read a few newspaper articles to say that the first amendment the Bloc will move in committee will be on the translation of the title of the accountability bill.

In an article by Michel Vastel it says:

No French or Quebec dictionary gives the word “imputabilité”, which is nothing more than a bad translation of the English word “accountability”. The Office de la langue française rejects this translation as well.

When we talk about politicians or public servants we say they must “account for their actions”, that they must “be accountable for their actions”, that they have a responsibility and that is “the obligation to be accountable for their actions given their role and responsibilities and to accept the consequences of their actions”.

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This French definition was taken from the *Trésor de la langue française*. I will continue to read from the newspaper article:

That is what the Prime Minister is talking about when he says he wants to restore public confidence in the institutions.

He wants the politicians, public servants and agencies of the federal government to be accountable for their actions to the public. He wants to pass legislation on accountability (of officers, agencies and so forth of the federal government). He wants the latter to have to account for their actions to the public. He wants to establish accountability as a common practice of good government. He wants the politicians, public servants and so forth to be accountable for their actions to the public. We hope that federal writers and translators will replace the French term “imputabilité”, which is incorrect, with a correct French term in the bill introduced in the House of Commons.

I have here another, slightly more unsettling article, by Laurent Soumis if I am not mistaken, entitled:

[The name of the Prime Minister] deliberately chooses the wrong translation, “imputabilité”.

I quote:

[The first and last name of the Prime Minister] is bound and determined to speak français. *Le Journal* learned yesterday that the Prime Minister's Office deliberately disregarded the federal Translation Bureau's recommendation, and used the term “imputabilité”, which is an incorrect translation of the original English “accountability” in the title of the legislation.

Since 1934, the Bureau has been providing translation and revision services for federal departments and agencies, the House of Commons and the Senate and helping the government select just the right word.

The verdict is final. Use of the term “imputabilité” is to be avoided, the government site confirms.

Two ministers—the Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages, and the Minister Responsible for the Translation Bureau—are also quoted and should support this amendment. I believe that my Conservative colleagues should also support it.

• (1115)

Still, there are mainly two ministers involved, one of whom does not sit with us but in the other place, but he still has responsibilities. And so all of these people should immediately rally to this amendment, so that the French language is used coherently and accurately.

That being said, we will therefore be moving an amendment to change the title of the bill. I am certain that language professionals and people who like things to be called by their proper names will be pleased. I also venture to hope that the President of the Treasury Board will very quickly agree, so that newspaper articles, people who make speeches in the House and our very professional interpreters will be able to translate accountability as *responsabilité*.

I repeat, the Bloc supports the principle of the bill, but we want some time, not for delaying tactics, but to study this important legislation seriously and carefully.

I recall that it took over nine months and a number of committee meetings. The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board was on the committee then; he knows that it did constructive work and that this took time.

The Bloc wants to hear the witnesses affected by this bill; we should at least hear the Auditor General in the committee. We should also hear the Chief Electoral Officer, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner—such is the new title—and other witnesses

who may benefit from the bill. I am thinking of the public service unions, for example.

As I said, the Bloc wants time, not to stall, but to study this bill seriously and carefully.

Moving on, we can also say that we are pleased to see a number of proposals that the Bloc has been making for many years included in this bill. I will mention a few, but I will leave it to my colleagues who are going to speak after me to address some of them in greater depth.

I would cite the example of the appointment of returning officers by Elections Canada based on merit. This is something that the Bloc Québécois has long been calling for. My friend and colleague, the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, even introduced a bill to that effect. The Liberals were in power and appointed the returning officers. We said then, as a joke, that there would surely be some Liberals left who had the skills to do the job of returning officer when merit appointments were brought in. There is no need to worry that they will disappear altogether. I am convinced that 10% to 12% of them will be appointed, as competent people. It is only the others that we want to remove so that we can have competent returning officers.

The independence of the registry of lobbyists is something the Bloc Québécois has long called for. We are pleased to see that request incorporated in the bill, imperfect as it is. The Political Parties Financing Act will be closer to Quebec's act, with the prohibition on donations by businesses. The powers of the Auditor General will also be strengthened.

You will permit me a little self-congratulation here. In a bill in the previous Parliament, the Auditor General was given what she wanted. For four years she had been asking for the right to audit foundations, something she was systematically denied by the government in place. With Bill C-277, a private members' bill which was included in the last Liberal budget, we allowed the Auditor General a greater role and enhanced powers. We cannot but support a further strengthening of the powers of the Auditor General.

However, there are a few deficiencies in the bill which we want to consider in committee. In our view, the bill encourages a culture of unhealthy informing by proposing rewards for whistleblowers.

When I was a child, I would read *Lucky Luke*, and written on the pictures I would see, “bounty hunters”. Do we want a culture in the federal government where workers, as well as being public servants, would have the job of bounty hunter? Where they look around to see if anyone is doing something wrong in the hope of supplementing their income? Crazy, you say? Well, there is worse still. At the moment a reward of \$1,000 is being proposed. During the week off, we heard that this could be increased up to 30% of the amount recovered, as is done in the United States.

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● (1120)

We do not want a culture of whistleblowing. We want a bill that will permit responsible public servants who witness wrongdoing to file a complaint and feel that they are protected. That does not mean creating a team of three or four persons who will go out of their way to search out inappropriate behaviour in order to make themselves a little money. I do not think that is the purpose of the bill, and I hope that is not the desire of the President of Treasury Board or his parliamentary secretary.

We shall again study the testimony we received concerning this aspect in the course of consideration of Bill C-11. At the time, the Conservatives were a little besotted with the idea of offering rewards to whistleblowers. But I believe I recall that all of the witnesses heard at that time told us that this was not a good message to be sending to the public service. We shall have witnesses to hear on this subject, and certainly some amendments to propose.

The bill proposes a public appointments commission within the Prime Minister's portfolio, responsible notably for overseeing the appointment selection process. We recently saw who was appointed to this position. When we know that most appointments come from the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office, when we know that it is the Prime Minister who appoints the person who is going to oversee these appointments, we think it is a bit like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse.

The bill proposes that the new parliamentary budget officer report to the Library of Parliament; it also proposes some exceptions preventing the officer from having access to certain information. This is a request made many times by my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, who will have an opportunity to speak on the issue. We can only be partly happy with this appointment of the parliamentary budget officer. Too often, the Minister of Finance hid the overall figures from the population. He told us that we were probably going to have a balanced budget and he stored away billions of dollars about which the members could say nothing. We dare to hope that the appointment of this parliamentary budget officer will remove the veil of secrecy from this part where the surpluses awaited by the government were hidden from us.

The bill proposes that only three out of nine major foundations be covered by the Access to Information Act and by the new powers of the Auditor General. In committee, we are going to ask why they are talking about three major foundations, rather than nine. Is it for organizational, serious reasons? In our opinion, all the major foundations, which together have close to \$10 billion in budget money, should be subject to the Access to Information Act.

In the proposed bill, lobbyists still benefit from numerous loopholes, notably e-mail communications. This will have to be checked and tightened. These are the questions we are going to put to the appropriate legislative committee.

We are going to study Part 1 of the bill respecting conflict of interest. The penalties it provides, so far, are not stiff enough to deter people from placing themselves in situations of conflict of interest. I will give other examples a little later, but suppose a lobbyist working for the government breached this part of the law; he would have the heavy fine of \$500 to pay. A \$500 penalty, for having broken the law

to obtain a contract worth \$200,000 does not look like enough of a deterrent to us. We will look at this in committee.

As for appointments of returning officers, the bill does not provide for open competitions. There should be better guidelines for the office of the director of public prosecutions. In principle, complaints to the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner should go through the members' offices. I feel this poses a serious problem. The Conservatives refuse to budge on access to information. They are asking for a little more time to reform the Access to Information Act. We should understand each other. We want to look further at what is happening.

I mentioned lobbyists. I could close by talking about the Minister of Transport's communications director, who seemed to violate the spirit of this bill at least. But we will have the chance to talk about that again later.

● (1125)

In conclusion, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois—and I think I have been clear—I will say first that the bill should be referred to as the *Loi sur la responsabilité* in French during the discussions. We plan to make a number of amendments to the bill, but we support it in principle. After all, we cannot be against improved ethics and greater transparency. But we want the government to proceed with seriousness and rigour, two qualities the Bloc Québécois identifies with. I can assure my colleagues that I will cooperate fully with them in order to improve this bill at the legislative committee stage.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Repentigny for his remarks. I know that he is an expert and that, both in this House and in committee, he has worked very hard on this issue of accountability.

I have a question for him. I do not wish to debate definitions. In fact, I do not want to talk about that anymore, because there has been much debate about that over several years. The hon. member has acknowledged that whistleblowing legislation was discussed for at least two years. There has also been much talk about other issues for years and years. The Canadian people have had it with all this talk; they want action and results, because results are needed soon.

Will the hon. member support us in our efforts to implement these policies in a timely fashion, so that the bill can go through all stages, in committee, the House and the Senate, before the summer recess?

● (1130)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for referring to the accountability legislation. That could be a start.

If indeed Quebecers and Canadians are tired of hearing about the bill, hence the need to proceed quickly, I would like to ask him this.

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The election platform of the Conservative Party, on page 12, states that, “A Conservative government will... Implement the Information Commissioner’s recommendations for reform of the Access to Information Act”. Like every other member on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, Conservative members, who were in opposition at the time, rejected the former Liberal justice minister’s proposal to examine the Access to Information Act some more. On November 3, 2005, the committee unanimously approved the legislation proposed by the commissioner and asked that the government make it into law as soon as possible.

Canadians are fed up with hearing about the access to information legislation. Why does the parliamentary secretary not intend to proceed as quickly on this legislation as a whole?

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I followed very carefully the comments made by the hon. member and I respect his knowledge of the process and the way things are done around this place.

One of the recommendations mentioned by the member, which does not have a great deal of content associated with it, is the appointment of returning officers. I think we would all agree that when we are dealing with the machinery of government it is important there is balance and total transparency, not the least of which is anything that is associated with elections and the electoral process.

In order to have that transparency and total objectivity during the electoral process, the recommendation has been made that Mr. Kingsley, the returning officer, should make the appointments. What process is the member suggesting would be in keeping with the kind of responsibility that his party and the government wishes to have in the whole electoral process, that transparency?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. One of the shortcomings of the bill is that it does not give enough details about the process. We are scrapping the governor in council appointment process for returning officers and handing the responsibility for appointing them over to the Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley—not to name any names. The process is not clearly defined in the bill.

I would humbly suggest that, for a long time now in Quebec, we have been operating according to a competition process that invites people to submit their applications. Thanks to a process established by Quebec’s chief electoral officer—whose name I have forgotten, but Pierre-F. Côté held the position for many years—we have a totally impartial and non-partisan process. During a competition, after receiving several applications for each of the ridings and—I believe—testing the candidates, the chief electoral officer identifies the candidates who are most competent and capable of doing the job.

We think this is much better for the electoral process than governor in council appointments.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud, on behalf of the NDP caucus, to join the debate on Bill C-2.

Let me say at the outset that Bill C-2, if we do this right, could be the most significant piece of legislation that we undertake in this 39th Parliament and it could be of great benefit to all Canadians.

Let me also say that the NDP firmly believes in open government. We do not use the terms “transparency” and “accountability” as buzz words. We view these as basic tenets of the NDP doctrine, which is why we are bound and determined to make Bill C-2 work.

Let me begin by recognizing and paying tribute to a former leader of the NDP and a former member of parliament for the riding of Ottawa Centre, Ed Broadbent, and the contribution he has made in this debate. I will not say that he crafted Bill C-2, that would be wrong, but I do believe it is fair to say that all the parties in the House have taken inspiration and guidance from the work that Ed Broadbent did in taking note of the state of affairs in Ottawa when he came back to Ottawa and realized that something was fundamentally wrong and that substantive change needed to be made. Ed Broadbent took it upon himself, as a project, to monitor, to analyze and to make recommendations that would lead to genuine accountability and transparency. For that, we owe him a great debt.

The idea of cleaning up of Ottawa, of changing the culture in Ottawa, is a massive undertaking. The public has to appreciate what a project this is. I have heard people say that it is like steering a supertanker to change the culture just one degree to the right or one degree to the left. I do not use those terms politically. I am saying one degree of change in the way we do things is a massive undertaking. Perhaps that is why we see that Bill C-2 is a massive tome. It contains over 270 pages. Some call it K2 because it is as big as a mountain.

It is also no coincidence that it makes a handy weapon with which to beat the Liberals. It is no coincidence that this is as much a weapon as it is anything else because on any page open the bill, it insults the Liberal Party of Canada because it reminds the Liberals of their shame as they sit isolated now on the sidelines watching others cleaning up the mess they created. I say that with no malice, and I will not use my 20 minutes to beat up the Liberals. I merely point that out to illustrate that the reason we have to dedicate the 39th Parliament to issues of corruption rather than moving forward with other issues that might advance the nation is because of the legacy we have been left, the mess we have been left to clean up after 13 years of abuse by the Liberal Party.

The President of the Treasury Board said that his main purpose was to improve the level of trust. That was the one thing I copied down from his remarks in introducing the bill. We stand committed to that same noble goal in improving the level of trust of Canadians. We want them to believe that we are doing honourable things with their money and with their trust, not abusing their trust, not breaking faith with the Canadian people. I will not stand for it. For that reason, we will not obstruct Bill C-2. We will do our best to make it the best bill it can possibly be.

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I will now return to my original point that it is a massive undertaking. It is like steering a supertanker. However we cannot legislate some of these things. We cannot legislate morality or ethics or morals. Those are things we either have or we do not. We can create an environment that lends itself to better ethical behaviour. I would argue that one of the best ways to do that is by shining a light on those things. The access to information law, which I will talk about later, perhaps is the best way to encourage ethical behaviour the way that we want to see it.

• (1135)

Before I get into the substance of the bill, I would also caution that we will not tolerate anything in the bill that may be viewed as bashing or blaming civil servants or trying to say that the reason we are in such a quagmire of maladministration over the last 13 years is because of corruption in the civil service. We will not tolerate that.

We start from the basic premise that no well-meaning civil servant goes ahead and, as the Auditor General said, breaks all the rule, unless told to break all the rules by political masters. The corrective measures in Bill C-2 should not be viewed by any public civil servants as threatening or as a condemnation of the way that they have administered public funds. If anything, our objections are political, not toward civil service.

As I have mentioned, Bill C-2 makes a dandy weapon to beat up the Liberals with; it is heavy enough to do some real damage. It also acts as a perfect shield that the newly elected Conservative Party may use when, as we predict, in time, similar accusations will be made toward that party. The Conservatives can hold that up against the onslaught of criticisms about their track record as the years go on and say that they in fact have tried to correct these measures. It is really quite a gift to put together one document that serves as a weapon and as a shield.

We are suspect of it in certain ways. As much as we support and endorse the idea of introducing a bill that truly will address accountability and transparency, members cannot blame us for being a little suspect of it and a little jaded that there may be aspects of the bill that are more self-serving than altruistic in terms of their purpose. After 13 years of recent experience, no one can blame us for looking for ulterior motives, for perhaps secondary objectives that may be in the bill.

While we would support a bill that is designed to create an environment where the Liberals cannot operate, and that aspect, we feel, is a natural idea, we are also critical that it may in fact be that the bill has been crafted in such a way, massive as it is, that it is designed to fail, that in fact it is impossible to attack this level, these complex administrative issues all in one package, within the timeframe contemplated by the federal government. It may be an impossible task, in which case the document would be more valuable to the Conservative Party as an election platform than as a document that actually passes Parliament and gets implemented.

We will not allow that to happen. We will not play political games with this. Our goodwill is finite, it is limited and it has qualifiers on it. We are willing to cooperate on the condition that it is a sincere initiative and is not being used for some political objective above and beyond its stated purpose.

I will give members an example. We are not paranoid. We do not just invent these things. There are clauses in the bill that give us cause for concern, such as what could be viewed as a poison pill about the Senate ethics commissioner. We know that senators are going to dig their heels in on this. They are not going to accept this readily. Why would the government plant such an obvious obstacle in the way?

There are two possible reasons. One is that it will grind down to a halt there and be sent back here for the six month delay, which the Senate can don and which would coincide perfectly with an election call in the spring of 2007. Away we would go with no new bill and no new accountability measures, but the Conservative government could say that it tried sincerely and the opposition would not let the Conservatives do it. That is one possibility.

The other possibility is that if the government can cause enough upset and unruliness in the Senate, it is a natural segue, then, for the Conservatives to point to that unelected body, the other place, criticize it for its very nature and then argue for Senate reform, which we also do not necessarily disagree with.

The Liberals are in an untenable situation. They are truly boxed in as we go into the debate on Bill C-2, because their best argument when they stand up is to say that the government members are just as bad as they are, that members are just as corrupt as they have been for the last 13 years. That seems to be the only accusation they seem able to make. It would be funny if it were not so sad. The only real criticisms of any substance that they make is to find an isolated incident and try to compare it saying the government is just as bad as they are.

An hon. member: A pox on both their houses.

Mr. Pat Martin: As my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley says, a pox on both their houses.

• (1140)

If that is true, we are critical of both of them. That is no argument. The Liberal argument is no argument. The Liberals think we should leave the status quo because they were corrupt, so therefore the Conservatives should not change the rules because they are acting in a corrupt way too. The public wants better than that. That is no comfort whatsoever.

We will be raising several points as we go through this bill. We welcome the reformation of the Elections Act, but at the same time, as I said when I opened my remarks with a nod to the Hon. Ed Broadbent, the changes contemplated by the Conservative government fall well short of what we have been advocating over recent years.

First of all, as for lowering the contribution rate to \$1,000, I cannot speak against that. That is like giving me a raise in pay because as MPs most of us donate a lot more than that per year to our political party. I will not complain about the \$1,000. It is like a tax cut for me.

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I will say, though, I am critical that the government failed to acknowledge the legitimate points that Mr. Broadbent was putting forward, such as fixed election dates and electoral reform, with a review of proportional representation.

This bill also does not do anything about spending limits for leadership contests, for instance.

Also, it does not do anything to ban floor crossing, which we are adamant needs to be addressed in this 39th Parliament.

On lobbyists, I think most of us are now prepared to accept that lobbyists bastardize democracy. We have seen what happens in the United States, where the lobbyists are running Capitol Hill.

Canadians demand sweeping reform of the regulations governing lobbyists. This particular bill, even though it does speak to the issue of the revolving door for lobbyists and sets stricter guidelines, will do nothing to end the practice of awarding government contracts to the very firms that also lobby government.

Lobbyists' firms enjoy an unnatural relationship with government. On the one hand they are being paid to beat down the doors of government and lobby it on various issues, as guns for hire as it were, but at the same time that same government is awarding government contracts to the lobbying firms, not their customers. This is an unnatural practice that is loaded with potential conflicts and problems.

Our experience to date cries out for reform in this area. I serve notice to the President of the Treasury Board that he can expect amendments to be put forward by the NDP in the area of lobbying.

On the appointments process, some would say the government has failed its first test in cleaning up the appointments process by appointing a well-known Conservative activist to chair the new appointments commission. Granted, it is a heck of a lot better than the status quo, where there was a desk in the PMO where the Liberals arbitrarily made appointments year after year based on a person's Liberal membership card being up to date.

We all want substantive change to the current practice. We are disappointed that we are off to a bad start. Maybe the government has made a mistake, but it has left itself open to criticism over its sincerity about cleaning up the appointments process. That does us all a disservice. If this were just clumsiness, then perhaps it could be fixed, but if it is an indication of something more sinister, if it is an indication that the government is not sincere about changing the appointments process at all, then we have a serious problem with it.

Thus, as much as we are enthusiastic about the opportunity and the potential of Bill C-2, our goodwill only extends so far. We will be the first to criticize its shortcomings on a point by point basis.

I should also point out on this whole appointments process that even though there will be a commission to review these appointments along the lines of what Ed Broadbent recommended, the whole process is still within the PMO. Along those lines, there will be a set of criteria and hopefully the appointments will be made and approved on the basis of merit as they apply to that set of criteria, but the whole process is still within the PMO, not truly independent but subject to veto or oversight.

The PMO is still running the appointments process and we all know that unbridled patronage reminds people of rum bottle politics. It just invokes bad memories of the 13 years of Liberal government that showed us how not to do it, that lost government the faith and the confidence of the Canadian people.

● (1145)

Let me speak briefly to the changes for the Auditor General. This act does in fact strengthen the powers of the Auditor General. The President of the Treasury Board was right to single out the confidence and the admiration we have for the Auditor General's office. Sometimes I think the Auditor General is really the only friend Canadians have watching out for their well-being.

I am very critical, though, on one matter. I will echo the comments of my Liberal colleague who criticized this, and I believe the Bloc did as well. First nations enjoy a unique status. There is no relationship like that between first nations and the federal government. The money that is transferred to first nations for their use is not federal government money being spent by others. It enjoys a different status altogether. It should not be viewed as another organization or agency that is spending the government's money. Therefore, the Auditor General should not have this additional auditing authority over first nations. Let me make that clear. I will speak in greater detail at committee. The NDP is vehemently opposed to this idea.

Let me now deal a little bit with what is not in the bill instead of what is in the bill. As I said, there is much in the bill that we can support. We will be supporting the bill to get it to committee.

The access to information provisions are so key and fundamental to accountability and transparency that it cannot be overstated. Access to information laws within Canada have been called "quasi-constitutional" by the Supreme Court of Canada. That is how fundamental the right to know is in this country.

Sunshine is such a powerful disinfectant, and freedom of information is the sunlight of Canadian politics. It was the culture of secrecy that allowed corruption to flourish under the Liberals all these years. Only access to information laws will in fact throw open the curtains and shine the light of day on the activities of government, so I cannot overstate how disappointed I am that access to information law, in its whole package, did not find its way into Bill C-2.

Actually, I should qualify that: I think there were strong access to information provisions in Bill C-2, but I think they were struck. I think the Conservatives lost their nerve and got cold feet. We all know what needs to be done. There are people on the Conservative benches with whom I have worked for five, six or seven years in developing what needs to be done in access to information. We had their full and enthusiastic support at every step of the way—at every step of the way except for implementing these changes now that they have the authority to do so.

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This is why I am very critical that we do not have comprehensive access to information reform within Bill C-2, although I will acknowledge and recognize that more crown corporations will in fact be under access to information laws by virtue of this bill. Some foundations will, not all, and we all know the Liberals were squirreling away money for years in these foundations, billions and billions of dollars that we have had no access to or oversight of whatsoever. At least these will be subject to access to information.

We still have this bizarre anomaly that there are 246 crown agencies, institutions and corporations. With the addition of these seven generously offered by the President of the Treasury Board, we now are allowed to see the inner workings of about 50 of them. I am able to get access to information on the Atlantic Pilotage Authority, but I cannot get access to information on some massive crown corporations that have billions of dollars of Canadians' money to spend.

We want to spend a lot of time on this. I understand that the bill is going to committee. Sometimes this can be viewed as death by committee. I am running out of time, so I will curb my comments on that.

Let me summarize by saying that the NDP is deeply committed to the concept of open government. We welcome and celebrate this opportunity to be able to make some meaningful changes in the way government operates.

• (1150)

We need to restore the trust of the Canadian people. I share that point of view with the President of the Treasury Board. Nothing will restore the trust of the Canadian people more than the substantive changes, as we view them, in terms of how government operates. If we do nothing else in this 39th Parliament, I encourage my colleagues to make sure that we pass meaningful reform in this regard.

• (1155)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre stated in his comments that he felt that perhaps the Conservatives had an ulterior motive for introducing this massive piece of legislation that will finally bring accountability to government. He suggested that we may have built in our own poison pill to ensure its defeat so that the Conservative Party would then be able to go to the electorate and state that once again there is a need for a majority government because the opposition has defeated the bill.

I want to say to my hon. colleague that I believe he has probably been watching too many Oliver Stone movies because there is no conspiracy theory here. We definitely want the legislation to pass and we want it done quickly. The member mentioned that it would be a great gift for Canadians to have the bill pass before the summer recess, and I agree with that. I will be one of the members sitting on the legislative committee who will be trying to shepherd the bill to speedy passage through the House and ultimately through the Senate.

I can assure the member that there is no ulterior motive behind the introduction of this weighty bill. It is merely to try to put into effect a number of practices, procedures, guidelines and conditions that will prevent anything like the sponsorship scandal from ever happening again in government. I give the member my assurances and I am sure the assurances of every member of this side of the House.

My question, quite simply, for the member is with respect to his comments on floor crossing. He said that element was missing in the legislation and that the NDP firmly believe there should be no such thing as floor crossing. My question quite simply is in respect to a comment made earlier by the President of the Treasury Board. Will he simply confirm that under the stewardship and leadership of Ed Broadbent, Mr. Broadbent allowed someone by the name of Mr. Toupin to cross the floor into the NDP Party?

Will he simply confirm that it may be a little hypocritical to suggest now that the NDP is against floor crossing when under the stewardship of the former leader of the NDP, who they tout now as being the most ethical of all leaders, he allowed someone to cross the floor and sit with the NDP?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the member really cannot blame the NDP for being suspect. We have just come through 13 years of what could be described as an abusive relationship when it comes to being misled about the true intent of bills and secondary objectives, Trojan horses if one will.

My point was not that the bill itself was a poison pill but that the poison pill is in the timing of the implementation. It is of more value on the doorsteps in an election campaign as a promise than is the nuisance of having it implemented and having to curb the activities of the operating government now in power.

Let us not kid ourselves. Members of the Conservative Party are no strangers to the hog trough in recent history either. We do not have to go very far back in history to find some pretty unsavoury practices by previous Conservative governments. It could well be that the elders of the Conservative Party are giving advice to the current Conservative government that maybe we really do not want open government.

My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst reminds me that the most corrupt government in Canadian history, as measured by the number of cabinet ministers led off to jail in handcuffs, was the Conservative government of Grant Devine.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Winnipeg Centre for his speech.

The Accountability Act was brought in because of the Liberal corruption that went on in Quebec over a number of years and particularly because of the sponsorship program. Money was misappropriated to further assimilate Quebec. Let us hope that the Conservatives will not try to use this bill for the same purpose.

I have two questions for the hon. member in light of his remarks. He said that he had some concern about financing for political parties. I would like to know how he would suggest the bill be improved.

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The issue of an informer culture has not been dealt with. The Bloc Québécois is opposed to including a section on informers in the bill. Protecting employees who disclose wrongdoing in the public service is one thing, but we are uncomfortable with the idea of compensating employees for doing so. I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on this.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, we are not opposed to limiting the dollar value of contributions to \$1,000 per person. We believe we are following the Quebec model of no contributions from business or unions at all. It should be that way and that is the way the Liberals should have done it when they first introduced it in 2003.

As for whistleblowing, I share my colleague's reservations about a reward for whistleblowers. In fact, we have talked about it in our caucus meeting and we are opposed to the idea. It is the wrong motivation if money is involved. Any compensation should be based on damages that the whistleblower may have suffered in terms of lost opportunity, et cetera, but not a reward. It is vigilantism. I do not think \$1,000 will change anyone's mind. If they are reluctant to come forward because of fear for their job or something, a lousy \$1,000 would not be enough to motivate them. It is the wrong thing to do. It is the American system and we do not like it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you are doing an excellent job.

I enjoy working with the member on many items related to aboriginal affairs. I think we have the same view and enjoy fighting on those issues.

I would like the member to comment on accountability. Would that accountability include maintaining the Government of Canada's commitments, in particular historic commitments for things like the Kelowna accord and residential schools? In relation to the aspect of the Auditor General, which the member commented on in his speech, my view is that because of Kelowna and land claims we now have a new government-to-government relationship. Was there government-to-government consultation on that aspect of the bill?

The member made a point in his speech with which I agree 100%. The Liberals are isolated over here as the only opposition party. It is really shameful how the NDP and the Bloc have gone over to the Conservative side when there is nothing in the Conservative platform for cities, nothing for drug abuse, nothing for supporting students, nothing for homelessness, nothing for low income people or the social economy, social housing, the environment and women's issues. We may be isolated here but we will continue to stand up for those items. I am sorry for the people who supported the NDP and the Bloc because their members have crossed the floor to the Conservatives and are not standing up and fighting for the items that are missing from this platform. However we will continue to fight.

I would just like the member to answer the questions on those two major historic commitments of the government and the government-to-government consultation that he thinks may or may not have occurred in designing the item in the accountability act related to the Auditor General and the first nations.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are sitting alone in their shame and their disgrace. They are sitting alone because no one wants to be associated with them. It is like in a school lunch room where they are sitting at their own little table and all the other kids are sitting at other tables and there is good reason for it. They broke faith with the Canadian people and shamed themselves. If it does feel lonely in his corner, there is good reason for it.

When people get caught with both hands in the cookie jar and they get busted for it, they will be punished, and I do not think that punishment is finished. I do not think the Liberal Party has bottomed out in terms of the public's lack of confidence and no leadership race will change that as much as the Liberals might hope.

• (1205)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the accountability act, if passed, will be the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. It will end the revolving door between ministers' offices and lobby firms. It will give the Auditor General the power to shine the light of day into every dark corner in her hunt for waste, theft and corruption. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns so that no longer will powerful interests buy favours during political campaigns. It will protect honest whistleblowers from bullying.

The latter point is a particular passion of mine because I represent an Ottawa area riding full of honest public servants who need protection should they ever step forward with information of corruption or wrongdoing. They need to know that their livelihood will be secured.

Our whistleblower protection, that which is provided for specifically in the accountability act, would do a number of things that the previous Liberal government failed to do in Bill C-11. For one, we intend to give full enforcement power to the office of the integrity commissioner. The integrity commissioner would be responsible for protecting public servants against bullying and reprisals. Bill C-2 would give the office of the integrity commissioner the authority to carry out that protection rather than simply the ability to make a recommendation.

For example, under the previous Liberal bill if a whistleblower were to experience bullying he or she would have to go to the employer originally to seek restoration and, if not, to the Labour Relations Board, a body that most public servants with whom I have spoken do not consider effectively independent.

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How likely is it that a public servant will be comfortable taking that risk under those circumstances? Without the enforcement power, the integrity commissioner would be unable to impose consequences on those who bully whistleblowers. Instead, the bully, often the employer, could be required to impose discipline on himself or herself. We do not believe that is a likely prospect. We do not believe that if a department, a deputy head or an employer has bullied a whistleblower that they will turn around and discipline themselves for having carried out that infraction. As a result, there is no way we can fully trust the integrity of the process unless it is made independent through enforcement power in the integrity commissioner's office. In other words, the only way to truly protect the whistleblower is to guarantee independent legal protection from someone who works for Parliament, not from someone who works for the executive branch of government.

History has shown that these independent protections are essential. Let us look at the case of Allan Cutler, a great whistleblower who exposed the Liberal theft and corruption in the sponsorship scandal. He was declared surplus and lost his job. To this day his job has not been restored. Why? It is because he would have to go back to his old employer, the very employer who terminated him or declared him surplus. The process is too political and until it is severed out and made completely independent, people like Allan Cutler will never get full restoration.

The whistleblower laws contained in the accountability act would remove the political interference and give the power to an independent tribunal of judges comprised only when needed, giving them the power to restore the Allan Cutlers of the world. Anyone who believes in the independence of the judiciary must also believe in the independence of this process. It is comprised of an officer of Parliament at the top and a tribunal of acting federal court judges throughout the process.

• (1210)

The accountability act would give these protections not only to public servants but to all Canadians. All employees of crown corporations and all contractors will receive protection. Every private citizen whistleblower will have protection under federal statutory law against bullying.

It is rare throughout the world to see protections that go this far, but we have been willing to institute them in the accountability act because it is the right thing to do. The thousands of public servants who live and work in my riding tell me consistently that should they find themselves in the unfortunate situation of an Allan Cutler, they would be desperate to have these sorts of protections because it is their livelihoods that are on the line.

Too often we have seen these courageous whistleblowers destroyed, their lives and reputations and yes, their own financial security. They do not have the ability to hire an army of lawyers to defend them in courts, and that is why we are giving them the ability to do so through an independent tribunal under the auspices of an officer of Parliament. Throughout that process, whistleblowers will have legal advice furnished to them and they will have the ability to operate in a setting that is open and transparent.

We are removing the cover-up clauses that the Liberals had installed in the previous whistleblower protection law. Those cover-

up clauses allowed cabinet to rip whistleblower protection out of the hands of employees at crown corporations, to cover up information related to scandal for five years, and prevent access to information requests from going there. We are removing those kinds of cover-up clauses because we believe that whistleblower protection is designed to expose corruption and restore accountability, not the reverse.

These protections for whistleblowers are long overdue. The government operations committee discussed whistleblower protection for two years. The Liberal government commenced the discussions on Bill C-11 almost two years ago, but still on election day the bill had not been given royal proclamation. In other words, Canada still does not have whistleblower protection.

I say whistleblowers have waited long enough. The time is now. We need not discuss the same old debates that we have gone over for years and years. The time has come for these measures, indeed all measures contained in the accountability act, to be promptly moved through committee, passed through this House, and sent to the Senate for quick ratification.

I believe any attempt to frustrate the passage of the accountability act will be met with ferocious opposition from everyday Canadian voters who demand these changes. I can assure members of the House that I, as a member of Parliament, will be both honest and vigilant in watching for any form of procedural subterfuge that Liberal senators and other Liberals might attempt to employ to block the passage of this important anti-corruption law.

More broadly, we are discussing the country that we wish to create. We wish to create a country that rewards people who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules, and punish those who cheat, steal and break the law. That is the very definition of accountability: rewarding good and punishing bad. That is what we as Conservatives believe; that is what our agenda is all about.

It goes beyond one single act. Consider the Conservative fixation with lower taxes, and I use that word fixation proudly. Taxes are a penalty on success. Conservatives will cut taxes to reward success by letting people keep more of what they work so hard to earn. We will bring in tax credits for the cost of a student's textbooks to reward learning, tax credits for kids' sports to reward exercise and healthy living, tax credits for public transit to reward clean transportation, and so on.

• (1215)

Conversely, the government will enact tough penalties for criminal wrongdoing. Mandatory minimum prison sentences and an end to house arrest represent new forms of accountability for lawbreakers.

Let us take Canada's foreign policy. A nation predicated on the principles of accountability must reward great strides toward democracy by committing aid and troops in places like Afghanistan, but punish tyrants and terrorists such as Hamas with international denunciation and cuts to foreign aid. That is what accountability means beyond this piece of legislation.

By itself, the accountability act is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history, but it is a theme by which the government, under the Prime Minister with his Conservative philosophy, will judge actions on policy issues ranging from fighting crime to foreign affairs, from fiscal policy to ethics.

I will now broaden my discussion of the accountability act. The act will open the windows to let in all that beautiful sunshine the NDP member has been talking about. He spoke of that sunshine as the greatest detergent to clean away the corruption, to hold to account the wrongdoer, to expose waste, and to rid ourselves of the wrongs that were done by the previous government. That is exactly what we have done.

We are extending access to information into a whole series of bodies of the government that were formerly excluded. Crown corporations, for example, will have new requirements of openness to the Canadian taxpayers. The Auditor General will have the ability to follow the money, to go into organizations that receive large sums of public money, and find out where those dollars are being spent.

Imagine if the Auditor General had been able to follow the money to the advertising firms and even the Liberal Party during the latest sponsorship scandal. Imagine if we had greater access to the books of the great foundations where Liberals have been stashing away billions of dollars for so many years. Imagine all the contractors that have benefited from the Liberal gun registry, which is now \$1 billion over budget. Those types of government expenditures deserve to be subjected to the greatest public scrutiny, and that is exactly what the accountability act seeks to accomplish.

I want to take this moment to thank those who have worked so hard in putting the bill together. In particular, I would like to single out the public servants from the Justice Department and Treasury Board, the drafters who have worked so long and so hard to put together this sweeping legislation in such a short period of time. Their efforts are recognized not only by myself and the President of the Treasury Board but by the Prime Minister who understands the way they have toiled to make their country a better place.

I would like to thank the Prime Minister for having given me this opportunity and the President of the Treasury Board for having carried out his duties with such vigour and integrity.

With that, I throw open a challenge to all members of Parliament. The time for talk is done. We have arrived at a moment of action. We must move swiftly through the legislative process to secure the passage of this law by the House of Commons and refer it to the Senate by early June so that senators will have the ability to pass the law into statute by the beginning of July. This is an enormous task.

For example, the whistleblower protection law of the previous government took two years and never got completely enacted. Whistleblower protection is one of 13 parts of the accountability act and we expect to have it completely passed by summer in approximately three months. It is an extremely tight timeline. That is why there is no time for gamesmanship. We have no room for partisanship.

• (1220)

Those parties that have an institutional opposition to any form of accountability must be served notice here and now that we will make

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them pay a grave public price if they try to hold back the public will, and if they try to stop the passage of this accountability act. The time is now. The place is here. We have been vested with this responsibility and very little time in which to execute it. I call on all members of the House of Commons to rise not only in support of this accountability act but in favour of more accountable society, one predicated on the principles earlier enunciated here.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his articulate views on the act. It is indeed a prodigious act that intends to many things.

I do have two brief comments or questions for a party that is not partisan and yet institutionally against accountability. I found those comments very contradictory. In any event, I have questions concerning the lobbyist act provisions and the whistleblower provisions.

I am concerned that registered lobbyists, as written, must recount all of their conversations whether they are paid or not, with public office holders. Does that apply hypothetically to members of the National Citizens' Coalition or the Sierra Club if they have conversations with political operatives, the people who hold public office?

The second aspect is on whistleblowing. Does the aspect of transparency, which whistleblowing is intended to make certain, apply to government employees who want to roll out perhaps private documents that they are working on, books for instance, suggesting that they should have the right to air in public and who have been withheld the permission from the government to do so? Finally, and I work as the assistant justice critic, in any department, does it preclude, or will it allow in other words, public employees who give advice to ministers, there is no doubt there, from expressing their views on intended legislation at conferences in the proper venue of the public? Is there any element of whistleblowing or speaking one's mind that the hon. member sees which will make government work better?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the first question the member poses is with regard to the recording of meetings between lobbyists and public office holders. I will explain to him why this is so important.

The accountability act stipulates that lobbyists must report every meeting they have with a public office holder and that the records of those meetings, date, time and frequency, will be published on a website so that the public knows who is influencing the government. What if we had a health minister that met 150 times in one year with a tobacco industry? I think the public would want to know about that. We want to know who is influencing our government.

As for his particular question, would groups like the National Citizens' Coalition and the Sierra Club be forced to register all their meetings with particular public office holders? Generally speaking, we are talking instead about lobbyists who are paid and have a commercial interest in advancing a public policy cause, which is distinct from advocacy groups which generally advocate in favour of broader principles such as environmentalism or accountability, depending on the group.

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The second question related to protection of whistleblowers. There is nothing in this law that would specifically restrict the ability of a public servant to speak out on matters of public policy. All the rights that currently exist for public servants to do that would continue to exist after the passage of the accountability act. However, it would specifically protect public servants who expose wrongdoing. The act is very specific in how it defines wrongdoing.

In other words, a public servant would not be able to use this act as justification for blocking a government's agenda, a public policy decision, but rather would be able to speak out if he or she witnesses waste of public funds, infraction of rules that have been passed by the House of Commons, violation of policy, and a whole series of other clearly defined acts of wrongdoing. Those would be protected disclosures. This law seeks to give an independent watchdog the power to protect public servants who make those disclosures.

• (1225)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board for his hard work and the effort that he has put into the accountability act, ensuring we have good whistleblower protection. The accountability that Canadians are looking for is going to be brought into place and it is so desperately needed following the scandal we went through in the last number of years.

One thing my constituents ask me is whether our accountability act will ensure that something like the sponsorship program and the scandal that surrounded it will never happen again.

Could the parliamentary secretary to go into some detail about this and talk about how our bill, with the support of the members of the House of Commons, will bring about the accountability that Canadians so desperately need to ensure that a program like the sponsorship scandal can never be abused again?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it would be intellectually dishonest of me to say that one act of Parliament alone could permanently prevent any scandal from occurring in government. What I can say is that had the accountability act been in place when the Liberal ad scam occurred, it would have been caught much sooner and punished much more swiftly.

I will give some examples. Allan Cutler would have had the ability to go to an independent officer of Parliament and report the scandal, theft and fraud that was transpiring with the sponsorship program. That independent officer of Parliament would have been forced, within 60 days, to report that wrongdoing to Parliament, meaning the public would have known of the wrongdoing within 60 days of the commissioner confirming it. In other words, the public would have known many years before what kind of fraud the Liberal Party was carrying out. That fraud, therefore, could have been stopped in its tracks. All the advertising firms that got money after Allan Cutler had originally come forward internally, we might have been able to have stopped, saving hundreds of millions of Canadian tax dollars as a result.

This is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. I thank the member for all of his work in helping to bring it about.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations in doing an excellent job in your new role. I congratulate the parliamentary secretary for his promotion. He too has a good grasp

and speaks very well. However, I was surprised when he said that the time for talk was over. This is the first morning of discussions on a huge bill, as he said a sweeping bill and one of the largest bills ever, which will have three readings of debate in the House of Commons and three readings of debate in the Senate, yet he says that the time for talk is over.

We just witnessed one of the most shameful things in recent memory in the House. I asked the NDP members to support aboriginal people and they refused. I gave them three choices to support the Kelowna accord, the residential school accord and a government to government relationship and there was absolute silence.

It is incomprehensible why they have abandoned their support for aboriginal people, social programs, the environment and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to support the government.

I have several positive questions for the parliamentary secretary.

I think the three parties have commented that they have problems with the fee to be paid to whistleblowers. Does the member have any comments on that?

I was upset about the member's comments related to the tax cuts. The Conservative government is actually increasing incomes taxes. It is reducing the GST, which will benefit very wealthy people, but is increasing, through income taxes, the taxes of low income and medium income wage earners.

I am glad he is the parliamentary secretary. Could he comment on the consultation with first nations people related to the item of the Auditor General?

Lastly, could he comment on how the Conservatives were such geniuses to get the NDP members to support their party and abandon the things that they normally fight for such as social programs, cutting greenhouse gases and aboriginal people?

• (1230)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member poses a number of interesting, though not particularly congruent questions. I will respond to them, as best I can, one by one.

To begin with, he referred to a fee to be paid to whistleblowers. The fee proposed in the accountability act, for those who come forward and take courageous action to expose waste and corruption, is designed to recognize the enormous sacrifice that any whistleblower makes, regardless of what protections we put in place. An example of where a fee exists is with Crime Stoppers, which has awards for people who come forward and expose a crime leading to a conviction. There is nothing wrong with this principle. If members do not agree with it, they can easily amend it out at committee.

As for consultation, we consulted with all kinds of groups, groups that were never included before in discussions on accountability. We brought their views forward, and we have implemented them in this law.

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I do not think we should be attacking members of other parties who have supported this act. They have stood forward and taken the courageous and bold step that we need this law passed into statutory law by this summer. I hope that member and his party will support the initiative.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Davenport.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on achieving your exalted position and the manner in which you have been adjudicating our proceedings thus far.

I have a comment with respect to the parliamentary secretary's characterization of taxes. I guess he would fundamentally disagree with Edmund Burke who has said that taxes are the price we pay for our passage toward a better world.

However, the subject at hand is accountability. I noted that the parliamentary secretary did not get into the role that members of Parliament could play in terms of heightening accountability, and I will attempt to address those concepts in my comments.

I am pleased to rise today, as the associate critic for democratic reform, to speak on behalf of all Canadians on the issue of accountability in government. I say I speak on behalf of all Canadians because I am certain that there is not one member, regardless of party, opposition side or government side, who does not believe that we all share a moral and ethical responsibility to extract from every dollar of expenditure a dollar's worth of service and value for the Canadian taxpayer. That should go without saying.

My colleague, the critic for our party, has very capably outlined the challenges facing us as parliamentarians to complete the accountability loop that was begun by the previous government. In order to develop some context for our own discussions and those of other speakers, it might be helpful to reiterate what in fact was done as a result of the sordid litany of transgressions, both professional and political, that were investigated by Justice Gomery.

First, as has been mentioned by my colleague and as a result of testimony provided to both the public accounts committee and Judge Gomery, which exposed the weakness in both internal and external audits back as far as 1995, the Liberal government restored the comptroller general's functions for each department and instituted internal audit policies. The role of the comptroller general had in fact been taken out by a previous Liberal government. The order of checks and balances did not recognize any partisanship. If there were weaknesses and mistakes made, they were made equally by both those governments.

That was changed as a result of the experience in 1995 and 1996 of internal and external audits not being followed up. This is important because what occurred was the systemic breakdown in the architecture of checks and balances. This was followed up by the political exploitation of the contract and award system, which is well documented by Judge Gomery.

To be clear, this was perpetuated by a small number of individuals. As Judge Gomery stated, and I quote once again, as my colleague did:

Canadians should not forget that the vast majority of our public officials and politicians do their work honestly, diligently and effectively, and emerge from this Inquiry free of any blame.

The government's accountability legislation picks up in several other areas where the foundation for accountability was laid, such as the continuation of the reform of financing for political parties, strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner, making qualified government appointments and cleaning up government polling and advertising. All of these were works in progress and are worthy of support.

• (1235)

Other parts of the bill have implications that warrant further review and should be sent to committee for further deliberation. I speak of two recommendations that both appear to be unduly bureaucratic. In fact, they cloud the historic and well-tried traditions of our parliamentary and justice system in a manner that is contradictory to the objectives of the government.

I am referring to the government's recommendation to create a "director of public prosecutions". That unnecessarily and even seriously collides with the responsibilities of the Attorney General and even by its definition and characterization implicates on the time-tested principle of natural justice. Those believing in natural justice and human rights and equality before the law should be concerned with respect to the creation of a director of public prosecutions.

The other recommendation that deserves the even-handed treatment of committee is the establishment of a parliamentary budget authority. While the reasons given are laudable, and I quote from the bill, to "ensure truth in budgeting" and "to provide objective analysis to members of Parliament and parliamentary committees concerning the state of the nation's finances, trends in the national economy, and the financial cost of proposals under consideration by either house", the advantages in creating yet another level of fiscal bureaucracy must be measured against whether the oversight capacity of committees as recommended by Judge Gomery and the Auditor General are in fact being vigorously enhanced by this recommendation to create a parliamentary budget authority.

It is my opinion that members of Parliament cannot and should not delegate away their accountability to what is becoming an ever more complex and intricate array of bureaucratic watchdogs. I believe it was Winston Churchill who said, "Watchdogs? Why yes, but who will watch the dogs?"

I would like to close by reminding Parliament most humbly that there was another work in progress that at least to some extent implicated on those abuses that were uncovered by the Auditor General and Judge Gomery. I am referring to the existence of what was described as a democratic deficit, where it was suggested that parliamentarians were either deliberately shut out or naively shutting themselves out of the process of policy development, evaluation and accountability.

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In my short time in the House I have witnessed the efforts of all parties to take back responsibilities from unelected mandarins, lobbyists and the like that had been delegated away. Just one example of this trend was the establishment of the estimates approval process through the standing committee structure. As chairman of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, I also found myself along with members querying whether the committee was being provided with the necessary investigative tools to carry out this responsibility with the capacity to follow through.

Under the mantra of parliamentary accountability much has been, and through this bill will be, accomplished. Let me make this one observation for the consideration of all hon. members. Let us not in combating the aberration of deceit, corruption and maladministration, pervasively create a culture where we forget that our parliamentary system is the foundation upon which the political, social and economic landscape of our country has been built. By all means let us do all within our power to assure Canadians that those parliamentary institutions and values are dynamic, democratic and flexible enough to reflect and protect the public trust.

This piece of legislation, if addressed in both manner of process and substance as I have tried to outline today, will be yet another step in that direction of accountability that Canadians want to see us take. Most important, it will empower their elected representatives to deliver on their great expectation to protect the public trust.

• (1240)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments on the tome that we are now debating. I would like him to explore a couple of places where I did not hear much commentary and that is with respect to access to information.

We spent time on the environment committee last year trying to understand the plans of the government of the day around climate change. We are unfortunately in the same scenario now. We are left with no plans whatsoever from the current government other than some George Bush inspired made in Canada plan.

When I look through this massive document with all sorts of opportunity and extensive consultation that the parliamentary secretary referred to, the access to information component of this proposal is so thin as to be insulting. Many of those groups that were consulted by the government have publicly declared since the issuance of this bill that the access to information is not substantive, is not substantial enough in order to find out the information that MPs need to do their work, that average citizens need to strengthen their requests for information from the government, and not receive those requests back as we did under his former government, unfortunately, with massive blackouts in the documents. There was a great inability to actually access the information required to make sound judgments about the way the government was heading.

Canadians need to know whether he and his party support the level and depth of access to information reforms that are listed here or not.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, there is no question there is a shortcoming with respect to access to information that is even more extreme when it is applied to committees and members of Parliament. In fact the only mechanism that members of Parliament through committee have is to petition for information, which is the same right that every individual, every taxpayer and every citizen in this country has. In a way it is a fundamental strength that we are all equals.

The point I was trying to make is that we in the House have information that may not be available to the public. We may have a hint of issues that are developing that we should not have to petition. We should be able to simply put it on the record and that information should be supplied to committee in an appropriate manner.

The problem we have is that process and that level of accountability will be delayed because the access to information portion of this legislation will be further referred to committee. My suggestion would be that we should focus on it. It is one way in terms of accountability that we can enable members of Parliament to deliver more on accountability to the taxpayers.

• (1245)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me thank the hon. member for his thoughtful comments and the tone in which he said them. I want to pose one question to him and to his party.

Some Liberal members have asked why this legislation does not cover MPs, or the staff of MPs, and MPs who were in opposition but are no longer members of the House. Obviously on the government side we see a distinction between those in cabinet and those who are not.

I want to ask the member to clarify whether he believes the accountability act measures should cover all members of this legislative body, whether it should cover all staffers or whether in fact he believes that it should be limited to those serving in a cabinet position and those in senior administrative positions. Does he think it should cover all the legislature or just the cabinet?

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, it is a very simple answer. The distinction at the present time is that the executive authority has privileged information. If we were more democratic, that privileged information would be less privileged and more generic to the House and to the institutions and structures of this House. If that reform is implemented and that path is taken, then it would naturally follow that there would be no distinction between the executive and legislative parts of the House. The legislation should cover us all as members.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to speak in the House today on the federal accountability act, I would like to begin by once again thanking the voters of my riding of Davenport. It is indeed a privilege and honour to continue to ensure that the people of Davenport have their voices heard in Ottawa.

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Throughout the campaign, the people I met made it clear that their vision of the kind of Canada they wanted to live in was not the one being presented by the Conservative Party. What they did want was a country that is compassionate, inclusive, and one that affords equal opportunity to all Canadians. They want a vision for the young and the old that is both inspirational and motivating. It is a vision my constituents and I share and one that I am proud to promote in this House.

Canada is a great country rich in history. Canada's past is full of visionaries including Laurier, who in his day welcomed to Canada millions of southern and eastern Europeans. They did not speak our language nor comprehend our vast geography, but their contributions to our prosperity are still felt today. Their descendants continue to lead and build this great country. The same thing will happen with those who are new to Canada in our time.

Our first nations people also continue to contribute to the vibrancy of this great land. There are over 50 different languages spoken by native people, most of which are only spoken here in Canada.

Just a few weeks ago the government presented its Speech from the Throne. It is impossible to separate the blueprint of the government's agenda and its flip-flop appointments of recent days from the bill we are discussing here today.

The government's vision of the country is not one that is shared by the large urban centres across Canada. Voters in these cities chose not to elect Conservative members to this House. When we look at the government's agenda, we see a vision of the future that is quite frankly out of sync with the aspirations of most Canadians.

In the area of child care, for example, I believe public policy should support those who are most in need. There are families in this country that are struggling. The previous Liberal government was putting in place a national child care program. This program was about helping those most in need so that they could access affordable child care. The Conservative government's apparent decision to discontinue this initiative will not create more day care spaces where they are needed. It will not serve those who can least afford child care services.

It is remarkable that the Prime Minister and his colleagues across the floor would speak of their dedication to accountability and ethics when their record to date is so inconsistent with their actions since taking office, a staggering comment in view of the record of what is still a relatively young administration.

The Prime Minister and his colleagues in the Conservative caucus have made much about their proposed legislation in the federal accountability act. Indeed the Prime Minister while opposition leader stated last November that cleaning up the government begins at the top. It is really quite astounding how much has changed since those words were delivered last November.

First, who did not watch in disbelief at the absurdity of the Prime Minister's decision to court and then appoint to the federal cabinet a member who had only hours before been elected by the people of his riding to sit as a member of the Liberal caucus? The people of Vancouver Kingsway made a clear and decisive choice as to which vision of Canada they wished to have represented in the House of Commons. My colleagues across the floor can speak all they wish

about accountability, but the truth is that a fundamental principle of our parliamentary democracy is that members are accountable to those who choose them, the voters of their riding. In this instance, the people issued their verdict only to have it completely ignored in less than 14 days. How is this accountability?

Then with hardly a moment to catch his breath, the Prime Minister proceeded to elevate to the Senate of Canada a long-standing personal supporter, simply so that he might also enter his cabinet, in the public works portfolio no less. This action was by the Prime Minister who never misses an opportunity to deride that institution or the process by which its members are appointed.

We were then all witness to a veritable barrage of criticism regarding the Ethics Commissioner, who would dare to even consider a review of the Prime Minister's decision.

The list goes on. Before my esteemed colleagues across the floor begin to attack the ethics of the previous administration, I would suggest a reflective view in the mirror would be more in order.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister has consistently spoken of his concern about the role of lobbyists in the political process. To demonstrate this concern, he proceeded to appoint to the cabinet a Minister of National Defence who is by every definition imaginable a lobbyist for the defence industry.

● (1250)

When it comes to accountability and ethics, we can hardly hear what the government is saying because its behaviour speaks so loudly.

We should also be concerned about what is lacking in this legislation. Where are the references to third party advertising? Clearly the role of third party advertising, which can be virtually unlimited, is a serious issue worthy of our attention. Third party advertising has the potential in any debate to skew the playing field. In avoiding any attempt to address this issue, the government is demonstrating a lack of good judgment.

As we speak about what is missing from this bill, we should also ask where there is any reference to access to information. The business we do here is the people's business. The voters have a right to know what goes on here in Ottawa. They should not have to endure a wall of secrecy. There should be a mechanism in the bill to allow for a full and open account of how the government operates. Instead, we are exposed to a government that micromanages information and is perhaps one of the most secretive administrations in Canadian history.

The truth is that the federal accountability legislation is like much of what the government has undertaken to date. It is narrow in focus and serves a very limited ideological view. It may look good at first sight, but behind its veil there is nothing but smoke and mirrors.

The Prime Minister ran a campaign that was centred on his commitment to transparency and accountability within government. The bill falls far short of the reasonable expectations of Canadians. It addresses some areas of concern but totally ignores others.

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To reiterate, the government's behaviour to date in terms of accountability and responsibility in government certainly leaves something to be desired. This all started before the signature was dry on the oaths of office at Rideau Hall.

Furthermore, on the subject of accountability, what about some of the other areas of public policy where the government has demonstrated a lack of accountability to Canadians?

Recently I have been approached by hard-working families who have worked in this country as undocumented workers. They have built families here, paid taxes, sent their children to school and helped make our country prosperous, yet they are now facing deportation at a time when industries such as the construction sector in Toronto are desperately in need of their labour. We need an immigration system that is more responsive, more compassionate and more understanding of the needs of this country. This needs to be addressed in very short order.

What about our cities? In the last Parliament, for the first time in history, a federal government treated our cities with dignity and respect. Indeed, the current mayor of Toronto often spoke of his gratitude to the previous prime minister and his government for finally inviting cities to the table. Where is the accountability from this government in that area?

We are a young country, but we are also a country with an increasingly large senior population. Where is the commitment to these Canadians who have spent their lives defending and building this country and sharing their vision with generations yet to come? We need to ensure that they are taken care of and treated with respect and dignity. I ask my colleagues now on the government benches, where is the accountability to Canadian seniors?

The arts improve the lives of our citizens, sustain many jobs in this country and draw considerable attention to Canada through a variety of means. The government speaks of its commitment to the arts, but it does not commit the money needed to match its talk. The government has abandoned the previous Liberal government's financial commitment to the arts.

In this esteemed chamber, we make the law of the land. I would encourage all members to remember the words of Cicero, who stated, "The people's good is the highest law". Canada is a country with a rich history and a rich and beautiful natural environment, including the boreal forests, which are a national treasure. We are truly blessed and each day we must be grateful for this great country.

The government speaks of accountability, but we surely must see that there is a great deal of space between its concept of accountability and its actions. It is for this that the government must be held accountable.

• (1255)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that we are debating the federal accountability act today in the House, something which I did not hear the member address at all in his speech. I would like to ask him some very simple and straightforward questions.

Does the member favour the inclusion in the accountability act of restricting donations to political parties, ending the cash donations,

restricting donations, eliminating donations by corporations and unions, and restricting personal donations? Does he support that provision?

Second, does the member support the provisions in the accountability act that would allow the Auditor General to audit all of the government's finances, including foundations and the \$11 billion or so that has been put into foundations?

Third, does he support the provisions in the legislation that would allow the Auditor General to follow the money in order to more effectively do her job? The Auditor General has been performing a stellar job thus far, but this act would allow her even more authority and independence to fulfill that role.

Does the member support the three provisions of the accountability act that I have just outlined?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to share my concern about the accountability of the government. How can he state that the words I have spoken had nothing to do with what we are discussing today? The reality is that we are talking about accountability, not just in the simple terms of what it means in fine print, but in regard to what the government has been doing thus far. It has acted totally hypocritically to what has been stated that it has been doing.

I would state that this is a fundamental issue of legislation and that it needs to be addressed, but also in the broader context of what actions have been taken by the government. I have to say that as a member of Parliament I certainly am quite shocked and astounded by all of the flip-flops of the government over the last while. It is shameful, the lack of accountability.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of comments for my hon. colleague. Obviously we cannot have accountability anywhere if we are not going to be accountable to our constituents, so I would like him to respond to the floor crossing aspect and why it is not in the accountability package.

The other day we heard that the Prime Minister was referred to by his trade minister as having somewhat of a *derrière* of concrete, which I suppose would be the proper way to say it, but he is also travelling to New Brunswick for a \$500 a plate dinner. I am just wondering if the hon. member knows whether the Prime Minister will be travelling on government expense, which is the taxpayer's expense, or is he going to be travelling at the expense of the New Brunswick Progressive Conservatives? I wonder if the hon. member would have any insight into how the Prime Minister will cover off the cost of that travel to New Brunswick for a so-called PC event.

• (1300)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that this dinner is a \$1,000 a plate dinner. I do not know but would hope that the Prime Minister in fact would not use taxpayers' money to get to the event. I think that again would be a total act of hypocrisy by the government. It claims to be an accountable government, but it in fact has acted quite the contrary.

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Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is much in the act that we can all agree with, of course, and much that is laudable, but it seems to me that one glaring exception is the lack of reference to third party advertising, thereby allowing people, possibly even people from other countries, to influence Canadian elections. I would ask the hon. member for Davenport if he has any comment on that glaring exception. It is missing big time.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, in my speech, I raised my serious concern about third party advertising. In countries such as the United States, we have seen third party advertising and lobbyists play a major role in elections. This is major flaw in the legislation and it needs to be addressed.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have spoken in the House with my colleague from Regina—Qu'Appelle as the Acting Speaker of the House. On my own behalf and certainly that of our colleagues, I want to congratulate you on the honour bestowed upon you. It is well deserved and well earned. You have done a great job so far, and I am sure you will continue to serve the House as well as you always have.

I did want to start my speech by mentioning, just before he leaves the House, that frankly I was very disappointed by the speech of the member for Davenport, who spoke previously. I have always been a fan of my Liberal colleague from Thunder Bay who just spoke in the House, and I appreciated his thoughtful intervention with regard to third party advertising and whether or not that should be in the bill. That is the kind of constructive input we are looking for.

Frankly, I was quite disappointed with the speech by my colleague from Davenport, whom I consider a good friend and who I know has made great interventions in the House in the past. He did not mention the legislation at all. He attacked the integrity of the defence minister. He did not mention any constructive criticism or thoughts he has on how to address accountability in the House, except to, without any evidence whatsoever, frankly, attack the integrity of the defence minister, who has given his life to this country, serving this country in the armed forces for many, many years, rising to the rank of Brigadier General serving this country and now sitting as the defence minister. For the hon. member to get up in the House and challenge his integrity without any evidence whatsoever, is, I think, frankly beneath the expectation I had of my colleague from Davenport.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Moore: I will get back to the debate on Bill C-2. I look forward to the intervention by the member from York. If she has any questions about challenging integrity, I am more than prepared to have that conversation.

[Translation]

I rise in this House to speak to Bill C-2, the bill to enact the federal accountability act.

I am delighted to speak in support of this bill, in part because this is the first bill introduced by a Conservative government in 13 years

and also because this bill will make profound changes in the way the government does business.

[English]

Accountability is the fundamental tenet of our democratic system of government, but one that has been sadly lacking in recent times. As we have heard today, Bill C-2 would break down the barriers to an open and accountable government that have been allowed to take root in the federal system. I am proud and doubly pleased to support Bill C-2 because it sends a signal that the government is wasting precious little time in implementing the commitments identified in the Speech from the Throne.

Like all of our communications to Canadians, the Speech from the Throne was clear and it was direct. It confirmed the priorities of the Prime Minister that he set out during and after the election campaign, including our pledge to clean up government. The federal accountability act is the cornerstone for building a new culture in government, a culture of respect for taxpayers' dollars, respect for independent officers of Parliament and respect for institutions of government.

[Translation]

I want to congratulate the President of the Treasury Board for carrying out the Prime Minister's vision by introducing a bill that contains at least 13 major reforms and 60 distinct initiatives.

• (1305)

[English]

These include measures to change the way in which political parties and candidates can be financed and by whom.

Bill C-2 would also tighten controls on lobbying and make the registrar of lobbyists an independent officer of Parliament with a stronger mandate and more resources to do the job.

It would give the elected members of the House a voice in the appointment of officers of Parliament and ensure that future appointments to government boards, commissions and agencies are based on merit, not politics or friendship.

People inside and outside government who expose wrongdoing would be afforded protection, including access to the courts and legal counsel. Information provided by whistleblowers would be made public, except where national or personal security may be affected.

[Translation]

As a result of this bill, the members of this House will get to have their say about the appointment of officers of Parliament and will also be able to ensure that the people appointed to government boards, commissions and agencies are appointed on merit, irrespective of their political ideologies or of whatever relationships they may have.

[English]

The powers and authority of the Auditor General and the Ethics Commissioner would be strengthened under the proposed legislation, as would the audit and accountability function within the departments.

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I could do justice to each of these areas but in the time allotted today I am afraid I cannot speak beyond merely mentioning them. Rather than trying to address all aspects of the proposed legislation, Bill C-2, I will focus my remarks on those measures that relate directly to the mandate of the Department of Public Works and Government Services for which I am the parliamentary secretary to the minister.

As hon. members know, Public Works and Government Services Canada is a large department with many roles. One of its biggest and most important jobs is to act as the Government of Canada's main procurement arm. Public Works and Government Services manages more than \$10 billion in procurement transactions every year, transactions that our government believes must be managed through processes that are fair, open and transparent. To that end, the federal accountability act would legislate these principles so that they are permanently embedded into federal procurement practices. This is just a step in cleaning up government.

I want to mention as well, in the spirit of good faith and, frankly, bipartisanship, that when the sponsorship program erupted the Department of Public Works was shaken to its core. All members of the House were scandalized, upset, frustrated and angry in expressing that anger that we experienced and we heard from our constituents through this House. It would be wrong of me, frankly, if I did not respect the hard work that was done by the member of Parliament for Kings—Hants when he was the minister of public works and the good work that he did in that department, and a former member of this House, Walt Lastewka, when he was the parliamentary secretary to the minister of public works, who did incredible work on behalf of the then Liberal government and on behalf of all Canadians in putting forward a comprehensive package of ideas of how to reform our procurement process.

As all members who have been on the government operations committee or who have come in contact with the Department of Public Works know, the procurement processes of the government have long been challenged and long been criticized. I do not think that reality will ever change because there are always people who are complaining about how government does its business. The fact is that this issue has been studied for a long time. The member for King—Hants did good work on this front, as did Walt Lastewka when he was a member of this House. We look forward to having Liberal members, when they come to the committee, work with us in a good faith effort to try to clean up the procurement process so we do not have the kind of scandals we have seen in the past.

Bill C-2 would also provide for the creation of the office of the procurement auditor to review the procurement practices across government on an ongoing basis to ensure fairness and transparency. When concerns or problems are identified, the procurement auditor would make recommendations on how the relevant department could improve its procurement practices. The office of procurement auditor would also provide a new avenue for addressing complaints from vendors. Exclusively, the office would be empowered to review complaints after contracts have been awarded for goods and services covered by the agreement on internal trade but which were below the monetary thresholds of the agreement, which are \$25,000 for goods and \$100,000 for services. The procurement auditor would also review complaints about the administration of contracts.

Finally, the office would establish and manage an alternative dispute resolution process for contract disputes.

I want to assure all hon. members of the House that the procurement auditor's mandate would not overlap or duplicate the mandates of other positions, such as the Canadian International Trade Tribunal or the Offices of the Auditor General or the Comptroller General. As well, to ensure the independence of this position, the procurement auditor would not report to the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Government Services but directly to the minister. As part of this reporting arrangement, the procurement auditor would submit an annual report to be tabled in Parliament.

Another important element of the federal accountability act related to procurement is our commitment to develop a code of conduct that will clearly outline for employees and suppliers what is acceptable conduct when contracting with the Government of Canada. This code will consolidate a number of existing measures related to procurement fairness, openness and transparency into a comprehensive statement of expectations. Consultations will begin in the near future with a range of affected stakeholders with the goal of having the code of conduct in place by this coming fall.

The code will provide a clear statement of obligations of contractors when doing business with the Government of Canada. For example, it will reinforce existing prohibitions against paying, offering or accepting bribes and will require contractors to disclose all commissions and similar expenses paid in connection with the contract. Integrity provisions will be included in bid solicitation and contract documents to provide a clear statement of the existing obligations of contractors.

● (1310)

[*Translation*]

The federal accountability act also broadens the reach of the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises. As the Minister recently announced, six new satellite offices for small and medium enterprises will be established in the four corners of Canada, so that businesses in all of the regions will be able to obtain support.

The staff in those new offices will ensure that small and medium enterprises have access to government contracts, as changes are made to federal procurement practices.

[*English*]

The government's commitment to reform the procurement process extends to all types of purchasing, including the procurement of advertising and public opinion research. Accordingly, the federal communications policy will be amended to ensure that the principles of openness, fairness and transparency are applied to all procurement of federal advertising and public opinion research. As well, our government will review the definition of advertising to ensure that it is properly distinguished from other related services, such as public relations or events management.

Government Orders

Bill C-2 would also make it mandatory that the results of all public opinion research commissioned by the Government of Canada be submitted in writing, that a copy be filed with the Librarian and Archivist of Canada and that contract information and executive summaries of completed projects be posted on the Internet.

Last but certainly not least, our government will appoint an independent adviser to review, assess and report on Government of Canada procurement practices and public opinion research. This review will include, but not be limited to, procurement issues raised in the Auditor General's report of November 2003.

[*Translation*]

That position will not be permanent. The independent adviser will be appointed only for a period of six months. However, he or she will provide Canadians with the assurance that the government is making the best use of the public funds spent on public opinion research contracts and that those contracts are not awarded or used for partisan or political purposes. The independent adviser will report to the Minister of PWGSC.

Of course, as is consistent with the spirit of accountability that has newly emerged in Ottawa, his or her findings will be made public.

[*English*]

Even on their own these reforms of procurement and public opinion research and advertising will make Bill C-2 worthy of our support. However I remind hon. members that they are part of a much larger package designed to restore trust in government. Every other element of the proposed federal accountability act is equally deserving of support.

All parties in the House have acknowledged the need to improve accountability in government. Now hon. members have the opportunity to put their words into action by voting in favour of Bill C-2, the federal accountability act.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his comments and in the way he has addressed this issue. I speak for myself when I say that by and large I would support most of the legislation. Any time we have more transparency, more openness and more clarity it is probably a good thing.

However when we are dealing with the issue of accountability I remind the member that this is in fact an institution of accountability. Our main job here is to pass legislation, to approve appropriations and supply but perhaps most important is to hold the executive, the government, to account.

When we are dealing with accountability we have to look at the pith and substance of the whole issue. One of the most flagrant violations that has happened in generations has been the Prime Minister's recent appointment of his campaign co-chair to the Senate and subsequently as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. The person is walking around Ottawa spending \$40 million a day. We do not know where he is, what he is doing or, in fact, even what he looks like. That is a total violation of any principle of accountability.

Dealing with this whole issue of accountability, when is this spectacle going to end?

● (1315)

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, the line about people in glass houses not throwing stones is interesting. The reality is that after the election campaign the Prime Minister made the determination, and in my judgment the correct one, that Canada's second largest city, the city of Montreal where we did not win any seats, should be represented at the federal cabinet table. He made that determination and appointed a well-respected business person from the city of Montreal to the cabinet table.

After making that decision he understood that members, such as the member opposite, in good faith would have concerns about issues of accountability. He therefore made the member, who would be sitting as the Minister of Public Works, available for accountability in the other chamber, in the Senate where there is a question period at the same time as we have a question period in this chamber.

Unlike the Liberals who in the past appointed members of cabinet who were not sitting members of the House nor sitting members of the Senate and who were not available for questions nor accountable in our regular parliamentary processes every day, this Prime Minister decided that Michael Fortier, the Minister of Public Works, should be available for accountability in Canada's Senate.

If the member has already forgotten, the Senate has 66 Liberal members of Parliament and 24 Conservative members of Parliament so the opportunity for accountability there is certainly more than present. In fact that is precisely what the Prime Minister tried to do which was to strike the right balance in ensuring Canada's second largest city had representation in cabinet but that members from other political parties had the opportunity to question him and hold him accountable in Canada's Senate.

If the member is so upset with this practice, if he thinks it is so fundamentally opposed to democracy, I am surprised that he is a member of the Liberal Party. In Canadian history 86 people have sat in cabinet and not been elected members of Parliament, including the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier who is running for the Liberal Party leadership. If he is so opposed to this practice I am sure he will make his views known to that member as he runs for the leadership of his own party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the parliamentary secretary and concerns an excerpt from the accountability action plan. On pages 8 and 9, under the heading "Strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner", we can read the following about the process. This federal legislation will:

give the public the ability to bring forward, through a Member of Parliament, information to the Commissioner for the Commissioner's consideration and action, as appropriate. Members of Parliament will be required to attest by oath or affirmation that, in their opinion, public complaints are well founded. The Commissioner will have the authority to reject complaints deemed to be frivolous, vexatious, or made in bad faith.

I would like my hon. colleague from the Conservative Party to tell me how he thinks this plan can be put into practice. It might sound appealing in theory, but as far as I am concerned it is almost totally impracticable.

Government Orders

Allow me to explain; it will take but a minute. A citizen in his riding goes to him about some potential wrongdoing. Let us say it happened in an employment centre without any of the staff noticing. That is what is called the conspiracy theory. But the citizen does notice and goes to his member, who then has to determine whether the complaint is well founded or not. Should he find it admissible, he refers the matter to the Ethics Commissioner, who in turn finds it inadmissible.

We have to get elected in our ridings and we have to deal on a daily basis with constituents. I would like the parliamentary secretary to tell me how he intends to make this impracticable theory practicable?

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I cannot see exactly the problem my hon. colleague appears to have with that particular part of the bill. If he could elaborate further and submit plausible situations that could take place in the future, we can look at them.

Nevertheless, I appreciate his concerns with this bill. We could discuss them in committee, after it has been established by this Parliament.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have always appreciated the parliamentary secretary's thoughts on such issues.

I need to follow up on the glass houses and stone throwing that I watched a little earlier in this place. No member of the New Democratic Party, as a principle, sits in caucus and in the Senate. This measure of accountability, and it is a stretch to call it that, in terms of placing an unelected person first into that other place and then into cabinet, while there might have been some process that the Liberals and former Conservatives have used in the past, I do not understand why he is able to associate himself to that in clear conscience knowing that is not an accountable house.

I have had many discussions with him and his colleagues about the lack of accountability and success that place has had in directing this country and having any bearing on the public policy or debate that goes on in this country, such as the effectiveness every once in a while of gophers popping their heads up and complaining about the GST or some other thing.

The idea that such a vital department as his is to be represented by somebody to whom I am unable to ask an accountable question on the floor of the House of Commons, the place where the Canadian people are represented, I still cannot square the circle and understand how that represents anything other than a moment of hypocrisy in this accountability push.

• (1320)

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe that this is an issue of being “damned if you do, and damned if you don't”.

As I said, the Prime Minister made the determination that Canada's second largest city should have representation at the cabinet table. The member opposite apparently is upset about that and does not believe in that. Had we not appointed Michael Fortier to represent Canada's second largest city, I suspect that members of the House, maybe not that member, would be rising in their place to ask how the government could pretend to speak on behalf of all

Canadians when nobody was representing the city of Montreal? There would be no voice for the city of Montreal either in the House or in the Senate.

We have consistently said that we believe in reforming the Senate so that it would be elected. Michael Fortier will be a member of the Senate for the duration of this Parliament and has said that he will be a contestant in the next election campaign. The Prime Minister has signalled that he has every intention of passing legislation to allow Senate elections in the next federal election campaign and Senator Fortier will be a contestant in that campaign. He will contest a seat in this Parliament for the region of Montreal. We have been consistent on that.

The member opposite can be upset about that, but the fact is that this practice has happened frequently in Canadian history. We are doing it with a measure of accountability greater than what the Liberal Party did. We are doing it in a way that will ensure that the city of Montreal has a strong voice at the cabinet table. We are more than prepared to go into the next election campaign with Michael Fortier on our team.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today on Bill C-2, which is very lengthy. It contains more than 317 sections, amends 43 existing acts and creates, if memory serves, two new ones.

First of all, I would like to say again that the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill. Ethics were at the very heart of the last election campaign, which chased a corrupt government from power. Liberal Party government was replaced by Conservative Party government. Now it is up to the Conservatives to prove themselves.

We think, as well, that this bill picks up to some extent on certain aspects of the work of the Gomery commission. The Bloc Québécois was an active participant, of course, in the work of this commission. The Bloc made some recommendations, which should now be implemented.

I should also add a commentary. My colleague from Repentigny just did so. We want the government to review the title of this bill. We have to get beyond semantics. “Projet de loi sur l'imputabilité” seems to us to be virtually a literal translation of Federal Accountability Act. If the Conservative government has any respect for the French name of this bill, it should take a serious look at the title and replace it with a much more accurate translation: *loi sur la responsabilité*. Pushing things to the extreme, one could maybe say “*loi sur la responsabilisation*”, because that is what this bill is really about. Insofar as we are concerned, I would like to announce right away that the Bloc Québécois will probably introduce an amendment so that we can speak henceforth of the “*loi sur la responsabilité*”.

In addition, the Bloc Québécois is pleased, of course, about certain things that have been part of its platform since 1993. I could pay tribute to the Bloc pioneers who sat here before the massive arrival of a strong contingent of Bloc members between 1990 and 1993. One of the Bloc's traditional demands had to do with the process for appointing returning officers. There are some references to this in the bill.

Government Orders

I should repeat in the course of my comments that the Bloc Québécois feels that this bill needs improvement.

Certain things need to be corrected and improved. Even though particular sections pay lip service to some of the Bloc's traditional demands, we think that much clearer commitments are needed from the government. I would like to speak now, in this regard, about the appointment of returning officers.

• (1325)

In the last Parliament, I tabled Bill C-312 on behalf of my party, which required that a competition be held, as provided for in section 2.1 of the Public Service Employment Act. This competition for the appointment of returning officers would replace the traditional process, which has been in place since about the beginning of this institution, whereby such appointment is a prerogative of the Governor in Council. Let us not mince words. Governor in Council means the prime minister's office and the minister responsible. They are the ones who make the political appointments.

The Bloc Québécois is asking that returning officers be appointed following an open and transparent process. And the Bloc will see that this is reflected in this bill. So the positions will be advertised in the newspapers and anyone who thinks he or she has the necessary skills will be able to apply. Furthermore, a selection board would be formed to choose the ideal persons to occupy the positions of returning officer in the 308 electoral districts of Canada.

I sit on the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The Elections Act provides that the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada shall be accountable for management of the last election. As for the returning officers—this has been a traditional demand of Mr. Kingsley, who is also critical of the current process for appointing them—at present, the returning officers are friends of the government and persons who have worked in electoral organizations and are appointed through patronage.

Far be it from me to allege that the 308 returning officers are incompetent. However, one returning officer who is not competent to manage the democratic electoral process is one officer too many. We have seen some horror stories—and if there were consensus, I could recount them until midnight. So it is important to have competent people who are free of all political affiliation.

Bill C-2 does not provide for open competitions to select returning officers. I was just saying that the Bloc feels that this bill can be refined and that we will have to improve on it. The Bloc also believes it imperative to add provisions whereby returning officers can be chosen through an open and transparent process.

I would like to draw attention to something else. The bill speaks of the financing of political parties. Let us talk specifically about leadership races. There is at present a political party on this side of the House, namely the Liberal Party of Canada, which is in the midst of a leadership race and which will have to choose its leader by the end of the year. Unfortunately, this bill mentions no restriction as regards a cap to financing during a leadership race. The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that, in not preventing candidates for the leadership of political parties from contracting large personal loans, the bill will make it possible to circumvent the restrictions on individual contributions. If this is not given a framework and

guidelines, it will encourage ill-advised persons to do indirectly what the bill does not permit them to do directly. I therefore announce to the government that the Bloc Québécois will want to ensure that this point is clarified.

• (1330)

We are prepared to study the problem. We do not wish to prevent candidates from taking personal loans, but we say that this should be overseen and should be part of a process, once again, that complies with the rules for financing political parties.

Another element is the whole question of following up on the Gomery Commission. The Bloc Québécois took an active part in the proceedings of the Gomery Commission, through our lawyer. Actually, we took an even more active part; we submitted recommendations at the request of Justice Gomery. So we, the Bloc Québécois, did not just have a passive role; we proposed recommendations.

I remind you that the Bloc Québécois was the only party to propose a report to Commissioner Gomery with recommendations for improving responsibility. You will understand, when I talk about improving responsibility, that I am referring to the faulty French title of the federal accountability act. But that was the goal of these recommendations. We, the Bloc, submitted 72 recommendations to Justice Gomery. Without repeating them all, I am going to give more or less the chapter headings or highlights.

One of the suggestions was about recovering the sponsorship money, which the member from Outremont qualified as “dirty”.

I put the question to the government: where do we stand in the process of recovering the dirty money? Has there been anything new since the Conservative government came to power on January 23?

Also, in our recommendations, we suggested giving more powers and resources to the officers of Parliament. For instance, we insisted a lot on intensifying the powers of the Auditor General. We also suggested some amendments to the Access to Information Act, the Lobbyists Registration Act and the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act .

By the way, the point of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act is not solely, not all in fact, to provide \$1,000 rewards for whistleblowers. Indeed the act does provide \$1,000 rewards for whistleblowers. I believe my colleague from Repentigny made these comments in his speech; the Bloc Québécois is opposed to compensating whistleblowers.

It is one thing to protect whistleblowers; it is quite another to develop a whistleblower culture with monetary incentives. Whistleblowers, if they wish to do their job properly, will not find any motivation in the \$1,000 cheque associated with it. They expect protection from the government and from the management of their department or agency, so that they are not silenced, dismissed or harassed.

Let us assume that the very large majority of public servants in Quebec and Canada, who work in the federal public service, are primarily competent and honest individuals who want to do their job honestly, but who do not accept abuses of the system.

Government Orders

• (1335)

Unfortunately they are often muzzled, implicitly or explicitly, because they do not have this protection.

We must avoid generalizations. There has been some wrongdoing by some public servants, but it is not the case that all public service employees are dishonest. We must avoid generalizations, and that applies to public servants as it does in any other area.

It will be recalled that Justice Gomery made a lengthy case for the accountability of every individual to be recognized throughout the hierarchy. The idea is if each person's role is recognized, there will be no abuses of authority, no dirty tricks, no shenanigans, and that this, rather than whistleblowing, is how fraud will be controlled.

When a superior supervises the work done by a subordinate—excuse the expression—or a co-worker, and the superior's superior supervises, and the superior's superior's superior supervises, we call this line of authority control. This will be much more effective than handing out \$1,000 cheques to encourage whistleblowing.

There is another thing: the Bloc Québécois made formal recommendations, out of its 72 recommendations, dealing with making individuals appointed by the government more accountable. In addition, the Bloc Québécois platform made various recommendations to the same effect, which it identified as priorities.

Certainly I am running out of time and we could address various things, but I will simply remind you that we are pleased to see that some of the proposals made by the Bloc Québécois have been incorporated in Bill C-2. I spoke earlier about the merit-based appointment of returning officers by Elections Canada. I could talk about the independence of the lobbyists registry.

Lobbyists are a powerful force here in Ottawa. We need only look at how they lie in wait for a change in government to see how true this is: some lobbyists painted themselves one colour while members of the same lobbying firm painted themselves another colour. They want to be certain that they make everyone happy, they buy drinks all round, and they know that the key to success as a lobbyist is to be connected. We even have a Minister of Defence who is a former lobbyist, whose clients were very well known. That is an illustration of the important role lobbyists play.

The Bloc Québécois has been making another recommendation for several years: we see that the new Political Parties Financing Act is going to be very similar to Quebec's legislation, by introducing corporate donations. And there is one more thing that the Bloc has traditionally called for: strengthening the powers of the Auditor General.

In conclusion, because I have less than a minute left, the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of the bill, which should be called, in French, *Loi sur la responsabilité*. As well, the Bloc Québécois will study the bill in depth and refuses to go along with any bulldozing.

• (1340)

It refuses to pass this bill, which has 317 clauses, with any undue haste. The Bloc Québécois will be making constructive proposals to improve this bill.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a short question for my hon. colleague. But first, I want to say that it is difficult for me to speak French, but I will do my best.

The people of Montreal have elected no one on the government side. However, because a need existed, the Prime Minister had to provide someone an opportunity to be a cabinet member.

I would like to hear the hon. member on that. There was a movement in Montreal, saying that it was necessary for the Prime Minister to have someone as a voice in government. The system has allowed someone to be appointed to the Senate, but that person does not sit here, in the House. That person cannot take part in debates or discussions or interact with other members.

Is that acceptable to the people of Quebec?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Indeed, under the democratic choice made in the January 23 election no member of the Conservative Party was elected in the greater Montreal area. Accordingly, the people of greater Montreal, including the areas to the north and south of the city, chose other candidates. It so happened that most of the candidates chosen were from the Bloc Québécois, and I am proud to work as a team with them, especially our ten new colleagues.

The appointment of Senator Fortier as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services confirms what the Bloc often said during the election campaign, which is that the Liberals and the Conservatives were essentially the same. Do as I say, not as I do.

When they are in opposition, they criticize the government. When they are in government, they forget what they said in the past. Hundreds and thousands of pages of speeches would have to be produced to see what the Conservative members and the current Prime Minister, while he was the Leader of the Opposition, said at the time. They criticized the practice of appointing people to the Senate as a way of compensating friends. At the first opportunity, on February 6, as the members of his cabinet were being sworn in, the Conservative Prime Minister appointed an unelected person to the position of Minister of Public Works and Government Services. This department has a budget of several billion dollars.

How can we in opposition put questions to him? I heard the parliamentary secretary say that questions could be put to Senator Fortier in the Senate. Does that mean that the Bloc Québécois will seek the unanimous consent of the House to go and put questions to Senator Fortier in the Senate? That is crazy. The Conservatives behaved exactly like the Liberal government they criticized.

The Prime Minister appointed a Senator, someone who had not been elected, as the minister responsible for the Montreal area. The department is a very important one, which generates billions of dollars in contracts, which have been put out of reach of questions in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

• (1345)

[English]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has talked about the importance of lobbyists to this place, and there is no question that lobbyists are important. They bring to our attention information and the position of groups wishing to have legislation passed. The problem is that this place has become too lenient as far as releasing very important and confidential information. The Dingwall affair shows how low this place has really become. It is an absolute disgrace what happened in that situation.

We have ministers and senior government officials who have very confidential and important information. What is wrong with tightening up the rules to stop this disgrace from happening in this place?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, when we are in our constituency offices on Fridays, Mondays or during recesses, like the one we just had, do groups that want to meet with us have to have lobbyists to make an appointment?

Unemployed people who find the current employment insurance system inadequate do not need lobbyists to meet with us in our constituency offices. Organized groups and associations, such as the Canadian Real Estate Association or the Association québécoise des pharmaciens propriétaires do not need lobbyists to gain access to members. Therein lies the problem.

I will respond to my colleague by way of a question. The current Minister of National Defence was a lobbyist for Hill and Knowlton for close to ten years. From 1996 to February 2004, he represented the interests of the following companies: BAE Systems, General Dynamics, United Defense, Raytheon, ADGA Group, Irwin Aerospace, Airbus, Orion Bus Industries, Galaxy Aerospace Co., and Bennett Environmental. This is our current Minister of National Defence. Are some of the companies I just listed involved in the defence sector? Will the minister be able to remove his lobbyist hat and meet with various groups without being influenced by his history as a lobbyist from 1996 to 2004?

As I was saying, this is another example of the important role that lobbyists play in this House. The Prime Minister made a mistake when he appointed a former lobbyist involved in the defence sector as Minister of National Defence.

• (1350)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

Since January 23, we have had a new Conservative government, a government that has been turning a new leaf, a leaf that we wish to turn together with the Canadian people, in trust and respect. This is why I wish to say today that I support the federal accountability act, a bill designed precisely to restore the trust of Canadians in their government and their federal institutions.

During the election campaign, I put the question to the people of Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins to find out what they expected of the government. It is very simple. They told me they expected the

government to manage public funds appropriately. This is not asking too much. This is not, however, what the previous Liberal government accustomed us to, with a long list of scandals and gross wastes of public funds. We need only think of the gun registry, the sponsorship scandal and so on.

I am proud to support this bill since it is in keeping with the Quebec tradition of cleaning up political behaviour, a legacy from a former Quebec premier, René Lévesque, a great democrat. It is tangible evidence of the contribution by Quebec society to the advancement of the Canadian community as a whole in a context of lasting partnership.

The federal accountability act presented in the House by my colleague in the Privy Council follows up on the Conservative commitment to clean up government practices, something which neither the Liberals nor the Bloquistes could move forward.

This act aims to go from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. It intends to make everyone accountable, from the Prime Minister to public servants, including ministers and members, to the Canadian people, those whom we represent here.

This accountability act takes up the commitments made by our party during the election campaign. This is why our government is proposing leadership to "Stand up for Canada" when it comes to honesty and integrity in the government. This is therefore a first legislative measure aimed at doing a thorough cleaning. These are actions following on promises.

We need actions to regain the confidence of the people of Canada and Quebec in their government.

[English]

Confidence between Canadians and their federal government is crucial. Our government intends to stand and deliver on that critical matter by reforming the financing of political parties; banning secret donations to political candidates; strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner and toughening the lobbyists registration law; ensuring truth in budgeting; making qualified government appointments; cleaning up the procurement of government contracts, polling and advertising; providing real protection for whistleblowers; strengthening access to information legislation, the power of the Auditor General, auditing and accountability within departments and agencies; and creating a director of public prosecutions.

We have a great piece of legislation and the ground upon which to turn a new leaf.

[Translation]

The principle underlying this act is very simple: the taxpayers are entitled to know how their money is being managed.

No more donations from big corporations and pressure groups, no more donations to secret trusts for candidates.

The Auditor General is the one who ensures that taxpayers' money is carefully managed. Our Conservative government will provide her with the tools and means to fulfill her role: ongoing review of departmental grant programs, more power for auditing not only the government, but also the organizations and individuals who receive grants.

Statements by Members

Where the Liberals hid money from public scrutiny, the Conservative government will broaden access to the Information Act so that crown corporations and foundations can also report to taxpayers. Is knowing how their money is being managed not the least taxpayers should expect?

We must not wait for scandals before acting. This is why the new accountability act will strengthen internal audit functions within departments and governance structures.

I have been a public servant myself; I have worked alongside these competent and dedicated people, who deserve our confidence and our respect. We are going to give them the tools to ensure that they are protected if they provide information about wrongdoing, to clarify roles and responsibilities, notably those of deputy ministers, and to establish a “uniform and transparent” process for the appointment of senior officials.

As an engineer, I also understand the importance of promoting principles which commit the government to making tendering processes fair, open and transparent, free of all undue political interference. We depend on this to maintain the competitiveness of our businesses and the integrity of our institutions.

We will also be developing a code of conduct for procurement, which will apply to suppliers and public servants. And we will be appointing a procurement auditor, who will examine the practices of the entire government and help it to resolve disputes.

Over the past year, many Quebeckers were shocked and outraged by the crooked dealings that the Gomery commission brought to light. Today, the Conservative government can say to all Canadians that it is at their service, not at the service of friends of the party in power.

The echoes of the sponsorship scandal are still fresh in our memory, and they are compelling us to action. If the Liberals have sullied the integrity of the government, the Conservatives will restore its integrity. It is spring, and time to do some major housecleaning: let us do a big spring clean-up in Ottawa!

Our hands are free and we want to change things.

It is a matter of trust. We put our trust in our elected officials, our public servants, and the employees who act in the best interests of Canadians. It is a bold vision that we want to give shape to, in collaboration with the other parties in the House. So our government intends to work with parliamentarians to bring about these changes.

As the Right Hon. Governor General said in the Speech from the Throne, “Effective checks and balances are important, but they are not enough. The trust of citizens must be earned every day”.

Therefore we must remember that nothing is forever; integrity is earned, and earned every day. The federal accountability act is a step in that direction. That is why I am proud to support it as a Conservative member.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1355)

[English]

ALTERNATIVE FUELS

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time speaking in the House, so let me begin by thanking the voters who elected me as their representative and who gave me this opportunity to represent them to the best of my intentions, including the firefighters from Surrey and North Delta who are in the gallery today.

Recently I met with members of the Canadian Urban Transit Association. They spoke to me of the B.C. transit initiative to buy 20 hydrogen fuel cell hybrid buses. The manufacture of these buses, 60% of which happens here in Canada, was made possible by the Liberal government's launch of the Canadian Transportation Fuel Cell Alliance as part of action plan 2000 on climate change.

I urge the Minister of the Environment to maintain this commitment as part of her plans to increase development in alternative fuels.

* * *

● (1400)

JEAN GAUDET

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to Jean Gaudet, a long-standing and outstanding employee of the House of Commons, who officially retired on April 19 during the recent Easter recess.

Jean Gaudet came to Ottawa from near Weyburn in Saskatchewan. She worked briefly for Alvin Hamilton and George Nowlan in the early 1960s, but began her parliamentary service in earnest on March 17, St. Patrick's Day, 1969 when she started working for Tommy Douglas. Subsequently she worked for David Lewis, for Doug Rowland, for Father Andy Hogan, and for the last almost 27 years she worked in my office.

Adjusting to life without Jean has been like adjusting to life without one's right hand. She phoned me the morning after the election of May 22, 1979 and has been an important part of my political life ever since.

On behalf of all the constituents she helped over the years, on behalf of all those who worked with her and learned from her as she shared her experience with new Hill staff, on behalf of my family and on behalf of all of us who had the privilege and good fortune to work with her, may I extend to Jean and her husband Cam all the best in their post-parliamentary life.

* * *

THE HOLOCAUST

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Canada pauses to remember the Holocaust.

In part we pause that the six million who died will not be forgotten. In part we pause to honour the righteous gentiles who risked their own lives that others might be saved. But mostly we remember so that the words “never again” will have real meaning.

It has been 60 years since the Shoah, but in those six decades “never again” has become “again and again”. The Holocaust, which should have been the genocide to end all genocides, the atrocity which would teach humanity at last to be civilized, has been forgotten by governments in other corners of the world, or else it has taught them another, much more sinister lesson.

The murder by governments of people due to their national, ethnic, racial, or religious group membership continues. Sometimes the world finds it convenient to look away, as Canada looked away when the Jewish refugees aboard the ship *St. Louis* arrived off our shores in 1939 and were turned back to Europe.

There have been times in our past when this nation has not done its duty. Therefore, let us say, never again.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MERCEDES PALOMINO

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 18, Mercedes Palomino, a leading figure in Quebec theatre, passed away at age 93.

Mercedes Palomino was born in Barcelona and emigrated with her family to South America. She pursued her career in dramatic arts in Chile, Peru, New York and Paris.

She arrived in Montreal in 1948 and a year later, together with Yvette Brind'Amour, founded the first professional theatre in Canada, the Théâtre du Rideau Vert.

She showcased the talents of our home-grown playwrights by featuring the works of Michel Tremblay, Félix Leclerc, Marcel Dubé, Marie-Claire Blais, Françoise Loranger and Gratien Gélinas.

The Bloc Québécois commends the generous contributions made by Mecha, as she was affectionately known by her friends and family, to whom we offer our sincerest condolences.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our country mourns the loss of four Canadian soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan on Saturday, including Corporal Randy Payne of Wainwright in my constituency. These men were serving in such an extraordinary and unselfish way to protect our security and to bring hope, freedom and prosperity to the people of Afghanistan.

I am proud of the work being done in that country and of our men and women who put their lives on the line to do it every day. As our Prime Minister said when he visited CFB Wainwright two weeks ago:

Statements by Members

—military service is the highest calling of citizenship, not because you are ready to die for your country, though every soldier is prepared to do that. No, it is the highest calling of citizenship because you are ready to live for your country.

We will remember that these soldiers did both for us.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of these four brave men in this time of sorrow and loss.

* * *

● (1405)

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Holocaust Remembrance Day and at a ceremony this afternoon I will lay a wreath in tribute to the millions of Jews and others who were systematically killed during the Holocaust by the Nazi death machine.

As citizens of Canada and the world, we must do all we can to ensure that never again really means never again. Nowhere is this goal more pressing than in Darfur. Many organizations have worked to keep this tragic issue in the public eye. I am participating in the all party Save Darfur Coalition to call for immediate action in this region. I am also wearing a green ribbon provided by the Canadian Jewish Congress National Darfur Committee to bring greater awareness to the plight suffered by the people of Sudan's Darfur region.

On the day that we remember the horrific suffering and losses associated with the Holocaust, we must never forget those who are suffering in Darfur. The lessons and the legacy of the Holocaust require no less from all of us.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the theme of Volunteer Week 2006, held in Quebec until April 29, is “Volunteering for all tastes”.

Let us acknowledge the importance of the work carried out by the thousands of men and women who spend time and energy helping and supporting others in society.

In Quebec alone, there are 526,000 volunteers working in social services and health agencies, 359,000 volunteers working in culture and entertainment, 133,000 in education and almost half a million who lend their passion, generosity and knowledge to other sectors of society.

Every second of the day there are people around us who do something to bring a moment of happiness to someone else. Every day, hundreds of our citizens volunteer to defend the rights of the most vulnerable.

On the occasion of volunteer week, the Bloc Québécois wants to say thank you to each and every one of them.

Statements by Members

[English]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal hypocrisy knows no limits. Once again Liberal members have flip-flopped on their positions by having the nerve to stand in the House and demand action on gas prices.

The Liberals were in government for 13 years and continually failed to offer any relief to Canadian drivers and families. In fact, many Liberal members supported higher gas prices. It was not long ago that the former environment minister said that high gas prices were not necessarily a bad thing and that Canadians must become used to changing our way of life.

The Conservative government will not accept this position and has committed to reducing the GST, allowing Canadian motorists to save \$220 million off fuel prices per year. It will also save Canadians on every other purchase they make, saving them \$5.2 billion per year.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, this government will keep its promises and we will deliver tax relief to all Canadians.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

Hon. Joe Fontana (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to welcome the International Association of Fire Fighters to our capital. I am honoured to support them as they raise public awareness of fire safety and security and the great risks that men and women take to protect the safety of the Canadian public every day.

In the fall of 2005 the Liberal government was pleased to announce that it would be supporting the creation of a memorial commemorating firefighters who had fallen in the line of duty. As minister of labour and housing, I was also honoured and committed to the creation of a heroes fund to honour all public safety officers who had fallen in the line of duty.

I can only hope that the Conservative government, which has set such low expectations for success with a mere five commitments, can find time in its busy schedule to follow through on this plan to create a heroes fund to honour the memories and sacrifices of those brave men and women who give so much every day of their lives.

Let us show our appreciation for these brave men and women, do the right thing and support them.

* * *

● (1410)

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply honoured to rise today on Yom Hashoah, on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Canada and the entire NDP caucus, to remember the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

Within living memory, our world was torn apart by an unimaginable evil. Millions of victims, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, were lost in a tragic torrent of hatred and violence.

[Translation]

Millions of people saw their lives destroyed and for more than 60 years have borne the scars of the worst human atrocities. Today, we remember those who lost their lives and those who had to put their lives back together again.

[English]

And yet the hatred persists. Genocide continues in Darfur. The green ribbon we wear today testifies to our obligation to work to expose and act to end the killing. We are each obliged to strive harder and to lend our courage to others so that we may build a better world for generations to come.

It is our duty to remember so that our world will never again know the worst that humanity is capable of, but rather will rejoice in the peace and light of a hopeful tomorrow.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently received a letter from the father of the late Corporal Dinning. The letter was sent to the Prime Minister on April 7. As per Mr. Dinning's request, I will now read it to the House. He said:

As a proud Dad of a Canadian soldier currently serving in Afghanistan, I was glad to see that you made your first foreign trip to that country. You have said publicly many times that you support our troops and respect the job they're doing in Afghanistan. You even invited some of them to your Throne Speech this week. For all that I applaud you.

My question is simple. For all the support and respect that you say publicly why do you choose not to fly the flag on Parliament Hill at half mast when one of our soldiers is killed?

When I called your Heritage Minister's office this week to inquire as to why it hadn't been lowered for the death of Private Robert Costall, I was told it's usually only done for politicians and VIPs. I would suggest to you that there is no more important VIP than a Canadian soldier who gave his life in the service of his country.

Please correct this wrong and show that actions speak louder than words and fly the flags at half mast the next time a Canadian soldier is killed...

P.S.—I hope and pray that you won't have to lower the flag but since Afghanistan is a war zone the likelihood exists that more soldiers could die.

This letter is even more poignant as the next Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan was Mr. Dinning's own son.

* * *

[Translation]

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we mark Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yom HaShoah. On November 7, 2003, thanks to the remarkable efforts of my friend Richard Marceau, a former Bloc Québécois colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Bill C-459 received royal assent.

The Shoah represents the degrading height of a policy that sought to annihilate clearly identified groups.

The Shoah is also an episode in history that could have been prevented if people at the time had not been silent and complicit and democratic regimes had not remained indifferent but had put a stop to Hitler and his officers earlier.

Unfortunately, the world has not taken the lessons of the Shoah completely to heart. Over a 12-week period in 1994, 800,000 people were massacred in the Rwandan genocide while the international community stood by.

Let us hope that Holocaust Remembrance Day will be an opportunity to reflect and remember and a reason to act now to avoid another tragedy.

* * *

[English]

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the survivors of the Holocaust who are here on Parliament Hill today, who alone understand the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, of things that are too terrible to be believed, but not too terrible to have happened and where genocidal echoes resonate again today as in the killing fields of Darfur.

I say to the survivors and those whom they represent here today that they are the true heroes of humanity. They have not only witnessed and endured the worst of inhumanity to man, but they have somehow found in the wellsprings of their own humanity the courage to go on, to rebuild their lives as they help to build their communities here in Canada. They taught us the evils of racism and bigotry, of the dangers of silence and indifference in the face of evil, of the reminder that every human being is a universe, and whoever saves a single person, it is as if they have saved an entire universe.

I ask all members to join me in tribute to these heroes of humanity, to remember at times such as these, “qui s'excuse, s'accuse” and to act upon the injunction of never again.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

NON-VIOLENCE

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Beauport—Limoilou and in partnership with my colleague, the hon. member for Jonquière—Alma, Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, I would like to ask all House members to support us in making the Jonquière non-violence week, which ends on April 28, a province-wide event in Quebec.

The first annual non-violence week in Jonquière, held in April 2001, was organized by advocates from youth round table discussions.

Several groups in the region are joining us to mark this non-violence week. The Minister of Labour understands the importance of having the opportunity to grow in an environment that is free of all forms of violence.

Oral Questions

I therefore ask all members of the House of Commons to support us in declaring the week of April 18 to 24 non-violence week across Quebec.

* * *

[English]

CHILD CARE

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that keeps its promises, especially that so directly impact Canadian families.

Our government supports freedom of choice for parents as they make their child care choices, rather than imposing financial penalties on parents who want to choose non-institutional care for their children.

Australian feminist social commentator and writer Anne Manne has recently written that love and care are different and that while caring is reproducible, parental love is not. She draws on the latest research into attachment therapy, neurobiology and social development.

Two Quebec authors, pediatrician Jean-Francois Chicoine and *La Presse* editorial writer Nathalie Collard, in a brand new book, *The Baby with the Bathwater: How Day-Care Changes the Life of your Children*, argue that in normal circumstances what children need in the first few years of their lives is their mother's love and meticulous care.

Our Conservative government will end the long Liberal policy of discrimination against parental choice and our Conservative government will financially recognize choice in child care. Parents know what is in the best interests of their children.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Dr. Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi, Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Founder of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians are saddened by the loss of any brave soldier serving our country. Recently, changes to the way in which our fallen are repatriated home have given rise to serious concerns among Canadians and members of this House.

Will the Prime Minister please inform the House what is his government's policy concerning the repatriation of soldiers who make the ultimate sacrifice for their country and how can we ensure their respect?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you will know and I think the member as a former minister of defence will know, when there is a fatality in Afghanistan or in another theatre the media does film the casket being loaded onto the plane in Afghanistan. From that point on the government will respect all traditional military practices and protocols.

In the case of dealing with funerals and families who are grieving, I know the Minister of National Defence's primary consideration is that we do everything possible to assist at the departmental and political level with the grieving the families may be holding. It is not about photo ops and media coverage. It is about what is in the best interests of the families.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the media are barred from the military ceremonies in Trenton. The presence of the media has never bothered the families.

However, the Prime Minister and many members here in the House believe that the government has ulterior motives and that the true intent is to try to minimize the impact of these events on the public.

There is nothing to hide. Canadians are proud of their soldiers and would like to be able to pay their respects. They would like their government to do so as well.

Does the Prime Minister have the courage to change his mind and to allow all citizens to participate in paying tribute to our fallen soldiers?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no intention whatsoever of hiding anything from the press. In Afghanistan, in Kandahar, there are embedded reporters, print reporters, TV reporters, and everything is recorded.

We are insisting that at Trenton, when the bodies return, the first time the families meet their fallen members, that there be a time of personal grieving. If the families want the media involved, they may get them involved in the memorial ceremonies or at the funerals. Some families do not want them involved and some families do. We are being consistent.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all wish to respect the wishes of the families. We are speaking here—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We have to be able to hear the question from the Leader of the Opposition who has the floor.

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, we are speaking here of a military ceremony and the presence of the press to report on the repatriation of our soldiers. This permits the nation as a whole to pay its respect and to mourn its loss. At these events, the press have always respected the grief of the family.

This is an invention on the part of the government. I respectfully ask the Prime Minister to reverse this unfortunate decision, so that all

Canadians can participate and pay their respects to our soldiers in a military ceremony.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has made it very clear that what is driving this policy is what is in the wishes and the best interests of the families. I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that politicizing these funerals is entirely unbecoming his office.

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I trust that the response to my question will be in response to the families and the request that they have made for what I am going to read. A few moments ago I read a letter to this House that was delivered to me by the father of the late Corporal Dinning. In that letter he asked the Prime Minister:

For all the support and respect that you say publicly, why do you choose not to fly the flag on Parliament Hill at half mast when one of our soldiers is killed?

I wonder if the Prime Minister would answer Lincoln Dinning's question here today and do the honourable thing.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read a contrary opinion that we have just received from The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada. It says:

—consider the insult that this recent practice of lowering the Peace Tower Flag for current veterans has had on the relatives of the tens of thousands of past veterans who have given their lives for Canada and who were not granted this additional honour. Was their sacrifice any less important than those of today? We think not.

This is an emotional issue. The path the government has chosen is in fact the policy introduced by the Leader of the Opposition at the end of his term as defence minister to respect the traditional protocols of the military. We think that is the way we should do it and not try to pit one family against another.

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the previous Liberal governments, the Peace Tower flag was lowered when Canada suffered the loss of a soldier. Why does the defence minister think that recognizing the supreme sacrifice in this manner is inappropriate, given that just last evening Mr. Dinning appropriately said to me that he felt the media should be there? I am sure that he was not consulted before he made that statement.

• (1425)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous government was inconsistent. At least 25 casualties came back from Bosnia and they were never recorded in the public's mind, and even in Afghanistan, it did not lower the flags for every casualty in Afghanistan. The previous government was inconsistent. We are putting in a consistent policy to ensure that every casualty is treated the same.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the present government rejected the Liberals' plan to implement the Kyoto protocol, but has yet to introduce its own plan. So, no one knows how the federal government plans to go about attaining the Kyoto objectives. This attitude is causing some concern. The Quebec environment minister has even sent a letter to his federal counterpart expressing his concerns on the matter.

Oral Questions

Could the Prime Minister tell us exactly when he intends to unveil his own plan to achieve the Kyoto objectives?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the Bloc Québécois knows, the previous government left us with billions of dollars worth of programs on Kyoto, but no results. Our greenhouse gas emissions have in fact increased by 30% over the targets this government had set.

Obviously, the plans need to be revised. It will take time. Our intention, however, is to have a made in Canada plan to ensure progress in this matter.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his letter, minister Béchard calls on the federal government to conclude an agreement with the Government of Quebec in the very near future. The best solution lies, however, in a bilateral agreement with a territorial approach, as the Quebec government had sought from the previous federal government.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he is in agreement with this approach, which would give Quebec the means to achieve the Kyoto objectives?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can say that, when we develop our plans for the environment, we intend to do things in full cooperation with the provinces, with the other countries of the world and with our trading partners.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's position on applying the Kyoto protocol is worrisome and the governments of Quebec and the provinces are wondering about the money that will be allocated for achieving the Kyoto targets.

Does the federal government intend to transfer the money directly to the various governments to allow them to work effectively in their own jurisdictions on reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to reducing pollution and greenhouse gases. The targets that were set by the previous Liberal government are unachievable and unrealistic.

The difference between the Liberal Kyoto plan and our made in Canada solution is that the Liberals were planning on spending billions of dollars to reach targets that are unachievable and most of the money would be spent overseas. We refuse to do that. We will invest in Canadian solutions and in Canadian communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said many times that he intended to respect provincial jurisdictions. In matters of the environment, several responsibilities come under the provincial governments.

Does the federal government intend to respect the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces in matters of the environment by allowing them to act independently and by not imposing a single, centralized action plan drafted here in Ottawa?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned before, the government is committed to made in Canada solutions. We will work with all of the provinces to deliver on clean air, clean water, and clean soil for the health of Canadians. What drives us is the health of Canadians.

Last year alone, there were 53 smog advisory days in Ontario and 35 in Quebec. We will work with the province of Quebec to clean up the air that Canadians breathe, Americans breathe and Quebecers breathe.

* * *

● (1430)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are rightly upset at the government's decision not to lower the Canadian flag when our soldiers fall in the field of battle. The fact is they are right to be upset. The flag should be lowered.

My question to the Prime Minister is very simple. If it is appropriate to lower the flag here on Parliament Hill every time an unelected senator dies, why is it not appropriate to lower the flag every time one of our soldiers dies serving this country?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have set a consistent policy that the previous government did not practise. That consistent policy is that we will lower the flag for all casualties in all wars and all operations on November 11, Remembrance Day. Everyone will be treated the same. All military casualties will be treated the same.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the disrespect does not end with flags. We now have the decision to ban the media from allowing Canadians to participate in the repatriation of our soldiers who have fallen.

I will remind the Prime Minister that I was with him on October 10, 2004, in Halifax at a ceremony to recognize the return of Lieutenant Chris Saunders who died on the HMCS *Chicoutimi*. All Canadians were able to participate in that very moving ceremony. There, we were reminded of the sacrifice that is made. It is very important that this opportunity be shared with all Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister tell us what he is trying to hide by dishonouring our fallen soldiers?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is not trying to hide anything. The media have full access to our forces in Afghanistan. They report every movement and every action in Afghanistan.

Back here in Canada, at the second stage in Trenton, we are going to allow the families to mourn privately for their fallen members. The media have a chance to go to memorial services or funerals, as they did in the case of Lieutenant Saunders. The family permitted the media to go. If the media had not been permitted, they would not have been there.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's decision to cancel the early childhood education and child care agreements has created a crisis for Canadian families. For example, Saskatchewan has dropped its program for all four-year-old children. The Conservative government has no plan to create child care spaces.

Will the minister agree to provide multiyear funding in next week's budget?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is very aware that our plan is twofold. One is to provide \$1,200 a year to the parents of each child under the age of six, but the other part is that we will work with business and community groups right across this country to create 125,000 new child care spaces. That is 125,000 more spaces than the previous government created in 13 years.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one would think that in 13 years as a government in waiting the Conservatives could have come up with something more substantive than vague promises and numbers pulled out of the air.

They have no plan and have never had a plan. The minister has admitted that herself. Why is she now trying to cobble together a plan when the provinces and the families have said that they like our Liberal plan? Is this just spite?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the help of the opposition parties, Canadian parents across the country will receive in the budget, should the opposition members support it, \$1,200 a year for each child to help with the choice in child care that meets their needs, whether it is day care, babysitters, grannies, moms or dads staying at home. Parents will have that option and then we will work on the creation of 125,000 new spaces that meet the needs of real working families.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in complicity with the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative government is preparing to sap the vitality of francophone communities in Canada.

By insisting on eliminating the national child care program, the government is also eliminating the universality criterion in the Liberal program.

Can the minister tell us how the meagre cheque that she intends to send parents will ensure that francophone children living outside Quebec will be able to have services in their mother tongue at this crucial stage of early childhood?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the great beauties of our choice in child care allowance is that it will be a universal benefit available to every Canadian family whether they live in a large city or a small one. They will be able to use the money for whatever early

development and child care facility they need, in whatever language and in whatever part of the country.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even in Alberta, the Prime Minister's own province, francophones have no guarantees.

[English]

Families in Quebec have voiced support for the Liberal plan for early learning and child care which would have helped create 200,000 new places for children in my province. By tearing up the agreement with the province of Quebec next year and replacing its universal access provisions with a meagre cheque, what guarantee will the minister give to the anglophone community today that their children will have access to quality services in their own language?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our program will allow every parent to spend the money where they need to, whether it is in English or in French in whatever part of the country they live. They can spend it on early developmental materials or they can invest it in registered savings plans for their children's education.

There are a lot of ways this can be done and we need to ensure that parents are working with the provinces whose responsibility it is to deliver the programs themselves. We will help parents get the spaces they need and the money they need to afford them.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we hear that Washington has made an offer to settle the softwood lumber issue that fails to comply with the NAFTA rulings but that the government has nevertheless deemed attractive enough to resume the negotiations.

Can the Minister of International Trade explain what has changed to make what was unacceptable a few weeks ago suddenly acceptable?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, over the last five years there have been at least five occasions when it was alleged that Canada and the United States were close to a deal on softwood lumber. I can say that being close does not count. There is no deal on softwood lumber at this time and when there is the House will be informed.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister assure us that the gaffe made last week by his industry minister—who said that the moneys held in trust by the Americans in the softwood lumber dispute were lost—will not result in negotiations that endanger the gains we have made through the NAFTA panel rulings?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just reiterate the position I took last week, which is the official position of our government and our department. It is very simple. This government is prepared to work together with the Americans to find a long-term solution to the conflict. If this long-term solution is found, the House will be informed in due course.

* * *

TRUSTS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have information that the government created trusts in which to deposit, prior to last March 31, some of the funds allocated under the Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make certain payments. We know that the budget will be tabled on May 2. There are some legitimate questions about the creation of these trusts.

Given the large sums in question, can the Minister of Finance confirm or deny the creation of these trusts?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we are preparing the budget. I was pleased to have the opportunity to have some discussions with the member about some of the issues we are facing in making determinations and preparing the budget.

We intend to fulfill as many of our platform commitments as we can. The budget is to be presented on May 2 at which time I can deal with the issue raised by the hon. member.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make certain payments allocates money for social housing. Three hundred million dollars have gone to Ontario for social housing. The remaining \$1.3 billion is in trust.

With the rest of the money, does the government plan to sign similar agreements with Quebec and the other provinces and transfer the appropriate money for social housing?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will be dealing with issues, such as the issue he has raised about affordable housing, in the budget to be presented next week.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, day in and day out the Conservatives refuse to listen to outraged parents. They refuse to listen to child care groups who signed petitions. They refuse to listen to cities that passed motions to not slash the Liberal child care plan, a plan that provided accessible and affordable day care for Canadian parents and families.

Will the Minister of Human Resources, who has already axed 4,000 child care spaces in Toronto, admit that the Conservative child care choice of \$1.60 a day is really no choice at all?

Why are the voices of parents falling on deaf ears?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the floor seems to think that we are taking away spaces when in fact these spaces were never created by the previous government. We cannot take away what was never given by the previous government.

We are providing \$1,200 a year to the parents of each child under the age of six, which is \$1,200 more than the previous government provided for child care. We also will be creating 125,000 new spaces at work, at home and in the community. That is way more than we have heard even promised before.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister should actually be embarrassed for parroting those canned lines from the PMO. The truth is that the Conservatives are taking away spaces and taking away money from Canadian families and Canadian parents.

The Conservative government has been busy cutting important social programs, despite inheriting one of the best surpluses from the previous Liberal government.

Given that the NDP has already betrayed Canadians by trading our national child care program for 10 more seats, Canadians are counting on the Liberal Party to ensure that we protect child care in this country.

Will the minister tell the House if the Conservative government will deliver and guarantee the \$100 million—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are in the business of creating child care spaces and of creating choice in child care: day care for those who need it and babysitters at night for those who need it.

Whether people live in small communities like my own or in big cities, we will help parents. We will help working families get the choice in child care that meets their unique needs.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I was one of a number of Nova Scotia MPs who received almost 10,000 signatures from Nova Scotia parents who are dismayed and angry at the government's plan to abandon child care in Canada.

Instead of honouring the Liberal child care agreements, a small taxable allowance will be given to parents and a tax scheme that has never worked before will now be used to create imaginary spaces and not real spaces.

Will the minister admit that this scheme will do nothing to create new child care spaces for Canadian children and families?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our program to create new child care spaces will be developed with business, large business and small business, and with community groups so that kids can get child care in their home community or at work so that if it is in their small community the kids will not have to commute.

This is a true vision for child care, one that we have never heard before and certainly in 13 years of promises never saw from the previous government.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not a vision, that is a fiction. Choice in child care exists only when child care spaces exist. A choice was made in Canada to provide real child care and better training and wages for child care workers. Over 60% of Canadians voted for parties on January 23 that supported real child care.

When will the government get serious about helping Canadian children and families?

•(1445)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are serious about creating these spaces and about child care overall. We will be investing \$1.25 billion in the creation of these child care spaces. We will be putting forth legislation for parents to receive \$1,200 a year to help with their choice in child care.

If the Liberal Party is serious about helping parents with child care, then I suggest it support our choice in child care allowance.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year an agreement in principle was reached in the residential schools resolution. Government agencies and those affected have been working toward a final settlement.

Would the Minister of Indian Affairs please update this House on the status of the residential schools resolution?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to inform the House that the government's representative, the Hon. Justice Frank Iacobucci, together with the Assembly of First Nations, legal representatives of the former students of the Indian residential schools and representatives of three of the churches running the schools have today reached a substantive agreement on a final residential schools settlement agreement.

I have also been informed that the lead representatives for the Catholic church groups involved have given their assurance that all these organizations will be confirming their support for the settlement agreement. The government will immediately consider the settlement agreement and the interim payments and the timing of those payments, and I will keep the House informed.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, six months ago the House adopted the NDP motion for compensation benefits for the families of public safety officers, such as Canada's firefighters, over the strident opposition of the Liberal government. The House voted to support the families of those who give their lives to protect others. Not only have they not moved to implement the motion but, incredibly, the Conservatives even refused to send a speaker this week to the gathering of Canada's firefighters held just a few minutes away.

Will the Prime Minister betray firefighters or will he honour the vote of this House and establish compensation for their families?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that firefighters from across the country are meeting here today. What they are doing is meeting with members of Parliament, not just in our party but also in others.

We appreciate the good work they do. We appreciate the fact that these people put themselves literally in harm's way in times of emergency to protect Canadians. We will be meeting with them to hear their needs in order to see what we can do to best meet their needs.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, words are cheap. The Liberals used to give the same answer.

I have another issue that may be another possible betrayal. Media reports are surfacing of a move to betray Canada's interests on softwood lumber.

Canada won on NAFTA but the Bush administration refuses to honour that. Anything short of full respect of NAFTA is a betrayal.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that he will not accept American control over our forest practices, not accept one penny less than the \$5.3 billion illegally taken and not betray the working families that have been devastated?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said before and I will say again that this government is committed to the softwood lumber industry. If there is a possible settlement of the softwood lumber dispute that is in the interests of the industry and all the workers and this country and respects NAFTA, we will be there.

We will be there, and if that member is saying he wants to stand up and be opposed to a settlement that the industry agrees to, then let him do so.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when he was in opposition, the Prime Minister said that Bill C-48 was so irresponsible, so absurd, that he wanted to bring down the government. He did not want anything for first nations, for public transit, for universities. Now things have changed. It appears he wants to use that bill.

Is there no end to the Prime Minister's daily flip-flops?

● (1450)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, the budget is to be delivered next week. We will be dealing with surplus issues and we will be dealing with some of issues relating to some of the items he mentioned in his question. I am sure the member will look forward to May 2, when we will be able to provide the information that he is seeking concerning many of those issues.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in reference to yesterday's mother of all flip-flops, I would point out that I have never seen the word "temporary" attached to the minister's castigations of GST cuts.

The point today is that the Prime Minister continuously did one thing in opposition and does quite the opposite in government. The modus operandi has become clear. He flips in opposition and then he flops in government.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is from the chairman of the "save the GST" society.

I read with interest the report last week concerning Mr. Dingwall. I now have a sense that this member was the one who kept saying that Mr. Dingwall left voluntarily, while Justice Adams said he clearly left involuntarily. That member is now also the sole member of the "David Dingwall left voluntarily and is entitled to his entitlements" society.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Bill C-48 the surprising thing is not that the Conservatives have flip-flopped. It is not even that the NDP was bought and paid for. The surprising thing is that the NDP members sold themselves so cheap.

They settled for less than Bill C-48, 25% less, and they have nothing to increase child care spaces in this country. Last November, the NDP traded off a national child care system for their own short term partisan gain.

The Minister of Finance cannot comment on the high value of the Canadian dollar, but could he please comment on the low value of the NDP?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am not sure that the value of political parties falls within the administrative responsibility of the government. I think we will move on. Perhaps in his supplementary the hon. member for Wascana could rephrase his question in some way that makes it procedurally acceptable.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue here, at least in part, is why the NDP have settled for so little: nothing for child care; nothing for the Kelowna accords; nothing to fight climate change; nothing for student aid; and nothing for science and innovation.

This is rather pathetic given that the government has inherited the strongest economy and the best fiscal position of any incoming government in Canadian history. Will the government at least commit to the \$5.1 billion to fully honour the Kelowna accords for Canada's aboriginals?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I hold all parties in this House in high esteem.

I can also assure the member that when the budget is announced, when we make spending initiatives and when we make commitments to reduce taxes, we will keep our commitments. We will not make a deal a couple of months later to change our commitments. When we reduce taxes, we will keep our commitments to the people of Canada, who voted for change.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pilot project no. 6 gives workers five additional weeks of employment insurance benefits in regions where the unemployment rate is 10%. In particular, it will reduce the income gap faced by seasonal workers. This pilot project ends on June 4, 2006.

Does the minister intend to renew this pilot project until there has been a comprehensive reform of the program, as many stakeholders throughout Canada are requesting?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, the pilot program, and that is what it is, expires on June 4. A review of the results of that pilot is under way. I look forward to seeing the results of that review. I would be happy to report back to the hon. member on the results when I receive them.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister must surely realize that her reply leaves these workers in a state of uncertainty. It is urgent that the current employment insurance program be overhauled, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Oral Questions

Will this government improve the program or will it too dip into the employment insurance fund, as did the previous government?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the EI program, part I and part II, benefits a lot of people right across this country. That is why we want to make sure that as we proceed with changes, if any, they are in the best interests of all Canadians. When we have a pilot project, we think it is the responsible thing to wait until we have the results to make a decision on how to move forward.

* * *

[Translation]

IRAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this day of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust, I ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs to tell the House what measures the government has taken—aside from the public statement that was issued—to express to the Iranian government the Canadian people's strong disapproval of the heinous remarks made by the Iranian president, who denied the Holocaust and again called for the destruction of Israel.

Has the government considered calling in the Iranian ambassador?
[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the question from the member opposite and I thank him, as I know that this is something all members of the House share in expressing their abhorrence for this type of advocacy of violence, this type of abysmal public commentary on what was truly one of the darkest eras in human history.

Clearly the Prime Minister has conveyed publicly Canada's distaste and abhorrence for this type of public commentary. That was received well in communities around the world in terms of Canada's position. If further action is necessary, I assure members that the government will take that action.

* * *

CHERNOBYL

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is now 20 years since the devastating Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Last week, there was another report on the continuing dangers to health caused by the radiation from this event. All reports so far have consistently indicated ongoing uncertainty about the long term health effects due to this disaster.

My question is for the minister. On the anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, what is Canada doing to mitigate the long term effects of radiation?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague and his constituents, particularly the Ukrainian community of Canada, have great concerns about this. I am pleased to announce today that the Government of Canada will continue its long term commitment to the people affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

In fact, we will be providing an additional \$8 million toward construction of a concrete shelter to contain the radiation at Chernobyl. This is to be used to cover the damaged reactor and it will have a very positive impact on the environment by reducing the amount of radiation that is released. It will bring the total of Canada's contributions to Chernobyl related projects to \$66.2 million.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1993 the Liberals promised a child care program, but they had no plan. The Conservative government has promised to create child care spaces, but the Conservatives have no plan either. Working families face the prospect of—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina has the floor.

• (1500)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, working families face the prospect of seeing their kids booted out of child care next year if the funding is ripped out after 2006.

Will the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development commit to at least \$1.2 billion in annual funding in 2006 and in 2007 to create child care spaces?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our commitment to Canadians is to create 125,000 new child care spaces and we will do that.

We will do it in partnership with businesses, both large and small, because when they see—and many of them already know this—how much more productive their employees are when they know where their children are and know they are being well taken care of, when they see that employees' productivity goes up and their absenteeism goes down, that is good for business.

This is why we are putting \$1.25 billion into the creation of new spaces.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for a party that talks a lot about lowering the tax burden on working families, I cannot understand why the minister will not make this \$1,200 promise tax free. After taxes and clawbacks of federal GST credits, the child tax benefit, the federal young child supplement, there is hardly any money left of that \$1,200.

Will the minister protect the allowance from all federal taxes and federal clawbacks for the families that need it most?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I announced yesterday, five of the provinces have already agreed to not hold clawbacks on the child care allowance. This is great progress. As for the federal government, I am afraid we will have to wait until we see the budget.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will know that Canadian citizen Huseyincan Celil is facing extradition from Uzbekistan to China, where he has been sentenced to death for defending human rights.

Tomorrow, Mrs. Celil and Amnesty International will visit Parliament, but the government has refused to meet with her. Even worse, after 30 days of incarceration, the government still has not even told Uzbekistan that we want Mr. Celil returned to Canada.

Will the Prime Minister please stand up for all Canadians and immediately intervene at the highest diplomatic levels before it is too late for Mr. Celil?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we actually have been in contact with the family. We have made representations on behalf of the family. I know that the wife of the individual involved will be coming to Ottawa. I understand that she has appointments here with members of this party. I would be pleased to meet with her as well should my schedule permit.

I can assure the member that this is a consular case in which we have been involved from the very moment it was brought to our attention. The member will also know that privacy concerns do not allow us to discuss these matters in such a public way.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the past government, this government will keep its promise to salmon farmers in New Brunswick. The Liberals talked about it, but just like they did on other promises to New Brunswick, they failed to deliver the funding promised to salmon farmers.

Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tell the House about the package being delivered to salmon farmers in New Brunswick?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some years ago, the stocks in New Brunswick were practically eradicated because of disease. The former government promised to help. It did not deliver on its promise.

Even though the industry right now has self-rationalized, it still needs to be put on a steadier footing. We will be providing immediately \$10 million to the industry so it can continue to progress in the great province of New Brunswick.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please. In commemoration of national Holocaust Remembrance Day, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the following Holocaust survivors: Hank Rosenbaum, Helen Rosenbaum, Saul Feldberg, Toby Feldberg, Morris Greenbaum, Norma Dimitry, David Smuschkowitz and Luba Smuschkowitz.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Government Orders

● (1505)

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I believe there is consent for a moment of silence to commemorate the Holocaust. I would invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

The Speaker: The Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony will take place at 3:30 p.m. in front of the Parliament Buildings. All members are welcome to join the ceremony.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

PEACE TOWER FLAG

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

Earlier this day I read a letter that had been sent to the Prime Minister by the father of the late Corporal Dinning, one of our fallen soldiers. While he wrote the letter prior to the recent tragic death of his own son, his words are certainly poignant and I believe warrant action in the House.

Accordingly, I am seeking unanimous consent for the following motion: "That this House direct, in order to show respect and honour to Canadian Forces and other Canadian government personnel who are killed while serving in overseas peacekeeping, peacemaking or humanitarian missions, that the flag on the Peace Tower be lowered to half-staff for one day as a remembrance of their important service to Canada and Canadians".

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent for the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[Translation]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Before oral question period, the hon. member for Lévis-Bellechasse had the floor. He had five minutes left for questions and comments.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his address, the hon. member made several points that referenced Quebec. I would like to ask him if the people of Quebec and the people in his riding openly welcome the changes made in the accountability act so that the kind of embarrassing things that happened under the previous Liberal administration will not happen again and the people of Quebec will not have to wear that type of humiliation again in their province?

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

[Translation]

The sponsorship scandal damaged Canadian unity and affected Quebecers' perception of the Canadian federation.

Now, with a new Conservative government, we have the chance to turn a new leaf and restore Quebecers' and Canadians' trust in their government with the adoption of the Federal Accountability Act and all the measures it contains.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have just two quick questions. One is that the other three parties have suggested concerns about making payments of \$1,000 to whistleblowers. I wonder if he could comment on the concerns that a majority of members in the House have on that.

Quebeckers have been very supportive of aboriginal people in general. I asked a question of the parliamentary secretary earlier today about whether there was any consultation with aboriginal people relating to the part of the bill that suggests the Auditor General be able to audit aboriginal organizations. The parliamentary secretary could not answer at all and did not suggest there was any consultation. I wonder if the member could respond to that.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his questions. The first was about whistleblowing and public servants who sometimes find that things are not working properly in the machinery of government. Public servants must be protected and supported.

I myself was a public servant for four years. Public servants do a very fine job and deserve our trust and respect. The Accountability Act contains measures to support them, including the provisions on disclosure.

The bill does provide for a small financial award. This will be studied at the committee stage. I invite my colleague to share his comments at that time.

As for his second question, I would invite him to propose the changes he would like to see as the bill is reviewed.

• (1515)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I have a very short question.

I know people in Quebec do not like too much interference by the federal government. I have already had complaints because of the many controls that have been put in by government over the last few

years. The previous government put a lot in to make sure things flowed well.

Is the member worried about even more controls in the bill that will make it harder for volunteer boards and for people who do not have that much capacity to follow all the controls of the government? Will this make it even more difficult for those organizations that are already complaining about the burden of bureaucracy?

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the Accountability Act is not to complicate the parliamentary process but to put in place measures that will increase transparency in financing for political parties, for example. The act contains a series of measures that will give people greater confidence in their government.

[English]

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election to the chair.

I would again like to thank the citizens of St. Albert for having re-elected me for the fifth time, and I appreciate very much their support.

I am pleased to support the government's new FAA, the federal accountability act, which has been introduced. As has been said many times, this is great legislation that will set back the concept of people helping themselves to the government's cash with impunity, hopefully by many years. The notion that governments have to be accountable to Parliament, that Parliament and the government have to be accountable to the people and that they have an obligation to act with honesty and integrity should be taken for granted. Unfortunately, we have had to entrench it in law to ensure that everybody who is in government, or who may come into government or who has been in government gets the message that we have to act with honesty and integrity.

We also have to think about why this bill has been required. We all know what happened with the sponsorship program under the previous government. The Auditor General reported in February of 2004, with a tremendous jolt to the nation, that there was large-scale corruption in our government, that \$100 million had been lost and that every rule in the book had been broken. We found out during the investigation that it had been ongoing for years and that the people responsible for ensuring the rules were adhered to were turning a blind eye.

Government Orders

It had tentacles leading right into the Prime Minister's office. Many of the questions were never answered as to exactly what was the culpability of senior ministers and the prime minister, under whose personal directive this program was being managed. His chief of staff, who as we all know appeared as a witness before the public accounts committee and the Gomery inquiry, admitted that he had hands-on administration of this program too. The former minister of public works, Mr. Alfonso Gagliano, had hands-on management of this program, as did his chief of staff, Jean-Marc Bard, and it went on and on. People who should have been, by the rules, barred from being involved in the daily administration of the program were actively involved. I do not know if we ever will know the real story of the particular involvement by these senior public officials, but the result of it has been the new accountability act to ensure that it does not happen again.

It is pointed out in the Gomery report that government reports to Parliament. The public accounts committee, which I chaired at the time, was conducting a full-blown investigation into the sponsorship program, from February until May of 2004, at which time it was cut short by the prime minister of the day who dissolved Parliament and called an election. This is why we told Canadians that we believed in a parliamentary cycle of four years, to ensure that prime ministers of the day could not pull the plug and dissolve Parliament to avoid their embarrassment.

When a public accounts committee, or any other committee for that matter, or Parliament itself is involved in holding the government accountable, it is very archaic for the government of the day to say, "Everyone go home and leave us alone". That belongs in the middle ages, in the evolution of Parliament back in the 1400s, 1500s and 1600s in the U.K., where the king could dissolve Parliament at will every time they asked an embarrassing question. Surely it does not belong in our hopefully mature democracy in Canada.

- (1520)

That investigation, which was truncated, was followed by the Gomery inquiry. We had a four-volume report from Mr. Justice Gomery, which talked, among many things, about the role of Parliament.

I am looking at the volume "Restoring Accountability" and his recommendations. He talks a great deal about parliamentary oversight in a democracy and our responsibility as members of Parliament to hold government accountable. It is unfortunate that, while he waxed eloquent on many areas of Parliament, his recommendations contained nothing about Parliament, as an institution, being required to be stronger in order that Parliament can oversee government, get the facts and figures and demand answers to ensure that honesty and integrity is the order of the day.

I look at Mr. Justice Gomery's recommendations and the majority of them seem to be that the government should do something.

For example, recommendation 2 on page 199 says, "The Government should adopt legislation to entrench into law a Public Service Charter."

Recommendation 4 says, "—the Government should modify its policies and publications to explicitly acknowledge and declare that

Deputy Ministers and senior public servants who have statutory responsibility...".

Recommendation 5 says, "The Government should establish a formal process by which a Minister is able to overrule a Deputy Minister..." and so on.

Much of that has been included in the federal accountability act, but I would have thought that Mr. Justice Gomery, after waxing eloquent on the role of Parliament in a democracy, would have had some greater recommendations to strengthen this institution to ensure that we as parliamentarians fulfill our responsibilities.

I want to talk a bit about other countries and the problems they have with parliamentary oversight. There is now an organization, which I chair, called GOPAC, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption. It is aptly named because while we have had and may still have corruption in our country, it pales in comparison to what happens elsewhere. I believe many of the undeveloped countries are undeveloped because of grand corruption by governments. They are not held accountable by the institution of parliament.

The whole philosophy of GOPAC is an organization of parliamentarians committed to improving the institution of parliament, to strengthen parliament, to ensure that it does really act as institution of oversight for governments rather than being a lapdog of government, in the pocket of government, to ensure that government gets what it wants, and no doubt parliamentarians get well paid along the way. If we could stop corruption in Africa, in Asia and in Latin America, for example, we would find that their prosperity would rise.

We spend \$60 billion a year collectively from the developed world into the undeveloped world in foreign aid and yet we do not seem to see much improvement, mostly because of corruption.

The president of the World Bank, Mr. Paul Wolfowitz, has now talked about how corruption is a major agenda of his presidency and how he would like to and is tackling corruption through the World Bank.

GOPAC wants to work with parliamentarians to ensure that parliamentarians who are speaking out against corruption, not just in Canada but elsewhere around the world, can do so knowing that they have a greater opportunity to do so without recrimination. There are some parliamentarians around the world whose lives are on the line, or who have disappeared or who have been found murdered because they spoke out against corruption. Parliamentarians need to know that they have support from their colleagues around the world. We want to provide that support.

We also want to provide education to parliamentarians. When we are elected to this job, nobody tells us how to do our job. Therefore, we need to understand the institution to which we have been elected. We need to know the rules and we need to know that our job is oversight of government, not to be cheerleaders of government, not to oppose it at every turn but, as an institution, to hold government accountable.

Government Orders

The third issue deals with what we call leadership for results. Far too many parliamentary organizations travel, but they really do not accomplish very much. We would like to see GOPAC be an organization that actually achieves things. Our Latin American chapter is working with the Organization of American States to implement the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption. There is the African Convention Against Corruption and the UN Convention Against Corruption. We would like to see these adopted.

• (1525)

The accountability bill being proposed today would ensure that we hopefully would never fall into the pit of corruption that has destroyed the prosperity and the economies of so many countries around the world and that we continue to be a beacon of prosperity and governance around the world.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have sat with the hon. member for the last five years as a member of the public accounts committee. I agree with most of what he has said regarding this institution, which is in fact an institution of accountability. Our primary role is parliamentary oversight. I associate myself with most of what he said this afternoon.

One issue which disturbs me is the appointment by the Prime Minister of his campaign co-chair to the Senate and then subsequently making him the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. I and all Canadians would like to hear his views. He was a long-standing former chairman of the public accounts committee and he is a person whom I consider to be an expert in accountability. I asked this question to a previous member who said that there was no problem because he was accountable to another institution down the hall. This person is spending \$40 million a day and we do not know what he is doing. In fact, I do not even know what he looks like.

I have three questions for the hon. member across the way. Do you agree with the Prime Minister appointing his former campaign co-chair to the Senate? If you agree with that, do you agree with his appointment as Minister of Public Works—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): May I remind the hon. member that his questions are through the Speaker.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Does the member feel this appointment is in line with the member's vision of accountability for this institution?

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, the questions the member has posed are complex. I also would like to acknowledge the great work that he did on public accounts when I was the chair.

This is the institution of oversight. We are the ones who approve legislation or otherwise. We are the ones who approve the budget and the estimates or otherwise. We are the ones to whom government reports. If we do not like the way the government does things, we should change it.

When I think back over the 13 years of Liberal government, I did not see any effort by it to improve accountability. I did not see any situation where the Liberals did not use the Senate to their advantage. They continued to appoint members to the Senate even though we were calling for elections to the Senate. Now we have to wait until we get that legislation forward in due course.

The point is, if we do not like what is going on in government, we are the ones who can change it. Therefore, I would expect the member opposite to propose changes along the lines that he would like and they would be considered by this institution and if deemed favourable, would be adopted.

• (1530)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first thing about accountability is being accountable to our constituents.

When the member for Kings—Hants crossed the floor to join the Liberal Party, the opposition leader, now the Prime Minister, said that anybody who crossed the floor for the perception of 30 pieces of silver would lead to a corrupt government. If the member for Vancouver Kingsway had stayed in his seat as a Liberal member, he would have received a regular MP's salary. However, he crossed the floor and became a cabinet minister. I do not believe he would have crossed the floor if he had been just a regular backbench MP. He crossed the floor, became a cabinet minister and received an over \$70,000 increase to his salary, plus his pension and everything else.

I have great respect for my colleague, but if the situation had been reversed and that party was in opposition, those members would be on their chairs screaming and yelling at the top of their lungs that this was wrong. How can he stand up and talk about accountability? He is right when he said that the Liberals are not even in this discussion on accountability. How can government members not be accountable to their constituents?

How can the government justify Jim Gouk now becoming a member of Nav Canada's board of directors and John Reynolds becoming a member of the Privy Council? The list of Conservative members of Parliament now in favoured positions goes on. How is that being accountable to the people of Canada?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): We are out of time, but I am sure the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert would want to answer these questions.

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I would like to answer the questions. We always want to do that and be held accountable for what we say.

I know the member has introduced legislation regarding anyone crossing the floor. It states that they cannot cross, they actually have to stop halfway, resign, and see if they can win a byelection before they travel the rest of the way.

I believe in free speech and I have contemplated this bill many times. While I understand the member's motivation, there are two things that are important here: first, is the freedom of free speech in the House, free of party discipline. We are given the opportunity to speak out in this place.

Government Orders

If we feel strongly about any particular issue and if we want to go against our party, then that should be our privilege without any fear of any kind whatsoever of losing our job. It is like tenure at a university. When people come up with radical new ideas and we laugh them out on the street as we have done before in the past, at least their job is protected. That is what tenure is about in university and we need tenure in the House as well to guarantee the right of free speech because if we do not have it here, it will not be anywhere else in this country. So we must defend it here.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga—Brampton South.

I am sure I will not be the last member to speak on some concerns that many Canadians have with this bill in regard to access to information. There are just too many gaping holes that suggest real transparency may be nothing but lip service from the government, as it is with so many aspects of accountability as well.

On April 11, the justice department released a discussion paper which suggested even further expanding the government's secrecy powers. This would essentially make everything outside of administration immune to access to information requests for some institutions.

We could debate the pros and cons of secrecy post-9/11 for such institutions that fit into the discussion paper's five broad categories, such as national security. The fact is that we have seen some roadblocks to accountability appear under the heading before. I am speaking of the problem of security certificates issued to a handful of Canadians with the reason and conditions of the incarceration, matters that could not be discussed or questioned in what one would call a meaningful dialogue or debate.

It could be argued that the whole issue compromises questions of what is considered a fair trial in a democracy. There is a case to be made for the fact that the democratic process requires more openness, that we do little to further the principles we hope to defend for all by denying them to even a few. I have not seen any real detailed information how what is determined national security will not compromise what an open democracy requires.

On the other hand, for other institutions such as the CBC, I also wonder how matters of secrecy that help determine freedom of press will be articulated. I am speaking of the importance of what is often called among journalists "protecting the source". I do not see enough of real substance to affirm that the essential right of both journalists and the public will be affirmed.

If the justice department's recommendations are followed, the government will have sweeping powers to override the access act, so how is this any improvement on transparency and accountability? Moreover, the reforms mentioned in this discussion paper are modestly targeted at around \$120 million. Canadians are not hearing these numbers. They have been led to believe this is all a very straightforward exercise and that ordinary taxpayers will just suddenly consent to the millions and millions of dollars thrown around to make the government appear more transparent.

There are seven crown corporations, including Canada Post, Via Rail and the Public Sector Pension Investment Board, that are

covered under the access act, and for the price tag for reforms, how much further ahead are Canadians?

There are more questions about this act that come from the difference between rhetoric and reality. The rhetoric by the lobbyists is a case in point. We heard initially that this act would require ministers and senior government officials to record their contacts with lobbyists, the idea being that all lobbyists would then become a matter of public domain, but that is not really the case. The act requires some lobbyists to disclose some of their communications.

Beyond the argument of creating a culture of suspicion by assuming the worst for what I believe is an essential and honourable part of government relations, we are dealing with the fact that if a loophole is created, most certainly a culture is created exploiting those loopholes. Unless I am told otherwise, the business of government relations is also competitive. It is wonderful to market forces, as in any other industry, and those who can keep information privileged will prosper.

● (1535)

There is also a gaping hole in what is defined as a ministerial advisor, one who would be prohibited from lobbying for five years. The act defines this person as someone other than a public servant who occupies a position in the office of a minister of the Crown or a minister of state and who provides advice to that person on issues relating to his or her powers, duties and functions as a minister of the Crown or a minister of state whether or not that advice is provided on a full time or part time basis, and whether or not the person is entitled to any compensation for this advice.

The larger, less prohibitive definition of ministerial staff is for those persons who work on behalf of a minister of the Crown or a minister of state. As the act defines it now, it rests on the minister or the former minister to define whether a person has crossed that critical Rubicon from staff to advisor. A simple letter stating that a person was not an advisor and outlining what his or her job description was as it was made known to the minister will suffice to get the person off the hook and into the lobbying business. This is clearly not good enough.

I think members can see how the whole culture of exploiting loopholes can be created. They entitle the policy advisors to simply take on the function of amending them and those who elude this definition may provide the real advice.

We are in the theatre of the absurd here where the crucial grey areas of counsel, the areas between partisan and non-partisan, become black and white, but black is really white and all can be fixed to avoid a five year ban with this letter from a minister or minister of state.

There is also a disparity between rhetoric and reality as it relates to the Ethics Commissioner's interface with the public. We heard initially that this act would allow members of the public, not just politicians, to make complaints to the Ethics Commissioner. As the act is written, only politicians can make complaints to the Ethics Commissioner.

Government Orders

Supposedly, there is a case happening right now in my riding where campaign donations are now a matter of an RCMP probe and there is some question as to how donation money ended up in the personal account of a previous member of Parliament. Many who donated never got a receipt. If I were just a voter and not a politician, why should I not be able to take this matter to the Ethics Commissioner myself? Why should I have to rely on a politician to be my voice when I have an articulate voice of my own on this issue and why should I not personally get an answer? How is this government any more responsive and accountable if it denies the right to everyone?

However, it is not only a question of how these watchdogs will divulge to the public how they reached their verdicts. The procurement auditor, the conflict of interest commissioner and the Ethics Commissioner will never have to divulge their backup investigation and audit work. I think an argument can be made that this information could be considered crucial to the decision. What are we left with if we cannot question their investigation and audits? We are left with nothing more than blind trust, no pun intended, but it gets worse on the audit front.

As for this version of the FAA, the government's own draft audits and working papers can be kept secret for 15 years. I do not think that requires much comment. Everyone knows the problem with that.

My last point on the rhetoric and reality relates to the public opinion poll research. We can all recall the televised episodes of the public accounts committee, the great theatre, about how there was talk of tabling certain forms and curbing competition. Information on public opinion poll research contracts with the government can be delayed for up to six months and certain polls would be exempt. Again we have the creation of a culture around the exploitation of loopholes. Six months can become a crucial period before an election, so I challenge the government to tell me how this can be imposed with any real rigour.

• (1540)

What we are really looking at here are some gaping holes that were decided upon through a star chamber process where exceptions and inconsistencies can be presumed as calculated circumstances.

As there has been so much around bureaucratic activity, transparency—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments?

[*Translation*]

The honourable member for Kenora has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Newton—North Delta raised some very good points and made some good arguments.

My question deals with the part of his speech where he mentioned lobbyists. We all know the challenges the government has to ensure it has proper controls in place and the proper means to deal with lobbyists and their effect and impact on government.

What does he see as being a challenge now that we see so many retired MPs moving into areas of lobbying? We have them from the

former party, from this party. Is it more dangerous to have a minister of the previous government, who has either retired or left the House, now working for a lobbyist firm, or to have a lobbyist being elected to Parliament and becoming the Minister of Defence? Which does he see as being the most dangerous part for the new government to deal with?

• (1545)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, when we are members of Parliament and we go out of this House we do not carry that much authority and power. On the other hand, the Minister of Defence, who was a lobbyist for many years, now carries real influence and that is more dangerous. I do not think people who were lobbyists should be allowed to be ministers.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for his overview of the accountability bill.

I spoke earlier with respect to the oversight nature of committees, in particular, as it relates to the public accounts and the estimates. I know the member has not had an opportunity to sit on committee but I might tell him that one of the goals of having transparency and accountability was to empower committees to have more oversight.

The proposition put forward in the bill is to create a parliamentary budget authority. Does he believe that, first, committees should have the responsibilities of oversight and, second, would he agree that to give the committees more capacity in the area of budgetary analysis would further reinforce the accountability of members of this Parliament?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me a bit of information as I am new here and have not served on any of the committees. I understand that committees play a major role when decisions are made around this Parliament. In fact, most of the real work that happens is around those committees. As committee members work together as a team, they should be the ones who decide in which direction they are heading and therefore they are the ones who should have more powers.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the maiden speech by the member for Newton—North Delta. I also thank him for allowing me the opportunity to share his time.

I stand today to speak to Bill C-2, an act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability. It is a mouthful but more simply put, the accountability act.

I want to state right from the beginning that I do support accountability. I support the notion of enhancing accountability and transparency in government because I believe the drafting of legislation can help to restore the public faith and public trust in our institution and in our democracy.

Accountability is an issue that I take very seriously and that is why it is disappointing that the government has decided to put forth an omnibus bill that includes over 300 clauses when the material in the bill could very easily have been split into three or four bills. This would have allowed us a more thorough examination of the issues. Instead, we have to deal with it in its entirety.

Government Orders

I do have issues with the bill in terms of the fact that I find it extremely convoluted, poorly organized and it does not really have a logical flow. Nevertheless, I am here in my given time to address some of my concerns and voice some criticism of the bill. However I do support the essence of the bill.

I will touch upon a few areas, the first one with respect to reforming the financing of political parties and third party financing. I also want to touch upon the role of the Ethics Commissioner, respect for that office of Parliament and, more important, cooperating with that office of Parliament. The next area concerns the Access to Information Act. I also want to discuss some issues on which the government has backtracked. I want to discuss the issue of government appointments and the government's poor judgment on those appointments. I find a bit of hypocrisy on the part of the government in protecting whistleblowers. I do again question some of the monetary incentives that have been built into the bill.

I must also highlight, however, that the bill is a reflection of many years and an initiative that was put forth by the previous Liberal government. I would like to commend the government of the past for building the foundations for the discussion that is taking place today.

As I enter into the debate around accountability, I must also point out that the Conservative Party, led by the Prime Minister, has lost a great deal of credibility on this subject in the past three months and I will demonstrate that throughout my remarks.

The first area I want to touch upon is reforming the financing of political parties and third party advertising. The Conservative government wants to reduce the influence of organizations and corporations that can be exerted through large donations. I want to remind the members, especially government members, that it was the Liberal government under Bill C-24 that brought about meaningful changes to the many donations for unions and corporations from unlimited amounts to \$1,000 for a corporation or a union and \$5,000 for an individual and put limits on the influence of third party advertising during the election campaign.

The accountability act, however, does not, in my opinion, which I think many people share, reduce third party election spending and actually strengthens third party influence. I do want to note that there seems to be a bit of concern about the current Prime Minister, who was a former member of a special interest group, the National Citizens' Coalition, and the fact that he has not opposed all efforts to put limits on third party advertising. I would question his integrity and his intent when it comes to this section of the bill.

The other area that I would like to touch upon is strengthening the Office of the Ethics Commissioner. It is important that the bill wants to strengthen the role of the Office of the Ethics Commissioner and integrate the role of the Senate and the House ethics offices into one office and to introduce a new conflict of interest act. I would remind the current Conservative government that it was the Liberal government that created an independent Office of the Ethics Commissioner. It was the Liberal Party that full cooperated with the Ethics Commissioner and the work that he was trying to achieve.

We should look at the track record of the Conservative government. I alluded to this earlier in my remarks and I will, from

time to time, remind the Conservatives of their distrust and disdain for the Ethics Commissioner.

Last year the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics held a confidence vote on the Ethics Commissioner. The Liberals supported the office but the Conservatives did not. When the Ethics Commissioner announced that he would investigate the role of the Prime Minister in convincing the member for Vancouver Kingsway to cross the floor, the Prime Minister had an opportunity to show that he supported the work of the Ethics Commissioner and yet he worked to undermine the Ethics Commissioner and declared that he would not cooperate.

● (1550)

I do have some reservations. The Liberal Party has clearly demonstrated its ability to respect the Office of the Ethics Commissioner and we look forward to the changes but it would be imperative for the current Conservative government to follow suit.

The third area I want to examine is strengthening the Access to Information Act. The Prime Minister has another credibility issue with regard to access to information. During the election he promised to implement all of the recommendations made by the Information Commissioner. Now that he has a chance to act on this, the Conservative Party has decided to take the Access to Information Act out of the accountability act and to table a draft bill and a discussion paper that will be discussed in committee.

I find it a bit ironic to have this thick document, this bill that contains a vast array of issues to the effect of reforming the financing of political parties, banning secret donations, strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner and so forth, and yet when it comes to access to information, they want to have a separate bill. As I said at the beginning of my speech, I do have concerns with respect to the logical flow of the bill.

In November 2005 the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics was chaired by a Conservative and pushed for a vote that endorsed the Information Commissioner's bill. I do not see the issue here. Why are all those changes not incorporated in the bill? Again, this backtracking is an area of concern that I have as well.

The other area I would like to address is making qualified government appointments. Again, the government wants to make a uniform process of appointing agents and officers of Parliament by ensuring they are based on merit. Again, it was a Liberal government in our past 13 years that had parliamentary committees empowered to review the appointments of heads of crown corporations. We brought forth transparency and it was increased even in the selection of Supreme Court justices. The Access to Information Act was extended to include 10 key crown corporations.

Government Orders

I do want to question the Prime Minister's judgment on appointing an individual by the name of Mr. Morgan to oversee political appointments and to end patronage. I see a great deal of hypocrisy in this. He wants to reflect a Conservative pledge of making appointments based on merit and yet the individual has clearly shown bias in his remarks and that he is partisan. I again have deep reservations and concerns with respect to this component of the bill.

I do not want to remind people, but it is important for those listening to CPAC to know that it was the current Prime Minister who appointed an unelected individual to the Senate, contrary to the commitments that he made for a department that oversees \$10 billion worth of spending.

The area I want to touch upon next is the protection for whistleblowers. We completely agree with the strengthening of the whistleblower protection. It will give the public service direct access to the public service Integrity Commissioner to report wrongdoing, which is excellent, and a new independent tribunal with the power to order remedies and discipline. Again, we agree with that in spirit as well.

I want to remind the Conservative government that it was the Liberal Party that made it easier for whistleblowers to come forward. It was the Liberal Party that brought forth meaningful legislation to protect whistleblowers. I fully support granting protection for whistleblowers but my concern, and this just boggles the mind, is with the offer of a monetary reward for ethical behaviour. It is counterintuitive. It just does not make sense. People who come forward are individuals of integrity and ethics. They are not looking for a \$1,000 reward to provide additional incentive.

I want to remind members in the House that, yes, we are talking about accountability and it is important legislation which I support in spirit, but it was the Liberal government that had many accomplishments when it came to accountability. We took on a leadership role and we are glad to see that the Conservative government is following suit. We look forward to working with the government to further strengthen accountability measures. It was our Liberal government that set up the most sweeping inquiry in modern political history. We brought dramatic reform to political financing laws in Bill C-24, to which I alluded, and we proposed whistleblower legislation.

• (1555)

We brought in Canada's first independent Ethics Commissioner. We brought forth clear conduct guidelines for public office holders and proactive disclosure of hospitality and contracts over \$10,000 on a website. These are all major reforms when it comes to accountability that were brought forth by the Liberal government.

I am glad to see the Conservative government has followed suit. I look forward to working with members in committee to strengthen this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. I recognize the hon. member for York South—Weston.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I meant no harm when I said that it is nice to be recognized these days. It was an attempt at levity and once again it was a failure. I do congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your elevation to the Chair.

The member has given a very comprehensive overview of the legislation and the continuity of the development of legislation which in fact started in previous governments in terms of searching out that ultimate balance that we all desire in terms of open government, transparency and so on.

Perhaps the member would like to pursue one area a little bit further, given his extensive knowledge and background on the access to information component of the bill. In the last Parliament the access to information officer had prepared a report. The report was approved by committee. In fact, there has been extensive consultation on access to information.

Would the member care to comment on the suggestion that that aspect go to committee? Perhaps it could simply be presented as a bill because there has been so much consultation on it.

• (1600)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, the essence of the question is alluding to the notion of the spirit of the accountability act and its incorporation in the accountability bill.

I said earlier that the concern I have is that this is a bill that is lengthy in nature. It lacks a coherent message and does not have a logical flow. Various sections have been excluded. Parts of the Access to Information Act and the recommendations that we made in committee have been excluded and will be put forth in a separate bill that will be going forward to a committee.

My concern is that we had extensively debated those issues. More important, not only did we debate those issues, but we had the full support of the Conservative Party and the Conservative members that sat on the committee with me.

I do not see what has drastically changed now that the Conservatives are in power. Why do they no longer want to pursue those changes and recommendations that we made in committee? We exhausted all possible avenues to the best of our ability. We consulted with the Information Commissioner and took his considerations into account as well. We came to an agreement on some of the changes on which he made recommendations. All that has been done.

I do not see any further value added by taking that particular component of access to information to the committee. Something we have to seriously consider when this bill goes to committee is that we might need to incorporate it to further strengthen accountability.

I have said before that the Liberals have taken a leadership role on accountability. We have done tremendous work on accountability. I look forward to working with the government in making sure that we continue to strengthen accountability and make sure that Canadians have trust in public institutions.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend from the Liberal Party in his intervention reminded us of some of the discussions that happened at committee. I would like to remind him that although the Liberals began making steps forward on some of the issues around accountability, they did not go far enough. This is why we have brought forward the federal accountability act that I am so proud to endorse on this side of the House.

Government Orders

We have to remember that events happened in the last government, the Liberal ad scam for example, that required us to toughen up the rules and the way we do business as politicians, the way we do business as government. We need to make sure that we bring about the changes Canadians wanted when they voted on January 23.

Does my colleague agree that the accountability act that we began debating this morning will achieve the results that are so desperately needed to make sure that Canadians have faith in government and the people that they elect to the House of Commons and to fulfill the aspirations that Canadians have of us?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member must be warned that it will be a very short answer.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the heads up. I want to capture the essence of the comments made by the member. This will really summarize it. I saw a quote yesterday which I would like to reiterate with respect to the accountability act. “The accountability act is the toughest piece of anti-corruption legislation ever tabled in Canadian history”. That was a statement made by the President of the Treasury Board on April 11, 2006. However, if we look at the comment made by Justice Gomery, he said, “Canadians should not forget that the vast majority of our public officials and politicians do their work honestly, diligently and effectively and emerge from this inquiry free of any blame”.

• (1605)

Ms. Helena Guergis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to congratulate you on your position as Acting Speaker. I would also like to thank the constituents of Simcoe—Grey for giving me an opportunity to represent them for another session in the House of Commons. We increased our plurality substantially this time and I really appreciate the good work of my entire team back home.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to the first piece of legislation that my government has put forward, the federal accountability act. I want to talk a little about the people in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. I believe they are truly representative of Canada. We have every kind of farmer in Simcoe—Grey, from potato farmers, to chicken farmers, eggs, beef, dairy, pork, grains and oilseeds, sod, and so on. We have apple farmers. There has also been conversation about planting grapes within the town of Blue Mountain. We may have a winery coming into Simcoe—Grey. This is something we are all looking forward to and something I am very proud of.

We also have thousands of auto workers in Simcoe—Grey. We have the award winning Honda plant and dozens of parts plants that supply our automotive industry within Simcoe—Grey. Hundreds of people work at our resorts. We have a very strong tourism industry in Simcoe—Grey.

Smack dab in the middle of my riding, which is right beside my hometown of Angus, Ontario, is base Borden which is the largest training base in Canada. I am looking forward to seeing an increase in the number of Canadian soldiers on base Borden and the impact it will have, especially on small businesses in the communities

surrounding base Borden and how positive that will be for my riding of Simcoe—Grey.

Last but certainly not least, in Wasaga Beach, which is the fastest growing community in Ontario, fourth in Canada, we have skilled trades and aggregates in sod.

Over the past few weeks we have heard many members of the Liberal Party continue to criticize our throne speech and agenda. They say the five priorities are not enough. Of course, to the previous Liberal government everything was a priority but nothing was actually completed. During the campaign I can remember that our party researchers assembled a list of quotes from the former prime minister of everything that he said was a priority for him and his government. I can recall the list being about 100 items long.

Outside of promises, I cannot think of much that the previous government actually did. The Liberals were consumed with extricating themselves from a growing scandal of sleaze and greed. They were doing everything they could to hold on to power. It was really their only priority and it was at all costs with no care for what was truly best for the country.

Why did we start with accountability? I think my words have already stated that. It is because without accountability, nothing else will work. Government will break down and it starts to fail the people. That is what happened with the previous Liberal government.

Just over a year ago I had an opportunity to go to Taiwan with many other members of the House. The sleaze and scandal of the sponsorship scandal was really starting to unfold. It was being exposed for what it truly was. I can recall that senior dignitaries were asking me about the sponsorship scandal here in Canada. I was thoroughly embarrassed and very ashamed.

The previous Liberal government had a difficult time accepting the fact that what was going on here with the sponsorship scandal in Canada was actually changing how the world looked at Canada. Now that we voted for change on January 23 we are getting back to accountable government. We are going to see that Canada's reputation on the international scene again is something to be very proud of.

We still do not know how much of the country's money the Liberal Party took, but we do know that the people of Canada have had enough and they have voted for change. We told Canadians during the election that we had the five priorities. They voted us in and now we are keeping our word.

The first is the piece of legislation we are talking about today, about putting the House back in order, restoring trust to the people of Canada, because people have to have faith in their institutions and in their politicians. The federal accountability act is a really good first step.

Government Orders

The act is about moving from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. It is about making everyone in government, from the Prime Minister on down, answerable to Canadians. It will of course ban corporate, union and large personal political donations. We will strengthen the powers of the Auditor General. We will provide real protection for whistleblowers. We will ensure government contracting is proper, fair and open.

•(1610)

We will prevent lobbying by former ministers and other public office holders for five years. This is something that I experienced in my own riding of Simcoe—Grey with a former member actually going into the lobbying business and circumventing the member of Parliament as an assistant. But we would also create more—

An hon. member: Paul Bonwick.

•(1615)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes, his name was Mr. Paul Bonwick.

Creating more open government by improving access to information is what the accountability act will do as well.

I would like to talk a little bit more about each of these areas, but I do want to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Let me talk a little more about reforming the financing of political parties. Money of course should not be the way that one accesses government. Canadians should have the ear of the government and not a chequebook. To me that means quite plainly that one should not be able to buy access. The federal accountability act would help take government out of the hands of big corporations and big unions and would give it back to ordinary Canadians. The federal accountability would limit individual donations to \$1,000 a year. We would ban contributions by corporations, unions and organizations and prohibit cash donations of more than \$20.

I think I have a great question here. How many members of the Liberal Party had secret trusts that they had set up? These trusts were not subject to the Canada Elections Act. The accountability act would also ban secret donations and gifts to political candidates. It would also increase transparency and help Canadians feel more confident about the integrity of the democratic process.

Another part of the accountability act for which I have great appreciation is the strengthening of the power of the Auditor General. Canadians truly deserve to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are going to be spent and the Auditor General needs the power to follow the money to make sure that it is spent properly and wisely. The government would give new powers to the Auditor General to audit individuals and organizations that receive federal funding.

This would help the Auditor General to hold to account those who spend taxpayers' money. We recall how many billions of dollars were in the foundations. The government and Canadian taxpayers had no authority and no right at all to actually see how their taxpayers' dollars were being spent.

In addition to that, we will provide real protection for whistleblowers. I think the fact that the man who blew the whistle on the sponsorship scandal chose to run for us says a lot about what

we are proposing for whistleblower protection. The men and women of the public service deliver important programs and services that touch the lives of Canadians each and every day. That is why another of our federal accountability act's key components will focus on providing real protection for whistleblowers.

People who see problems in government need to know they can speak up. Too often in the past, whistleblowers have been punished for saying the truth. The government will give real protection for whistleblowers by giving the public sector integrity commissioner the power to enforce the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. The law would be extended to all federal bodies. In addition, the law would be amended to protect all Canadians who report government wrongdoing, not just public servants.

The act would also help clean up government procurement. The Government of Canada is one of the largest purchasers of goods and services in the country. Its practices should be free of political interference and conducted fairly so that all companies, regardless of size and location, have the opportunity to compete for government work. We would enshrine in law the principles of a fair, open and transparent bidding process.

We will also toughen the rules around lobbying. Canadians need to know that lobbying is done in an ethical way. After the 2004 election, we saw Liberal ministers immediately come back to lobby their former cabinet colleagues. People should not get rich bouncing between government and lobbying jobs. Lobbyists should not be allowed to charge success fees, whereby they only get paid if they deliver the policy and the change their clients want. The government would get rid of success fees and extend the ban on lobbying activities to five years for former ministers, their aides and senior public servants. In addition, we would create a new commissioner of lobbying with the power and resources to investigate violations and enforce the rules.

We will also strengthen access to information legislation. Canadians deserve better access to government information. The Government of Canada belongs to the people and it should not unnecessarily obstruct access to information.

I will wrap up and say that I look forward to the many questions I am sure I will be receiving from my colleagues. I look forward to being a part of the government as we work toward restoring accountability for the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the sponsorship scandal has left people feeling quit burned by and cynical about politics and politicians, at the federal and all other levels. Not just in Quebec, but everywhere in Canada. As our colleague stated, it has even tarnished our reputation internationally.

With regard to the accountability legislation, would it not be logical to include a ceiling for donations to leadership races? At present, the legislation does not provide for a maximum donation to leadership races, which runs counter to the maximum donation of \$1,000 that will be applicable to individuals. The election of a candidate and that of a party leader are not treated the same.

[*English*]

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, as I outlined, we will be making some very substantial changes to political donations to political parties. Inside politics, I am sure we can continue to have a further discussion on this, but right now what we are focusing on in the accountability act is completely eliminating political donations from corporations and unions and limiting personal donations to \$1,000.

I think Canadians want to know that if we need to see policy change within the country, we simply do not cut a cheque. Just cutting a cheque should not be the way to have policy change in this country. The accountability act will simply eliminate that by limiting personal donations to \$1,000 and eliminating contributions from corporations and unions.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her comments on this act, which is a very complex and complicated act. It is being referred to committee, which I think is good, and it will be discussed.

I am very curious about one issue in the act that perhaps I really do not understand. It is the concept of a director of public prosecutions. It is my understanding of the law that whether or not to prosecute would be a provincial decision; federal offences would be drug offences, income tax offences, certain environmental offences, shipping and whatnot. For the life of me I cannot understand what this person would do. If the person could investigate wrongdoing, I assume the first person he would investigate would be Brian Mulroney for the \$300,000 payment he received after leaving office, but even for that I do not think he would have jurisdiction.

What is the member's concept of this position? Exactly what authority would this person have to act in any type of situation, other than drugs, income tax or shipping?

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since I am addressing the House for the first time today I would like to thank the people of the great riding of Mégantic—L'Érable for giving me their confidence and electing me as their representative in the House of Commons. I especially want to thank my parents, friends and volunteers, who believed in me and gave their all to help me get elected. Their hard work was certainly motivated by their desire for change.

In that vein, I must add that in my riding of Mégantic—L'Érable there are three totally different RCMs with various sectors including agriculture, mining, forestry, and all sorts of industries. Despite this diversity, there is one common denominator in my riding: the desire for change. This desire was expressed loud and clear on January 23, as it was in most of Canada's ridings.

Government Orders

My speech in this House on the federal accountability bill is very important. I realize that my constituents, like most Canadians, expect change. Unfortunately, the public has become increasingly cynical about politics.

Worse yet, some Canadians are completely disenchanted and choose not to vote in elections, while in some countries people pay with their lives in order to get that right.

I am very proud that the government, which made federal accountability its ultimate priority, is now presenting strong legislation that will certainly contribute to rebuilding public confidence. We finally have the concrete measures to truly clean things up in Ottawa. For far too long there has been nothing but sterile discussions, when in fact basic ethics rules were being broken. What is more, although the Auditor General was able to uncover these violations, she did not have the authority to do anything about it.

It is all the more scandalous to Canadians who make an honest living and who have to pay taxes from their hard earned money. In future, there will be harsher punishment for lesser crimes than were committed in the past.

It was time that a government finally showed true will to make government transparent, as well as to bring back the clean system Canadians are entitled to. This government, which intends to be one that takes action, is proposing a consistent and efficient system to clean up government. It is not content with haphazardly developing policies to deal with isolated cases. Such policies could prove ineffective in some instances. To propose a system, a comprehensive one, an overall vision is necessary. That is what we, in the Conservative Party, have proposed during the election campaign and, on January 23, the people of Canada voted in favour of our proposal.

The government is delivering on its promises. Less than four months after the election, it is introducing this major and long-awaited reform for approval by the House. More concretely, we can see that, under this reform, accountability is taking on much more importance, starting from the time an election is held. This will make candidates accountable and impress on them the seriousness of our parliamentary institution and the importance of the role played by members of Parliament. Strict election financing rules are being proposed to deal with conflicts of interest and campaign slush funds for candidates. The people are entitled to expect that their peers representing them in the House of Commons are designated democratically.

It is good to talk about ethics but, as mentioned earlier, the role of the Ethics Commissioner has to be strengthened. The commissioner has to play a proactive role and have the skills necessary to exercise control. In fact, that is what is proposed in the bill.

The people also expect transparency in the process to appoint those individuals who will play a significant role within government. A fair process which goes beyond cronyism and is actually based on competency is required. That is what is proposed in the bill.

Government Orders

As a rule a thumb, words fade away but written statements endure. It therefore makes sense for reports on government expenditures to be in writing. The man on the street will have no problem figuring that running a business on the basis of verbal reports does not make much sense. It is no surprise that the people were deeply shocked that such practice was allowed to exist in government.

• (1625)

The bill will therefore require written reports. This is another concrete, simple measure that is easy to implement.

With regard to access to information, major crown corporations such as the CBC and Canada Post are part of Canadians' daily lives.

Yet the public does not have access to essential information. The bill strengthens the Access to Information Act so that the public can have access to additional information.

As has already been stated, the Auditor General must have coercive powers. It is inconceivable that she could identify crimes and major breaches in the past but could do nothing about them. The bill will remedy this deficiency.

The bill also provides for the appointment of a director of public prosecutions. The director's office will be an effective, specialized, independent body. This appointment shows that the government is determined to give complaints all the attention they deserve. We are not talking about just anything here.

Completing the circle, we have whistleblower protection. For our system to work, it must encourage anyone who becomes aware of irregularities to report them. That is what the bill proposes to do in order to make the system effective. Finally, we have a coherent, logical system based on a sound vision. Canadians asked for good governance, and that is what this government will give them.

That is why I say loud and clear that I am proud to be part of the government that is bringing in this major reform. Needless to say, I support this bill.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you will forgive me for being flabbergasted. I imagine that many of my Bloc colleagues are as well. I am going to question the member for Mégantic—L'Érable on this point.

It is caused, in part, by the terminology he has chosen. He has obviously used his party's slogan and said that his government would keep its promises, that it would solve the problem of cynicism and that it would restore trust.

My question is about the transparency and accountability the government talks about. One of the first things the Conservative Prime Minister did was to appoint a minister who had not been elected. That person cannot, therefore, be accountable for his department in this House. This seems to me to be the height of inconsistency.

With respect to the terminology he used, I would very much like the member to explain to me how that is consistent. To the majority of people who heard that decision, this is total inconsistency coming from a government that calls itself transparent and that wants to hold people accountable.

I am the Bloc Québécois critic for public works and government services. I will never see the minister in this House. How can you explain this, from a government that advocates transparency and accountability?

Mr. Christian Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

I am part of a government that wants to listen to Canadians. The greater Montreal region accounts for nearly half of Quebec. It is therefore unimaginable that this region should not be able to make itself heard. The Prime Minister has made the wise decision to appoint a representative from that important region so that the issues can be discussed in the proper places.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member does not take my criticisms too hard, but it is very difficult not to be cynical when he said in the preamble of his speech that we were elected in a democratic process. The trade minister was not elected in a democratic process, he was appointed. Since then, we have had an appointed senator, a floor crosser who was given a cabinet post, three or four Conservatives who we know of who have been appointed to prominent positions within government agencies, and the list goes on.

He says that he wants to listen to Canadians. Canadians do not accept this. The Liberals did this and every time it happened, the Conservatives got up from their chairs and screamed like banshees that this was wrong. Now that they are in government they seem to say think it okay. They are going to do all these things first and then forget about them later.

The other day the Prime Minister was asked a question about a fundraiser that he was having in New Brunswick, at \$500 or \$1,000 a plate, which would be against the new rules, if passed, for federal politicians. The Prime Minister has to travel from here to New Brunswick. Will it be the PC Party of New Brunswick that pays for his travel to New Brunswick for a PC Party event, or will it be the taxpayers of Canada who pay for the Prime Minister to fly on the Challenger to attend a party event in New Brunswick?

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He has raised a lot of different points. I would like to come back to the case of the Minister of Industry.

The Minister of Industry was elected democratically. The Prime Minister is clear on that point: if members want to introduce a bill, no one is preventing them from doing that in this House.

With respect to the fundraising campaign in New Brunswick, I believe that the Prime Minister was extremely clear. He complied with provincial legislation and the federal government has nothing to do with it. It goes without saying that in the course of his duties the Prime Minister has to travel everywhere in Canada. I do not see a problem in any of that.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before resuming the debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Windsor West, Canada-U.S. Border.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your appointment.

We are faced with an opportunity today to change the way things are done in the federal government. The legislation before us does take some important steps in remedying the lack of accountability and transparency between Parliament and government. However, there are some measures lacking that would make Parliament and government more accountable to Canadians.

Prior to the election last November, Ed Broadbent and the NDP demanded changes in ethics and accountability. The New Democratic Party proposed the following set of ethical reforms.

First, we called for democratic accountability for MPs. This means that no MP would be able to ignore his or her voters by leaving the party that he or she ran for and crossing the floor to another party without first resigning their seat and running in a byelection. We must put an end to the political opportunism that accompanies the backroom dealing in floor crossing and the accompanying job offers for personal gain. This simple rule would help to restore a measure of trust that has been replaced by voter cynicism. It is unfortunate that this measure was not included in this accountability legislation. My party is committed to banning floor crossing and will continue to demand this accountability measure for Canadian voters.

Second, we believe that election dates must be fixed. The date should be every four years, unless a minority government is brought down because of non-confidence. The large majority of the world's democracies do not give the party in power the right to determine when to call an election. The prime minister and the ruling party use this measure to ensure that elections are called at a time that is most beneficial to their re-election bid. This is anti-democratic. Fixed election dates would add fairness and transparency around elections for Canadians.

The power of the prime minister to set election dates has other negative effects on the way our government operates. Much of the business of government stays on hold when the possibility of an election looms. The longer the period of uncertainty, the less that we are able to accomplish for the voters who sent us to Parliament. This measure was also not included in the accountability legislation.

Third, we called for spending limits and full disclosure on leadership contests. As Ed Broadbent pointed out, parties are not private clubs. The legislation does include a ban on all corporate and union donations, something with which this party agrees. However, while we have strict spending limits on election campaigns, candidates and local riding associations, the amount spent by those seeking to lead their parties is limitless. This is a major deficiency in accountability to the citizens of our country who finance our parties. Often a new leader of a party will become the Prime Minister of

Canada before facing the general electorate. We deserve to know as much about how he or she arrived at the most powerful office in the country. This new legislation does not accomplish this and that is unfortunate. In a democracy, leaders of parties should not be chosen simply by the virtue of unlimited access to money.

Our fourth demand was electoral reform. In the recent Speech from the Throne the government committed to involving parliamentarians and citizens in examining the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions. I am encouraged by this, but I am also aware that serious reform will take serious action. In Canada every vote should matter. Ninety per cent of the world's democracies, including Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland and Wales have abandoned or significantly modified their original electoral system. However, this is the same electoral system that still exists in Canada.

● (1635)

Not only would we attain a House of Commons that numerically better reflects the way people vote, but with much better regional representation in all party caucuses we would more likely have better decisions and more thoughtful debates on regionally divisive and other important issues. In addition, empirical evidence drawn from other countries strongly suggests that women and minorities would be much better represented in the House of Commons.

I believe it is imperative for Canada to change its electoral system so that Canadians can receive what they voted for and have their elected officials work on their behalf in the most meaningful and positive way. I, for one, will welcome the day when the mindless exchanges in our question period cease to be the standard by which Canadians judge our national political behaviour. My party will continue to work to ensure that our present electoral system is improved, making us more accountable to Canadians.

Our fifth objective was the elimination of unregulated lobbying. While this new act toughens regulation of lobbyists, including "Ed's clause" to ban success fees, it falls short of ending the practice of awarding government contracts to firms that lobby government. There is also nothing to stop anyone from going to work for a lobbyist; he or she is stopped only from being a registered lobbyist.

The sixth measure in the NDP ethics package was a change to the way government appointments are made. The New Democratic Party has proposed that the government develop skills and competence related criteria for all government appointments, that these criteria be publicly released, and that committees scrutinize appointments.

Government Orders

This new act does create a new process that would improve the way government appointments are made, including a new public appointments commissioner, whose own appointment is now called into question given his links to the government. However, this process for appointments is kept with the PMO and therefore is not independent. The unfair and unethical patronage practice of government appointments must end. The NDP would ensure that any Canadian who qualifies for these positions on boards, commissions and agencies would have equal access and thus again bring accountability to all Canadians.

Another objective was to ensure serious reform to access to information legislation. I am sad to say that access to information reform is limited in this act. While it is expanded to include seven officers of Parliament, seven crowns and three foundations, comprehensive and meaningful reform has not been included in the act but instead has been sent to committee as a draft bill and a discussion paper. Canada badly needs the improved Access to Information Act. Canadians want more access to information about their government. My party is committed to accomplishing these objectives.

My colleague from Winnipeg Centre has worked tirelessly on this matter over the last two sessions of Parliament. His proposed changes would lead to the real openness and transparency that Canadians want in Ottawa.

I would like to conclude by discussing the long awaited legislation to provide for the protection of persons who are involved in the disclosure of wrongdoing in the workplace. These workers provide support for the government's agenda and must be protected against retaliation when they honestly and openly raise concerns that are evident to them in the workplace. This is the only way for Canadians to become aware of any wrongdoing, either ethical or legal, in the government departments they support. These women and men have been waiting too long for this protection from their government.

This act allows for disclosures to be made directly to the commissioner, who would now have the authority to deal directly with complaints both from public servants and the public. The NDP supports the initiative to remove the process whereby allegations were made to a middle person before a complaint was brought to the commissioner.

We are concerned, however, that whistleblowers would not have the right to seek remedy through the court system even as a last resort and also that in cases of retaliation a whistleblower would be referred to a "tribunal" headed by judges who are appointed by the Prime Minister. However, we are confident that we can influence the necessary changes to this act so that it is truly accountable to all Canadians.

• (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before we go to questions and comments, I would like to make a comment of my own and it has to do with cellphones. I know they are fun toys, but please turn off the music.

I recognize the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton under questions and comments.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his very informative remarks and for his very committed work, in particular to protect whistleblowers, as he strives to better represent the thousands of public servants who live in his constituency.

He said in the closing portion of his remarks that he was concerned about the tribunal process we have in place to protect whistleblowers. That process includes a group of judges who are active in part of the judiciary, who would listen to grievances by whistleblowers, offer restoration where necessary and discipline where they must.

He questions the independence of that process given the fact that the Prime Minister would choose the judges who would be involved in the tribunal. In the very next breath, he said he wants to use those same judges through the court system. If he questions the independence of judges who form, evidently, the basis of our judiciary when it comes to the tribunal, why is he perfectly willing to accept judges in the courtroom as the protectors of whistleblowers?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, our point as a party is that notwithstanding the fact that there is seemingly more independence in this process than the previous whistleblower legislation, we have concerns that whistleblowers going forward may see that their grievances are not being heard fully and independently by someone appointed by the Prime Minister. We need to look at the scrutiny of appointments by the Prime Minister. Perhaps this is something we could look at in terms of amendments. That is my first point.

My second point is about the remedy that would be in place for those grievances if the whistleblower was not satisfied or was not being heard. We have seen this time and time again with whistleblowers. In fact, some of the whistleblowers who have blown the whistle in this city and who are constituents of mine have blown the whistle one, two or three times. Each time they are fighting the cause and doing good work for Canadians, but they are being beaten down because there is no access to an appropriate remedy.

I am simply making the point that if at the end of day there is not a fair hearing for whistleblowers, they should be able to avail themselves of the court system, which is independent, not questioning the appointments of the judiciary, simply talking about the avenues in which they can go and the fact that we have oversight for those appointments for this tribunal process.

• (1645)

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question has to do with reform of this place. There were comments made about changing the nature of Parliament. It is a topic that I have had a personal and professional interest in for a long time.

There are two concerns I have always had with proportional representation that I would like the member to comment on. First, under our current system, any citizen of Canada has the right to run for this place directly and to represent his or her peers as a member of Parliament. Under a proportional representation system, that would not exist any more. As an individual, one would have to go through a party. A party would actually determine who would be here.

Government Orders

That raises my second point. If it is a list system in a proportional representation legislature, who determines who gets on the list? These two points are connected. As a member of Parliament in my riding, I feel responsible to my constituents for what I do. There are a lot of Saturday mornings when I roll out very early to head off for a full day of events because it is my riding and they are my constituents. I think that people elected in a proportional representation system would be much less likely to do that.

I have two parts of one question. First, how does the member resolve this issue that individuals actually cannot run for Parliament, that it is up to parties to decide who would sit in this place? Second, how would the member convince the voters out there that they would be better served by members of Parliament who are not actually directly connected to them or not directly elected by them, and consequently have no responsibility back to them, but who will be less accessible to them because it is not their own constituency per se?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I have an observation. When we look at the present cabinet of the government, we see someone who has not in fact been elected and was appointed by the Prime Minister by way of going into the Senate. I think we have some problems at present.

I will say quickly that we are not talking about full proportional representation. If we were to go to the Law Reform Commission website, we could see what the model is. It is very sensible. Most Canadians who have seen it agree with the model. I look forward to further debate on electoral reform.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the member for Ottawa Centre for splitting his time and for his speech, which I thought was commendable and touched on some of the points that I think need to be raised in the House and have not received the proper attention they need from the government.

Second, as this is my first time to rise in the House, I would like to thank the voters of Skeena—Bulkley Valley who saw fit to place me in this seat again and represent their views. It is from their perspective that I am looking at this voluminous bill which seems to cry out for clarity and attention to detail.

I will be fully transparent with the House. I am ambitious, but I have only made it three-quarters of the way through the bill. I would not want to be disparaging in thinking about how many members who have spoken, particularly from the government ranks, have not read the bill in its entirety as yet. Let us presume they have and have missed a few of the key points that need fixing.

The riding from which I hail is a rural riding in northwestern British Columbia and is extraordinarily beautiful. In that riding are people who bring a great deal of rural Canadian common sense to issues of the day and who ask me to bring some of that perspective to bills like this one that are filled with the obviously necessary legal jargon in order to be presented in the House. Yet in a region like mine, which is just now turning the corner from years of regional economic pain and suffering, a region that is 30% to 35% first nations people with a long and strong history of good governance and sound pride in their culture and tradition, they want a government they can trust.

And gosh, after all these years of watching brown bags pass across tables in Italian restaurants, still there is a kernel of hope in the voting minds of our constituents, who want to believe that this place can become more accountable. They want to believe that the members, and particularly those who do not sit in the seats that represent the cabinet of this country, will in fact represent their interests and not the interests of narrow self-interest groups and lobbyists.

I will break the accountability act into two parts. One part is what is in it and one part is what is not in it. The former shall be quite a bit smaller than the latter. In it is some progress on whistleblowing and some progress on campaign finance reform and crown corporation transparency; that is the government's due. We must again commend the work of Mr. Broadbent for what is not missing. He spent many years in this place and outside this place pushing for many of the reforms that I find in Bill C-2.

This, I believe, is the duty of all members of the House, from all four corners, both opposition and government. It is not simply to stand up and clap ourselves on the back and say, "A job well done and let us get on with it". It is the duty of all members to look at the bill. Let us look at what the government is proposing and look at believing in the intention that the Prime Minister has spoken about. We must look to see if that intention is true, from the campaign to now, about truly opening up government to the scrutiny of Canadian citizens and their representatives who sit in these seats in this House.

The list is long, but I will try to focus on what is not in this bill, on the pieces in the bill that need either serious reform or an outright new look, and at whether that is presented in another omnibus bill, heaven help us, or in a partial act that comes before the House. Floor-crossing comes immediately to mind.

I listened to the two parliamentary secretaries prior to my speech and found them wanting in their discussion about open and transparent democracy. On the one hand, it was suggested that the bill furthers the cause of democracy and accountability in this country. On the other hand, it was said that it was quite acceptable to appoint someone to the Senate and then drop them into a cabinet seat if the government was unable to win seats in the vicinity of Montreal.

Then, lo and behold, some of its policies and its candidates did not attract the voters in the vicinity of Montreal. Perhaps one should work harder in that direction and not go against the wishes of the Montrealers I know, who find it difficult to believe how an appointed friend of the government helping it run a campaign somehow deserves the honour of sitting at the cabinet table and making decisions on behalf of them when they had no voice and no say in that person's election. I find the hypocrisy in that one statement alone incredible.

Government Orders

●(1650)

Regarding floor crossing, I know there are hon. members present who are interested in this issue. When people cast their ballots in that most sacred and private act which is an election, they make decisions about their future and about the combination of a party's leader, the party's policies and platforms, and the candidate presented in the local riding. Clearly nobody in this place would suggest that our own presence as candidates is enough to sway the majority of voters in our ridings to vote for us alone. It is the combination of what we represent by the parties we sit with and the policies and debates that we engage in, and it is on that combination that voters present their opinions.

To simply take for granted those opinions, that sacred trust placed in the ballot box and decide for ourselves where we should sit in this House, what policies we should be pushing for and what credo we should stand by is hypocrisy that Canadians clearly cannot stand for. It further erodes the confidence people have in the simple act of putting measures in this so-called accountability act, which many Canadians agree with, which simply asks members who choose to no longer sit with a party, however long or short the time has been that they have sat with that party, to sit as independent members. Some independent members have been very effective in this House. In a byelection the members would seek a new mandate under the new party's flag, policies and leader, in order to go forward and do the work they feel is best on behalf of their ridings. It passes the test when I speak about it in various parts of this country and particularly in my home in Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

The biggest hole in this bill in terms of details is access to information that citizens and members of Parliament need to have. Knowledge truly is power when it comes to the dealings of government. While the vast majority of civil servants, the majority of members of Parliament, those sitting in government and otherwise, come to their work with integrity and honesty, there will always be suspicion. Voters and members of Parliament need solid access to information legislation set in law that will allow them the power to wrest information from government, which has its own self-interests as members now sitting in the official opposition can well attest, and bring it to the light of day. My colleague from Winnipeg Centre has said that sunshine is one of the best cleaners we have. The best determinant we could have to proper and just government is full and open transparency.

That brings me to the BlackBerry, the wonderful device that many have become so greatly addicted to. When we look at lobbyist reform, we find that as long as lobbyists conduct themselves via the most popular form of communication available on the Hill, they are not subject to the scrutiny of transparency and openness, but if they make a phone call, perhaps yes, and if they sit down, certainly yes. That seems absolutely silly and obviously is an oversight which I look forward to the government correcting as the bill heads to committee.

Appointments will be the last subject I touch upon. When we raised the issue of floor crossing earlier in this debate, a member of the government stood up and said that lo and behold, some 25 years ago a member from the Progressive Conservatives crossed over to the NDP, that the NDP accepted it at that time for two months prior

to an election, and how dare they see the light of day and realize that floor crossing is not such a good idea?

I remember reading a news article about former prime minister Mulroney making 1,250 appointments on his last day in office. That is wrong and Canadians identify that as wrong.

When we look at what the government has done in the three months since being in office with respect to open and transparent appointments of officers and people in positions of authority, one scratches one's head to think that hypocrisy can reign so quickly, that in the 13 years it took to mature into the party that is now the official opposition, the government is now on a fast track and able to pull off such leaps and bounds of reason and logic after three months to entice floor crossers, to appoint senators, to appoint failed candidates to positions of influence and authority and all the benefits they ascribe to.

●(1655)

Again, I take the perspective of the common average citizens from my riding and the common average sense and sensibility they bring as Canadians to what they want to see in government. This bill begins to take us along that path, but clearly, the committee is going to be an interesting place to be. There are some fundamental reforms that need to take place in order for this bill to actually become the piece of legislation we all desire.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really do not understand members of the NDP on this particular issue of changing political parties. I think they tried twice in the last Parliament, I think with a motion and a bill, and they lost on both accounts. It is their prerogative to raise the matter again. With all the issues this Parliament could be discussing, all the things that are important to Canadians, they are obsessed by this. We get it every day during question period. I think there are three slots for the New Democratic Party in question period and usually one out of those three is that they are upset about people crossing the floor.

I could point out to the member that this practice has been part of our democratic tradition for centuries. The greatest parliamentarian probably in the history of our system was Sir Winston Churchill. He crossed the floor. He started off as a Conservative. He fell by the wayside and he became a Liberal. When he saw the light again, he came back to the Conservative Party. It was a great move, a great thing for democracy in Britain and one could argue for the world. He did it.

There are members of my own political party who have been members of three or four different parties. They were part of the Alliance or the Reform, the Democratic Alliance, the Progressive Conservative Party. They were doing their best for Canada and they changed parties.

The NDP wants some outside control. I know what it is all about. It is all about having the party have more control. If members want to leave the NDP or leave any other party, they have to kowtow to the party apparatus or they are in big trouble.

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I am prepared to place my confidence and my trust in the voters who will ultimately get a chance to decide on these things.

I realize that members of the NDP are not quite happy with the system we have and they would like referenda on a regular basis to dissolve the Parliament. Perhaps it is because nobody wants to join the NDP. I do not know if that is the problem. I did not hear about this much from the NDP, quite frankly, last May when members of the Conservative Party changed parties, but now it has become an obsession with members of the NDP. Every day during question period, at every opportunity, that is all they are worried about. They might want to worry sometime about crime in this country, about bringing in some minimum sentences. How about worrying about getting that \$1,200 to parents with children? How about worrying about that sometime?

Again they are welcome to do that. They can spend the whole 39th Parliament worrying about somebody enticing their members or some member switching parties. They could spend the whole 39th Parliament for all I care—

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. The hon. member for Skeena-Bulkley Valley is being recognized.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I will wade through that diatribe to find a question. The question that I actually find is that in fact members of the hon. member's own party, somewhere near 40 of them, voted for such legislation to be brought in in the last Parliament, and would it not be an interesting exercise to go through such a thing again? That is what we hope to do.

In terms of justifying this floor crossing practice and saying it is tradition, there are many things in our tradition that we have left by the wayside, many of them quite bad. Thankfully we do not have some of the traditions that we used to have in yesteryear. Perhaps women not voting or minorities or natives or any of those others not voting are traditions the hon. member would like to grab back because they were considered to be sound and wise traditions, even in Winston Churchill's time.

He chose to go after a party in the middle of this debate and deride it for whether or not it had the attention of voters—while the NDP doubled its votes in the past election and then went up another half again—and to take this debate to such a base level. All we were suggesting is that the voters need to be brought back into the conversation of where it is that members of Parliament stand on issues. When voters hear a candidate during an election deride another party, run it down and accuse it of all sorts of terrible things and then within hours find that the candidate is in agreement with such things, the voters have to question the validity of the electoral process. All the New Democrats are saying is to allow the voters to make a decision and wrest control from the parties. If a member finds it so abhorrent to actually sit with a party any longer that the member needs to cross the floor, the member can simply return to the voters and seek that mandate, for clearly this is not an occurrence that happens every week.

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Don Valley East.

As this is my first opportunity to rise in the 1st session of the 39th Parliament, I would like to sincerely thank the citizens of my riding

of Saint John for the confidence they have expressed in me. I look forward to advocating strongly on their behalf on issues such as harbour cleanup, housing and child care.

I am pleased to offer my perspective on Bill C-2, the federal accountability act. This is an issue I well understand. In 1988 I represented the Canadian Bar Association before the Holtmann committee that the then prime minister Mulroney had convened to examine the area of lobbying in Canada. In 1994 and 1995 I chaired the industry committee and during that time I chaired the subcommittee on Bill C-43, the Lobbyists Registration Act. In the last Parliament I sat on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

I believe that the government has to tread very carefully on this issue and to be intellectually honest about what it is trying to achieve. A lot of media spin and rhetoric from the government that has surrounded the introduction of this bill would give one the impression that all of government is corrupt. This is simply not the case.

This type of rhetoric brings disrepute on the men and women who serve in public life, the people who come to this House of Commons with the right morals and the right intentions. We all come to this place wanting to make a better country, a better place for our children and grandchildren. Anyone who claims that he or she has a monopoly on accountability does a disservice to Parliament and to this country.

Flippant comments and generalizations that are not based on fact bring this House into disrepute. It also brings honest, hard-working civil servants into disrepute. We need to be judicious and we need to be factual about what we say and the perception that it can breed.

Canada is a successful, modern democracy, not some banana republic as the government would like to portray. What it comes down to is either a person is fundamentally honest or not. As the hon. Mitchell Sharp, the esteemed former member of this place, said before our committee in 1995, "You cannot legislate integrity".

This brings me to the federal accountability act. The measures in this legislation are not fundamental or even dramatic changes. To describe this legislation as wide sweeping, fundamental, ethical reforms is just not the case. We should not be telling Canadians that we can legislate integrity. We cannot.

The changes proposed in this legislation are things that we as parliamentarians have been talking about and moving toward since the 1980s. This is part of the Canadian tradition. We review legislation after a three or a five year period and improve or change the legislative framework so that it is more reflective of public expectations of legislators and civil servants.

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For example, the evolution of the ethics counsellor who reported to the prime minister evolved to an Ethics Commissioner who reports to Parliament, to the creation of a new ethics auditor on lobbying.

Interestingly, we talked about this in the 1995 report, "Rebuilding Trust". The government speaks of these changes, yet at the same time it seems to have shown disrespect for independent officers of Parliament, such as the Ethics Commissioner. While parliamentarians may not always agree on everything that the Ethics Commissioner says, to politicize the issue casts a negative pale over everyone in this place.

• (1705)

Members in previous Parliaments worked together to establish an Ethics Commissioner who reports directly to Parliament and yet time and time again members of this government refused to participate in investigations and tried to undermine the integrity of Mr. Shapiro. Either we have accountability or we do not. The government cannot pick and choose which investigations it wants to participate in or who occupies the position of the Ethics Commissioner.

The issue of reforming the financing of political parties and candidates is not a new issue. A significant overhaul was already completed by the Liberal government in 2003. I support the latest changes, but they are tinkering with the natural process. When this bill reaches committee, I would also like to see the inclusion of third party advertising restrictions perhaps.

This bill talks a lot about lobbyists. The government, through its media spin, would have Canadians believe that all lobbyists are crooked or corrupt. That clearly is not the case. I would like to remind parliamentarians of a 1995 report called "Rebuilding Trust". This report came out of a committee that I had the privilege of chairing. It was called "Rebuilding Trust" because of a perception that, between the period of 1984 and 1993, there was a lot of corruption under the Conservatives. That government did suffer some serious ethical challenges which then Prime Minister Mulroney attempted to redress.

Interacting and advocating to government is a natural part of the democratic process, whether it is charities like the Canadian Cancer Society or the Canadian Institute for the Blind, or firms that are looking to do business with the government. There are checks and balances in this current legislation. To pretend that this bill is a complete overhaul is disingenuous indeed.

In the fall of 2002 when the government was in opposition, the then prime minister put forward a motion to the House of Commons proposing that the chairs of House committees be elected by secret ballot rather than being appointed directly by the prime minister. With the cooperation of members of the House, the motion passed and our committee chairs were elected by secret ballot. The government is now seeking to reverse this very process that we in the House put in place. This one act of not electing our chairs would lend some hypocrisy to this legislation. The government has spoken about reforming the appointment process and I am fully in support of this, but this is a natural evolution of this policy.

Whistleblower legislation is also a natural evolution. Legislation was before the House during the last Parliament and I look forward to participating in that debate.

Steps are going in the right direction to expand the reach of the Auditor General. They would build on improvements that we made when we were in government. Strengthening auditing and accountability within departments was done in the last Parliament. It is not something new; it is not something dramatic. There are aspects of the legislation that will work well; however, it is the natural evolution of this Parliament.

Accountability is about doing what we say we are going to do and keeping our promises. Accountability should be about the Prime Minister coming to my riding of Saint John, New Brunswick and delivering money that is needed to clean up our harbour as he promised he would do on three occasions. Instead, the Prime Minister makes a token gesture of \$2.2 million and says the government is starting to clean up the harbour. The previous government promised \$44 million. To pretend that \$2.2 million is going to clean up our harbour is not genuine. Reinvesting money in our community is about accountability.

I look forward to sending this bill to committee and to working with all members of the House toward improvements.

• (1710)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that the member criticized the approach of the government with respect to cracking down on the pervasive culture of lobbyists who exerted undue influence in the previous government. He himself of course was a lobbyist. Immediately after leaving office he entered that sector, stayed in it, and now he is coming before the House of Commons and criticizing our legislation which seeks to regulate and control, with some degree of accountability, that sector.

We are taking steps to make public the number of meetings that occur between lobbyists and ministers, to end the revolving door between ministers' offices and lobby firms, and to institute a cooling-off period of five years from the time people leave a minister's office until the time they can begin lobbying that minister's office.

These are real steps. In fact, the *Ottawa Citizen* has called them a cultural revolution. The *National Post* called them the most sweeping ethics changes in a generation. The *Globe and Mail* said that clean does not get any squeakier.

Why will this member of the House and former lobbyist not stand now and affirm that he will support the accountability act, fall in line with what his other party members have finally said, and affirm his support for this, the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history?

• (1715)

Mr. Paul Zed: Mr. Speaker, the presumption of the member's question is a little flawed. First of all, my criticisms are in fact part of what this process is about. Let us get this piece of legislation, which in principle I support, to committee and let us get some improvements to areas that need changes. To pretend, like the hon. member would have us believe, that this is wide sweeping legislative change is just not correct. That is not a fact.

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I would commend the hon. member to read a report called “Rebuilding Trust”. Members of his own party or, I should say, members of the former Reform Party participated in “Rebuilding Trust”. It was a very fulsome—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: What happened to them?

Mr. Paul Zed: Does the member want me to answer the question, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would ask all hon. colleagues to allow the member to finish his statements in reply to the question.

Mr. Paul Zed: In fact, Mr. Speaker, the report formed the basis for some of what has happened in the accountability act today. The member might want to check with the hon. member from Saskatoon.

The report talked about ethics counsellors, ethics commissioners and ethics reports coming directly to Parliament. The report talked about some wide sweeping changes that needed to occur, some of the difficulties within the lobbyist industry, and regulating lobbying in this country. The Government Relations Institute of Canada has worked very hard to ensure that there is a lot of integrity within the lobby industry. I think a lot of us would have acknowledged that this is a very important and integral part of public life in this country.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief question with respect to an aspect of Bill C-2 that we have not discussed and that is the full and open declaration of leadership contests, both who the contributors are and any notion of a limit on how much someone can contribute to a leadership race. In some cases these can be a leadership race for the Prime Minister of Canada, but in any case hold important democratic positions. I wonder if he could give us his opinion on opening up some transparency on this much needed issue.

Mr. Paul Zed: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that transparency and openness are critical for leadership races. I note that members opposite, perhaps, have not always been as open and transparent about the expenses for leadership races that they might have incurred or who contributors might have been. The short answer is that I favour a full and open transparent disclosure for leadership races.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to address the government's first bill introduced in the 39th Parliament, Bill C-2, the federal accountability act. It is in the interests of all Canadians to ensure that the federal government is accountable. As an accountant by trade, the people of Don Valley East elected me as their federal representative because they wanted someone deeply concerned about transparency and accountability.

There are aspects in the proposed legislation that I and my colleagues in the Liberal Party will support because it builds on many of the initiatives launched by the previous federal Liberal governments between 1993 and 2006. For example, everyone knows that it was a Liberal government that first introduced the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

It was a Liberal government that fostered the development of this office to make the Ethics Commissioner independent from the Prime Minister's Office and instead, directly accountable to Parliament.

It was a Liberal government that established a separate Senate ethics commissioner, an office, by the way, that will be eliminated under this proposed legislation.

It was a Liberal government that first established clear guidelines for public office holders and it was a Liberal government that restored the Comptroller General's functions for each department and subsequently instituted an internal audit policy.

Bill C-2 does attempt to build on these very important reforms, but many of the proposals contained in the legislation are just simple extensions of existing legislation.

I will comment on electoral reform, for example. It was a Liberal government that first introduced Bill C-24, the first dramatic reform of political financing in Canadian history. It placed strict limits on the amount of money that private companies and trade unions could contribute to a party or candidate.

Through the same bill, it was a Liberal government that first introduced public funding for political parties, an innovation that made political parties far less reliant on corporate or union financing as a source of revenue.

In many instances, I see many of these extensions as nothing more than a lame attempt to exaggerate a situation that simply no longer exists. In other words, as one prominent academic recently observed, we see here many solutions in search of problems resolved long ago.

To be fair however, let us look at what the Conservatives promised Canadians in their election platform and what the legislation actually delivers. According to the document entitled “Stand up for Canada”, the Conservatives promised on page 12 that they will “allow members of the public, not just politicians, to make complaints to the Ethics Commissioner”. Unfortunately, I see no reference to public access in this proposed legislation which, in effect, denies voters the right to complain about their elected officials. It appears to me that “Stand up for Canada” just fell flat on its face.

Here is another broken promise. On the very same page of the Conservative platform, the plan would “make part time or non-remunerated ministerial advisers subject to the ethics code”. Again, there is absolutely no reference to this promise whatsoever in the legislation that we have before us. Canadians do indeed feel stood up by the Conservatives.

Although the Prime Minister has promised to apply strict new rules to the conduct of lobbyists, one of his first acts was to appoint a lobbyist as the Minister of National Defence. A lobbyist, I might add, who represented the top suppliers of military hardware to the federal government and members on the opposite side of the floor wonder what is wrong. The problem is that the defence minister will be in a conflict of interest on too many files and he will be forced to remove himself from critical discussions.

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• (1720)

Furthermore, the Prime Minister says that he will no longer allow political staffers to immediately jump into the lobbying business so they can profit from contacts with their former employers. However, we know of at least three Conservative staffers, who worked for current ministers, who are now suddenly and miraculously in the private sector and lobbying their former bosses.

What about accountability? The Prime Minister has made it clear for years that he believes in an elected Senate. Yet the first thing he did when he arrived in Ottawa was to appoint his campaign manager to the Senate and then made him the Minister of Public Works. Shame. As a senator and a minister of one of the largest departments in the federal government, he does not have to face the House of Commons during question period. What kind of accountability is that?

Let us look again on page nine of the Conservative platform. It says, "A Conservative government will ensure that all officers of Parliament are appointed through consultation with all parties in the House of Commons, not just simply named by the Prime Minister". What was the first thing the Prime Minister did? He arbitrarily appointed a loyal Reform Party member as head of federal appointments with absolutely no consultation with Parliament. This is a person who has already managed to offend Canadians of Caribbean and Asian descent by referring to them as nothing more than "lawless immigrants". This is the type of irresponsible, redneck comments which are abhorrent to people who believe in pluralism and civil societies. It is a very offensive comment and the Prime Minister has decided to make this person the head of appointments.

The Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that he will stand up for his close friends and Conservative campaign workers, but the rest of Canadians no longer matter now that the election is over. It is precisely this kind of behaviour that fuels public mistrust of government institutions. If the Prime Minister is so concerned about accountability and transparency, why will he not disclose who donated to his leadership campaign? What does he have to hide?

In conclusion, my colleagues and I in the Liberal Party will be placing the legislation under close scrutiny in order to salvage genuine reforms. Canadians deserve better accountability and we in the Liberal Party will give it to them.

• (1725)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from across the way referred often to how the Liberal Party had brought about measures throughout the last 13 years regarding accountability, almost as if there were no need for any new measures on accountability. Was the sponsorship scandal perhaps a good reason for bringing about some new measures on accountability?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, when anyone says that accountability comes to an end when the context is not there, it is not fair. Basically nothing ends; it is an evolving process.

We put in many measures, and we will work with the government on those measures that will extend, for example, the lobbying law,

which would ensure lobbyists including members who have been staffers of Conservative MPs are no longer in the lobbying business. It has to be equitable and it has to be egalitarian. In cases of third party advertising, we would like to know why the Prime Minister has not put that in the accountability legislation.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the question that was put forward to my distinguished colleague from Don Valley East concerning the sponsorship scandal and the questions as to whether this legislation would be enough to cover lobbyists. I know the minister who was proposing the bill was himself a lobbyist in Ottawa, so I suspect he has a bit of experience in this.

However, without going further, it is interesting that while the sponsorship issue was brought forth for an inquiry, which the then prime minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, had the intestinal fortitude to bring forward, the same is not true of the performance of the minister who is now proposing this legislation, Bill C-2, when he was minister of social services.

We all remember the Accenture scandal in which a quarter billion dollars of taxpayer money went missing. It went down basically a funnel into some company that came out of Bermuda. Here we have an example from the parliamentary secretary and others suggesting that scandal only goes one way.

It is important for us to recognize that when it comes to transparency and openness, the minister who is proposing this legislation is in no position to do so. I would like to get a comment from the hon. member on this. Knowing the reputation of the member of Parliament, the Treasury Board minister, does she not find it ironic that the individual, who himself was cited several times by the auditor general of the province of Ontario, is now going to teach this Parliament, this House of Commons, a lesson on ethics?

• (1730)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I was quite concerned about the fact that the President of the Treasury Board would be so sanctimonious in his presentation of the bill. The provincial auditor has constantly cited him for being negligent and responsible for scandals that took place, under his watch, in the ministry of community and social services. Instead of taking the blame for it, he was moved away.

However, we were very strong about our accountability and we brought in the Gomery inquiry despite the fact that it would not be politically wise. It is important to know that hypocrisy exists on the other side and the government members should not be so sanctimonious.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member for Don Valley East is this. I am a bit confused. If the measures the Liberal government took over the last 13 years were so strong, why was there a need for change? Why was there a verdict by Canadians that accountability was something lacking in the past government? Does the member really believe that the measures in this accountability act will not foster a new spirit in Ottawa? The question that has been asked numerous times throughout the day to Liberal members is, will they support the accountability act?

Will she support the accountability act, one of the toughest pieces of ethical legislation that the House has ever seen?

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Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my comments are that the bill comes from a minister who himself was responsible for \$500 million of boondoggle. He brings in an accountability act, which is very selective and does not have enough teeth. If it goes to committee and comes forth with definite changes in terms of third party advertising, without the hypocrisy of do as I say and not do as I do, we will be there to work with it.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the bill. I will be splitting my time with the member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

I do not know if one can continue to give maiden speeches every time one gets elected to the House of Commons. If that is possible, then this would be my maiden speech for this Parliament.

At the outset, I am pleased and proud to have the opportunity to once again be in the House of Commons. This is the fourth time that I have had the privilege of representing the people of Niagara Falls. I am very grateful to that community, which is also my home town. It includes the towns of Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake. Together they comprise the riding that I have the honour to represent.

On this debate, which is about the democratic process and how we conduct ourselves, what a privilege it is for me to have grown up in that community and to now represent it in the House of Commons. As all members of Parliament know, because of our great democratic process in Canada, this is something we cannot take for granted and we must continue to earn the trust of the voters, the individuals who have sent us here.

I want to take this opportunity as well to reiterate something that the Prime Minister has said, and that is to congratulate Her Majesty The Queen on her 80th birthday. I was thinking about that recently. I have been able to count very easily the number of years that the Queen has been on the throne, since I was born a couple of weeks after she acceded to the throne in 1952. It was very clear to me whenever it was her silver anniversary, or the 40th anniversary and recently her 50th anniversary, because they mark milestones in my own life. As a public servant, as a lawyer and as a parliamentarian, I have always been very proud to take the oath of allegiance to the Queen, as our head of state, and I have been very proud and pleased all my life to count myself as one of her loyal subjects. I join with I believe all members of the House in congratulating her on her 80th birthday.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to talk about the bill, the federal accountability act. It is a major part of the Conservative government's platform. The new Government of Canada has indicated that it is something we believe this Parliament needs and deserves and it is what Canadians want. It will fundamentally change the way government operates by strengthening ethical rules and political institutions to ensure transparency and accountability to Canadians.

The objective of the bill is very clear. It will put in place the means to allow Canadians to once again place their trust in the Government of Canada.

Canada is a strong democracy. I point out to students who visit that this is one of the oldest democracies in the world. We think of Canada as such a young country and we sometimes forget that we are one of the oldest democracies. We could go right through that list. I think the United Nations has about 161 different countries and it is very difficult to come up with any country that has had a democracy longer than ours. Indeed, in constitutional discussions that took place in Parliament in the early 1990s, I used to say that perhaps we should have invited people from around the world to come and study the Canadian Constitution, or the British North America Act, now known as the Constitution Act. When people said to me that we should study other people's constitutions, I said it should be just the opposite. People should try to come to Canada to understand how we have governed ourselves so successfully.

However, there were serious problems that were unveiled by the Auditor General. I am always glad to get into the details of these things, but suffice it to say quite a mess was uncovered by the Auditor General and the subsequent Gomery commission. The federal accountability act is an important and essential component of restoring the trust that Canadians must have in their democratic institutions.

• (1735)

These democratic institutions cannot be taken for granted. We must continue to examine them to ensure we maintain the trust that Canadians place in us. We must start by reforming the process by which we are sitting in the House today, and that is the election process. The bill proposes a number of political financing reforms that would restore public confidence in the integrity of our system. These elements are very important. I have already had expressions of interest from outside this country after they heard what we were proposing to do.

What we are proposing is that only individuals can make political contributions; that those contributions be limited to \$1,000; that cash donations over \$20 be banned to dispel the negative images of brown envelopes being filled with cash and being passed around; require the disclosure of all large gifts to ensure the contributions, whether in money or in kind, are captured and accounted for; ban the receipt of gifts or trust funds that are meant to influence candidates or MPs so that no one has hidden or privileged access to power; and ban trust funds used for political purposes to keep soft money and secret donations out of politics.

Taken together, those reforms would help restore public trust in the electoral financing system in a number of ways. First, they would eliminate the undo influence of big institutional and secret contributors; second, they would bring the focus of the electoral system back on ordinary Canadians who are at the heart of our democracy; and third, they would provide an open and transparent political financing system through the elimination of loopholes and the setting of straightforward rules that are easy to follow and clear to enforce.

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On the subject of eliminating undue influence, the bill would ensure that all candidates and indeed the parties are on a level playing field. It is fact that 99% of Canadians make donations to the political process of \$1,000 or less. We are not eliminating people. We are keeping the large number of people who want to contribute in a meaningful way to the political system. By limiting those contributions to \$1,000, ordinary Canadians would not be left to compete with wealthy donors to make their contributions count.

No longer will we allow corporations, unions and organizations to contribute to the political process in terms of donations. I think this is a step in the right direction. Elections are about individuals. They are not about corporations, unions or other organizations trying to influence the political system. The bill would eliminate the opportunities for undue influence and it would ensure that Canadians are able to play on a level playing field.

Second, the bill promotes the democratic process. We have to keep in mind that it is our constituents who vote to bring us to Ottawa to represent them. The electoral system should reflect this primary democratic principle. Individuals and not corporations should be directly supporting the political process through their contributions and by tailoring limits to reflect the contribution patterns of the vast majority of Canadians it will require candidates and parties to strengthen their connection to the constituents whose trust they must earn and whose interest they intend to serve. Candidates, parties and MPs will need to reach out to the people who they want to represent and engage them in the political process rather than catering to a few.

Public trust and participation in the system will be difficult to maintain unless the system is open and transparent. Given some of the negative perceptions of our political institutions, it is important that Canadians are able to see that the political financing regime is comprised of a set of rules that are clear and easy to enforce, and that means closing the real and potential loopholes in the system, which, of course, is the third function of the federal accountability act.

I think this bill is a step in the right direction. As I said, there are even people outside the country who are looking with interest at what we are doing because they realize this is the way to go, this is the way to restore confidence in our political system. I am proud and pleased to be a part of that system and I am always pleased to be part of a process that will help to improve people's respect for our political institutions in Canada.

• (1740)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the larger issue of accountability, I want to ask the government House leader a question about the appointment of committee chairs.

This, as the government House leader is aware, is an institution of accountability. Our job here as members of the House of Commons is to hold the executive to account and we operate through 26 separate committees. The chair is supposedly appointed by the members of the committee to preside over the meetings and to provide direction but also to be the spokesman for every member of the committee as the government House leader is a representative of every constituent in Niagara Falls, including those who did not vote for him.

I will point out that this party was wrong. We allowed the executive, in our past, to appoint the committee chairs. However that was changed back in 2003 or 2002. One of the most active spokesmen who spoke very clearly on the issue was the Prime Minister who was totally against that and voted against it, like other people, including myself, and that was changed to the benefit of this House, and the chairman was the spokesman for the committee.

I am disappointed, as I believe are most people in this House, that the Prime Minister is now, despite what he said in the past, going to appoint the chairs. The chairs now are not the nominees of the committee members but the nominees of the Prime Minister.

Does this action by the Prime Minister comply with his vision of accountability in this institution?

• (1745)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the committee members themselves will be appointing the chair and the vice-chairs. There is no question about that.

One of the fascinating remarks made by the hon. member was when he referred to the fact that his government, or "our executive", made a mistake in the way it went about appointing a committee chair. That is quite an admission. I guess I have seen some fascinating things over the years. Certainly the Liberal Party has a history of very heavy-handed tactics in committees. It has always surprised me and I believe it was unnecessary and, quite frankly, counterproductive.

I was a member when the first Canadian environmental protection act was introduced into this Parliament back in the eighties. I always remember how amazed a member of the New Democratic Party was when he suggested amendments to those of us who were on the Conservative side, when we were the government, and if they made sense we allowed them. He said that he had been here for a long time but had never had any amendments accepted because the former Liberal government had a policy that if amendments came from opposition members it would not accept them. He was quite taken, and it is part of the public record, and said that he had never in all his years as a member of Parliament had so many amendments. Why not? If members of Parliament, from whatever party, make amendments that make sense, I applaud and I welcome that.

When I was the parliamentary secretary to the justice minister, I was a part of all the justice legislation from 1984 through 1993 and we accepted amendments from the Liberal Party. If they made sense they made the bill. I think that is the way committees should work. They should work on a consensus and they should work on democratic principles.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, accountability is the key word in this discussion but, unfortunately, when the Conservatives became government they threw that subject right out the window by appointing a person to the Senate, by taking a floor crosser and by putting some of their friends in prominent positions in various agencies throughout the country.

They also talked about accountability and fiscal responsibility. The Prime Minister is going to New Brunswick this weekend for a big fundraiser for the PC Party. He had said that the fundraiser was only for the PC Party of New Brunswick and not for the federal Conservatives. I just want to ask him, quite clearly, who will be paying for the Prime Minister's trip to New Brunswick, the taxpayers of Canada or the PC Party of New Brunswick?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things the hon. member should know and should remember is that this Prime Minister is absolutely committed to bringing back accountability, fairness and transparency in government. He has done more already than has been done in decades in this chamber in the pursuance of that goal.

I was very proud and pleased to see legislation like this being introduced that would bring back accountability, transparency and fairness. The rules that are set out in this are very clear and they will be followed by all members of this government. That sort of thing should be applauded in this chamber because that is what is fair and right.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion to refer a number of statutory reviews to committee. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be the committee for the purposes of section 145 of the Anti-terrorism Act (2001) and that, pursuant to subsection 145(2) of that Act, the committee report no later than June 23, 2006;

that the Standing Committee on Finance be the committee for the purposes of section 89 of the Canada Revenue Agency Act;

that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be the committee for the purposes of section 5.1 of the Canada Travelling Exhibitions Indemnification Act;

that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be the committee for the purposes of section 46.1 of An Act to amend the Criminal Code (organized crime and law enforcement);

that the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development be the committee for the purposes of section 343 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act; and

that the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be the committee for the purposes of section 29 of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

• (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there unanimous consent for the parliamentary secretary to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Government Orders

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this bill we are talking about is about changing the culture of politics. I want to begin by acknowledging that with the introduction of the federal accountability act both this House and the people of Canada are seeing at first hand the real and tangible steps that the Conservative Party of Canada is taking to clean up government in Ottawa and to return confidence both to Parliament and to the bureaucracy that runs government.

Such a bill is long overdue in view of the scandals, the corruption and the culture of entitlement that has permeated the Liberal Party and those well connected to it during the past 13 years. The federal accountability act represents our government's response to the Gomery inquiry, to years of wanton and unregulated excesses, to years of patronage appointments, to dealing with highly paid lobbyists who worked their trade in and around the halls and offices of Parliament Hill, and to the culture of political fundraising, which offers those with money access to government. The act now prohibits contributions from corporations and unions altogether and limits personal obligations and contributions to \$1,000 so that big money no longer has the sole voice in Ottawa.

The federal accountability act is all about accountability for everyone, starting with the Prime Minister and extending to all parliamentarians and public sector employees, to those who receive government funding and to those who seek access to government officials and decision makers.

The act itself is lengthy and multi-faceted and affects some 28 other pieces of legislation. It is broader in scope than the recommendations of the Gomery inquiry, and while the act may amend scores of existing laws, its primary aim is to address the moral decay that has permeated every level of government.

Our government is unquestionably intent upon changing the culture of politics on Parliament Hill and ending the culture of entitlement that has existed under successive Liberal governments. This act will make this government work better for Canadians. It provides oversight, rules, restrictions and measures to ensure that public interest is preserved and individual opportunism curtailed, and that there is an administration that carries out the affairs of government in a way that is both transparent and accountable.

Government Orders

In the end, of course, only people of integrity and character can change the image the public has of politicians and those connected to them. The bottom line is that Canadians deserve to know that their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent and used wisely by those in government.

Part 1 of the bill deals with the conflict of interest and post-employment code for public office holders. Canadians rightfully expect their representatives and public office holders to make decisions in the public interest and without any consideration of personal gain and without taking advantage of information not available to the public. Public office holders must perform their duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest. The bill specifies in clause 4 that:

—a public office holder is in a conflict of interest when he or she exercises an official power, duty or function that provides an opportunity to further his or her private interests or those of his or her relatives or friends or to improperly further another person's private interests.

It restricts the office holder from making those kinds of decisions.

The act deals with recusal from voting or debating on matters that would place an office holder in conflict. Other provisions of the act deal with the issues of preferential treatment, insider information, influence peddling, fundraising, cash donations and the acceptance of gifts and advantages. This is clear and unambiguous language. It is language that demands a much higher standard for public office holders than has been the experience and the custom in Ottawa to this point.

These conflict of interest rules are not merely guidelines or recommendations, as compliance with part 1 of the act itself will be deemed a term and condition of a public officer holder's appointment for employment.

Most important, the legislation provides the rules of the road for those office holders who have assets, are competent and do want to contribute to our country and our society, but who want to do it in a way that preserves their integrity and honour. It prescribes the means that may be used to resolve conflicts, which in some cases may even require the disposal or divestment of the offending assets.

• (1755)

The federal accountability act would combine the position of ethics commissioner and Senate ethics officer and create a new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner. This newly appointed commissioner shall be an individual with judicial experience, either a former judge or an individual with federal or provincial board, commission or tribunal experience.

The commissioner will have the same power to enforce the attendance of witnesses, to compel them to give evidence under oath or affirmation and to produce documents as would a court of record in civil cases. All decisions of the commissioner must be made on the balance of probabilities, the same test utilized by judges in all civil cases. This is coupled with a reasonable opportunity for the public office holder to present his or her case.

These are very real powers and responsibilities entrusted with the commissioner. It is further evidence of the government's commit-

ment to provide the new commissioner with the power and authority to get the job done.

The federal accountability act will expressly make government accountable to the people by affording the opportunity to a member of the general public the ability to bring forward, through a member of Parliament, information to the commissioner of an alleged contravention of the act by a public office holder.

The act also provides for the appointment of a parliamentary budget officer, with a mandate to provide objective analysis to the Senate and to the House of Commons about the state of the nation's finances and trends in the national economy.

Additionally, the government will also provide quarterly updates to its fiscal forecasts. There is now to be an independent analysis on economic and fiscal issues. Gone are the days of unanticipated surpluses used to buy votes with reckless spending. It is time to ensure that we have truth in budgeting.

Another area of change is in the creation of a director of public prosecutions. Part 3 of the act creates the office of the director of public prosecutions and allows this office to initiate and conduct wholly independent investigations and prosecutions, including the decision to lay charges unless the federal Attorney General publicly directs otherwise. The proposed office of director of public prosecutions reflects the best features of those offices that currently exist in British Columbia, Quebec and Nova Scotia as well as those found in several countries around the world, including the United Kingdom, Australia and Ireland.

The federal accountability act also includes a number of real and sincere protections for whistleblowers, something that is long overdue.

People who see problems within the government need to have the confidence and the knowledge that they can speak up without intimidation or fear of recrimination. Too often we have learned that whistleblowers have been punished by their superiors for speaking the truth and taking courageous stands against instances of corruption and abuse.

The public service of Canada is a multi-faceted institution staffed by professional, dedicated and highly skilled individuals. Its employees play a crucial role in support of the government's agenda and they are essential in delivering programs and services to our citizens. This government will foster and champion an environment in which its employees may honestly and openly raise the alarm and express concerns without fear or threat of reprisal.

The bill would give real protection for whistleblowers by creating the position of public sector integrity commissioner and by making this individual an agent of Parliament. It will also give the commissioner the authority to deal with complaints from whistleblowers who feel they have suffered reprisals for identifying potential wrongdoing.

Government Orders

We shall see the creation of an independent tribunal, composed of judges or former judges, with the power to order remedies and to discipline wrongdoers. The remedies available to the commissioner include: the right to permit the complainant to return to his or her duties; the right to pay compensation in lieu of reinstatement; to rescind any measure or action; to cover expenses and other financial losses as a direct result of the reprisal; to provide up to \$10,000 for any pain and suffering; and to order disciplinary action against a perpetrator.

It is fair to suggest that the actions of a handful of public servants involved in the ad scam scandal have tainted the image of the public service for many Canadians. This element of the act will reinforce the non-partisan and professional excellence of the federal public service and return it to the place of honour and dignity it has historically enjoyed.

I am reminded of the recent words of the President of the Treasury Board when he stated, "Today is about putting the legacy of political scandal behind us and restoring Canadians' trust in government".

The federal accountability act will change the culture of politics and it will move Ottawa from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability and responsibility, one that is accountable and responsible to all Canadians equally.

● (1800)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member's comments and was reminded again about what I had asked the previous speaker with respect to the author of this particular legislation, admittedly drafted quite quickly. I understand the hon. member's comments with respect to finding problems with this Parliament in terms of the conduct of certain individuals but I believe the hon. member has an obligation to look at all aspects of previous wrongdoings and indeed the ones that were acted upon by the very minister who is proposing the legislation.

We heard from the auditor general for the Province of Ontario on three occasions, 1998, 1999 and again in 2000, where the auditor general of the province cited that there were irregularities with allowing a company to in fact go after welfare recipients and charge taxpayers up to \$258 million, for which that minister was never held accountable.

The hon. member talked about balance of probabilities and the civil test. I am very interested in that because his party opposed this very thing in the Competition Act. It is easier to apprehend people using a civil model than a criminal model. If the member is looking to get people quickly is it possible that in this circumstance he could create injury where injury is of course not found?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, the process we have is one that has been used in the judicial system on a regular basis. It is one where all sides on a particular issue are given an opportunity to present all the evidence that they choose to present and to be represented at the same time. I do not think there is anything wrong with a balance of probabilities. This is a different burden of proof than what we have under the Criminal Code or in criminal matters but, nonetheless, it is a standard that is fairly high and is not easy to be met. The burden is on the proposer to meet that standard. It is not an uncommon standard. It is a standard that is used time and again in all civil matters.

When reviewing the issue of complaints of wrongdoing raised by employees, when there is substance, not a frivolous claim or a vexatious one, we find that people are expected to go through this process, which is a fair process and allows each and every party to the process to make a full and ample defence and to present their views. There is nothing wrong with that. It is something that is recognized in our provinces and around the world.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member agrees with me that accountability is about telling the truth, something for which the member for Pickering—Scarborough East is not particularly renowned.

To start off with, he has—

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hopefully will receive an apology from that member of Parliament before he says what he is going to say, if what he has to say is indeed correct. I will accept his apology before that because what he has just said now diminishes, not only the reputation of this member of Parliament but every member of Parliament sitting in the House today.

● (1805)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary wish to respond to the point of order?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I said that the hon. member was not renowned for telling the truth and I stand by those remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): That is insinuating that a member of this House is not honest and I have to ask the parliamentary secretary to stick to parliamentary language and perhaps consider withdrawing any kind of insinuation that the member would not be honest.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I will consider that, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to point out the factual mistakes that the member has made.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I heard the wisdom of the Chair, who asked the member to withdraw his remarks. You have made it abundantly clear in your statement that he ought to withdraw them. This will be the third occasion. By the rules of the House, if the member refuses to respect the authority of the Chair he should be booted out of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am going to ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to withdraw any insinuation that the member for Pickering—Scarborough East is not honest. He has that opportunity to do so right now.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw the remarks here and just reserve them for outside the House of Commons.

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that first of all, the member accused the President of the Treasury Board of having been involved in some sort of nefarious lobbying activity when in fact what he is referring to is in 1994 as a 24-year-old, the President of the Treasury Board advocated on behalf of a university health and sciences centre in favour of a grant for students and for research. He then went on to say that the president had been cited negatively by the provincial auditor general. In fact the only time the minister was ever cited by the provincial auditor general was in praise of the actions that he took to clean up waste and corruption.

I would like the member's comments, particularly on what the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said about the member for Pickering—Scarborough East when he attacked the Auditor General's reputation for exposing Liberal waste and corruption at Groupaction. They said about the member that he should stop his political mudslinging.

I wonder if the hon. member agrees that the member should stop his political mudslinging and start telling the truth?

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I think you have just heard the honourable member—and I use the word “honourable” advisedly and reservedly—you have just heard him again, notwithstanding your admonishment on the comments that he has made with respect to my reputation and therefore the reputation of every member of Parliament, bringing into question my integrity.

The record will show in reference to what I have raised with respect to his cabinet minister, he was indeed a lobbyist in 1993. He was indeed a minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Sorry, but the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East is bringing matters of debate into his point of order.

Perhaps the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East would like to conclude his point of order and not bring matters of debate into his point of order.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I think you, along with members of the House, will have heard that the hon. parliamentary secretary again referred to the word “untruthful”. He just made it in his last comment, Mr. Speaker. I think the blues will show that. I believe that you have now for the fourth time an opportunity to admonish that member of Parliament.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I did not use any unparliamentary language. I simply said the words and I will quote them again, that that member should start telling the truth. There is absolutely nothing wrong with urging other members of the House to refer to the truth. I stand by those remarks. There is nothing unparliamentary about them whatsoever.

• (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I think we are getting into some points of debate and we should try to avoid that. I encourage all hon. members not to impugn any motives in terms of other members of the House. We can give the hon. parliamentary secretary a very brief 10 or 15 seconds to respond to the original question put forward by the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, there may be differences of opinion between members of Parliament and we may have many

rules and regulations in respect to the act that we propose, but ultimately it will take the goodwill and good judgment of all members of Parliament to raise the standard of the House so the public can regain their confidence in their politicians. It will take the concerted effort of all parties to come to the place where the House will rise to the level that it ought to.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, on four occasions, indeed a fifth time, the hon. member made a statement again impugning and alleging that something has been said by the member of Parliament that is untruthful. I am here to defend my integrity as well as to ensure that that member understands it is not a matter of debate.

If one member of the House is decidedly allowed to be put in a situation where we admonish or impugn the member's reputation, Mr. Speaker, you have an obligation as the arbiter of this place and in that chair to ensure that that member of Parliament understands that there are limits. It is in the rules.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you therefore to look at the standing rules of this House and to in turn put those in the way that I believe is consistent. It has been in the past that the comments made by the member of Parliament were not just a matter of debate; they were in fact based on previous rulings. Those decisions in the past would demonstrate that the member is clearly out of line and ought to retract his remarks and apologize.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the remarks that I earlier made which were deemed by the Chair to be unparliamentary have been withdrawn. All later remarks fall fully within the realm of acceptable debate in the House of Commons.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the rules of order are very important in this chamber. The reason we have this particular rule against the use of unparliamentary language is to maintain order and decorum in this place. That is a very important provision. That is why members cannot say, “I withdraw but I reserve it for outside”. They either withdraw it or they do not. They do not half withdraw; they do not partially withdraw. They either fully withdraw those kinds of comments, that unparliamentary language, or, Mr. Speaker, it is your responsibility as you know, to name them and have them leave the chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to the Standing Orders the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board did withdraw the original remarks, as per my request. I will review the rest of the exchange, consider the Standing Orders, consider what was said and if necessary, I will report back to the House accordingly.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to take the floor on this bill which in French was initially called the “projet de loi sur l'imputabilité”. In response to a suggestion by the Bloc Québécois, the French title will be changed to “projet de loi sur la responsabilité”, as it should be in correct French. One must underscore the spirit of cooperation that the Bloc has tried to show with respect to the study of this bill, as well as the government's response in agreeing to change the title. This is of course a minor element relative to the whole situation, but all the same it was important for this to be done.

Let us remember why the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle of this bill. First, ethics was central to the last election campaign, the result of which was the ouster from power of a corrupt government. Quebeckers especially were victims of that government.

The Gomery commission inquiry and its various results have shown that not only was there an attempt to misappropriate public money for personal purposes, but even an attempt—unfortunately, successful—to use that money to influence the choice made by Quebeckers about their future. We saw this during the referendum campaign, and then by the system set up by the Quebec section of the Liberal Party of Canada. The people's judgment was very clear and very blunt, and it was absolutely necessary to find ways to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

In that sense, as regards the principle of the bill, it seems to us appropriate that this bill should be tabled to try to correct the situation. Appropriate action must be taken to arrive at satisfactory ethical rules which can restore to elected officials the image that they deserve. They have been chosen by the people to represent their fellow citizens, to do their work honestly, and in democratic debate, to decide on the best choices to be made for our society. That is the rule that was broken by the Liberal government, particularly in Quebec. The present bill will correct this situation.

The Bloc Québécois has participated intensively in the Gomery commission. It has made recommendations which now have to be implemented. The Bloc is the only party that has prepared a report containing dozens of recommendations which it wanted to see implemented. Some of these are in the bill. So we will ensure that these recommendations are followed up and make it to the final stage.

Also, this is a very lengthy bill. It is large and ambitious. It aims to correct various elements of a system that was highly defective. The government will have to agree not to go full steam ahead with the passage of this bill, for time will be needed to give it very serious study. Good intentions notwithstanding, it does contain various shortcomings which deserve to be rectified, shortcomings related not to its principle, but rather to the way of doing things. Certain elements will have to be changed to ensure we obtain the result we want, and not the opposite.

The Bloc Québécois is particularly pleased with the points taken from the proposals that it made in the House, in many cases repeatedly. The first has to do with Elections Canada appointing returning officers on the basis of merit. The current practice in

Canada is archaic. It is a remnant of the days when partisanship was maybe a normal part of the process. But the partisan appointment of returning officers is no longer acceptable nowadays.

We have seen incongruous situations arise in which appointed people who did not have the skills for the job could simply tell the chief electoral officer of Canada to get lost because he was not the person who had appointed them but rather the governor in council. So they could just tell the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada that it was none of his business if they did things the way that they thought they should be done and that he did not have the power to dismiss them because it was the cabinet that had appointed them—a cabinet that took a partisan approach.

This will be set right by the bill before us now. I have been a member of this House for about a dozen years and have seen the Bloc Québécois take up this matter over and over. The first few times, the Liberals—who were in power then with a majority government—had a really arrogant attitude and simply brushed this project aside. They said that they controlled the appointments, and things would stay just the way they were. This situation will be corrected by the bill before us now.

• (1815)

The Bloc Québécois has made a positive contribution that will ultimately improve the democratic process in Quebec and Canada. We should all be happy about that. When the process is implemented in its entirety, people will be appointed. They will be competent people, and that will help them carry out their duties better. This is one of the positive aspects of this bill and one of the reasons why we support it in principle.

Another important point is the independence of the registrar of lobbyists. The Bloc has already made representations in this regard. The bill contains some satisfactory points that improve the situation.

As regards the act respecting the financing of political parties, as Quebeckers, we react by saying, “Finally”. In 1976, 30 years ago, the Parti Québécois was in power for the first time. René Lévesque, a man of integrity, put in place a system which is today one of the rules of the game in Canada. Furthermore, this was one of his primary concerns. At the end of his two terms, this was the act he was proudest of. It must not be forgotten that, in the past 30 years, we have seen a whole range of behaviour in Parliament and among political parties in Canada. People have accepted cheques for inordinate amounts. These cheques from various companies and banks skewed the democratic process. Obviously those who donated \$50,000 or \$100,000 could expect the government to pay greater attention to them than to individuals without such financial means.

Today, this bill is coming full circle and ensures that corporations will not play a part in financing. This is therefore a huge step and it is what the Bloc Québécois proposed ages ago. I recall that the member representing the region of Sorel-Tracy in this House proposed a bill to this effect in the months following the creation of the Bloc Québécois. Today, we will see the result in the form of a bill, and this is a good thing.

Government Orders

The Bloc, however, regrets that reform of the Access to Information Act has been postponed till later. The government could have gone ahead much more quickly. At present, all it is doing is introducing a bill prepared by the Information Commissioner. This is only a draft bill and it will take some time for the process to be completed. This is somewhat contrary to the position of the government, which claimed to have priorities and to carry through with them. There is already a flaw in the system. The people deserved better than this.

The Bloc will examine the bill closely, as is our practice. We have identified certain shortcomings that will have to be corrected during clause by clause study of the bill and in the light of testimony before the committee.

For example, the bill promotes a culture of unhealthy informing by proposing to give whistleblowers financial awards. In good faith, the government has allowed honest whistleblowers to be compensated. However, the pendulum has swung to create a climate of unhealthy whistleblowing. This must be rectified so that compensation does not become the goal and lead to false accusations and pointless investigations. In my opinion, the focus should be on developing among public servants a spirit of doing their job well. When they see unacceptable behaviour, they can report it but without compensation. The bill will have to be corrected, because it is headed in the wrong direction. I hope that people will testify in committee and make suggestions or propose other solutions to improve the bill and have it corrected. Attention must be paid to the witnesses, on this and many other points. In the end, the bill that is passed will have to correspond to the initial objective. It cannot be adopted in haste or under pressure. Let us take the time to listen to those who have an opinion on the matter.

Another element deserves careful study. The bill proposes a public appointments commission within the portfolio of the Prime Minister. It will oversee the appointment selection process.

● (1820)

We have seen that before. Under the previous government, the Ethics Commissioner reported to the Prime Minister. This made him both judge and judged. The Prime Minister would ask him to investigate him or his ministers; ultimately, it was not a very objective process.

We have managed to get that changed, but now the Conservative government is coming up with a similar process for appointments. The whole process should be at much greater arm's length from the government. Also, the public appointments commission should be able to answer to the House of Commons without putting itself in a conflict of interest situation, so as to satisfy the appearance of justice and transparency necessary for the legislation to produce the desired effect.

The bill proposes that the new parliamentary budget officer report to the Library of Parliament and provides for exceptions, denying the officer access to certain information. The Bloc's 2005-06 election platform, however, proposed the establishment of an independent organization tied to the Standing Committee on Finance, whose mandate would be to make realistic financial forecasts which would be periodically reviewed.

The difference is that the organization proposed in the legislation will have its hands tied. When it will want to gather information to document an issue and shed sufficient light on a given situation, it will not be able to, because it will not have enough independence, given that it will be reporting to the Library of Parliament.

This will have to be looked at in greater detail, and the government really should examine the proposed amendments of the Bloc, as well as those of other parties, as the case may be, and the results of committee consultations on the matter.

This bill proposes that the Access to Information Act apply to three of the nine foundations, leaving six that will not be covered. Consideration will have to be given to extending the list, so that as few as possible of the foundations are excluded. This would prevent problems from arising in a year or so with foundations that might have been forgotten and would be protected.

With appropriate consideration and amendments, this piece of legislation should withstand the test of time. It is imperative that it be given sound basis right away and to ensure that it will address as much as possible all that we want it to.

This bill also poses the threat of blocking democratic debate. Let me explain. The citizen complaint process that has been developed is a problem. Citizens will be able to go to their member of Parliament to describe the situation they wish to report and ask that its relevancy be assessed. In turn, the MP will go to the appropriate commissioner and try to secure a commitment that the matter will actually be looked into. However, under this bill, from the moment that a member has taken this step, he or she would no longer be allowed to discuss the matter. If I understand the enactment correctly, this would limit democratic debate, prevent the member from raising the issue in the House during oral question period and in statements, even statements made outside the House. That needs to be corrected, so that the citizens' right to complain can be exercised without gagging members, whose democratic mandate is to convey the will of their constituents. I think that imposing such a restriction on the members' ability to speak would not serve government accountability well.

It is obvious that many amendments will have to be made to this bill. For example, the proposed changes to the Lobbyists Registration Act do not address e-mail correspondence. In this 21st century, we receive a great many e-mails containing a wealth of relevant information, and this type of communication ought to be addressed. Legislation is not designed for last year's reality, but today's and that of years to come. It is therefore important to make changes in that regard.

In addition, lobbyists continue to benefit from a number of loopholes. E-mail correspondence is not addressed. There is also the issue of political party financing. A cap has yet to be set with respect to leadership races. There is such a race underway within the Liberal Party of Canada. The framework of leadership races has to be tightened.

● (1825)

We have seen excessive spending in the past. Such excessive spending was carried out both by the party that was in power at the time and by the one currently in power.

In both instances, this restriction, and the fact that we could not—

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize to the hon. member for interrupting him, but unfortunately we have come to the end of the allotted time for this part of the debate. The hon. member will have four minutes left the next time the debate resumes on this issue.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have had a chance to address the House with yourself in the Chair. I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. I look forward to participating in debate in the House of Commons over the years and to your interventions.

I am rising today again on a border issue that affects not only my constituency of Windsor West but also constituencies across this country. The issue I am rising on is called the western hemisphere travel initiative. This is actually the first late show debate that we are having in the House of Commons in this session and my constituents will not be surprised that I am using this opportunity to talk about the border issue once again. I hope to give Canadians a broader perspective of what is going to happen with the WHTI.

The WHTI involves the implementation of passport requirements or another document for U.S. citizens to get into and out of their country. The actual document requirement has not been finalized yet. Canadians are going to require a passport as well in order to get into and out of the United States. This will be a big problem because it will affect our tourism and trade industries.

The question I asked the Prime Minister related to the abandonment of the position of the Canadian Parliament on this issue. We had come to a resolution during the last Parliament and I would like to revisit the history of this issue.

Days after the actual implementation was announced by the Homeland Security Department, I immediately wrote the previous Liberal government calling for action. We are not only going to suffer consequences to our tourism industry, but we will also suffer socially and culturally. Our borders will be clogged and individuals will no longer travel between our two great nations for varying types of reasons, whether for pleasure or for work. This is critical because our relationship with the United States will erode.

We put a lot of pressure on the Liberal government, and I will give the Conservative Party some credit with regard to that pressure. A take note debate was held in the House and the present Minister of Veterans Affairs pressed this issue as well. We came up with a position that was adopted by the House and we submitted our objection to the WHTI.

That take note debate was important because it outlined our position on why we were opposing the WHTI. It also laid down the

framework of where we were going in the future. When the Prime Minister went to Cancun to meet with President Bush and President Fox, he immediately capitulated the position that had been adopted here in the House by agreeing that we would have to endorse this without any type of plan in place.

I specifically asked why we were abandoning the position that was championed with the Conservatives, the New Democratic Party and the Bloc to get the Liberal government at the time to make a submission. That four page submission was the starting point of a formal argument about the effects of the WHTI, the implementation of passports, and the consequences to our national economy. Four independent studies have confirmed the grave consequences.

The Prime Minister's position was rather puzzling because of the champion work that the current veterans minister had done on this file. It seemed like a capitulation that was not going to be in the best interests of Canadians. At that time I asked the Prime Minister to present a specific plan as to what the government was going to do.

• (1830)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like those who have gone before me, I would like to congratulate you on your new role. Obviously, it means that you will not be sitting on all those committees with the rest of us.

I rise in response to the question put to the House by my hon. colleague, the member for Windsor West, regarding the western hemisphere travel initiative of United States.

Canada recognizes and shares the U.S. security concerns, which the western hemisphere travel initiative is attempting to address through improved security of documentation. At the same time, we have questions and concerns about whether the initiative, as proposed, fully serves the interests of both our countries, particularly in light of what we know about the negative impacts on trade, tourism and border communities. Such concerns have been raised on a number of occasions with our American counterparts, including President Bush, Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff and Secretary of State Rice. I would also note that these issues have also been brought forward by a number of representatives in the U.S. Congress and Senate.

That being said, the western hemisphere travel initiative is a law passed by a majority in the U.S. Congress and President Bush has clearly stated that he will abide by it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon this government to take the necessary and appropriate steps in preparation to meet these deadlines. This includes collaborative work between the most senior officials in both Canada and the U.S. to explore alternative documents other than the passport and the United States pass card for securing efficient cross-border travel.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Minister of Public Safety recently had a series of meetings in Washington with Secretary Chertoff and other senior U.S. officials, and good progress was made on several fronts. In particular, it was clarified that the U.S. remains open to the idea of alternative documents, other than the proposed passport or pass card, for the purposes of cross-border travel. This is important as we continue to address with our American counterparts the need for affordable and easy to obtain documentation that meets the security requirements under the western hemisphere travel initiative.

I am pleased to report that the Minister of Public Safety and Secretary Chertoff were in full agreement that wherever possible, our two countries should look for opportunities to enhance the flow of trade and travel across the border, and we will continue to examine options to make this work. Secretary Chertoff will be coming to Ottawa in late May or early June so we can jointly assess our progress on this critical issue under the western hemisphere travel initiative.

While this joint Canada-U.S. work moves forward, we at the same time remind Canadian citizens who may wish to travel to the United States after January 1, 2007, that they will be able, as always, to use their Canadian passports. What is of critical importance to both countries is how best to implement a meaningful solution which ensures that our borders are open for legitimate trade and travel and closed to terrorists, drug dealers and smugglers.

• (1835)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, first, that does not answer the question of why the Prime Minister abandoned the position of Parliament, which called for specific action. Second, where is the plan?

We have a series of ministers who have been out freelancing a different position on this matter, which is giving a confusing message, not only to the general public but also to the American representatives who are coming for various meetings. I would like to have a specific strategy.

The Prime Minister has a responsibility. I would suggest that a national tourism strategy will be necessary. I would like to see the government table a plan on how to deal with the WHTI specifically. We can take a number of different measures, whether it is a request for the actual implementation date to be developed through a plan of education and process so when individuals come to the Canadian border, they are given a package with the deadline date of 2008 to enroll in a new program. Then we do not have the confusion and we settle those things.

That is critical because we are going to witness—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, clearly the government is committed to collaborating with its U.S. neighbours to realize the security benefits intended by the western hemisphere travel initiative, while ensuring that our shared border remains open to legitimate trade and travel.

This issue has been a top priority at the most senior level meetings between our two countries, including the recent visit to Washington by the Minister of Public Safety. Senior officials from the White House, the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department were in attendance and we will continue these fruitful discussions in the near future, including a visit from Secretary Chertoff in May or June.

What is already clear from meetings held thus far is that both countries are committed to the idea that we cannot have an efficient free flow of goods without security at our shared border. This government is taking the necessary action to move forward with a workable and achievable plan under a tight timeframe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:39 p.m.)

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