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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, June 14, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 14, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. members for Battlefords—Lloydminster, Edmonton Centre, and Souris—Moose Mountain, in trio.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

PANCREATIC CANCER RESEARCH

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in June 2004, former Argonaut Dick Aldridge suddenly passed away from pancreatic cancer at the age of 63. His wife, Betty Aldridge, a constituent and local councillor in my riding of Simcoe—Grey, created the Dick Aldridge Pancreatic Cancer Foundation to further the awareness of funding for pancreatic cancer research. On July 25, Betty will host the second annual Dick Aldridge golf classic and hopes to surpass the \$50,000 raised in last year's tournament.

Pancreatic cancer is the fourth most common cause of death related to cancer, both for men and for women, in Canada and the U.S.A. The disease is not only common but extremely difficult to treat. For these and other reasons, cancer of the pancreas has been called the challenge of the 21st century.

That is why it is important we raise awareness of this deadly disease. In commemoration of Dick Aldridge, I would like to designate the month of November as national pancreatic cancer awareness month. Through prevention and research, we will find a cure.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives say Canadians voted for change. Then why are so many of their initiatives based on successful Liberal ideas?

In this spirit, I would like to thank the Conservatives for endorsing the following Liberal achievements:

By re-announcing the \$755 million package for grains and oilseeds producers.

By re-introducing Liberal amendments to the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act.

By supporting the Liberal municipal rural infrastructure fund.

By implementing the Liberal residential schools agreement and accepting the Liberal government's good faith agreement to fast track payments to elderly survivors.

By implementing the Liberal campaign pledge to increase the \$1,000 refundable medical expense supplement.

And by implementing the Liberal campaign pledge to raise the child disability benefit to \$2,300.

Seven Liberal policies adopted by the Conservatives and not one word of thanks.

* * *

[Translation]

LAC SAINT-PIERRE

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week I tabled in this chamber a petition signed by people from many regions of Quebec. They are asking the federal government to assume its responsibilities and take action to remove the 300,000 shells, 8,000 of them unexploded, that have been abandoned by National Defence in Lac Saint-Pierre, which UNESCO has designated a world biosphere reserve.

The federal government must correct its errors, especially since the local communities wish to take charge of sustainable development of the UNESCO world biosphere reserve. However, in recent years the Department of National Defence has adopted a piecemeal, often improvised approach.

The Bloc Québécois urges the Minister of National Defence to table without delay a specific plan with a detailed timetable that will result in the full recovery of these shells.

Statements by Members

[English]

ELDER ABUSE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge this House to join governments around the world in combating the hidden crime of elder abuse. It can come in the form of neglect and physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse. It can take place at home, in an institutional setting or in the community.

It affects our parents and grandparents, yet it often goes unreported. It is for this reason that awareness-raising is a crucial component of preventing the abuse and neglect of older persons. I contacted the Minister of Canadian Heritage asking her to support the commitment made under the United Nations international plan of action by proclaiming June 15 elder abuse awareness day here in Canada. She declined. I was absolutely shocked.

During the last election, the Conservative Party promised to protect seniors against elder abuse in all of its forms. I had hoped the government would now walk the walk.

In other parts of the world, Elder Abuse Awareness Day is tomorrow. It is not too late for us to do the right thing here. I have placed the appropriate proclamation motion on the order paper. I would urge my colleagues on all sides of the House to put partisanship aside and join me in supporting this vital first step in protecting our seniors.

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ALBERTA ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more than a million Americans, along with U.S. politicians, senior government officials and industry leaders, will get a close-up look at Alberta's beauty, diversity and opportunity this summer when Alberta is featured at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C.

This marks the first time that a Canadian province has been featured in the 40 year history of this festival. From June 30 to July 11, more than 150 Albertans will bring Alberta to life at the National Mall.

I am pleased that four people I know of from the riding of Macleod will be participating. I wish Hal Eagletail, Ian Tyson, Jenny Burke and Doris Daley the best of luck. I know they will be great ambassadors for the people of Macleod and for Alberta.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are so enamoured with what the Liberal Party proposes that they are hastening to adopt our ideas. Here are some other examples.

They have created an earned income tax benefit to encourage low-income citizens to re-enter the labour market: this was a Liberal commitment.

They have restored the tax credit for mineral exploration: that was another of our ideas.

They have implemented the deduction for depreciation applicable to renewable energy generation equipment or enhanced performance of fossil fuels. Guess where that came from.

They have picked up the lifetime capital gains tax exemption for small businesses and fishers: another of our ideas.

They have permitted the tax-free intergenerational rollover of fishing businesses: an excellent Liberal idea.

In the 2006 budget, they were inspired by our announcement to double the lifetime capital gains exemption for fishers.

These are six Liberal initiatives adopted by the Conservatives. They might at least thank us for them.

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[English]

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 27, six students turned the sod in front of community supporters of the Thousand Islands Secondary School community track project in Brockville in my riding of Leeds—Grenville. The track will be a one-of-a-kind venue. It will enable TISS to host high level meets and major competitions.

The fundraising committee surpassed its original goal to raise a million dollars by better than 20%. To be thanked especially are David and Ann Beatty, Don and Shirley Green, DLK Insurance Brokers, Jan Shroy of Procter & Gamble, Burnbrae Farms, and the Upper Canada District School Board.

This project has been a terrific example of a community coming together to deliver a project that is both worthwhile and needed. I salute the group of volunteers, led by co-chairs Mary Jean McFall and Steve Clark, as well as principal Arlie Kirkland, who worked tirelessly to bring this project together.

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[Translation]

FIREARMS' REGISTRY

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a letter to the Prime Minister, the Maison des femmes de Drummondville women's centre expressed support for registering any and all firearms. In its opinion, because of the efficiency of the gun registry and the Firearms Act, the number of women killed with guns has dropped by 67% from 1991 to 2002. On average, the gun registry database receives 6,500 hits a day from police.

It is more than ever essential that the government toss aside its dogmatic attitude and work together with the various organizations and individuals concerned with greater safety for women and the public in general.

Like millions of people across Quebec and Canada, the Maison des femmes de Drummondville is calling on the Prime Minister to commit to combat violence and, to that end, maintain the requirement to register all firearms.

[English]

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December 2004 the world witnessed the devastating effects of an earthquake under the Indian Ocean and its subsequent fury unleashed in a tsunami. Many countries felt the devastation of this tsunami. In Sri Lanka, tens of thousands lost their lives and millions were displaced.

The ray of hope and good that came out of this devastation is that so many valiant, humanitarian-minded Canadians helped victims financially and in the rebuilding. This includes a dedicated group from McMaster University in the riding I represent, which set up a voluntary organization called Relief Aid International. Faculty and students got involved with fundraising and purchasing property in Sri Lanka. Their development and building includes a new village for those most vulnerable who find it difficult to obtain care: women and children.

Today we are fortunate to have some of the leaders of Relief Aid International here with us. I invite my fellow members to join us at a reception later this afternoon to hear more about the work Relief Aid International continues to do for those less fortunate.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is a list of additional Liberal ideas that the Conservatives have endorsed:

Tabling Bill C-14, an act to amend the Citizenship Act with respect to adoption, a Liberal bill.

Launching the off campus work permit program for foreign students, based on the successful Liberal pilot project originally launched in April 2005.

Introducing Bill C-12, the Liberal emergency management act.

Introducing a Liberal bill to amend the National Defence Act.

Introducing Bill C-6, which builds on three years of Liberal consultations.

And integrating Liberal whistleblower legislation into Bill C-2, which makes up the bulk of this new legislation.

These are six more Liberal policies adopted by the Conservatives and not a word of thanks.

* * *

•(1415)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of waste, corruption and mismanagement, the opposition has the nerve to attack Conservative cabinet ministers who have followed the rules.

The previous Liberal leader raised serious questions about his involvement in files that directly affected his own company, Canada Steamship Lines. The Liberals had no problem with the \$160 million

Statements by Members

they handed over to the member for LaSalle—Émard's multi-million dollar company. They saw no problem with the former member for Vancouver South and his direct involvement in the negotiations for a transit line, despite the fact that he owned his own transportation company. They saw no problem with the member for Newmarket—Aurora's involvement with her own company despite possible conflicts of interest when she joined cabinet.

The Liberals' current leader said just yesterday, "I can't be expected to know what every single person in the House of Commons did in terms of the Ethics Commissioner". Before launching baseless attacks against the government, maybe the Liberal leader should check in with his own caucus.

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NOVA SCOTIA POLITICIANS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the federal New Democratic Party, I wish to extend our condolences to the family and friends and to the Conservative Party on the passing of the great Senator Mike Forrestall.

Senator Mike Forrestall served this country, this House and the other place, and the province of Nova Scotia with great distinction.

I would also like to congratulate Premier Rodney MacDonald and Francis MacKenzie on their elections yesterday in Nova Scotia. But the night truly belonged to Darrell Dexter and the NDP. The NDP won 20 seats, seats in Queens, Shelburne, in the capital district, in the Pictou area and in Cape Breton, with people of diversity and more women in the NDP caucus than in the other caucuses.

This is a party in Nova Scotia that is on the move. In fact, the *Chronical-Herald* said that we are the government in waiting. When that day comes, it will be a glorious day in Nova Scotia.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here are more Liberal initiatives that have been lifted by the Conservatives.

The Conservatives have acted as if the ten-year plan to strengthen health care developed by the Liberals was part of their program.

They have introduced Bill C-5, to establish the Public Health Agency of Canada, which is a carbon copy of former Bill C-75 introduced by the Liberals.

In budget 2006, they earmarked the \$5.5 billion the Liberals planned to allocate to reducing wait times in hospitals.

They have announced an investment of \$10 million in the Terry Fox Foundation, which the Liberals had previously offered to the mother and brother of Terry Fox.

Oral Questions

They have credited their party with the successful implementation of the Canadian pandemic influenza plan launched by the Liberals in 2005.

These are five Liberal initiatives that the Conservatives have made their own without a word of thanks.

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CLAUDE SAINT-JEAN

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are saddened to learn of the death of Claude Saint-Jean, the founder of the Canadian Association for Friedreich's Ataxia, now known as the Canadian Association for Familial Ataxias.

In 1972, Mr. Saint-Jean learned that he suffered from this progressive genetic disorder. He created the Fondation Claude-Saint-Jean, which collected millions of dollars to fund scientific research and thus discover that there were different forms of ataxia.

Together, science and the tenacity of Claude Saint-Jean led to the discovery that ataxia is a symptom, and not a specific disease; it is characterized by impaired coordination among the parts of the human body. This physical condition progresses inexorably and cannot be arrested.

Claude Saint-Jean put a face on Friedreich's ataxia. He exhibited uncommon courage and phenomenal perseverance in his efforts to relieve the suffering of people with ataxia.

Claude Saint-Jean is gone, but his work will continue. The Bloc Québécois offers its deepest condolences to his family and friends.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to thank the Conservatives for endorsing Liberal ideas by promising to honour the Liberal funding for the human rights museum in Winnipeg; by renewing the Norad agreement which builds on Liberal legwork; by continuing the Liberal commitment on funding for the new deal for cities and communities; by accepting the Liberals' national target of 5% renewable biofuel content in Canadian gas and diesel fuel; by using a Liberal government guide to propose a national security committee of parliamentarians; by using a Liberal bill which received royal assent in 1998 as the building block for Bill C-7.

Last but certainly not least, I thank the Conservatives for taking eight consecutive Liberal balanced budgets and introducing the first Conservative balanced budget in 80 years.

There has not been a word of thanks from the Conservatives.

* * *

• (1420)

DECORUM

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday some members raised a concern about some gestures that they alleged I had made in the House of Commons at that time. I

wish to say, as I am a gentleman of this House, that if any of my gestures have offended them or any member in this House, I wish to apologize and withdraw.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

DECORUM

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Precisely, Mr. Speaker, it was regrettable that last night all of us in the House witnessed members of the Conservative caucus acting in a totally unacceptable manner. We raise the matter today because these actions were not simply insulting to Parliament, but showed contempt and disrespect for all Canadians in this institution.

The obscene gestures made in the House by the parliamentary secretaries for agriculture and the Treasury Board reveal an attitude that is an insult to our democracy and to the Canadian people who sent us here to do serious work.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would call upon the Prime Minister to either direct his colleagues to apologize unequivocally, or does he condone these actions?

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Both members did apologize. It is true that from time to time members on both sides of this place do get carried away, and it is appropriate when they do so to apologize.

I find it strange that there is nothing else for the Leader of the Opposition to ask questions about than gestures that have already been apologized for. Perhaps that is because he does not want to ask a question about a government that is keeping its promise and that has already delivered the lowest unemployment rate in Canada in 32 years.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is all well and good, but a picture is worth a thousand words. The image of the parliamentary secretary giving farmers the finger speaks volumes about this government's contempt for farming and its attitude toward this House.

I therefore again ask the Prime Minister to denounce this insult to our farmers and direct the parliamentary secretary to apologize for what he did yesterday, which was unworthy of this House.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat it in French: both members have apologized for this, and that is the end of the matter. The Speaker accepted the parliamentary secretary's apology last night.

I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition a question: when will he apologize for voting against mandatory minimum sentences for criminals who use firearms?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the hon. members opposite seem to believe that what they said is acceptable to the Canadian public, perhaps you might ask that your dignities and privileges as the Speaker of the House be protected, because the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board last night was making ridiculous comments in your respect and mocking you, Mr. Speaker, and with you, the dignity of the members of the House and every Canadian citizen that sent us here to respect our democracy.

When you are doing that, Mr. Speaker, you might speak up on behalf of the dignity of the House, since the members opposite will not do that.

The Speaker: The Chair appreciates the concern of the Leader of the Opposition. I stress question period is for opposition to government, not either party or anybody to the Speaker.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

• (1425)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have enough confidence in you. We know that you do not need the government to stand up for you. You do a very good job in the Chair and we support you fully.

As it relates to decorum, those two members have apologized for their gestures. We are still waiting for an apology from the member for Bourassa for waving a box of chocolates around the House.

The reality is that all members should work together to improve decorum in a fashion that we are not seeing from the opposition right now.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière did not apologize. He said that we had misinterpreted his vulgar, crass and uncouth gesture.

As well, he is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food and he voted against the measures that protect Canada's dairy farmers. When he voted, he gave the finger to all members, to all Canadian dairy farmers, and to supply management. This is disgraceful. He should apologize. The Prime Minister should dismiss him immediately.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. government House leader.

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member did not hear the comments of the parliamentary secretary, but he did apologize and I think it was most appropriate under the circumstances.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that alleged apology was based on his own words, “—the House misinterpreted my gesture” ... If what I did was misinterpreted, I apologize”.

That is not a genuine apology.

The Prime Minister should answer today, in this House, and say that he does not tolerate behaviour of this kind. He should immediately dismiss the parliamentary secretary, whom he personally selected.

When will the Prime Minister dismiss the parliamentary secretary for his “bloopers”?

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is completely ridiculous. The hon. member apologized last night and the incident is closed.

However, the real question is this: why can the Liberals not ask questions about things that are important to Canadians, like the economy and crime? It is because the government is doing something to deal with those questions. It is because we are doing something, we are instilling a culture of accountability in government, instead of the Liberals' corruption.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 13, 2005, the Prime Minister—then leader of the opposition—declared in the House, and I quote: “The Prime Minister has the moral responsibility to respect the will of the House”. Now yesterday the House adopted a motion of the Bloc Québécois demanding that the government limit imports of milk proteins.

Does the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food intend to respect the decision of the House?

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will defend the dairy producers. It clearly supports supply management. That system will continue to serve dairy producers and processors well, as it has done for many years.

The Bloc Québécois motion of yesterday evening will jeopardize the operation of the working group, and will prove ineffective in meeting the long-term concerns of dairy producers and processors.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the people who are jeopardizing the dairy farmers are on the other side. What is more, farmers want exactly what is contained in the motion passed by the majority of the House yesterday.

The Conservatives are obliged to remember what they said in the past: the decision of the House must be respected. The matter of milk proteins cost us \$242 million last year.

Are they going to wake up?

I ask the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to answer this question, he who claims to be defending the dairy producers.

Oral Questions

●(1430)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the support from this side of the House for supply management is absolutely clear. It has been clear since the campaign, before the campaign, during, after, and continues to be the position of the government that we should move ahead and support supply management. We are doing so in Geneva as we speak.

I am grateful that the dairy producers and the processors have agreed to sit down in a working group to address issues like MPCs, milk protein concentrates. They have agreed to sit together and are working together as we speak. I am hopeful that they will come up with recommendations to the government in order that we can move forward.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is less milk in ice cream and less milk in cheese because increasing use is being made of dairy by-products from elsewhere, instead of real domestic milk, in the manufacture of these products. If nothing is done to control imports of protein concentrates, up to 25% of the Canadian milk protein market will be lost, and the lost revenue will amount to over a half a billion dollars.

What is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food waiting for to limit imports of dairy by-products, so as to offer real protection for the dairy producers of Quebec and Canada?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we are doing something. In fact, for the first time we have arranged for a mediator to work together with both the dairy farmers and the processors. Those two groups have come together with our mediator. They are working together as we speak to come up with recommendations to the government on things like composition standards and other issues that are facing the industry.

To simply say that this can be solved using an article XXVIII in fact jeopardizes supply management. We want to come up with long term solutions that both the processors and the dairy farmers can agree with. When that happens, then the future of the industry will be very secure indeed.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): The Minister knows very well that the one does not prevent the other. He can have his meeting with the dairy farmers and the processors, and he can take a stand and defend the dairy farmers. Despite the powers he now has, the minister is incapable of standing up on this issue.

With such an attitude, how will he be able to suitably defend the agricultural sector when the time comes to defend supply management? This is a fine signal the minister is sending to the other countries!

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

that is interesting. This government and this country has stood against the world over in Geneva in support of supply management. We are happy to do so.

What we have said is that we are going to Geneva to get a good deal not only for the supply managed industries but for our export industries as well. More importantly, we are not going to jeopardize supply management by using a knee-jerk reaction like the Bloc would have us do for short term political gain. We want a long term solution that is in the best interest of supply management across the country.

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the inane behaviour of these two parties today, let us go back to something that really concerns Canadians. The Minister of Finance has recently sent a letter to environmental groups defending his decision to continue the Liberal legacy of subsidizing the oil industry.

Can the government explain how in a time when the UN is condemning Canada for the widening gap between rich and poor, when over a million children live in poverty and seniors cannot afford the care they need, it cannot find the money to address these pressing issues, but can find \$1.4 billion a year to subsidize the most profitable and polluting industry in this country?

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is mistaken in the premise of her question. In fact, what this government has done in terms of its budget is to create incentives for people to use mass transit through a credit for mass transit users.

We have increased the required content for ethanol in fuel. We have acted rather than just talked like the Liberals did for 13 years. We have provided real incentives to improve our environment, the quality of our air and to reduce carbon emissions.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if that is all that the government can come up with, it is pretty pathetic because it is still defending its subsidies to the oil industry.

In fact, just yesterday the town of Fort McMurray voted unanimously to place a moratorium on the oil sands development until an infrastructure plan is developed. The people of Fort McMurray, like all Albertans and all Canadians, want their tax dollars spent wisely and want to see greenhouse gases reduced. The government's corporate welfare for the oil industry does neither.

Again I ask the government, when will it end this corporate subsidy to the oil industry and re-direct that money to seniors, kids and Canadians who really need it?

•(1435)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member describes is far from what is happening in the oil and gas industry. The revenues to the people of Canada and the Government of Canada from that industry last year were \$5 billion in taxes. That is compared to only \$2.1 billion two years earlier. That is almost 15% of the total corporate tax revenues to the Government of Canada. We are proud of our oil and gas industry. It is growing. It is great for the future wealth of our country and for Canadians.

* * *

MEMBER FOR NEPEAN—CARLETON

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a growing file on the immature and unacceptable behaviour of the member for Nepean—Carleton. Last night he performed his pixie dance in the House, directly mocking the Speaker. Just before that he joined the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food in a vulgar gesture to farmers, and a few days ago on Bill C-2 he used obscene language in reference to other Canadians. This guy simply has to go.

Will the Prime Minister remove the member for Nepean—Carleton from his job as a parliamentary secretary?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already indicated that the member for Nepean—Carleton has apologized.

I will tell you what I do resent, though, Mr. Speaker. I heard two members on that side describing that vulgar and obscene gesture. They described it as Italian. They used the word “Italian”. I say to check the record on that.

I am a member of Parliament. There is a large Italian Canadian population in my riding and I think that is an insult. I would ask the Liberal Party to withdraw that reference.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I invite the government House leader to check the verbatim quotation from my colleague compared to what the translation delivered and he will find a great difference between the two.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. When I negotiated for Canada in the GATT in 1993, I reported to Prime Minister Chrétien in response to his question whether I could guarantee him that supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board would exist for a full decade at least after those negotiations. I looked him right in the eye and said “yes”, and I was right.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food today, can he show the same conviction and offer the same guarantee to Canadian farmers?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just heard the opposition House leader say that compared

Oral Questions

to what the parliamentary secretary said, the reference to Italians was insignificant.

He asked us to check the record. I say let us check the record and I want an apology on behalf of all Canadians of Italian heritage and I want it withdrawn. That is an insult.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend the Minister of Canadian Heritage attended a Banff World Television Festival. Close to \$200 million in production deals are cemented at this event. We know, through the Ethics Commissioner, that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has a financial interest in at least one production company which has in the past benefited from government funding.

Can the minister tell the House if she discussed any funding productions with any production company while she was in Banff?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday to the House, there is a code in place that applies to all ministers. My colleague has made complete disclosure and has ensured that all directives have been complied with. There is no conflict of interest and the Ethics Commissioner agrees.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows very well that the issue is not whether the minister has complied with disclosure requirements. The issue is whether or not she has placed herself in a conflict of interest.

When the minister responsible for the allocation of government funds to film and television producers has a financial interest in a company that stands to receive such funds, there is at the very least, the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Can the minister tell the House herself that she has not had any discussions or discussed any matters with the production company in which she holds a financial interest?

•(1440)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to confirm that I am in full compliance. In response to the question, I have had no discussions.

In fact, I would like to point out that only a member of the Liberal opposition would even suggest that a member of Parliament interfere when it is an independent body making those decisions.

* * *

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Industry directed the CRTC to rely more on market forces to reach its telecommunications objectives.

Oral Questions

Are we to understand that the Minister of Industry has decided to abandon the regions to their fate by imposing a double standard? Clearly, this means that level of service will be more important for cities than for the regions.

Under this new approach, will the minister be dropping the universal level of service principle? This is a sad day for regions of Quebec and Canada.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have introduced in this House yesterday a proposed policy direction for the CRTC. This is a first. The proposal is clear: we are telling the CRTC to rely more on market forces, and, as I said in a speech yesterday in Toronto—if my hon. colleague had read it, he would have known—to ensure that remote regions continue to enjoy the same services they do now.

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry told the CRTC that it should rely on the invisible hand and the free market to meet its objectives. There is every reason to be concerned about whether the same criteria are to apply to radio broadcasting.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage reassure us and commit to never using her industry colleague's tactic to deregulate and thereby justify reduced francophone content on the airwaves, for example?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada enjoys the strongest broadcasting system. It has been through years of working with the private sector, the public sector, the CRTC and government, as well, that we have enjoyed a strong broadcasting system, and we intend to do so in the future.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the more time goes by, the less likely it seems that there will be a quick agreement on softwood lumber. The more time goes by, the more companies have to deal with enormous difficulties, deprived as they are of \$5 billion of their own money that they still have not recovered.

In view of the deadlines dragging on for reaching a final agreement, why does the government still refuse to provide loan guarantees for companies that are still grappling with the softwood lumber crisis?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber industry waited five years for what we managed to get for it.

Since the election of this new government, we have brought prosperity to Canadians working in the softwood lumber industry. More than loan guarantees, we have brought guarantees of a prosperous future; these are guarantees of free, unfettered access to the American market; these are guarantees of a better future for the communities.

I am proud of that and proud of the work done by my colleague, the Minister of International Trade. We are going to continue down this same path.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the minister makes hollow speeches, the American department decided this very day in a preliminary decision to increase the countervailing duties on Canadian softwood lumber. The minister must know that even if the agreement were concluded today, many long months would pass before the industry gets its money back.

Would loan guarantees not be an excellent way of showing the American negotiators that the government is ready to support its softwood lumber industry until a satisfactory final agreement can be reached since they are still increasing duties on softwood lumber from Canada and Quebec?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the best agreement that we have ever had. It is a historic agreement. We are proud of it and very pleased. We are going to ensure that the softwood lumber industry finds its way back to prosperity.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have shown absolutely no leadership and made no commitment to reducing wait times in our country, to increasing the accessibility of doctors and to implementing a national pharmaceutical strategy.

Is it because, number one, the minister's 25% ownership in a drug company has compromised his ability to do his job, or is it, number two, because this is yet again another "harpocracy" where the Conservatives have no plan to protect public health care in our country, or is it number three, that the minister's real priority is to increase the profits in his drug company?

• (1445)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already indicated to the House that there is a code in place and it applies to all ministers and parliamentary secretaries. My colleague has made complete disclosure. He has complied with all directives.

This may not satisfy the Liberal Party, because it has a different ethic, but it certainly satisfies the Ethics Commissioner.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at first it was the Prime Minister who was muzzling his MPs. Now it is a House leader who continues to muzzle his ministers.

Why does the minister continue to hide behind his House leader? Why does he not stand in the House, do the right thing, admit that he has made a mistake and sell his shares in his drug company?

Yesterday, the minister stated that he did not have to answer to the House. Let me tell the minister that Canadians want answers. They want the minister to get to work and start protecting public health care in Canada.

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already indicated that this is a very unfair question from the hon. member.

The member is the health critic for the Liberal Party, yet one year ago, when she was in government, her disclosure said that she was the sole owner of a health consulting company. Did she sell her shares? I want to know that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker —

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. We will have a little order.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard has the floor now. The previous question and the answer are finished.

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, first, my colleague from Brampton—Springdale was not a minister.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, the health minister said that he could not find any takers for his shares in Prudential Chem Inc.

My question is very simple. Why does the health minister not just make amends and donate his shares rather than selling them, if it is so difficult?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has made complete disclosure according to the code. He has followed it to the letter of the law.

If the members are truly interested in the whole question of ethics, they will make every effort to ensure the federal accountability act gets passed before we adjourn for the summer.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a problem of disclosure. This is a problem of conflict of interest. The minister's personal monetary interests are ahead of the interests of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Since having shares in a pharmaceutical company is preventing the minister from introducing a national strategy on pharmaceutical products, why is he keeping his shares in the company?

Is it because he knows that the aim of a national strategy would be to provide medications at the lowest possible cost and this would make him lose money?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member could help us out with something. Since his colleague from Brampton—Springdale is the critic for the

Liberal Party, could he answer the question that was posed a year ago? Has she sold her shares in a health consulting company? We would be interested to know that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, revenues from energy resources are vital to the Quebec economy and the Canadian economy. However, some Liberal members are even prepared to put this industry at risk. Liberal leadership candidates want policies that are cause for great concern. The hon. member for Kings—Hants is even proposing to implement an energy tax.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources explain the harmful repercussions of this measure on Quebec's hydroelectricity industry?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only a Liberal could believe that imposing punishing taxes on clean, renewable energy is good public policy. Ninety-five per cent of Quebec's power generation is hydroelectric, which emits virtually no greenhouse gases. Quebec's hydro industry employs over 20,000 workers and last year alone contributed over \$2 billion to the Quebec economy.

It is beyond ridiculous. I guess only the Liberal Party could think that the path to energy is paved with regressive taxation and robbing Quebecers of their hard-earned tax dollars. How could anybody do something so ridiculous, wanting to tax clean, renewable energy?

* * *

● (1450)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families who care for their loved ones in difficult times deserve some help. The NDP pushed the Liberals for years to broaden the definition of who could qualify for EI benefits under the compassionate care program. Then we saw classic Liberal politics, announcing but taking no action.

Now we learn the Conservatives are no better and are refusing to implement the very changes they also called for when in opposition.

When will the government do what it said and put compassion back in the compassionate care program, as it should do?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as happens too often, misrepresentation of the facts is going on in the House.

I am pleased to inform members that the government has made regulatory changes that will be an important improvement to the EI compassionate care benefit. No longer will other family members, friends or neighbours be disqualified from this benefit. I am pleased to inform members that this takes effect immediately.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is sad to see that this has to be in the news for the government to take action. It is sad that families have to suffer. In future, the government will have to be less heartless to those who are struggling and caring for their loved ones. Furthermore, the government should be able to put programs in place without the media having to push it to take such decisions.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was never any doubt that we were going to move forward with this program. We said we would do it and we delivered on it: promise made, promise kept.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is defending the decision by his defence minister to override military experts and spend multi-billions of dollars on C-17s that our military does not want, and are of no benefit to Canadian industry. Furthermore, he has no problem with a former military lobbyist making this decision for an estimated \$20 billion in total military purchases, even though during the last election the Prime Minister said himself that it would represent a clear conflict.

Which is it? Is the Prime Minister selling out Canadian interests and ignoring military advice for his lobbyist friend, or does he think that shafting Canadian industry will win him more Republican friends?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where to start with that outrageous question.

The government has not made any decision with respect to equipment. When the government makes a decision, it will be announced to the public.

With respect to the second issue, it is like that member is on some kind of closed loop. The answer to the question is this. I followed all the rules in the past, I am following all the rules now and I will be following all the rules in the future.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister should start by resigning. I do not know how stupid those members think Canadians are, but they made a military lobbyist a defence minister, allowed him to award contracts to his previous employers and then had the audacity to call it accountability.

Let me remind the House what the Prime Minister said on CBC *NewsWorld* during the last election. He said, “—to correct [the Minister of National Defence]...we won't be making the selection ourselves...of the actual equipment. And as you know, for all kinds of conflict of interest reasons, we'll want to stay out of those kinds of things”.

Will the Prime Minister for once do as he says and remove that conflict laden lobbyist from his portfolio?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to refer to who is actually stupid here.

The previous government allowed the military to decay year after year for 13 years. It acquired three major pieces of equipment. We are now picking up the pieces. We are going to provide the military with what it needs so it can get on with protecting our sovereignty and our security.

● (1455)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of National Defence.

We know that the Boeing C-17 planes are not the military personnel's choice or priority. We know that this does not serve the interest of Canadians, since it is the Americans who will build and service the planes.

What is the hidden agenda? Is this another gift from the Prime Minister to President Bush in order to buy his friendship?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite obviously does not know much. The government has not decided on any equipment. When it decides on the equipment, it will be announced to the public.

I will also remind the member that, during our campaign, we promised to acquire strategic and tactical airlift.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Americans would have full control over servicing these planes, what would happen if, for example, we wanted to take on a mission in Cuba or Venezuela? Could the Americans then decide not to service our equipment because they do not like the destination?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is downright silly. Whatever equipment the Canadian Forces acquires will be owned by the Canadian Forces, managed by the Canadian Forces and employed by the Canadian Forces. The hypothetical situation that the member opposite has created is just pure bafflegab.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the question of nitric oxide treatment, the Minister of Health said yesterday that it was impossible for him to raise the question with the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. I read him section 90 of the Patent Act: “The Board shall inquire into any matter that the Minister refers to the Board for inquiry and shall report to the Minister at the time and in accordance with the terms of reference established by the Minister.”

The minister really cannot pretend that this section does not exist. Can he at least acknowledge that he may raise the question with the board?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give the same answer as yesterday. I would like to tell this House that the board is an independent body with quasi-judicial powers. In this House, I cannot get involved.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to have the section translated and send it to him. Then he may be able to understand this better.

Yesterday, the minister claimed that the board has the power to determine whether the price of a drug is excessive. In such case, it is within the power of the board to require that the price be reduced.

Does the minister not think that a 400% increase in the price of nitric oxide in the space of a few months is excessive? Why is he refusing to use the provisions of section 90 to request an inquiry?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear, on reading section 90, that the minister does not have the power to demand an answer to a regulatory question or to demand an opinion regarding drug prices.

It is a quasi-judicial agency. It is an independent body. From this side of the House, it is impossible for me to raise this question with the board.

* * *

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the part-time minister for ACOA is once again talking nonsense. He recently stated that in future, opposition members who approached him for investments in their ridings would have to register as lobbyists. I have never heard anything so ridiculous in my life. The members of this House are elected by their constituents primarily to promote the interests of those constituents.

When will the Prime Minister tell his minister that no member of this House will have to register as a lobbyist to do the work he or she was elected to do?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we are talking about foolish questions, certainly that is one. The member knows full well that members do not have to register to ask for money from ACOA.

Just this morning I announced a grant of \$243,000 for a Newfoundland riding, the riding held by the member for Random—Burin—St. George's. I do not hear anyone complaining about that.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the candidates for the leadership of the Liberal Party take opposing views on taxation. Our government promised to reduce the GST. The opposition members supported that measure by

voting for the budget. However, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier is now proposing to raise the GST. It is unbelievable.

Can the Minister of Finance explain to the member why this is a wrong-headed move and why reducing the GST benefits Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, finally a good question about a happy subject for Canadians, reducing taxes for all Canadians by reducing the GST by a full percentage point.

I know the members opposite are probably the last members in Canada of the save the GST club. They are hanging on. They only have another week or so until we get to that great day, July 1, Canada Day, when the GST will be reduced by a full percentage point for all Canadians, including the one-third of Canadians who do not pay income tax. It is truly a tax reduction for every Canadian.

We are keeping our commitment to Canadians.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a study released today reveals that fast foods sold in Canada contain some of the highest trans fat content in the world. In a media survey published today, one cardiologist from Denmark said, "I was surprised to find so many foods in Canada with such high levels of trans fats".

So was I, considering that over a year and a half ago in this House an NDP motion was adopted that would see trans fats eliminated in Canada.

The government talks about upholding the will of the House. When it comes to trans fats, when will the government do just that?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge what happened a couple of years ago in this place. I understand at the time the member for Winnipeg Centre forged a coalition in the House to put a resolution forward. Since that time there has been a multi-stakeholder task force that has been reviewing the issue and reviewing the science. When the review is complete and the science is before us, then we can make a decision.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP motion to ban trans fats was adopted with all party support, including 18 members of the now governing party.

The studies have been done. The consumption of just five grams of trans fats a day increases the risk of heart disease by almost 20%. Labelling does not work. Voluntary measures, as we have seen under the Liberals for 13 years, do not work.

Will the government commit to take action on the motion adopted by the House and ban trans fats for the health of our nation?

Points of Order

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her advice. It is important to us but we also require the advice of scientists. We are also reviewing best practices in other jurisdictions. When we have a strategy that we think will protect the health and safety of Canadians we will table it in the House.

* * *

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question concerns ACOA and I guess my question will be for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I think we are on our fourth minister of ACOA at this point.

The minister wants to stop MPs from representing our constituents. I will again cite the article that suggests we here in opposition must register as lobbyists just to get a chance to talk to him.

The Conservatives can muzzle their own members and attempt to muzzle the media but they will not muzzle us in this situation.

Will the part time minister apologize to all members of the House that their access will not be eliminated in ACOA?

• (1505)

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the representation the member has given his riding on the main issues, the people of his riding will be the ones to muzzle him in the next election.

The member does not have to worry about that. He just heard the announcement I made on behalf of his friend and colleague in Random—Burin—St. George's and maybe he should line up like the others and ask what more funding they are getting. He will find out that we treat everybody fairly. Just because some members do not sit on this side of the House does not mean they do not get their fair share.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL REVENUE

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of meeting with representatives of the New Brunswick Teachers' Federation a few weeks ago. We discussed the refund of the GST overpayment that the federation had made. The federation has asked that these funds be reimbursed.

[English]

I agree with the federation that this matter needs to be settled immediately.

Could the Minister of National Revenue tell us if she has made a decision about reimbursing these funds?

Hon. Carol Skelton (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New Brunswick Teachers' Federation paid GST in error to the government. The issue remained unresolved for over two years under the Liberals.

I am proud to say that it was addressed immediately by this government. A remission order has been approved by cabinet in this case and, after careful review, the government will be returning over \$273,000 to the New Brunswick teachers.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the hon. government House leader suggested that I had used the term "Italian salute" in my question.

[Translation]

In my question, I used the term "bras d'honneur", as the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine also did.

[English]

If the hon. government House leader had been listening to the question as asked rather than the translation, which he depends upon, he would have known what terms were used by the Liberals in the official language of our country when we spoke it at the time. We at no time would ever disrespect our Italian colleagues. We have too many in the House and too many constituents who we respect and admire.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, English and French translations have equal weight in the chamber, as you know. As a matter of fact, if you check what I said, you will see that I did not say that about the Leader of the Opposition. I thought I heard him say that because that did come through the translation, but I did not raise the matter. However, I then heard the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine. When I heard it the second time come through or something, that is when I took offence and raised it in the House.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in oral question period, I asked two questions. Those two questions were asked in French. In French, the correct term for the gesture made by the hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière is "bras d'honneur". There is no exact translation in English, so when we refer to this gesture in English, we use the French term "bras d'honneur".

First, I think that the translation should be changed to accurately reflect the expressions I have used.

Second, since I was born in Canada, I have Canadian citizenship. I have also been an Italian citizen since 1974. As an Italian citizen, I would have been furious to hear someone use, in English, the term used in the translation. I never used that term, either in French or in English. The correct term is "bras d'honneur". That term has nothing to do with an ethnic group or a foreign country. "Bras d'honneur" is the correct term.

As for the hon. members on the other side of this chamber—especially those in the Conservative government—who do not understand the French official language, I would like to see them take a few courses. That way, when questions are asked in French in this House, they listen—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1510)

The Speaker: Order!

Hon. members on both sides of the House have had a problem with the translation of certain questions asked by the hon. member and by the hon. leader of the official opposition. That is a pity.

We will try to ensure that such a problem does not happen again. The repetition of such an error is not necessary. I greatly appreciate the fact that the hon. members have raised this matter. Clarification has now been made. I do not believe it is necessary for the Chair to intervene. Apologies have now been made. The hon. Leader of the Government has explained that these remarks were caused by what he heard. The fault lies in the translation. That is now quite clear to everyone. It is a shame, but it is not the fault of the government House leader or the fault of the hon. members of the opposition who asked certain questions in which the French phrases were poorly translated.

In my opinion, the subject is closed. We may now proceed with tabling of documents.

The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, since the Speaker of the House has officially recognized, in this chamber, that the English translation of the term “bras d'honneur” was erroneous, I hope that Hansard will reproduce in English the proper English term, which is also “bras d'honneur”.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. I am not a translation expert, nor am I an expert regarding the gesture she mentioned. Nevertheless, I appreciate her comments. Furthermore, the individuals who translate for us will no doubt carefully examine what she said. However, the translation of what is said here in the House is not my area of expertise. As I said, I regret that such an error was made. I hope that we will be able to correct it, either in Hansard, or tomorrow, if the same expression is used in the House.

The hon. member for Bourassa on another point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the old Latin phrase *delegatus non potest delegare* means one cannot do directly what one cannot do indirectly. The behaviour of the leader of the government in attempting to use a poor translation and his subsequent conduct require formal apologies. He disrupted oral question period and offended not only the opposition leader, but also the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Now, I also heard—

Hon. Marlene Jennings: The President of Treasury Board.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I heard the President of Treasury Board say—I hope this will be investigated—that the remarks of the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine were racist. She was accused of racism. So it is serious. This must be investigated.

Routine Proceedings

There is something else. It is clear that, since last night, there is a problem with behaviour in this House. Some individuals made insincere apologies for having made rude gestures in this House. That is why we are talking about the French term “bras d'honneur”.

On behalf of all members, on behalf of all Canadians, I am asking that you investigate because the members for Nepean—Carleton and for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière were not sincere when they apologized. When you look at the video, you can see that many Conservative members made the same gesture. I think this is disgraceful and, in addition, given that Canadians are watching us, you should investigate this matter.

● (1515)

The Speaker: An error in the translation of an expression used by a member, either in English or in French, during questions or comments creates problems in the House. In my opinion, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons explained that he based his remarks on the translation he heard. Therefore, it is not his fault if he misunderstood what was said. In my view, this matter is closed. We have heard explanations.

I hope that we will not have another such incident and that we will be able to change our translation method in order to prevent a recurrence. If there were another problem, I would get back to the House. For now, that is the end of the matter.

The hon. member for Brampton—Springdale on another point of order.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to clarify something that was stated by the House leader opposite during question period, when he stated that I owned shares for RD health consultants. Let me please remind the House leader that if had he done his research he would have realized that I have sold my shares in this consulting company.

I find it shameful, extremely disappointing and very meanspirited, in fact, that the member opposite has made these allegations. Last year I was not in cabinet. I was a member of Parliament on the side of the government and I did make all appropriate disclosures. Now, as the health critic, I do not have any holdings in any type of companies. I wish that he would advise his health minister to also sell his shares in Prudential.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development regarding the United Nations draft declaration on the rights of aboriginal peoples.

Routine Proceedings

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament regarding its mandate and quorum.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the first report later this day.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) asked for leave to introduce Bill C-323, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (use of hand-held cellular telephone while operating a motor vehicle).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to make it an offence to use a hand-held cellular telephone while operating a motor vehicle on a highway.

[*English*]

If passed, the bill will still allow drivers to use a cellphone while driving as long as it is connected to an earpiece and mouthpiece so that both hands can remain fixed on the wheel. It seems to me that if we can afford a car and a cellular phone, chances are that we can afford a headset as well. There is no reason to take this kind of unnecessary risk on the road and endanger innocent lives.

The bill carries no more than a \$500 fine for a first offence and a maximum \$2,000 fine or six months of jail time for second and subsequent offences. This bill sends a clear message that convenience and lifestyle habits cannot take priority over public safety.

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

• (1520)

Mr. Peter Goldring: Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I would move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Edmonton East have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I have not had an opportunity to see this item yet. The opposition is not prepared to consent to something it has not seen.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today in this House to state my position on this motion requesting that the second report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, presented to the House on June 7, 2006, be concurred in.

This second report was presented by the committee chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee considered the matter of the acquisition of significant property by the Government of Canada.

A motion agreed to by the majority at that particular committee meeting states, and I quote:

That the committee reports to the House that it recommends that the acquisition by purchase or lease of any significant property, such as the former JDS Uniphase campus in Ottawa, by the Government of Canada for use by its departments and agencies be the result of a competitive public call for tender process.

Naturally, the rationale for this motion agreed to at committee was to draw attention to this question and to ensure that the House of Commons could make a decision regarding potential actions of the Conservative government. Let me explain.

We learned a few weeks ago that the Government of Canada, through the Department of Public Works and Government Services, was seriously considering leasing the former JDS Uniphase complex at 3000 Merivale Road in Ottawa on a long-term basis to use as the headquarters of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

We know that JDS Uniphase decided to sell this building a few years ago. The company had formerly been headquartered in Ottawa, but had decided to move its operations primarily to the United States. This property therefore became vacant. It was strongly recommended that JDS Uniphase sell this complex, and the market expected that it would. The company put the complex on the market for roughly \$30 million.

We know that at the time, the Government of Canada was approached about purchasing the building without a public tendering process. It was even suggested that the building be used as the new headquarters of the Department of National Defence. However, the government at the time refused this transaction because it was unsolicited and a public tendering process had not been held.

Some time later, JDS Uniphase managed to sell this complex to Minto Developments for, we are told, about \$30 million, the original asking price.

Minto Developments subsequently made a proposal to the Government of Canada, again unsolicited and without a public tendering process, that the complex be used by one of its departments or agencies.

• (1525)

This would have had to be a transaction without competitive bidding. It was not obviously a good transaction, financially healthy for the Government of Canada, especially because there was no public tendering. Other developers did not have an opportunity to submit competitive prices or propose other locations.

We have been hearing for a few weeks that the Conservative government was holding discussions with Minto Developments. A lobbyist with close Conservative ties was even said to have taken part in these discussions in one way or another, directly or indirectly.

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After that, the Conservative government supposedly decided to seriously consider the transaction. Rumours are that the government is very interested in this transaction, even though there is no public tendering. It is quite difficult, therefore, for the House of Commons and the people of Canada to ensure that this transaction is a good one financially for Canadian taxpayers.

Rumours are that the transaction is worth more than \$600,000, payable by the Government of Canada over 25 years. In other words, it is apparently a lease with an option to purchase upon expiry. The total cost for Canadian taxpayers is apparently over \$600 million, even \$625 million.

The reason why we asked the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to look into this matter was precisely because no one so far, especially among the opposition parties, is convinced that this is a good deal for providing space for about 10,000 public servants.

The government seems to be clinging very stubbornly to this transaction. Members will recall the parliamentary secretary to the minister stating categorically in this House that there was no transaction and no agreement on the building.

At the same time, the minister was saying in the other house that there had been negotiations and even a letter of understanding signed by the Government of Canada and Minto Developments. It is not right for us to discover that there were negotiations—and apparently still are—the minister knows about them, while in this House the parliamentary secretary is telling us—playing on words and not necessarily using the exact terms in the letters of agreement—that there is no transaction, we can sleep in peace, there is nothing to fear, we can merrily dream on, and all is well, thank you very much. But that is not the reality.

This leads me in the debate to speak about the details of a government policy that has been in effect for several years. Under this policy, employment with the Government of Canada is supposed to be spread across the greater national capital region. In fact, 75% of the jobs should be in Ontario and 25% in Quebec.

●(1530)

This policy refers to jobs which are directly or indirectly related to the federal government. To give you an example of indirect jobs, the jobs at crown corporations such as the CBC or Canada Post are indirect Government of Canada jobs.

The Parliamentary Secretary was just recently given a candid and honest briefing by employees of the Department of Public Works. They presented him with statistics which clearly demonstrated that the current split was actually 77% or 78% on the Ontario side and 22% or 23% on the Quebec side. Those are not exactly the figures contained in this Government of Canada policy.

If all Government of Canada jobs, direct and indirect, were correctly compiled, I believe that the current split is around 82% on the Ontario side and 18% on the Quebec side.

If the JDS Uniphase Minto Development transaction were to go through, it appears that this complex would be assigned to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. That would mean that all kinds of space on the Ontario side, now occupied by the RCMP, would become

vacant. So there is reason to believe that the Government of Canada would prefer to fill up this free space on the Ontario side before creating space on the Quebec side.

In that sort of situation, considering that the JDS Uniphase Minto Development complex could accommodate around 10,000 employees, the percentage or proportion becomes very different. For then, on the Quebec side, the number of jobs in the federal public service, in agencies and corporations related to the Government of Canada, would fall below 15%. So it would rise above 85% on the Ontario side. This is totally unacceptable and contrary to the Government of Canada policy which stipulates that the rates have to be 75% on the Ontario side and 25% on the Quebec side.

Long-time members of this House will surely recall a very similar situation which occurred mainly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, the Government of Canada had decided to install Transport Canada in a new complex, a new building. The Conservative government of the time issued a call for public tenders, and it was very clearly established that the three bids most favourable to the Government of Canada were for properties located on the Quebec side of the national capital region.

You will recall that the Conservative government did not want Transport Canada to move to the Quebec side. The Prime Minister of the time, the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney, and his government therefore bypassed the bids that were made and the whole tendering system in place. I know of what I speak because I received confirmation of it: certain promoters and contractors spent over a million dollars to prepare those tenders.

●(1535)

Those were the winning bids, right? Wrong! The Conservative government of the day decided that it should not go to the Quebec side, but should stay in downtown Ottawa. So the government signed agreements to renovate Mr. Campeau's building, Place de Ville.

Mr. Speaker, I see you are smiling. No doubt you remember because you were here at the time.

The Government of Canada ended up spending more money retrofitting Place de Ville to bring it up to the federal government's standards than it would have spent to get a brand new complex on the Quebec side. The Conservative government of the day decided to keep it in downtown Ottawa. This time, the government did not issue a public tender. It did not invite developers and entrepreneurs in the region—neither in Quebec nor in Ontario, the entire national capital region—to submit bids. It took a shortcut. It is now in the process of deciding about buying Minto Developments' old JDS Uniphase campus. This is unacceptable.

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With respect to distributing jobs on the Ontario and Quebec sides of the river, the minister and his parliamentary secretary—a tip of the hat to them—have acknowledged that the 75:25 policy exists and that at some as-yet-undetermined point in the future, the government will do its best to comply with it. The minister stated that reaching that goal would be costly because the government would have to lease or buy new buildings in Gatineau for new employees. I strongly believe that a strategy should be implemented immediately to fill this gap. It should come as no surprise to the members that I think this precludes buying or leasing the old JDS Uniphase building or campus from Minto Developments.

My hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, who is listening, will be tempted to say that the previous government, my government, did not manage to achieve the 75:25 ratio. He is right. However, our government made a very laudable effort. New buildings were leased on our side of the river, the Quebec side, in the former city of Gatineau, on boulevard de la Cité, and what used to be called Hull, at Crémazie and Montcalm streets. However, in recent years, jobs seem to have been moving to the Ontario side. The first example that comes to mind is Canada Revenue Agency, formerly located in the Fontaine building, in Gatineau, in the old Hull sector. More than 600 employees were moved from the Quebec side to the Ontario side, to Ottawa. Those people who live on the Quebec side of the National Capital Region—you are familiar with the city, Mr. Speaker, having lived here long enough—must now commute to Billings Bridge in Ottawa, or worse, to the west end.

Furthermore, the Conservative government is not considering the intentions of the City of Ottawa, which seems to believe that there should be a greater balance between the east end and the west end of the city. Currently, the west end is favoured.

Since I am being signalled that my time is nearly up, in conclusion, I would ask this House to approve the report tabled by the Chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The report clearly tells the government that it must use the public tender process before it enters into any purchase or lease contracts for major spaces.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for providing the background to this report that concurrence has been moved.

As a former parliamentary secretary to the minister of public works and government services, I spent quite a bit of time looking at the realty issues. In one of the meetings I recall that Public Works and Government Services would often buy buildings on spec because they have come onto the marketplace.

Anyone who knows about the volatility of the departmental requirements, they may require an inventory of unoccupied space to be configured as changes occur. This is an example of where the issue of a competitive bid basis is not significantly applicable. The principle has always been in that particular department, the realty division of Public Works and Government Services, to look at all of the opportunities in the best interests of all Canadians. Certainly, the

public bid basis is the international standard of openness and transparency.

I wonder if the hon. member would care to advise the House about the experience and range of these kinds of investments that Public Works and Government Services must review and when public tenders normally have been exercised.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the good points in his question.

[Translation]

We cannot ignore the economic and social importance of public service jobs in a region, whether in the national capital region or other urban areas such as Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Hamilton, London, Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton. You know what I mean.

Locating and consolidating federal government jobs in the Outaouais, respecting the distribution of jobs on both sides of the river, is a major factor in our development. The hon. member for Mississauga South did not fail to mention that, for us, the economy of the Outaouais region is largely based on the presence of the Government of Canada.

Obviously there are other government jobs at the provincial and municipal levels. Furthermore, for the past number of years, we have been enjoying the contributions of the high-tech industry. Another very significant domain for us is tourism.

Let us come back to Government of Canada jobs. I should point out that this has been done. I introduced a motion during the 38th Parliament asking the Government of Canada to take the necessary steps to distribute federal jobs in the national capital region more equitably, as I was explaining earlier.

This job distribution strategy must cover all federal departments and include all federal corporations. If you allow me to go into detail, I will let you do the math as to what this represents in terms of departments, agencies and jobs. The strategy must include all the federal public agencies identified in the Bank of Canada Act, the Broadcasting Act—the CBC and the Société Radio-Canada—the Canada Council Act, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development Act, the International Development Research Centre Act, the National Defence Act, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act and the Telefilm Canada Act. It must also include the institutions that are identified in a schedule to the Financial Administration Act or come under that act. I am thinking of Canada Post and even the House of Commons and the Senate. I am not saying that jobs should be moved to that side, but they should be included in the calculation.

I hope this answers my colleague's question. I expect other questions.

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• (1545)

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my first reaction is one of surprise. But after thinking about it, perhaps I am not surprised. This distribution of 25% and 75% was decided on in 1984 by a Liberal government. My colleague for Hull—Aylmer, who just spoke, was elected on November 15, 1999, and it was not until November 10, 2005, with things heating up and the elections coming, that he decided to start defending the Outaouais.

Why did it take him six years to realize that there was a problem? This is an extremely important factor in opening up the Outaouais, and ensuring that the Outaouais may be recognized as an integral part of Quebec. In Quebec we have always paid our taxes; we are entitled to our share of income, our share of jobs in the region.

I am stunned. He has not clearly shown that the objective of his efforts was to defend the Outaouais. The elections are behind his efforts because the Bloc Québécois is monitoring him closely. We will work on this issue. How can the member make such comments?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the parliamentary system, and I know that questions, like answers, must go through yourself. In this case, out of respect, I will address my answer to you, although I understood that the question did not come from you.

I find it surprising that my colleague, the member for Gatineau, who represents the Bloc Québécois, would launch into a personal attack that contains as many falsehoods as can be spoken in 45 seconds. I will explain.

In 1993, I agreed to work and collaborate with the team working for a minister from the Outaouais, the former member for Hull—Aylmer, the hon. Marcel Massé. Starting on November 4, 1993, the date when Mr. Massé was sworn in, our priority was to get jobs to come to the Outaouais, and to bring jobs there ourselves. It was an honour for me, and a privilege, to work with Mr. Massé in the government of that time.

In 1999, when Mr. Massé retired, people from my riding persuaded me to stand for election to replace him.

Since November 15, 1999, I have been elected, re-elected, re-elected and re-elected once again, because in six years and two months I have run in four elections. The big priority has been jobs in the Outaouais.

The member must have been distracted when I spoke earlier about the progress we have made in recent years in bringing new buildings to the Boulevard de la Cité in the riding of Gatineau. I am surprised that he is not aware of this, because it is his riding. So I have to wonder how well he knows his riding. We have also brought new buildings to the riding of Hull—Aylmer, on Crémazie Street and on Montcalm Boulevard.

I am surprised that a Bloc Québécois member would attack one of his colleagues who is trying to bring economic growth and jobs to the Quebec side of the Ottawa River. What he is doing, for his part, is trying to break up the country, to separate Quebec from Canada. That would stir things up on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River.

Perhaps the member should understand that once Quebec separated, if that were to happen, I do not believe that the

Government of Canada would be preserving jobs in another country. To Canada, Quebec would be another country. In Quebec, the capital is not the Outaouais, but in fact Quebec City or, potentially, the city of Montreal.

I think that the member for Gatineau should wake up and get his aim straight.

• (1550)

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, before beginning my speech, I wanted to comment on what my hon. colleague from Hull—Aylmer had to say.

In regard to the point he just made, our government, like the Liberal government before it, recognizes the 75%:25% principle. When the federal government shows leadership, it shows Quebecers that they should remain part of our country. When we share federal government responsibilities on both sides of the river, we will show Quebecers in the hon. member's riding of Gatineau that Quebec really has a place in our government and in our country.

We want to show through buildings and responsibilities that Quebec has a place within our federal government. Through a 75%:25% sharing of the square footage and employees on the two sides of the river, we will show that we agree with this principle and that our government has embraced it. It is really a Canadian principle.

[*English*]

My colleague from Hull—Aylmer raised three points which I would like to address. First, he discussed the issue of the JDS Uniphase building and its future. Second, he mentioned the 75%:25% issue on both sides of the river in usage of office space. Third, was the specific language of the motion and where we go from here.

With regard to the JDS Uniphase agreement in principle that has been signed, as I have said a number of times in the House and as the Minister of Public Works has said a number of times, both in the Senate and in public, the deal has not been finalized. It has not received Treasury Board approval and has not been given the go ahead as of yet. Should it receive that status, we will have an opportunity to have a full and open debate on that project.

On the issue of the 75%:25%, we are completely in favour of that as a principle of this government in sharing federal government responsibilities in the national capital region, 75% on the Ottawa side and 25% on the Quebec side. With regard to real estate going forward, there are real opportunities to re-balance this number. I believe the number currently is 78% on the Ottawa side, so we are pretty close to the 75% number. However, to actually get precisely to a 75%:25% Ottawa-Quebec ratio, it would require moving tens of thousands of jobs to the Quebec side. That is something that can be done in the future. It is not something to rush into and it is not something we would do just to say we have achieved the 75%:25% principle.

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Canadians, Quebecers and Ontarians want us to achieve that ratio but they also want us to do it in a way that is fiscally responsible and prudent going forward. We believe in the principle. We take that into consideration with any potential leases or purchases of federal government office space going forward. We will adhere to that principle going forward but we will do so in a way that is fiscally responsible.

The third and final aspect the member for Hull—Aylmer addressed in his comments was with regard to the specific line of the motion itself. In case anyone has forgotten what we are actually debating, we are debating a motion that came from the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates that reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), your Committee has considered the matter of the acquisition of significant property by the Government of Canada. Your Committee recommends that acquisition, by purchase or lease, of any significant property, such as the former JDS Uniphase campus in Ottawa by the Government of Canada for use by its departments and agencies, be the result of a competitive public call for tenders process.

As a Conservative, I believe in competition, in free markets and in fair prices. The Speaker may roll his eyes at that but I certainly do believe in that, as does this government.

On the surface, the motion makes a lot of sense. This is an approach the government should take.

However, with regard to the JDS Uniphase building and a number of other transactions that the federal government has taken over the years, if we were to limit ourselves to the public tendering process it potentially could hurt taxpayers and the federal government's options. This could result in some real missed opportunities for taxpayers and for the federal government.

Again with regard to the JDS Uniphase proposal, this was an unsolicited proposal the government received from JDS Uniphase and the Minto group which is now investing in that property. The government, in this circumstance or any others, has an opportunity to look at the proposal, to consider it and to negotiate the best value for taxpayer dollars. If the proposal is good, then the process moves forward. If it is not, then the government can walk away.

With regard to the JDS Uniphase building itself, as I have said a number of times, no deal has been finalized but we will do all of our due diligence to ensure taxpayer dollars are well spent, are appropriately allocated and that we are getting the best value for taxpayer dollars.

To support the motion would be a real mistake. In fact, it would go against what the Liberals did a number of times while they were in government. The former Liberal government considered and used unsolicited proposals all the time. In fact, the Department of Foreign Affairs has offices in office space that was through an unsolicited proposal. The Food Inspection Agency is in office space that was obtained through an unsolicited proposal, in the same way as the proposed JDS Uniphase building. That was done in a way that actually received good value for taxpayer dollars.

Therefore, to remove options from the table in terms of real estate and asset allocation on behalf of the federal government would limit our opportunities, limit the choices for government and therefore for taxpayers and is not the best way to go forward.

This motion, which we did not support at committee stage, is a real mistake and we certainly would not support it again.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the parliamentary secretary read the Auditor General's report. On page 215 in chapter 7 on the acquisition of leased office space, she refers—the parliamentary secretary will surely remember—to the entire question of 800 Place Victoria in Montreal, where Public Works Canada did not issue a call for tenders.

According to its own guidelines, Public Works Canada directly negotiated a lease without a call for tenders. The results of this were bad—I will not go into the details because I think he knows very well, but I do want an answer from him—and cost taxpayers \$4.6 million. That is not a detail, it is not trivial. We have this example and we have others. I think that this is one of the things—in a few minutes I will have an opportunity to speak—that leave a bad taste and one of the reasons why parliamentarians, as the citizens' representatives, want to do introduce a rigorous competitive bidding process.

This is the second part of my question: we agree entirely that the Outaouais is very dear to us. We want it to benefit economically from employment and the occupation of purchased or leased space.

I would like a brief comment from the Secretary of State on the possibility of economic spinoffs for other regions as well and on the possibility of moving programs or offices in the future. I would like to know how he sees this.

• (1600)

Mr. James Moore: I will deal with the second part first. We are open to opportunities to buy or lease buildings so that some departments could be moved to different regions of our country. If my colleague has some ideas in this regard, he can provide them to us. Minister Fortier and myself are prepared to discuss this and to have meetings with the member.

The first point of my colleague refers to Place Victoria, in Montreal. Yes, chapter 7 of the document mentioned shows that what happened is awful. Indeed, there was no public tendering in regard to this space. Sometimes, there are really some disasters, but there are also opportunities, real opportunities to get good value for taxpayers. This is what we will do.

We are not in favour of this motion, which would take away from the government a tool to manage taxpayers' money well in order to find spaces for the federal government in any part of the country. Sometimes, buildings are offered to the federal government. We can then negotiate a price that is reasonable to Canadian taxpayers. Sometimes, we get real value. Taking this tool away from the government is not in the interests of Quebecers and Canadians.

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[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, representing, as I do, a large northern region with high levels of unemployment, it is hard for me to agree with the principle that 75% of the jobs stay in Ottawa and 25% of the jobs are on the other side of the river when I am looking at regions that have almost no federal presence.

We hear discussions about the kinds of prices we are paying for buildings in the Ottawa region when we could get much better benefit for taxpayers. For example, in the town of Kirkland Lake where we have the veterans affairs building there is room for more government jobs. It is a hardrock mining town and federal jobs play an incredibly important role in that community.

It is the same in downtown Timmins where we fought to maintain a federal presence. It is not just a benefit to the taxpayers. It is a symbol. It is a commitment. It is saying that there is life outside of Babylon here on the Hill, that there is a country out there and that when we are making a commitment to move forward in planning for new federal expenditures, we should be looking at these regions. When the federal government has a presence in those regions, it creates stability and a workforce that is motivated. In my region there is a bilingual workforce.

I would advise the government to sell the building and move workers to Kirkland Lake and Timmins. If it did that it would have a great deal.

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. I did my undergraduate studies in Prince George, British Columbia, which is a little bigger than Timmins. With a population of about 85,000 or 90,000, the federal government's presence in Prince George was profound in terms of economic development. I therefore understand what he is saying with regard to his own constituency. However, when we talk about the 25%:75% role, we are specifically dealing with the national capital region. It is not a nationwide principle.

I would say to my colleague from Timmins—James Bay that the argument he just made about the impact the federal government's presence and its buildings can have on communities is an important one, which is why his party should be supporting this government's position and opposing the motion.

The motion calls for the government to abandon the principle of unsolicited proposals. It is through unsolicited proposals from communities that allows the government the diversity to invest in the economic development of communities like his, which may need the support of the federal government and its presence to be an economic anchor.

If the member agrees with that principle, which I am sure he does as he is a well-spoken member who speaks forcefully and thoughtfully in this House, he should have a chat with his colleague from Parkdale—High Park who at the government operations committee voted against allowing unsolicited proposals which would have allowed the kind of economic development that he has described. The member for Parkdale-High Park voted for this motion which would take away the government's opportunity to purchase or lease buildings in different economic regions in order to get value for communities and for taxpayer dollars.

If he agrees with this principle, I encourage him to convince his party to support it because the member for Parkdale—High Park, the spokesperson of public works, does not agree with him.

• (1605)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find that last comment to be absurd. If the federal government is serious about moving assets and moving jobs into regions, it can call for tenders for facilities within those regions.

The defence of the member that the government has to do that because it was done by other governments in the past, is contrary to the Conservatives' assertions that they were elected for change and calling for transparency. This motion calls for public tenders for public assets. It seems to me that is transparency.

If this unsolicited proposal to which he is referring is so good it would stand up to the scrutiny of a public tender and it would be the favoured tender. Perhaps there are other facilities out there that would have been a better value or would have better responded but if no search is done through public tenders, how are we ever to discover that?

If the government is serious about decentralization, I would encourage the member to have those tenders.

One thing I want to say on transparency is that one of the reasons we need this type of a motion is because of the actions of the government. The minister responsible for this action, who said that this was the best deal possible, is not even allowed to take questions from the members in this chamber, to answer to the Canadian public for his actions and to answer on how he is expending the Canadian dollar. Is he getting value? He may be but I cannot ask him that question. Nobody can. He sits in another house. He was appointed off the campaign bus to the Senate and into cabinet and expends billions and billions of dollars.

The government says that the people of Canada asked for change and they are getting nickels and dimes.

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the unsolicited proposals and this issue, of course we believe in public tendering and having an open competition on bids. That is the natural and default position of any government that truly believes in getting value for taxpayer dollars

The member for Wascana, who is a former public works minister himself, understands that to eliminate the opportunity for people to come to the federal government with an unsolicited proposal for an asset that is unique and may suit the needs of the government in whatever capacity, is not an option that should be taken away from the government.

The Liberals did this, as I said, with regard to the Food Inspection Agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and dozens of other buildings and it received value for taxpayer dollars. It would be a mistake to take that opportunity off the table. With regard to the member from Timmins, that is precisely what I am talking about. I am talking about having more options on the table and allowing the professionals at the Department of Public Works, through the minister, to do their jobs and to get value for taxpayer dollars.

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We cannot do that if we eliminate their options. We need to expand the options, leave them on the table and at the end of the day everything is transparent and people can decide where we are going.

With regard to Minister Fortier, the Prime Minister made the determination after the election campaign that the city of Montreal, the second largest city in Canada, should have representation at the cabinet table. If the member opposite does not agree that Montreal should have representation, he should say so, but I do not think he will.

Once the determination was made, the Prime Minister felt that Mr. Fortier should be available for questions in the Senate. If the member does not think that the 70-plus Liberals sitting in the Senate can hold the Minister of Public Works accountable, then he should have said that this morning in their caucus meeting and told them all to resign.

The Minister of Public Works is available every day for question period over at the Senate and is available for accountability. He is also available to the public. He has done more in his Department of Public Works in the four months that he has been there than the Liberals did in the past 13 years.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must inform you that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Gatineau.

For the benefit of those who are listening to us, I will take a few seconds to read the motion that was adopted in committee and that is the subject of the report now before us:

That the committee reports to the House that it recommends that the acquisition by purchase or lease of any significant property, such as the former JDS Uniphase campus in Ottawa, by the Government of Canada for use by its departments and agencies be the result of a competitive public call for tender process.

I think it is important to take the time to describe the context in which this motion was presented. My Liberal colleague who launched this debate chose to focus on the issue of the JDS Uniphase campus. I will use a different approach even though I will be speaking to this issue later on.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates had the opportunity to invite various witnesses to appear before it at its recent meetings concerning the study, by the committee, of the 2006 report of the Auditor General to the House of Commons.

I should mention that we had the pleasure and the privilege to hear testimony from Mrs. Sheila Fraser on three occasions, as well as testimony from officials from various departments and agencies.

The committee examined chapters 7, 4 and 1 of the report, which cover the acquisition of leased office space, the Canadian Firearms Program and managing government: financial information, respectively.

The study of these three chapters of the 2006 Report of the Auditor General brought to light real problems with the management of the public purse. I just mentioned one such problem when I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services a question a few minutes ago.

Another disturbing problem revealed in chapter 7 relates to the fact that the government's funding mechanisms can significantly preclude selection of the most cost-effective option. For the people who are watching, it is amazing to think such a thing. What we are talking about is financial management of public assets.

What can and should the government do to manage taxpayers' money as effectively as possible? I am sure that, as parliamentarians, we are all driven by that desire.

What can and should the government do to make the best possible use of every dollar that comes out of the pockets of the people to whom the government is accountable?

How can and should the government be accountable for this use of public money and for the actions it takes and the choices it makes?

The government is accountable to Parliament, to the members of Parliament, who humbly and collectively represent the people of Canada.

The Auditor General describes this accountability much better than I can, which will surprise no one. On page 3 of her report, she says, and I quote:

As Parliament's auditor, the Office of the Auditor General plays an important role in promoting government accountability and well-managed public administration in Canada. Our performance audits provide parliamentarians with fact-based information they can rely on in their oversight of government spending and performance on behalf of Canadians.

This means that the government must have a method, a system of governance where best practices apply not only to the government's actions, but to its intent as well, the goal being to achieve the utmost transparency and probity. That is what is being referred to here when committee members ask that the acquisition by purchase or lease of property by the government be the result of a competitive public call for tenders process.

● (1610)

First, it is even more crucial because Public Works and Government Services manages over 6 million square metres of space, of which 52% belongs to the government, 41% is rented and 7% is lease-optional. Second, this same department has fiduciary responsibility for \$3 billion a year in real estate, and thirdly, it signs 500 leases a year. I would also point out that Public Works and Government Services manages offices in 1,900 buildings, of which only 250 belong to the government.

This represents a tremendous amount of spending power and, in my opinion, its duty of accountability is equally significant, which is why it is very important to be as transparent as humanly possible. Speaking of transparency, I would like to express regret for the absence of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services during such a debate, since he was not elected as a member of this House. I will say no more on that.

Speaking of responsibilities, the responsibility for ideal governance does not end there. There is also the issue of fairness. The tendering process allows potential bidders to be up to date and aware that the government happens to be looking for space. The process thus ensures that competitive offers are submitted so that, in the end, the best value is obtained—for whom? for taxpayers—in order for this reality to be considered and obtained.

Routine Proceedings

The tendering process must also avoid giving rise to or maintaining the perception of favouritism and privileges, even if unfounded.

Fairness also means that the government must avoid giving the impression that it prefers one developer, one owner or one company over another. In the greater national capital region, fairness also means taking into consideration bids from both sides of the river so that the 25:75 rule—deemed by the secretary general to be accepted by the Conservative government—may be respected and in order to enable Quebec to receive, as does Ontario, its share of direct economic benefits arising from property leased, purchased or obtained through lease options, as well as jobs. My colleague from Gatineau will undoubtedly speak further about this in a few minutes.

Entrepreneurs, developers, owners must be apprised of the government's realty needs. They must have information that is complete, accessible and open in order to bid.

The Conservative government, which tabled Bill C-2, almost boasts about reinventing the concept of responsibility when it declares that accountability is one of its major priorities and, I quote from page 5 of *The Budget in Brief*:

A core priority of the Government is to improve the accountability and transparency of government operations to Canadians.

If the Conservative government is truly guided by the value of transparency and wishes to convince the public of this, it has a golden opportunity to do so by adopting the report of the Standing Committee on Governmental Operations and Estimates and implementing it.

In closing I will quote, as I did in my opening remarks, the Auditor General:

[Public Works and Government Services Canada] needs complete, accurate, and timely information to support good decision making, strategic management, and risk management. The Department's commitment to achieve the government's cost-reduction goal makes strong management practices even more vital for the Branch.

● (1615)

One of these strong management practices is the use of the process known as calling for tenders, as recommended by the majority of the committee members.

● (1620)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her speech, which I listened to carefully.

I have a very simple question for the hon. member. Does the hon. member think that the JDS Uniphase case and the government's conduct in that case are part of a trend in accountability? She mentioned Bill C-2, which aims to increase accountability. In my opinion, all parliamentarians are working together to that end. She said that the purpose of the bill was to achieve greater transparency.

Does the hon. member think that the JDS Uniphase case, which comes on the heels of the announcement by the defence minister that the government intends to purchase aircraft from the United States for \$3.2 billion, is part of a trend that Canadians should monitor more closely?

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer my colleague's question, but I will not make any assumptions or impugn the motives of any government.

The Bloc's goal and my goal as a member of a committee and as a parliamentarian is to ensure that situations where disturbing events appear to be developing are condemned. That was the case with the example we are discussing.

Earlier, I asked a question about 800 Place Victoria, where an additional \$4.6 million was spent without a public tendering process, using the guideline Public Works Canada has. These are disturbing events that must be condemned. That is why most of the members of the committee supported this motion in committee. We are presenting it today in order to make it a recommendation so that the government will act on it. What we want is that, in future, there is never any risk of a lack of probity or transparency.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for her excellent speech.

For a government, everything is based on the tendering process. I have worked long enough in that kind of structure to know that, when there is no tendering for the big picture and for the smallest details of these projects, costs rise astronomically.

With my colleague, I would like to look at the alternative to tendering. What would it be? Traditionally, it is always the tendering process that ensures that we can maintain our prices. What might happen in the case where there was no tendering? How could we control prices?

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I do not see any alternative. I believe the most transparent way to be accountable to the people is to ensure that the information is available to all those who are interested.

Today, this is done through systems on the Internet. We must absolutely avoid cases of cronyism. The risks are very harmful and the danger is great. As I said earlier, what is important to us is that we have economic benefits in our regions—and I am speaking for members of this House, but especially for people from Quebec—and that we have benefits in the national capital region, on both sides of the Ottawa River. We deserve no less.

● (1625)

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must say today that the situation that prompted this motion may have come as a surprise to a lot of people, but it did not surprise me or the people in my riding. Once again, the government is trying to use taxpayers' money to reward friends of the new regime. After a few short months in power, good old Liberal habits seem to have won out over the accountability and transparency that the Conservative government wants to bring in.

Routine Proceedings

The government is getting ready to pay \$224 million over the next 25 years to Minto Developments Inc. to lease office space in the JDS Uniphase building in Ottawa, without a public tendering process. Minto bought the building last June for \$30 million. One day, perhaps, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services will explain to us what logic told him that this was a good deal, but as you know, the minister was not elected by the people and unfortunately does not sit in the House of Commons.

Let us not forget that this government campaigned on a platform of accountability and transparency. When we look at the connection between Minto and Fred Doucet and the connection between Mr. Doucet and the current government, we can understand the transaction more easily. In 2003, Fred Doucet was a key member of the leadership campaign strategy committee of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs. Now things are making more sense. Let us not forget that this government campaigned on a platform of accountability and transparency. Mr. Doucet is the middleman between Minto and the government. I wonder what my Quebec colleagues who were elected under the Conservative banner think about this attitude.

What does the Minister of Transport think? These people promised major changes in how the country is governed. They promised accountability and transparency to the people of Quebec. Where are accountability and transparency when the government is going to spend more than \$600 million on a building worth \$30 million? Where is accountability when the government is going to pay \$23 million a year in rent for a building worth \$30 million?

Try offering any Canadian the opportunity to rent a house for \$75,000 per year instead of buying it for \$100,000. What do you think the response would be? The Minister of Public Works and Government Services said, "I'll take it". Why? We would have to be in the Senate to know the answer to that. We would have to be sitting in the Senate to ask that question.

What do Conservative members from Quebec—who stood to vote against their fellow citizens on the fuel price issue last week—think? Do they represent Quebec in the government, or do they represent the government in Quebec? They condemned Liberal cronyism, so how can they now accept the Conservative variety?

Irony of ironies. Not so very long ago, the Liberals perfected the art of cronyism, and now they are condemning the Conservatives for practising it. Earlier on, the Liberal member for Hull—Aylmer condemned Conservative cronyism, never mind the fact that in his six years on the government bench, not once did he rise to condemn Liberal corruption and scandal. That is the kind of conduct that is giving cynicism license to run rampant among Quebecers.

The saddest part of this story is their contempt for the Outaouais region. In 1984, the Liberals and the Conservatives promised to resolve the issue of locating 25% of public service jobs in the Outaouais and 75% in Ottawa. It is now 21 years later, and nothing has changed. During the last campaign, the Minister of Transport promised to use his position to help the region. Last week he backed away from the Canadian Museum of Science and Technology issue and tried to pretend he had never promised the people of the Outaouais anything. Still nothing has been done. This government has not proposed anything to rectify the job distribution situation.

●(1630)

And yet we have a minister in the region. This should give the Outaouais some prestige, but there is still nothing. I invite the Minister of Transport to drop the fine speeches and deliver the goods to the Outaouais.

It is quite ironic to see, again this time, our colleague from Hull—Aylmer huffing and puffing about the 25-75 distribution. He forgot to mention that during his six years in government he did nothing tangible about this except to put forward a single motion on November 10, 2005, some 18 days before the last federal election. It took him four elections and six years and seeing the Bloc Québécois in his rear view mirror to start getting interested in his riding and the Outaouais in this matter at the end of the Liberal cronyism mandate.

Where was my colleague during the last election campaign, the night offices were being moved from the Hull sector in his riding of Hull—Aylmer to the Vanier sector in the City of Ottawa? You have to want to see this issue through to get anything done. The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer had six years to defend the Outaouais to his government. If he had done his job, like the public expected him to, he could not now denounce this situation because in speaking out against the 25-75 problem, he is speaking out against himself for not being equal to the task. Between 2000 and 2006, only 21.4% of the jobs in the national capital region were in the Outaouais. That is still far from 25%.

I believe the public expects better—from a government that promised responsibility and transparency. The government has a chance to kill two birds with one stone by agreeing to take a step in the right direction in the matter of distributing public service jobs and showing true responsibility and true transparency.

Therefore, I invite the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Public Works and Government Services to ensure that the leasing of office space is always done through a public tender process. It is a basic rule of transparency. On this subject, I would ask the minister responsible for Quebec, who is from my region, to look closely, with his colleague from Treasury Board, at the issue of public service jobs on the Quebec side of the Ottawa river. Previous governments introduced a policy of equity between the two shores. But there is a serious shortfall on one side that must be corrected, and I invite the government to propose a plan to restore the proper balance. I am prepared to work in a constructive manner, putting all partisanship aside, to correct this situation once and for all. I will see to it that members from the Outaouais region work with the Bloc Québécois for this particular region of Quebec.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

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, I appreciate the speech of my colleague from Gatineau, but unfortunately he does not have the faintest idea what he is talking about. He condemns a JDS Uniphase-Minto deal with the federal government that has not been finalized. He has not read it and he knows nothing about it, yet he condemns it.

He mentioned the name Fred Doucet, the deal and one newspaper story. The Minister of Public Works has never met Fred Doucet on this file. I have never met this man in my life. Yet somehow my colleague from Gatineau claims that this man is a mastermind behind this deal. What absolute absurdity.

An hon. member: He is a lobbyist.

Mr. James Moore: He may be a registered lobbyist, but he has not lobbied the federal government with regard to this file. My colleague from Gatineau says that somehow this is some conspiracy.

With regard to the principle of the motion at stake, my colleague, who replaced Françoise Boivin as the member of Parliament for Gatineau, says that he is here to defend the interests of Gatineau. The hon. member should know about the Zellers building in his own constituency, which was leased by the federal government. The property was purchased by the Crown for \$3 million. It was done so at more than 30% below its assessed value of \$4.3 million. It was done so through an unsolicited proposal, the very thing my colleague is saying that the federal government should back out of doing.

If he is here to defend his constituents in Gatineau, why is he condemning the very process that brought jobs, opportunity and investment to his riding? Members of Parliament should not be in the business of supporting ideas that would limit opportunities for their own constituency.

I would urge my colleague opposite to sit down and chat with the member for Wascana, the member for Kings—Hants, the member for Sudbury, all former public works ministers from—

•(1635)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry I cannot let the hon. member go on forever. We only have five minutes and we have other questions.

The hon. member for Gatineau.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say to the parliamentary secretary that, during our meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, on Thursday, June 8, 2006—not too long ago—an official mentioned that he had met with Mr. Fred Doucet in regard to public accounts. If the parliamentary secretary wants his name, I can give it to him later.

The issue of tendering is an issue of transparency. I find it shocking that a parliamentary secretary does not tender and does not require that Public Works and Government Services Canada always tenders, to ensure that we get the best price possible, that we do not spend taxpayers' money needlessly and that all Quebecers and Canadians have a chance to take part in the tendering process of the department, the agency or the crown corporation that needs space.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again I will rise to say how surreal I find this discussion, coming from an area along the James Bay coast where I have 21 people living in houses on the first nations. We cannot make any kind of moves or any first nations development without tender process after tender process, capital study after capital study. It seems the federal government's main job in these communities is to block development, and it is always speaking of accountability.

We are talking about a real estate deal of \$30 million that might be flipped to \$300 million or \$600 million. My God, that money spent on first nations across Canada would turn some of these terrible sinkholes of human misery into livable places. Yet we are going to spend that on one building. To even talk about the issue is scandalous.

I came back from Kashechewan, just before the flood, for the funeral of four year old Trianna Martin who died in a house fire in a community for which the federal government will not pay any fire service, and it is its responsibility.

Why do we have this demand on all our isolated first nations for tendering processes for the smallest project and a project of this size can go through the system without any tendering at all?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I first want to specify that the 25%:75% issue concerns the federal capital region.

If I am not mistaken, there are about 450,000 public servants across Canada and 110,000 here in the region. When we talk about the 25/75, it applies to these 110,000 public servants, and not to the other 340,000.

Let us get back to the tender issue. At the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, last Thursday, officials said that they had a free hand to tender or not, based on their knowledge of the real estate market. This is outrageous. I support what my NDP colleague said: in this regard, the Conservatives are no better than the Liberals.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, the Environment; the hon. member for West Nova, Passports.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with some sadness, quite frankly, that we have to debate this issue, because of the scope of the issue and the idea, as we heard from my friend on the other side, that we are looking at a deal that has not been signed or completed. The deal has not been done, although my understanding is that the deal will be done, possibly as of tomorrow, so it is important that we talk about this issue and try to shine some light on the facts.

Routine Proceedings

I am going to stick to the facts as I know them and as they have been presented. Sadly, this issue has not been dealt with through transparency but through the opaqueness of the brown envelope I received, which I used to bring this issue to Parliament and to Canadians. That is not the way it should be done.

In fact, I have just come from the committee dealing with Bill C-2, the accountability act. One thing we have proposed for Bill C-2 is to deal with the disclosure of information on contracts to make sure that Canadians receive value for the money they are spending and investing. We want to hear more than “trust us, just wait, the deal isn't signed yet”. We want to hear more than “when the deal is signed you'll all be happy with it”.

Canadians want the people they elected to represent them to be able to hold the government to account. Clearly this is not going to happen when we are told time and time again when this subject is raised in the House, and I did raise it, that we should trust the government, that the deal has not been signed, and that when it is we will be happy with it. I am sorry, but I am from Missouri and I want to see the facts.

We have heard that the government is in talks or having discussions. I trust the member when he says the deal has not been signed, so we are in discussions, and what are the facts as we know them?

One fact is that JDS Uniphase, which was hit severely by the downturn in the high tech sector in the local Ottawa economy, had surplus land. JDS Uniphase had its surplus campus on Merivale Road. The company went to market to sell its property.

Initially, JDS Uniphase spoke with the former government and offered the property to the Department of National Defence. We believe the price tag was somewhere around \$30 million. What we then found out was that the Department of National Defence said at the time that it was interested. There were some talks. In the end, the department turned down JDS.

What followed was that Minto Developments bought the land for \$30 million, following which Minto entered into talks with the former Liberal government to sell the building to the government for what we now know turned out to be over \$600 million over 25 years with a lease to buy. I will come back to that in a minute and will reference what the Auditor General thinks about those kinds of deals.

Here we are now with a new government that is continuing the talks and again says “just trust us”, that the government will tell us it is a good deal.

However, my constituents and the 4,500 people on the waiting list for affordable housing, for instance, would love to see just a couple of million dollars invested in affordable housing. The NDP has been asking for affordable housing. My party did make some changes to the budget last spring to make sure that there would be investments in affordable housing in our communities, so that people could see money invested in their own communities. My colleague from northern Ontario spoke about the need for investments there.

Clearly the fact that we have over \$600 million to be spent over 25 years on a lease to buy needs a lot of examination and we need answers to a lot of questions that we have put forward.

Those are the facts. That is the trajectory.

• (1640)

I would have to add, with respect, that the previous government and the present government have something in common when it comes to this deal. Not only are they both part and parcel on this deal, but they also managed to receive over \$70,000 from Minto Developments. Did they break any rules? No. Is it against the law? No, but it gives one pause for cause.

An hon. member: Did the member for Eglinton—Lawrence get any of that?

Mr. Paul Dewar: I am not sure if he was on the list, but perhaps. Maybe the kids at Minto.

Let us look at how much money this developer invested, we will say, in the political parties. Then we turn around and we have a developer pick up, scoop up, a property for \$30 million and say, “Hi, would you like to buy it for \$625 million over 25 years?” I have to say that I do not criticize Minto Developments for that. We have to give them credit. If they can make that kind of money, the shareholders and the family firm will be very happy. It will be a good year for them.

We have to examine it and make sure that it sees the light that Canadians want illuminating it. I am going to go over a couple of the questions that I put to the government. Perhaps it is *Waiting for Godot* on these answers, and we know what happens there, where Godot never comes, but I am optimistic that we will eventually hear. Here are the questions I put to the government.

What financial details have gone to Treasury Board to support the agreement in principle? It is a very straightforward question.

I put a second question forward. Was the search for a lease agreement publicly tendered? I think we know the answer to that, but it is important to have it for the record.

What are the details of the tendering process for the relocation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police headquarters from 1200 Vanier Parkway?

Next, what are the details of the analysis for all of the options considered by public works prior to the agreement in principle with Minto Developments?

Last, was the City of Ottawa's 2001 policy of stimulating growth by encouraging the location of future federal workplaces near transitway stations, giving particular consideration to the east end of the city, considered in this decision? I have to say that this is not my riding. This is something I am putting forward because this was a consensus of smart growth that the City of Ottawa put forward to make sure that we would have some balance in our development.

I think those questions deserve answers. They deserve answers before the deal is announced. I think we need to have more transparency, particularly when we are talking about this amount of money. Part of the evidence that was brought forward to me was that there was to be a \$5 million down payment to Minto Developments just to be able to discuss the deal. I am wondering if that money was exchanged. What happens if we do not have a deal? They keep the money, I presume.

Routine Proceedings

Again, this is a shady deal. I have spoken to members of the RCMP, as recently as last weekend. I was at a community event and had the opportunity to speak to some RCMP members. I asked them what they thought about this. They were not keen. I dare say that they have not been consulted about this. We are talking about a workplace that is fairly central to the east, in the riding of my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier. We are talking about moving it to the other side of the city.

I think this is important these days when we are looking at planning and future proposals: we might want to consider talking to the men and women who work there. It means that we are talking about disruption of life. The fact is that their lives will be affected. Does it make sense for them, not just in the community but from a safety point of view? Does it make sense to consolidate all of those services in one area? I do not know. Maybe it does and maybe it does not, but that kind of thought process has not been put into play here. That is an issue of safety.

I have to say that there is another issue when we look at how much land is available. Recently, Algonquin College by the Queensway, which my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier will know, is available. Was that a parcel of land that has been known as being available for quite a while? Was it considered? What is the inventory of all the public holdings? Let us have a full analysis of what the options are. Again, we do not know. Maybe that has been discussed, but it has been kept from members of Parliament and therefore kept from Canadians.

•(1645)

The Auditor General recently referenced the fact that there have been some rather ill-informed, and some would say dubious, kinds of arrangements made with a lease to buy. What happens in these arrangements is that when one actually buys a piece of property it is possible to put off the books the money one would normally spend at the front end. It is possible to string it out over a period of time, much like what is done by many of the P3 operations we are seeing. What happens is that we pay for the building four or five times when we could have bought it once.

This arrangement is similar to that. In other words, would we rather own a home or rent? I know that most people would love to own their own homes. What the government is deciding to do is rent, the landlord in this case being Minto Developments, and we will pay for the building hundreds of times over before we own it. It does not make sense. The men and women who do their accounting at the kitchen table would not sign off on a deal like this. They would be very disgusted that this kind of financing is going on in this government or any other government.

In summary, what we need to do is make sure this does not happen again. We need to make sure there is some transparency, understanding that when there are competitive bids that process can be honoured, so there is no tipping, so to speak, of one company over another. It is done all the time.

We need to have competitive bidding. We need to make sure that we do not get into lease to buy arrangements. We need to make sure that we take out of the arrangement those who have given to political parties, particularly as we have found out that more than \$70,000 was given to both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party by

the developer. We need to make sure that the government is taking into account all of its holdings. We need to make sure the government is looking at the local municipality, in this case Ottawa, and is looking at its designs, its plans and its future. That is not being done here.

Finally, I must say that if this is the first test of the government for transparency and accountability, as a former teacher I have to say that it would get an F.

•(1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Ottawa Centre on his excellent speech.

Nonetheless, I would like him to comment on the following: we are still talking about calls for tender, but I think there is a word missing. The important word being left out is “public”. We are talking about calls for public tender: these words go together. When a government, a public agency, goes to tender it is a call for public tenders. This means that documents are made available and that anyone can consult them and submit an offer, provided they include the required fee.

The hon. member is absolutely right about everything he said. Nonetheless, in his view, can the current process lead to a call for public tenders?

I would also like him to comment on what the governing party is saying. Earlier, we heard the excuse that things could not be discussed in public, because they were working on an agreement. Since they were working on an agreement, they could not discuss it publicly.

That strikes me as wrong. When there is a call for public tenders, documents are made available and things are prepared well in advance. I totally agree with that.

I would also like my colleague to address the preliminary steps: establish the need, which is public; establish who will be the key players; establish who will do what. Every aspect—the key players, the engineers, those who will build the building or renovate it if it already exists—requires a call for tenders.

Could my colleague comment on this?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I touched on this question at the beginning of my comments when I talked about Bill C-2 and what the NDP has proposed. I will read from our own NDP proposal, “The head of a government institution” or an agent of the government “shall not...refuse to disclose a record or a part thereof if that record or part contains...details of a contract or a bid for a contract with a government institution.”

When the member talks about a public tender, he is quite right. The criteria need to be public so that people can see what it is about and make sure it is not a backroom deal. Those who are in the business of land sale and have assets will have not only equal opportunity but equal knowledge, which is so critical.

Routine Proceedings

I have to say, though, that the other part of this equation that is missing is the minister responsible. That has been more than frustrating. He has been a phantom minister. When we ask a question, there is no one there.

Not only do we have a process that does not allow us to have a window in with regard to the public disclosure piece or the fact that this should be a public tendering, we cannot even ask the minister the question because he is down the hall. That door, as they say in Spanish, is *cerrado*. It is closed. We are not allowed in.

•(1655)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I share my hon. colleague's frustration that someone is missing from this room, someone who could give us answers on whether this deal is on the up and up or whether this deal should be turned down.

There is someone who is making decisions who is unelected and unaccountable. When he was asked prior to the election if he would consider putting his name forward to represent the people of this country, he said he was too busy. That man was too busy to run for office, but he was not too busy to take the free cash for life lottery from the Prime Minister of Canada to sit in that other chamber.

I believe that the day of accountable electoral reform will come and all of the friends of the two main parties in the Senate will be tossed out with their desks after them. Then we will be able to put something a little more accountable in place.

There is a major issue here for Parliament. When a minister who has control over such important decisions in terms of public spending is unaccountable to Parliament, it raises serious questions.

In light of the fact that there is a minister who is unelected and unaccountable and does not feel the need to show his face anywhere, if we could get all-party consensus, perhaps we could get a large cardboard cut-out of him and wheel it into the House so that we could ask it questions. We would probably get about the same level of answers that we are getting from his lessers right now. If we had a cardboard cut-out of the minister, at least we would know who he is. We would at least be able to put a face to the backroom deals that he is making.

Would my hon. colleague support me in bringing forward a motion to have a cardboard cut-out brought into the House each day for question period?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, it is a superb idea and I know some kids who could help with that. Just down the way there are some kids at York Street Public School who could do that. The first day of school they do outlines of their friends.

In fact, now that I think of it, the Senate has a budget for its members and we could get the money from the senator himself to help us with this. Then we could have at least a one dimensional minister. We certainly do not have a three dimensional minister. We are not hearing anything from the minister. Maybe we could get a ventriloquist to help us out as well and we could hear what the minister had to say.

That is an excellent idea.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we could also ask the government House leader to respond, as he has been responding for many others today.

I take great pleasure in participating in this debate. I will share my time with my colleague, the member for Mississauga—Erindale.

There are three or four items of importance to keep in mind in this matter. I want to briefly touch on each.

There has been reference to the 75-25 split of the federal public service in the national capital region.

[*Translation*]

I always supported this fair distribution of employees of the public service of Canada in the national capital region, between the Ontario side and the Quebec side of the national capital.

I have always worked toward this objective and I have always supported initiatives on this. Until very recently, we were getting close to the 75/25 objective, but for some time, it seems that we are moving away from it.

My first objection to the unsolicited proposal of Minto Development for the Government of Canada to acquire JDS Uniphase is due to the impact that this acquisition might have on achieving the 75/25 distribution objective.

We are talking about one million square feet, about 100,000 square metres on the Ontario side. This is a huge deal. It would cause a real setback in achieving this 75/25 objective. Before these additional 100,000 square metres are occupied and the space that is left vacant is filled, we will have a major setback in achieving this objective.

My first objection is that this acquisition would move us away from the objective and the Department of Public Works and Government Services never put forward a plan to counter this impact.

My second concern stems from the fact that the Canadian government, as the largest employer in the National Capital Region, has an obligation to be a good employer. It is also obligated to be aware of the impact of its decisions on the local economy and population.

Already, there is a disparity between the number of jobs in the east end—of the City of Ottawa—and in the west end. For example, according to the person-year data, in terms of employment on the Ontario side of the National Capital Region, there is a marked disparity between east and west, in favour of the west end, where there are far more jobs.

Acquiring a million square feet in the west end of Ottawa will only exacerbate an existing problem. The Canadian government, as a good employer, as a so-called good citizen, must carefully consider the repercussions of its decisions on the local economy and population.

Routine Proceedings

Speaking of local infrastructure, it must be recognized that this disparity, putting the east end at a disadvantage, is very clear. If the Canadian government, for whatever reason, were to acquire a million square feet in the west end, it would have to come up with a plan to correct that disparity, just as we need to see a plan to correct the 75/25 disparity for the Ontario and Quebec sides of the National Capital Region.

These are two major concerns, and I would like to add a third. The government is dealing with an unsolicited proposal.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Whenever the government acquires a huge amount of space such as this one, a million square feet, 100,000 square metres, it is not a small amount of space and it has an impact on the local economy. To acquire that on an unsolicited proposal is a mistake. I believe the government has a duty to respect its own commitment of transparency and go through a public tender process.

The arguments offered by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works that the government could lose this do not hold water. If it comes back that the best deal is indeed the one that Minto is putting forward on an unsolicited basis currently, then so be it. I will still say, as I have in the past consistently, and Mr. Greenberg of Minto Developments, whom I have met on this occasion, will confirm that I have always said that it should not be an unsolicited proposal. If the Government of Canada acquires that space, it should be as a result of a public call for proposals. I know there are others in the area, both in Quebec and Ontario, who would like to bid on this. There are some in the east in Orléans, so I imagine that the member for Ottawa—Orléans would be quite interested in knowing that the government would not want to proceed with a proposal call. I believe there may even be some from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell who might have some land holdings and would be interested in bidding. I know there are some from Gatineau, Aylmer and Hull sectors who might be interested.

There would be a great advantage for the government to know what proposals are out there and let the developers sharpen their pencils and put the best deal forward. If Minto still provides the best deal in response to the needs of the government, then proceed with the proviso that public works has a duty at the same time to come up with a plan that will make sure that the long-standing objective of a 75-25 split of federal public service employees in the national capital region, 75% on the Ontario side and 25% on the Quebec side, is met. Also as a good employer, as a model citizen in this community, it should address the current imbalance between the east and the west. These are the conditions that I have always said should be met in dealing with this kind of proposal from Minto.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

I also want to take a minute to comment on what the member for Gatineau said about my colleague from Hull—Aylmer. I was elected to this place before the member for Hull—Aylmer and immediately got to work with him in his capacity as executive assistant to the regional minister. I can assure the House that, even in those days, he made sure that issues pertaining to the Outaouais region were looked after. When he was elected member of Parliament for Hull—Aylmer,

he joined the government caucus for the national capital region. We would meet every week. Ministers dealing with issues important to our region were invited to attend these meetings, so that we could express our views. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and all the people of Hull—Aylmer that the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer did not miss a chance to make demands, as appropriate, for the riding and the people he represents. So, what our colleague from Gatineau said has to be taken with a grain of salt, because it does not hold up.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to stress that one wonders who would go there. I must admit that, as the member of Parliament for Ottawa—Vanier, the riding which is currently home to the RCMP headquarters, I am somewhat concerned. The commissioner of the RCMP may correct me publicly if I am wrong, but I was told that he, the commissioner of the RCMP, was the one pushing for this deal to be closed.

The deal is all but closed. A letter of intention has been sent. In fact, the parliamentary secretary said so himself. From the moment that a letter of intention is sent, the rest, including the Treasury Board process, is a mere formality. I may be wrong. Still, the government should take the will of this House into account and wait for a vote to be taken on this proposal. I support the motion to concur in the second report of the committee, requesting that, when making or planning to make acquisitions as major as this, the government go through an open tendering process.

I will conclude on this note. Should the government go ahead with this acquisition, it would be required to indicate how it plans to achieve the 75-25 split, and to mitigate the current east-west imbalance on the Ottawa side of the national capital region instead of making it worse.

[*English*]

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, I appreciate the intervention from my colleague. As an experienced member for the region, certainly on this file, his thoughts certainly are welcome. However, I do find it curious that now that the Liberals are in opposition, they find sin in things in which they found virtue when they were in government.

We are talking about a motion which deals with unsolicited proposals to the government. As I said, of course we believe in open tendering, transparency and competition for taxpayers' dollars and contracting. There is no question about that

The member should know that the former Ottawa city hall building at 111 Sussex Drive, which is in the member's district, was appraised at \$85 million and purchased by the government for \$60 million, 30% below market value. Tenants there currently include: the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Canada School of Public Service, Public Works and Government Services Canada, and the City of Ottawa. This was done through an unsolicited proposal, the very process that would terminate if we took the very approach that he has spoken about in his speech.

If this is such a bad idea now, why was it a good idea when he was in government?

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Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, first, to say that I take this stand because I am in opposition is absolutely and totally inaccurate.

I said to the member and I said in this House, whenever I met with Mr. Greenberg of Minto on this file, when I was in government, the conditions that I have just enumerated of a public tender process were required in order for Public Works to reach the 75-25 objective. This was to ensure that we did not exacerbate the current east-west balance but redressed it, and it would also accompany the acquisition. That is what I said then and that is what I say now, so for the member to say that I have changed my tune because I am in opposition now is totally inaccurate.

Second, the acquisition of the old city hall of Ottawa was something that the government wanted. It wanted it because it happens to be on Sussex Drive which is next to Foreign Affairs. Buying a public property from a government to a government is a totally different process, as the hon. member will know. When the Government of Canada disposes of property, it first goes to other departments, then to provinces and then to municipalities, and the reverse process occurs out of courtesy and respect from other governments.

He is mixing apples and oranges here.

• (1710)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when referring to this government, the Conservatives always talk about openness, transparency, honesty and responsibility to the taxpayer. We hear that coming from these guys ad nauseam, but the problem is that these are the same people who, when in opposition, said that when people cross the floor, it leads to corruption of government.

In fact, the Prime Minister's words were, when he was in the official opposition and the member for Kings—Hants crossed, that anyone going over for 30 pieces of silver leads to the corruption of government, and the first thing the Conservatives did was accept the floor-crosser from Vancouver Kingsway without asking him to go back to his constituents.

They then appointed an unelected, unaccountable, Conservative friend from Quebec, who by the way could not be bothered to run because he was too busy. He had other things to do. He was appointed to the Senate as the Minister of Public Works, which means that hon. members cannot question him here in the House, which is really in itself a slam at democracy.

This is coming from the Conservatives who preach openness and transparency. The reality is that the first thing they did was break their own moral ethics in this House when they formed government.

Does the hon. member give any credence to what these people say at all when it comes to the issue of Minto?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I will not make reference to the comments about the Minister of International Trade or the Minister of Public Works. I want to concentrate on the process and the substance at hand here.

The government has received a proposal. That is legitimate. Whether the government decides to act on it is the question. I am sure the member for Abbotsford, as reasonable as he is, might even

agree with me that whenever the government acquires a million square feet of space, it should do so through a public tender call process.

It may still acquire it after the public tender call process because it may be the better deal. I do not know that. I do not have the details of the deal, but in terms of the transparency aspirations of the government, which the Conservatives have touted as their number one priority, it stands to reason that the government should acquire that huge amount of space as a result of a public tender call process and not an unsolicited proposal.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this motion today.

Canadians expect their government and parliamentarians to manage the matters of our great nation with a high sense of responsibility and diligence. The executive branch, the government, is expected to manage the day-to-day operations while Canadians, through their elected parliamentarians, act as a sounding board and a safety valve for the government's conduct. Our democracy thrives on this dynamic and the eventual beneficiary is Canada and its citizens.

At the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, of which I am a proud member, parliamentarians have been working diligently to examine various procedures and practices to ensure that Canadians are served well.

The committee had the pleasure of inviting and speaking with the Auditor General and Public Works and Government Services officials. The committee was interested in chapter 7 of her 2006 report, which dealt with acquisition of leased office spaces. The Auditor General and her team have done extensive and excellent work on this file over a number of years, and shared with the committee very insightful and informative findings.

The committee, and any reader of that chapter, would find that there is room to improve the government's practices when it comes to acquiring office spaces. The committee was very interested in examining possible failures and identifying opportunities to enhance the expenditure of taxpayers' money when acquiring office spaces.

The committee confirmed that the government is on the verge of acquiring large office space in the Ottawa region. The government has apparently signed a letter of intent to purchase the JDS Uniphase campus in Ottawa without conducting an open and transparent competitive bid process.

Given that the committee had just heard from the Auditor General about examples of mismanaged taxpayers' money, I proposed a motion that would call on the government to perform its due diligence before acquiring any significant real estate property, such as the JDS campus, and that any decisions be the result of a competitive public tender call process.

I was pleased that the majority of the committee endorsed that motion, although I was somewhat bewildered to see my colleagues from the Conservative Party voting against accountability and transparency.

This motion intends to encourage the wise expenditure of government funds, so all options are evaluated before a final decision is made.

I recognize that there are occasions when certain situations may contain conditions and requirements that might appear unique. As someone who worked in the private sector for years, I have a great appreciation for following competitive processes when acquiring or purchasing significant products or projects. The apparent unique requirements, if they are essential to the property needed, can be described in the specifications of any tender.

Members will be surprised how many creative and useful offers will be presented. As well, a competitive process would encourage all bidders, including the apparent favourite ones, to be aggressive in their pricing when they know that open and competitive bids are being sought.

I am glad that we are having this debate right now. Even though the government has signed a letter of intent, the building has not been purchased yet. Now is the right time to ensure that this decision is the right decision that offers the highest value to Canadians.

The Liberal Party has repeatedly attempted to ask the Minister of Public Works about the government's intentions in regard to this transaction. Unfortunately, the minister does not sit in the House so he cannot answer those questions.

The motion is asking a reasonable and logical request. It calls on the government to ensure transparency, accountability and openness.

It amuses me to see my Conservative colleagues oppose this motion. They are claiming to be the champions of accountability, but their position on this motion proves what the Liberals have been saying for a while.

The Conservatives are only promoting selective accountability. They appear to be only pursuing slogans and rhetoric, "Do as I say, but not as I do". Accountability is good for them when it does not mean holding the government to account. When real accountability and prudent management of taxpayers' money is the real issue, the Conservatives appear to be waffling.

• (1715)

The irony is that the Conservatives are accusing the previous Liberal government of forcing their hand to purchase this property. If that is the case, the Liberals are presenting them with a clear opportunity to enhance this transaction right now. If they truly believe that the Liberals have put them in this quandary or made errors, why do they not vote in support of this motion and blame the Liberals?

I hope that my colleagues, members of the House, including the Conservatives, join together to endorse this simple and clear motion. The motion does not prevent the government from obtaining any property. In fact, it protects it from any future accusation of lack of transparency. It might delay the decision for a short while, but it would ensure that when a decision is made, that it is the right one for all Canadians.

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, the motion that we are dealing with essentially calls on the federal government, not only this one but all future federal governments, to do away with the concept of accepting unsolicited

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proposals for consideration of a property or, I suppose, in any other aspect, with regard to getting assets for the federal government.

I am trying to be diplomatic, but the best thing I can say is, that is a profoundly stupid idea. It is incredibly dumb. In fact, the member should know that a number of federal government buildings have been purchased or leased through this process and it has led to incredible value for taxpayers' dollars.

I would encourage the hon. member to talk to the member for Kings—Hants, the member for Sudbury, and the other former ministers of public works that are on the government side. I would be more than prepared to wager with him that virtually every single one of them will tell him that this is a profoundly stupid idea, because it is.

I have already given examples before. I will give him one more. Just a couple of blocks away from Parliament Hill, 90 Sparks Street was purchased by the Crown for \$60 million and it is now occupied by a dozen federal departments and agencies. Its appraised value at the time was \$72 million. It was purchased for \$60 million through an unsolicited process and it got value for taxpayers' dollars.

The idea of walking away from this whole approach to doing business is dumb. As I have said, we believe in competition. We believe in an open, transparent and effective tendering process. If he is condemning it in this one circumstance with regard to the former JDS building, it was his government that entered the process years ago and started negotiating on this back in 2004.

We believe in getting value for taxpayers' dollars. We do not believe in taking away options from the table for the government to get value. The member, with respect, really does not know what he is talking about here.

Having unsolicited proposals is an opportunity to get value for taxpayers if it is used in the correct manner. On a number of occasions in the past it has been and in the future it may well be, but for him to just carte blanche say it is a bad idea, is profoundly stupid.

• (1720)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I am very amused by the hon. member's remarks.

We are suggesting exactly the opposite. We are asking to confirm that any transactions, especially large transactions, conducted by the government, and regardless of who is in government, are done through an open and transparent process.

Occasionally, we may come across unsolicited bids, but by making sure that we confirm that those unsolicited bids are valid and valuable, we need to seek other bidders and other opportunities to ensure that the price we have in front of us is the right price that benefits all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague is very simple.

How would he react if a high-level official in the Department of Public Works and Government Services told him that he, the official, had carte blanche to decide whether or not there would be a call for tenders?

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[English]

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, this is the way we need to react as parliamentarians. This motion calls on the government to ensure that any time it acquires any significant real estate properties, that it go through a competitive bid to ensure that we get the best value for Canadian taxpayers' money.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we see deals like this going through, we invariably see a lobbyist and I understand the lobbyist in this case is Fred Doucet. Fred was around in the Mulroney years. He was involved in the airbus issue.

Does the member have any comment on the role of the lobbyists in this field and does he have any comment on the involvement of Fred Doucet in this matter?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that this is precisely why the motion is necessary. I cannot comment on the specific involvement of any individual. I do not have any specific facts.

We are trying to protect any government, including, believe it or not, the Conservative government, from being accused of lack of transparency and mismanaging public funds.

Let us have a clear and transparent process. Let us ensure all options are considered. Let us put all the specifications on the table. Let us put everything that we need, including the specifications, on the table and invite all bidders to ensure we have the best value for our money and prevent any lobbyist from favouring a proposal over others.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the comments made by the parliamentary secretary just moments ago and commend him for his efforts in defending the indefensible.

It is clear that most Canadians could be forgiven for assuming that this question of a deal with a particular property in mind, in the Ottawa area, is part of a pattern of conduct that the government has embraced very early on in its mandate.

Let me state something for the record clearly. I think all parliamentarians would join me in saying that we are trying to encourage and strengthen accountability. Most parliamentarians are working feverishly to see the accountability act pass with the right kinds of amendments. I still think Canadians could be forgiven for deducing that there is a pattern of conduct here, which is leading Canadians to ask some fundamental questions. Let me illustrate.

First, the government is wreaking havoc, for example, in changes it is making to the sole source procurement system of our country, without notice and without consultation. Many of my constituents and thousands of companies are working now in concert with the federal government, and have been for years, only to find out one morning that the sole source system, which the government is forcing down their throats, is one about which they have not even been consulted.

It has done away with the procurement strategy for aboriginal businesses. It has silenced behind the scenes. This is again part of a pattern.

The House of Commons legal counsel has issued an opinion saying that the accountability bill is at least partly unconstitutional, but the government has not addressed the unconstitutionality of the bill.

The Minister of National Defence, leaving aside the optics of the fact that he was a former lobbyist for the defence industry, wanted to sole source and acquire \$3.2 billion worth of airplanes without any kind of tendering process. He is now denying it and backtracking.

Now we have a real estate deal, a letter of intent, as acknowledged by the parliamentary secretary, and, on his behalf, the Minister of PWGSC has acknowledged it as well, but apparently there is no deal. The government is backtracking again. I think Canadians could be forgiven for deducing there is a pattern of conduct here.

The government has not learned anything from the Nielsen report in the Mulroney years. At that time, Prime Minister Mulroney asked the former minister, the member for Yukon, Mr. Nielsen, to do a major analysis of property deals with respect to the federal government because of the trying circumstances around many of those deals. This ended up causing problems for the former prime minister and his Conservative government. I really do not think the present government has read that report or understood much from it.

This is reminiscent of the comments recently made by the Minister of Transport who, in a speech in Gatineau, said that he was prepared to move an \$800 million museum from my riding in Ottawa South to his riding across the river because he would exercise his political influence. He said this even though a \$1 million engineering and architectural design and analysis study was commissioned by the museum, which suggested that the site the minister was targeting was not even on the short list of five. Again, I would forgive Canadians for deducing a pattern of conduct here.

Furthermore, the Minister of Transport freelanced recently on a question on the National Capital Commission, an instrumental organization in the development of this region. He said that he questioned the very existence of the NCC. There was no notice given, no dialogue, no debate, no commentary and no input. Instead of pursuing constructive reform ideas, we get a pattern of conduct that seems to continue. It is a do as I say, not as I do pattern.

Most recently we heard about the Minister of Health owning 25% of a private health care company, which he now regulates as the Minister of Health. The government, while in opposition, savaged the Ethics Commissioner saying that he was not a real Ethics Commissioner. Now it hides behind his ruling. The Minister of Health did not place his stocks in a blind trust. On the contrary, he makes a very small statement that he has no intention of dealing with the matter while he is a minister of the Crown. Again, I would forgive Canadians for deducing there is a pattern of conduct here.

Finally, the question of unsolicited proposals, allowing economic development versus value for taxpayer dollars, as the parliamentary secretary to the minister puts to the House, is frankly a mugs game. It makes no rational sense whatsoever.

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•(1725)

Public tendering is the central building block of any procurement regime. It is the central building block of any transparent procurement regime. For a government that rode into town high on its horse of accountability, it is bewildering for most Canadians to try to understand this pattern of conduct in the short 120-odd days since being elected.

In my estimation, the motion is a sound one. I would urge all parliamentarians to support it. It really does speak now to the question of our willingness as parliamentary colleagues to address the question of transparency and accountability in a serious way.

It is very unfortunate for the government, in its unwise decision, to appoint an unelected individual, who refused to seek office in the last election, to the Senate so he could be responsible for managing billions of dollars of procurement and not be here to answer those questions.

•(1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. will have 14 minutes left to continue his speech.

It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion at this time. Accordingly the debate on the motion will be rescheduled for another sitting.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC) moved that C-291, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (injuring or causing the death of a child before or during its birth while committing an offence), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, my private member's bill, Bill C-291, is meant to protect pregnant women from violence and to protect their unborn children in an attack against the mother. In current federal criminal law an unborn child is not recognized as a victim with respect to violent crimes. This gap in federal law gives rise to grave injustices.

In November 2005 Olivia Talbot of Edmonton, who was 27 weeks pregnant with her son Lane Jr., was shot twice in the head and three times in the abdomen by a long time friend. Because Canadian law offers no legal protection for the unborn child today, no charge could be laid in the death of Baby Lane.

Another pregnant Edmonton women, Liana White, was slain by her husband in the summer of 2005. Again, no charges could be laid in the death of her baby.

Many Canadians are shocked to learn that, when an attacker kills a woman's pre-born child, no charge is laid in the death of that child,

even when the attacker purposely intended to kill the child. Clearly, there are two victims in such cases, and the public recognizes this.

A Robbins SCE Research poll, conducted in December 2005, found that 78% of Canadians supported a separate homicide charge in the death of an unborn child in such cases. A *Calgary Herald* poll, conducted on November 30, 2005, showed 82% support.

The grieving families, who have lost their loved ones in this type of crime, only too tragically recognize that there are two victims. Just ask Mary Talbot how many victims there were when her daughter Olivia and her grandson, Baby Lane, died in November of 2005.

Any pregnant woman who survives a violent attack, but loses her pre-born child, a child she wants and loves, will grieve for that child, and no one can say she grieves for that child any less simply because that child has not yet been born.

My private member's bill seeks to address this injustice by making it a separate offence to kill or injure a pre-born child during the commission of an offence against the child's mother. Let me explain how it would do that.

In current federal law a child becomes a human being only after it is born alive, and only then does it receive protection under the law. Because children before they are born are not considered human beings, in today's criminal law they receive no legal protection whatsoever. The amendment to the Criminal Code, which I am proposing with my private member's bill, would change this so legal protection would be given not only to human beings, as defined by the Criminal Code, but also to unborn children who were harmed or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers.

My private member's bill does not change the definition of a human being. What it does is offer protection to the unborn child, despite the definition of a human being. I believe this will also provide added protection for the pregnant woman.

Note that my bill specifically states that it applies only "while committing or attempting to commit an offence against the mother". Why is this important? Because this terminology was used precisely so abortions would be excluded. As we have seen from reports by a few extreme media, this issue is being linked to abortion. The media seems to have more concern that it somehow is an attempt to restrict access to abortion than it does about protecting pregnant women and their unborn children. The bill has nothing to do with abortion. In fact, it is the very opposite of abortion. In the case of abortion, the woman chooses the procedure.

The bill is about protecting the children whose mothers have not chosen abortion, mothers who have chosen to carry their child to term. That is why those who truly are pro-choice will support the bill because it respects a woman's right to choose to bring her child to term in a safe environment.

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Some people have argued that the Supreme Court will not allow an unborn child to have legal protection under the law because the Supreme Court has said that a fetus is not a person. This is a false interpretation of the court's rulings. It is the existing law which offers no rights to the fetus and the courts have just been applying the existing law when they have made their rulings. However, the law can be changed and that is the responsibility of Parliament, not the courts, as the Supreme Court itself has said in a number of cases.

● (1735)

For example, in the case of Winnipeg Child and Family Services v. DFG in 1997 involving a glue-sniffing pregnant woman, the issue at hand was whether child protective services could force the pregnant woman into custody in order to protect her unborn child. The Supreme Court said that according to existing law the unborn child has no rights and therefore the woman could not be forced into custody. The court stated, "The law of Canada does not recognize the unborn child as a legal person possessing rights".

The court went on to ask, "At what stage would a fetus acquire rights?"

The court said that dealing with such "thorny moral and social issues" is "better dealt with by elected legislators than the courts".

The Supreme Court has clearly stated that the existing law does not offer legal protection for the fetus and that it is not up to the court to change the law in order to offer this protection. That is the job of Parliament.

My private member's bill addresses this issue in one very specific way, by extending protection to the unborn child who is harmed or injured when the mother is the victim of a violent crime, only in those very narrow circumstances.

Violence against women is a serious problem in our society and studies have shown that pregnancy increases the risk that a woman will be abused. When a woman is pregnant she is especially vulnerable because she has not only herself to protect and defend, but also her unborn child.

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says that physical abuse remains a frequently undetected risk factor in a large number of pregnancies and that violence begins or increases during pregnancy.

Canadian studies estimate that the prevalence of physical abuse during pregnancy is around 6%, which is extremely high, and that 64% of women abused during pregnancy reported increased abuse during pregnancy.

According to the Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System, women abused during pregnancy were four times as likely as other abused women to report having experienced very serious violence, including being beaten up, choked, threatened with a gun or knife, or sexually assaulted.

One Canadian study found that the most common area of a woman's body struck during pregnancy was the abdomen. The literature shows that "severe blunt trauma to a maternal abdomen has been shown to lead to spontaneous abortion, fetal death, placental

abruption, preterm labour and delivery, and fetal injuries, such as skull fractures, intracranial hemorrhage and bone fractures".

It is very disturbing that when a woman is at her most vulnerable she is at increased risk of attack. This bill would act as a strong deterrent to perpetrating violence against a pregnant woman.

In testimony at a subcommittee hearing on the U.S. unborn victims of violence act, Tracy Marciniak, who survived a violent attack by her husband who killed her unborn child, said the following, "Before his trial, my attacker said on TV that he would never have hit me if he had thought that he could be charged with the killing of his child". She went on to say, "If an attacker of a pregnant woman knows that they can get prosecuted for harming or killing that woman's child, they are going to think twice before they do it". This was said by the victim of a violent attack that killed her unborn child.

What message are we sending to those who physically abuse pregnant women when we allow them to inflict such physical harm and even death on the woman's unborn child with no consequences whatsoever? The perpetrator will simply be charged with the assault on the woman, as if the child simply did not exist.

● (1740)

What message are we sending to the mother of the child when we refuse to acknowledge that her offspring growing inside of her is worthy of protection? We give more protection to animals.

Before judging that statement as being over the top, I ask members to please consider this. If a person assaulted a woman who was carrying a pet cat or dog and intentionally injured or killed the pet, the person would receive the penalty for assault against the woman plus the penalty for the separate offence against the animal, which in itself could carry a prison sentence of up to six months and a fine of up to \$2,000. Does anyone really believe that it is right and just that there should be a penalty for the injury or death of a pet but not for an unborn child?

The type of law that I am proposing in my private member's bill would not only act as a strong deterrent to violence, it would not only send a strong message to society that we will not condone this type of abuse on women when they are most vulnerable, but it would also bring a sense of closure to the surviving family members because it recognizes that there are two victims in such cases. Our current law, which fails to recognize a second victim in these violent attacks on pregnant women, amounts to telling Mary Talbot that she really did not lose a grandson the day that Olivia and baby Lane died. It means that we are saying to Lane Griffith, the father of the baby, that he did not really lose a son that day but baby Lane did exist. He had a name and he was loved.

The *Edmonton Journal* reported that baby Lane's father talked to the belly of his pregnant fiancé every night that he could and told his unborn son how much daddy loved him. Lane Griffith and his mother, Kathy Scott, held the baby after he was removed from Olivia's womb and Kathy told the *Edmonton Journal* "The baby was perfect looking. He was just beautiful with nice dark hair".

Private Members' Business

I have a photograph with me here today and I challenge everyone to look at the photo and tell me how many victims they see. A beautiful young woman lies in the casket with her baby boy whose short life was ended before he ever saw the light of day, before he ever saw his mother smile and before he ever felt his father's hug.

Our law in Canada today, which gives no recognition to the tragedy that befalls a family when they lose a beloved child prior to its birth, is outdated and heartless. Again, I refer to the testimony of Tracy Marciniak, who knows only too well what it is like to have one's pre-born child killed in a violent attack. This is what she said in her testimony at the subcommittee hearing:

I know that some lawmakers and some groups insist that there is no such thing as an unborn victim, and that crimes like this only have a single victim—but that is callous and it is wrong. Please don't tell me that my son was not a real victim of a real crime. We were both victims, but only I survived [...] I do not want to think of any surviving mother being told what I was told—that she did not really lose a baby, that nobody really died. I say, no surviving mother, father, or grandparent should ever again be told that their murdered loved one never even existed in the eyes of the law.

I agree.

• (1745)

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than a decade ago when I rose for the first time in this place as a newly minted MP, full of lofty ideals and untested enthusiasm, I verbally underscored my belief that all human life is sacred from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

Since that time I have been tested in nearly every conceivable manner. My perceptions and beliefs have been challenged and, in some instances, I have altered my positions in a manner that more accurately reflects evolving constituents' wishes and feedback or in a manner consistent with the ever-changing state of knowledge on a given subject.

That aside, my core beliefs or what I view to be absolute truths have stood the test of time and remain a constant factor in my voting record.

With the latter in mind, I am on my feet this evening but this time I will frame my remarks within the specific context of Bill C-291.

For many, Bill C-291 represents just another round in the age old abortion debate. It represents a nibbling away at the edges of the perceptions of the 1988 Supreme Court decision on the subject. I would reject any such notions and I challenge those people to lay solid evidence on the table here tonight defending that position, which I would believe to be rooted in specious logic.

First, to be absolutely clear, Bill C-291 is not a bill about abortion. It is a bill about protecting women from violence. To be precise, Bill C-291 is about protecting the choice of a woman to carry a fetus to full term. Surely we can agree that a woman has every right to make that determination.

Many Canadians do not understand that there are no protections in place for viable unborn children who, despite the mother's desire to carry to full term, are harmed or terminated at the hands of those seeking to perpetrate violent crimes. In some cases the said violence is committed in a manner specifically targeting the unborn child. This is astounding to me.

I for nearly 13 years have listened to some of my colleagues speak on the merits of a woman's right to choose but now I learn that some of those same people will not vote to protect the woman's choice if it involves the choice to keep her baby.

When the member of Parliament for Vegreville—Wainwright sought to defend this bill against irrational committee allegations that it was unconstitutional, he cited several instances to the committee where violent and criminal actions were perpetrated upon third party against prospective mothers who had chosen to carry to full term.

An example that has already been cited this evening is the one about Olivia Talbot of Edmonton who was 27 weeks pregnant with her son Lane Jr. In November 2005, Olivia was shot three times in the abdomen and twice in the head. Because we offer no legal protection for unborn children today, no charge could be laid in the death of baby Lane.

Another pregnant Edmonton woman, Liana White, was slain by her husband in the summer of 2005. Again no charges could be laid in her baby's death.

Many of my constituents and, indeed, many Canadians would be shocked to learn that when an attacker kills a woman's unborn child no charges are laid in the death of that child even when the attacker purposefully intended to kill the child.

To use the words of the member for Vegreville—Wainwright, his bill seeks to address this injustice by making it a separate offence to kill or injure a pre-born child during the commission of an offence against the child's mother. That offence would be the offence of which the person would have been found guilty had the injury or death occurred to the mother. In other words, the unborn child would be treated as if it were a human being and the existing legal protection already defined for human beings in the Criminal Code would apply.

The exact offence depends on what existing sections of the Criminal Code would apply under a specified set of circumstances. Just to be clear, Bill C-291 is not seeking to invent new offences. In the same vein I should point out that Bill C-291 actually excludes abortion. The provisions of the legislative proposal would apply only while a perpetrator is committing or attempting to commit an offence against the mother.

Again, Bill C-291 is not about limiting a choice but rather it is about instituting protections for women when they have decided that they wish to carry their child to term.

I also understand that some have objected to Bill C-291 because they have come to believe that the Supreme Court has determined that a fetus cannot be afforded the legal protections of a human being as defined by the Criminal Code. To that I would again say respectfully that notions to this effect would be inaccurate.

Currently, section 223(1) of the Criminal Code of Canada defines a human being as a child that has completely proceeded in a living state from the body of its mother. Furthermore, section 222(1) of Criminal Code of Canada defines a homicide as the act perpetrated by a person when directly or indirectly by any means causes the death of a human being. To me this seems simple enough.

Private Members' Business

● (1750)

Currently the Criminal Code of Canada does not consider a fetus to be a human being as defined by the code. This proposal would seek to extend certain legal protections to the fetus in instances when the mother was being victimized in a criminal manner. This would have no impact on other debates involving fetal rights, or the greater issue of abortion in general. It would simply seek to add certain protection to women who might fall victim to violent criminal activities.

Again, while generally speaking I support a pro-life stance on the issue, in this instance I support freedom of choice, that is to say, the freedom to choose to conceive and deliver a child without threat of violence being perpetrated against prospective mothers.

I would also like to take a moment to address this notion of Bill C-291's constitutionality. I happen to believe that the committee is mistaken with respect to the state of the court's notions on the subject. Again while I do not believe that Bill C-291 is unconstitutional and I do not outright accept that it is about abortion, for the purpose of responding to claims to the contrary, I would offer the following.

First, the Supreme Court has consistently ruled that it is incumbent upon Parliament to establish parameters under which an abortion could be permitted. For example, in *The Queen v. Morgentaler*, Smoling and Scott in 1988, when the Supreme Court struck down the abortion law, it was done for procedural and administrative reasons only. The court clearly did not find a charter right to abortion, but rather articulated that it was up to Parliament to determine what level of protection to afford the unborn child. It said it had to be done in such a way as to balance the rights of the woman with the rights of the fetus. In that instance Chief Justice Dickson said:

I agree that protection of foetal interests by Parliament is also a valid governmental objective. It follows that balancing these interests, with the lives and health of women a major factor, is clearly an important governmental objective.

Justice Beetz said:

I am of the view that the protection of the foetus is and, as the Court of Appeal observed, always has been, a valid objective in Canadian criminal law...I think s. 1 of the Charter authorizes reasonable limits to be put on a woman's right having regard to the state interest in the protection of the foetus.

These sentiments were echoed again in 1989 by the court in *Jean-Guy Tremblay v. Chantale Daigle* when the court stated:

The Court is not required to enter the philosophical and theological debates about whether or not a foetus is a person, but, rather, to answer the legal question of whether the Quebec legislature has accorded the foetus personhood....Decisions based upon broad social, political, moral and economic choices are more appropriately left to the legislature.

This was restated in 1997 in *Winnipeg Child and Family Services v. G. (D.F.)* In this case involving a glue-sniffing pregnant woman, the issue at hand was whether child protective services could force a pregnant woman into custody in order to protect the unborn child. As in the previous case cited, the Supreme Court said that according to the existing law, the unborn child had no rights and therefore the woman could not be forced into custody. The court stated:

The law of Canada does not recognize the unborn child as a legal person possessing rights.

The court went on to ask at what stage would a fetus acquire rights. The court said that such thorny moral and social issues were better dealt with by elected legislators than the courts.

What I am trying to say is that the Supreme Court has consistently called upon Parliament to step up to the plate and to provide the courts with guidelines with respect to fetal rights. I respectfully submit that Bill C-291 was a genuine attempt at just that.

In closing, I would unreservedly underscore my support for Bill C-291 and renew my objection to the logic that has deemed the legislation to be unvotable. I firmly believe that the process was politicized in a manner that ignored legal precedent and continuing requests from the Supreme Court on the subject. I would like to compliment the member for Vegreville—Wainwright for putting this legislation forward in the House.

Hopefully this debate will bring this matter to light in the future so that we can actually deal with the complexities of the issue rather than hide behind the politics of it.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to add to the debate by saying that all parliamentarians must keep in mind that our colleague's bill is unconstitutional. Regardless of whether one is for or against abortion, at the moment, that is the state of the law. The Supreme Court has handed down decisions and it is not possible—it is not within a parliamentarian's prerogative—to change that through a private member's bill. Of course, our colleague has the right to a debate on his bill, but we must nevertheless keep in mind that this bill is unconstitutional.

Why is it unconstitutional? Because the state of the law indicates that the first rule in right-to-life issues is that a fetus is not a human being until it is out of the womb, has drawn its first breath, and is deemed living and viable. That is the legal situation; that is what the Supreme Court has said. And what the Court has said is in line with the definition in section 223 of the Criminal Code.

Naturally, we can review the history, recall the battles fought. Nevertheless—and I invite all parliamentarians to be seized of this reality—section 223 of the Criminal Code states and declares as follows:

223. (1) A child becomes a human being within the meaning of this Act when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother,

As an aside, in jurisprudence “proceeded in a living state” means that the first breath has been drawn.

—whether or not (b) it has an independent circulation;

whether or not (c) the navel string is severed.

That is the position of the law. It is not possible for a member of parliament, no matter what his or her beliefs, to table a bill that is not compatible with the provisions of the Criminal Code, which are based on a ruling made after the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was proclaimed.

Private Members' Business

Let us look at the history of abortion in Canada. In 1969, the provisions of the Criminal Code were slightly different in their approach. The 1969 provisions criminalized abortion, except in cases where approved by a therapeutic committee comprised of three doctors. There have been provisions dealing with abortion since 1777, even before the Criminal Code came into being. Since the 18th century, we have followed the practices of Great Britain and those found in common law. Since 1777, provisions have protected what we would call today the sacred nature of life.

In 1969, a legislative decision has continued to prohibit abortion, which is punishable—

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hesitate to interrupt the gentleman from the Bloc, but he is talking about abortion. My private member's bill has nothing to do with abortion. Relevance is an issue here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It does seem to be a matter for debate and not a point of order about procedure. The hon. member for Hochelaga will continue on debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, that was not a point of order, and I hope my colleague will show the courtesy of letting me finish my speech. First of all, his bill is unconstitutional. He should at the very least have the decency to listen to his fellow parliamentarians.

Yes, there are similarities between the infraction he is proposing, which relates to killing an unborn child, and abortion. All the same, I think it is my prerogative in this House to express the point of view I wish to air on behalf of my party.

In the current state of the law, the fetus has no rights while in its mother's womb. That decision was handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada, is reflected in the Criminal Code, and is the state of the law. That means that a parliamentarian cannot question that definition through a private member's bill. I think it would have been interesting if our colleague had provided us with a legal opinion submitted by the Minister of Justice, who acknowledges that the bill is unconstitutional. It is worth noting that the minister has the same background as the member who introduced the bill.

That said, I do not wish to deny our colleague's right to draw the attention of this House to such a question. He is entitled to his point of view, and all of the members of this House have heard it. This is how things should be done in a Parliament like ours.

On the topic of rewriting history on the question of when life begins, with respect to the rights of the unborn and abortion rights, I was saying that, since 1777, there have been provisions that did not appear in the Criminal Code—since the Criminal Code did not exist until the end of the 19th century—but that protected the sanctity of human life. Later, certain changes were made. The most important change was made in 1969. At that time, we maintained criminal sanctions against abortion, except if a therapeutic committee, made up of three doctors, authorized an abortion for health reasons, linked to the mother's health.

As several members have said so far, there were a number of court challenges.

Therefore, in 1969, Parliament made several important amendments to the Criminal Code, at the time referring to section 273, which specified the time when an abortion could legally be performed. Then it could be performed with the recommendation of a therapeutic committee made up of three doctors.

The section set out criminal sanctions for doctors who did not respect the strict rules that I outlined. These rules required authorization from a therapeutic abortion committee at an accredited or approved hospital and that the abortion had to be performed at an accredited or approved hospital.

The therapeutic abortion committees had to consist of at least three doctors, none of whom could be performing abortions. That very year, in 1969, Dr. Henry Morgentaler opened his first clinic in Montreal where he performed abortions without approval from a therapeutic abortion committee. As we all know, this resulted in a legal drama—probably the most famous controversy ever.

Then 1982 saw the advent of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which included an article on the right to physical integrity, the right to life, liberty and, of course, security of the person. This is from article 7 of the charter, which talks about life, liberty and security of the person. This would be the legal recourse by which it would be decided, in a legal manner, that women must have control over their own bodies, and that it is not in keeping with the values in the charter to restrict the right to abortion, as the provisions in 1969 did.

That is why decisions have been handed down, which prompted the lawmaker to define what life is, when a fetus becomes a fetus, and at what point a fetus must be recognized as having rights.

• (1800)

I will remind the hon. members that neither the Quebec civil code nor the major existing statutes respecting women's health recognize that, as long as it is in the mother's womb, the fetus is not considered a human being. Whether we agree or not, the fact remains that such is the current state of the law.

Our colleague's bill was deemed unconstitutional because clause 2, as amended, states, "It is not a defence" to a person charged with an offence set out in the Criminal Code, namely causing the death or injuring the unborn child of a pregnant woman, "that (a) the child is not a human being; (b) the accused did not know that the person was pregnant".

Can hon. members see how profoundly incompatible this bill is with the Criminal Code and the courts of law—

• (1805)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after all this time, and all the debates about a woman's right to choose, and the securing of those rights under the law, here we are again talking about this issue.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-291 proposes changes to the Criminal Code that are unnecessary and will potentially jeopardize a woman's right to choose. The proposed amendment would have two charges laid against a person who kills a pregnant woman. This would, in effect, give legal rights to a fetus and change the definition of when a fetus becomes a person under the law. Currently, a fetus is not considered a person or a human being until actual live birth.

While I will not argue that harming or murdering a pregnant woman is a particularly abhorrent crime, this bill will in the end do more harm than good for women's rights in Canada.

Some may contend that this bill has nothing to do with abortion and is just about ensuring that someone who murders a pregnant woman will pay doubly for his or her crime. However, this bill is the thin edge of the wedge, as it will change the definition of when a fetus becomes a person. This change will have an effect on the legal status of abortions in Canada.

This is not something that needs to be opened up for debate once again. Canadian women fought long and hard for the right to safe, legal abortions in Canada. Women have been forced to put their private lives under scrutiny in the courts in the fight for the right to choose.

If we take away that right, women in desperate situations will have to take desperate measures, such as a young woman in 1989. While the federal government debated making non-emergency abortions illegal, this young woman bled to death after attempting to perform an abortion on herself.

This bill is nothing but a thinly veiled attempt to make abortions illegal in Canada. I am extremely disappointed that the Conservative government would use the tragic murders of young women to push its abortion agenda.

This bill calls into question a judge's ability to take mitigating circumstances into account. Courts already take aggravating circumstances into account when deciding on sentences for crimes and would most likely consider injury to or death of an unborn child to be a serious aggravating circumstance.

Furthermore, two separate offences would not necessarily equal more jail time. In Canada, unlike the United States, multiple sentences are often served concurrently.

I bring up our neighbour to the south for a reason. As many of my colleagues well know, this type of bill has been passed in several states. This type of bill does have some impact there, as jail sentences are often served consecutively, increasing the time served.

I would also like to note that the United States is the same country where there is an active attempt to ban access to abortion for American women at both the state and the federal level. The supporters of this type of bill are the very same people actively working to ban abortions.

The evidence is clear. To date, the courts across Canada have blocked provincial attempts to substantially regulate the issue of abortion, finding that the pith and substance of such attempts is actually an attempt to recriminalize abortion through the back door.

And recriminalizing through the back door appears to be the intention of this bill. Bill C-291 puts the legal status of an unborn child into question. First, Bill C-291 does not refer to an unborn child in the same manner as other sections of the Criminal Code. Section 223 states that a child becomes a human being when it is born alive, and section 238 refers to "a child that has not become a human being".

By contrast, Bill C-291 refers to "a child before or during its birth". Not only is this terminology generally inconsistent with the approach taken to the fetus in the Criminal Code as a whole, but it is also inconsistent with terminology used in section 238 itself, the provision it is amending.

Bill C-291 essentially represents an indirect recognition of an unborn child as a human being. Such an initiative could have significant ramifications in a number of different areas of law.

Recognition of an unborn child as a human being indirectly leads to its recognition as a person with legal status. If an unborn child becomes defined as a person with rights, it opens a Pandora's box in the abortion debate.

● (1810)

Recognition of an unborn child as a person would also have a significant impact on tort law and other areas of the common law. Numerous cases have been commenced in the past on behalf of unborn children. They have not been successful because the law does not recognize the fetus as a person with legal status. Any change to this status in the criminal law could potentially have wide ranging implications in common law.

The proposed amendment will also have a significant impact on the mens rea or the intent of the accused. Mens rea includes issues such as the accused's perception of the risk or legal consequence of his or her actions.

The amendment states that it is not a defence that the unborn child is not a human being, that the accused did not know that the mother was pregnant, or that the accused did not mean to injure or cause the death of the unborn child.

Bill C-291 essentially eliminates the intention requirement, and the lack of intention defence appears contrary to the fundamental elements of criminal law.

There is a "thin skull rule" in criminal law which already states that a person who inflicts more than trivial bodily harm must take the victim as he or she found the victim; for example, with a medical condition that leads to more serious consequences to that bodily harm. In other words, judges already have the ability to consider a pregnancy.

Bill C-291 goes beyond this to create an entirely separate offence that eliminates the lack of intention defence inherent to all criminal law. While it may be argued that intent to injure the mother fulfills the mens rea requirement for this separate offence, this is a potentially tenuous link that would likely be challenged in the courts.

Private Members' Business

It is obvious why this bill was ruled non-votable. Not only is it a veiled attempt to make abortions illegal in Canada, but it would make a significant change to our legal system that is neither necessary nor welcome.

The Conservative Party continues to repeat that it is keeping its election promises, yet its members are bringing bills to the House that directly contradict that platform. I would like to quote directly from what the government has said:

A Conservative government will not initiate or support any legislation to regulate abortion.

This bill does exactly that. It initiates legislation that will essentially regulate abortion in Canada by changing the definition of the legal status of a fetus. It opens the door to making abortion illegal in Canada.

A woman's right to choose was hard fought, and it would be detrimental to Canadian women and an international embarrassment to remove that right. The Conservatives are not standing up for Canadian women by tabling bills that will impact on a woman's right to choose.

Taking away a woman's right to choose will not reduce violence and will not make this a better world. It will only remove her freedom. That simply is unacceptable.

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-291, a bill that proposes to amend the Criminal Code to create a new offence of injuring or killing a child before or during its birth while committing an offence against the pregnant mother.

I believe, at its core, the bill is about ensuring that our criminal law strongly condemns and holds fully accountable those who commit violent acts against others, particularly against persons who are more vulnerable to violence. The evidence is clear that pregnant women are more likely to be victims of assault by their partners than other similarly situated women. These objectives are strongly supported by Canadians and, indeed, are reflected in the government's priority of getting tough on crime.

At the outset, I understand and support the message that Bill C-291 seeks to send to would-be offenders. If we are to achieve this important objective, we must seek to do so in a way that is consistent with fundamental principles of criminal law and that conforms with our constitutional law. If we do anything less, if we support legislative reform that does not follow the contours of our Constitution and its conventions, then we in fact fail to provide Canadians with the very protection against violence we seek to provide.

That is why the government cannot support Bill C-291. Although it appreciates the its intent, we believe its proposed reforms are in fact unconstitutional and, as a result, cannot do what it purports to do. It cannot succeed in providing the additional protection against personal violence, which we all agree Canadians want and deserve.

Bill C-291 proposes to create a new criminal offence. Under the bill, a person who injures or kills a child before or during its birth, while committing or attempting to commit an offence against the mother who is pregnant with that child, could be charged with the

same offence against the child. Under Bill C-291, an accused could be charged with such an offence without knowledge that the mother was pregnant and without the accused intending to injure or kill the child. Therein lies the problem.

Bill C-291 proposes to create a new offence that would apply even though an accused did not intend to commit a crime. One of the fundamental principles of criminal law is that persons are not punished simply because harm was done, but rather because they are morally culpable for causing that harm. Therefore, a criminal offence may only be committed where there is both a guilty act and a guilty mind. There must be an intention to commit the act, as well as the commission of the act itself.

An offence that does not require a guilty mind and that requires only a guilty act is called an "absolute liability offence". The Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly found criminal offences of such a nature to be unconstitutional. The effect of the proposed offence in Bill C-291 is also to clearly prevent an accused from invoking available legal defences. This too raises additional charter concerns under sections 7 and 11(d), namely, the right to a full answer and defence.

Again, the Supreme Court of Canada has consistently held that such grounds of unconstitutionality cannot be saved under the charter. In other words, punishing people who cause harm but who are not morally culpable cannot be said to be "demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society".

As I said at the outset, while I understand and appreciate the objective of Bill C-291, I believe the bill's proposed reforms are unconstitutional. As a result, the bill cannot achieve its objective of safeguarding Canadians against violence. This does not mean that Canadians are not protected by existing criminal law.

Section 238 of the Criminal Code makes it an indictable offence, with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, to cause the death of a child while it is being born. As well, section 223 provides that where a person causes injury to a child before or during its birth, as a result of which the child dies after its birth, that person commits the offence of homicide.

Moreover, where an accused kills another person, whether the victim is pregnant or not, the accused may be charged with first degree murder or second degree murder, both of which carry a mandatory penalty of life imprisonment.

The criminal law ensures that the impact of violence perpetrated on victims is reflected by the sentence or penalty imposed in each case. In all cases, a sentencing court must consider aggravating as well as mitigating circumstances.

Private Members' Business

•(1815)

The specific situation of the victim is always considered. For example, was the victim a victim of spousal abuse? If so, section 718.2 of the Criminal Code requires the sentencing court to consider this as an aggravating circumstance for sentencing purposes. Whether the victim was pregnant or the mother of one or more children will also be considered as an aggravating circumstance. Indeed, under section 722 of the Criminal Code, a sentencing court must consider a victim impact statement that has been prepared in a case that describes the harm done to, or the loss suffered by, the victim arising from the commission of the offence.

The government's commitment to Canadians does not end with merely supporting the existing criminal law. The Speech from the Throne underscores the government's commitment to get tough on crime, to tackle offenders, to bring in tougher sentences for violent and repeat offenders, particularly those involved in weapon-related crimes.

This commitment is directly relevant to Bill C-291, as I understand the bill was motivated by a case that is currently before the courts and which involved the use of a firearm. The government has already delivered on our Speech from the Throne commitment. On May 4, the Minister of Justice tabled Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code, minimum penalties for offences involving firearms, and to make a consequential amendment to another act. The reforms in Bill C-10 seek to ensure that the use of a firearm in the commission of a serious offence will be subject to a significant sentence.

Further, as the House knows, we brought in Bill C-9, which addresses the serious issue of conditional sentencing. The government is serious about getting tough on crime, about protecting victims and about ensuring that we have a criminal justice system that Canadians can have faith in.

Bill C-291 speaks to the importance of protecting Canadians against violence. It speaks to the need to ensure that our criminal law adequately reflects the serious impact of violence on all of its victims. I believe all members of the House can support these objectives. That said, our duty as parliamentarians is to ensure that we enact legislation that respects fundamental principles of Canadian law.

The government is committed to protecting Canadians and we have already taken strong measures to do so.

•(1820)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because the time is short, I want to make three points.

I want to thank the member for raising this issue, which deals with some fundamental values. It is important for Canadians to hear this discussion. It is a valid debate and I can see no better place than the Parliament of Canada for holding it.

Currently, under the laws of Canada, the fetus has no rights. It is interesting to note that the U.S. secretary of health and human services amended the regulations, which he oversees, to amend the definition of child. Now the definition of a child is a person under 19 years of age, including the period from conception to birth. The

United States did this for one reason. Medical science today is doing a lot of work in terms of rectifying problems detected in a fetus prior to birth. Insurance companies were not going to pay for this because a child was defined as someone who was born. The change in the regulations took into account the fact that real work was being done that should be covered by insurance companies, and the change in the regulations did just that.

Therefore, this is not an entirely irrelevant discussion.

With regard to domestic violence, members should know that the two most prevalent periods for domestic violence are after a breakup or during pregnancy. That is a fact. Bill C-291 would have been votable had it not asked for double jeopardy or two penalties. Had the bill been worded that if the mother were injured or died and the aggressor knew she was pregnant, this would have represented aggravating circumstances, and that would have warranted stiffer penalties than otherwise would have been prescribed under the law. This would have been appropriate here and we would have had a vote.

The member is not totally offside on this issue. However, under the circumstances, it is unfortunate that the House will not have an opportunity this time to talk about these issues. It is very clear that once conception occurs, there is a virtual certainty that a child will be born.

•(1825)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to very briefly comment on the remarks of the member from the Bloc who tried to make my bill an abortion issue, which it is not. His speech clearly was not relevant to the debate taking place here today.

The member from the NDP tried to do that too, but at least she did bring in some honest debate on the issue. I did not agree with it, but that is fine. We carry on debates and we do not always agree with the positions taken.

Earlier this month my bill was deemed non-votable because it was declared by a committee to be clearly unconstitutional. This is quite extraordinary since at least three lawyers, with experience in criminal law, have said that it is not clear at all that it violates the charter. They were quite surprised at the decision taken by the committee.

Although the justice minister said in his opinion that it was unconstitutional, that standard is not good enough to deem a bill to be non-votable. That is an opinion from the justice minister. We see judges on both sides of a lot of issues with opinions. Therefore, clearly, the bill should not have been deemed non-votable, because it is not clearly unconstitutional. There is reason for debate on that.

The Standing Orders clearly state that in order to be deemed non-votable with respect to constitutionality, it must clearly violate the Constitution, including the charter. The committee provided no proof that my bill met that sense of certainty.

Sadly, what happened is the process was abused and the constitutional criteria was used simply as a convenient excuse when all opposition members collaborated to prevent my bill from coming to a democratic vote in the House. The reason I believe, although who can ever judge for sure, is that some people do not want to deal with this issue because they believe it is a thorny issue for some reason.

Having been through the process of having a private member's bill deemed non-votable for reasons that seem to be, to quote one lawyer's opinion on what happened, "disingenuous", I am in a far better position than I otherwise would have been to comment on how manifestly unfair the current process is and to suggest possibilities for improvement.

The current process allows five members of the subcommittee on private members' business to decide on the votability of a private member's bill, in secret. They deemed that my bill was clearly unconstitutional without providing any information whatsoever on how the charter would supposedly be violated, nor what part of my bill was in violation. I had to guess. This is like taking someone to court and asking them to defend themselves without telling them with what they are being charged.

I went to the full committee and appealed, not knowing the reason and having no way to find out the reasons for my bill being rejected as a votable bill in the first place. How was I supposed to present any kind of a reasonable defence for what had happened?

However, even changing this is not likely sufficient to present the process from being abused, as we have seen happen with my bill. Because even after I had my chance to defend the bill to the main committee, albeit only in a generic way because I did not know exactly what the problems were supposed to be, the committee upheld the subcommittee decision. All opposition members voted against making my bill votable, in spite of the fact that it clearly was not unconstitutional. This was a sad political process to an end rather than respect the intent of private members' business, which is to have fair and honest debate on private members' bills.

If they had even said that they were unsure if it were unconstitutional, we could have debated it, voted on it and if the vote was passed, it would go to committee and amendments could be made.

I have changed the bill so that, when it comes to the House again by someone else at some time, there will be no constitutional issue whatsoever. I believe at that time it will be supported by most members in the House.

● (1830)

Let me conclude by saying to Mary Talbot, the grandmother of baby Lane, and to Lane Griffith, the father of baby Lane, that we will not forget him. If there is any good at all that can come from tragedy such as the one that befell Olivia and Lane and Liana and her baby, maybe it is this: that it will encourage all people of goodwill to mobilize together in an effort to bring an end to this abysmal lack of justice that exists in Canada today toward pregnant women and the children they love.

I can see that I am out of time. I appreciate having had this time today. I look forward to a revised version of the bill coming before

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Parliament. It could happen at any time. Because it was deemed unvotable, it could come up again in this Parliament. I am looking forward to it and I will support the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. As the motion has not been designated as a votable item, the order is dropped from the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very much looking forward to the chance to address the House on what has become a critical issue for many Canadians and I hope a growing and critical issue for the government.

I hope a number of members will be offering their opinions on this issue, because the New Democrats have been extremely critical of the government's choice to cut the EnerGuide program. It is certainly not something the Conservatives talked about during the last campaign, unless one of the members here tonight will enlighten me as to why a party would make such a silly commitment during a campaign. Certainly it was not talked about prior to the cancellation of the program. There was no consultation with the key stakeholders. There was no engagement of Canadians in any sense of the word. It was simply a drastic cut to a program that by all measures was working very effectively for Canadians.

Two main components were in play. One was an EnerGuide program to help Canadians at large. It was a program that had been in place well before the turn of the millennium, but had increased exponentially once the government had started to make contributions to allow homeowners to engage in the process of lowering their energy costs.

There are a number of charts, and I will table them in the House, that show Canadians were engaging in the program in an exceptional way, a way in which we would hope Canadians would engage in other environment programs. This program was proving to be successful. It was making the investments that governments talk about but had finally begun to make.

Bill C-48, the so-called NDP budget, was a huge push forward in putting real dollars on the table so Canadians could actually lower their energy costs.

A lot of people will ask what the point of this was and did the program really meet the means and measures it was meant to. Certainly it did. The ratio was that for every dollar the government was putting in, Canadians, private individuals, were putting in a little more than \$3.50 to make the adjustments and improvements to their homes that would lower their dependence on energy by almost 30% on average.

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If we told average homeowners in Canada that there was a program that would offer a 30% reduction in their home heating bills, a lot of Canadians would say it was an excellent thing and that finally after so many years the government was doing something real and tangible that their families could appreciate. They could spend the money they saved in other places and thereby improve the value of their homes.

The NDP supported this. We supported it so much that when we had the government to the wall, we insisted that these types of programs happen. This program lowered our energy dependency. It lowered greenhouse gas emissions across the nation. It leveraged funds. It resulted in almost four tonnes of greenhouse gas reductions per house per year.

The minister's response to the question was absolutely atrocious. Rather than take up the issue and debate the merits of the program as to whether or not it was good, the minister chose instead to make personal attacks. This is becoming the norm in this place.

The minister did not attend Bonn in a serious way, other than to say that Canada was backing out of Kyoto. She ducked out on the smog summit and attended a blue chip luncheon instead. She has not attended the committee at this point, but there is a standing invitation. She ducked out of a meeting of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, an opportunity to address Canadian mayors. They were so interested in this program that they passed a unanimous resolution at that forum calling on the government to reintroduce the program and for fundamentally not being responsible about climate change.

We are wondering when the minister will actually show up on this file, start to defend the interests that an environment minister is meant to do and bring this—

• (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his interest and hard work on the environment file. I look forward to working with him to make sure that we have effective programs that help clean Canada.

Regarding his questions on the different programs, I believe that the Minister of Natural Resources has spoken about this issue on numerous occasions. It is hard to justify continuing programs that require that 50¢ out of every \$1 go to administration costs.

While we appreciate there are sound reasons for encouraging homeowners to take steps to improve the thermal efficiencies of their homes, we as a government are strongly committed to taxpayer value for money and effective program design and administration.

Continuing programs that require \$2 of funding for every \$1 of subsidy is just not acceptable.

We appreciate the important role that energy efficiency can play. Energy efficiency can strengthen economic competitiveness. It can lower the cost of heating, cooling and other energy services, reduce investment in infrastructure supply and reduce emissions to the environment.

As we move forward we are committed to developing an approach to clean air and greenhouse gas reductions that is effective and that produces real results. We need to see emission levels decline through the interventions that we as a government put into effect. That is the bottom line.

There has been little effect seen from the previous government's programs aimed at climate change or clean air. There has been no improvement in air quality and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

The government is committed to delivering a made in Canada approach that sees real progress in cleaning up our environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We will do this in an open and transparent manner by setting realistic and achievable goals. We expect that the full scope of the government's made in Canada solution to clean air and climate change will be articulated in the months ahead.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, what an opportunity to address again the untruth in the reading of numbers. The Deputy Minister of Natural Resources has shown it to be otherwise. This 50¢ on the \$1 in audits has been shown to be 12¢ in fact.

For a party and a government that is looking for accountability, what other way than to do a proper assessment and audit on the way the government is spending money than to audit the very improvements that Canadians are making to their homes, to audit the very decisions that Canadians are making in order to lower their energy costs.

Part of this program was delivered with the unanimous consent of the House. The parliamentary secretary was with me when that passed in the House not six months ago. To turn around less than two months after the election and cancel a program for the lowest income and most vulnerable Canadians, a program that had received all-party support is atrocious. I would like to ask him why the switch, why so quick, and to get the numbers right.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, we welcome all members of the House to work with us as we map out our made in Canada plan that improves our air quality and lowers our greenhouse gas emissions.

We plan to develop and deploy leading edge technologies that are clean and efficient in their conversion of energy and resources into goods and services. If we succeed in this endeavour, we can lay the foundation for a prosperous and sustainable economy that will be the envy of the world while ensuring that future generations inherit a stable and productive environment.

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● (1840)

PASSPORTS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the day for the implementation of George Bush's western hemisphere travel initiative quickly approaches, Canadians in border communities are becoming increasingly nervous about the lack of leadership from the Conservative government.

When I raised this issue in the House two weeks ago, the Minister of Public Safety brushed off my concerns with yet another non-answer. Since the minister is so blasé about the issue and since his promised solutions have yet to materialize, I would like to take this opportunity to remind him of exactly what is at stake with this policy.

On January 1, 2008, all Canadian and American residents will require a passport to cross the Canada-U.S. border. Such a rigid requirement will severely impede the flow of goods and people across the border. Even the Minister of Foreign Affairs concedes that it will likely cost the tourism industry more than \$1 billion per year in revenue. Others estimate that the number is more like \$2 billion in lost revenue.

For a riding like mine that depends on casual cross-border travel, this will have serious implications for the tourism industry. In my riding, when the weather heats up in the U.S., we get a flow of tourism. It is that volatile and that quick. If there is some special project or special package in the tourism industry, we get the flow from the U.S. It is not always planned tourism.

As well, the western hemisphere travel initiative has important ramifications for other Canadians. For example, each year Quebec City hosts the largest peewee hockey tournament in the world. In 2008, American teams that have played in Quebec for years will find themselves turned away at their own border should they come into the country without passports.

It also means that American families will have to spend more than \$500 on passports to visit their relatives in the Maritimes. How many, I wonder, will simply choose not to visit us?

Now the government assures us that the U.S. government is willing to consider an alternate secure travel document for Canadians travelling to the U.S. To date, however, there have been no firm decisions as to what would be required from such a document, and there are no guarantees that we will even reach an agreement on this matter.

Moreover, unless there is a cost effective and convenient alternative for American travellers, Canadian tourism will still be negatively impacted as Americans choose to stay at home rather than visit our country.

In the House of Commons, the Minister of Public Safety keeps repeating his mantra that his government has made this a priority. Unfortunately, no one told him that the Conservative government had only five priorities and that the western hemisphere travel initiative did not make the cut.

In fact, Canadians are dependent on the U.S. senate and American governors to protect their interests on this issue. This is bush-league leadership and Canadians deserve better.

The minister keeps repeating to us that the U.S. senate has passed a bill that will delay implementation. I would like to remind him that this development is meaningless unless the U.S. house of representatives also passes an identical piece of legislation, which is increasingly unlikely.

Even more concerning are statements from the Secretary for Homeland Security saying that the Bush government does not support delaying implementation. If the congress does not want to introduce the necessary legislation and if the Prime Minister's ally in Washington wants these new regulations to be implemented without delay, how can the minister expect to satisfactorily resolve the matter?

Let me ask the minister again. Why is the government abandoning Canadian communities on this issue? Will the government stand up and represent us on this vital question or do we have to depend on the U.S. senate and governors to defend our interests?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in response to the question put to this House by my hon. colleague, the member for West Nova, regarding the United States' western hemisphere travel initiative.

This issue demands that we work effectively with our partners and our stakeholders in furthering the best interests of Canadians, not in working to antagonize our international partners, which would clearly not be effective. We believe that a sound approach that focuses on both advocacy and action will resolve this matter.

On the former, the Prime Minister has held open and frank discussions with President Bush in Cancun at the security and prosperity leaders' summit. They will meet again in July where the western hemisphere travel initiative will be a key item on the agenda.

The Prime Minister also recently met with provincial premiers and senior U.S. officials in Gimli, Manitoba, and continued to press the message that implementing this initiative without properly evaluating all the implications and doing the necessary due diligence is not in the interest of Canadians.

The Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have met with their counterparts in Washington and both meetings have achieved success, both in establishing flexibility for implementation and in ensuring that Canada will continue to play a key role in considering options.

We are already seeing the results of this advocacy approach. Delay is increasingly being raised as a serious and recommended option in the U.S. That will allow time for the appropriate analysis to be done on technologies and infrastructure to ensure that it gets done right.

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We are pleased to see that it is not only the Government of Canada that is carrying this message. Industry associations representing tourism and trade are being heard and are providing evidence of economic impacts that will be experienced in their areas should this initiative be implemented as it stands.

Canada's ambassador to the United States has been a strong advocate for additional economic impact analysis of the western hemisphere travel initiative and has made his case to Congress and a number of audiences both south of the border and here at home.

A number of high level meetings have been held with senior U.S. officials at both federal and state levels and I am pleased to report the Canadian government's position on this matter is held in high regard.

Progress is being made on several fronts, from the acknowledgement that alternative documents will be acceptable under this initiative to the increasing recognition that more needs to be done to properly evaluate new technologies and new infrastructure. This is both advocacy and action, but the government is doing even more.

Over \$400 million in new funding was announced in budget 2006 for border security initiatives, including resources dedicated to ensuring that low risk travellers can cross the border quickly and securely using the latest biometric technologies.

This government is moving forward on other security commitments, such as equipping our border professionals with the tools and infrastructure they need to do their jobs and protect the safety and security of Canadians.

This kind of action is recognized in the United States and this government is doing its part to ensure the message is both clear and consistent. The Canadian border is open for legitimate trade and travel and closed to drug smugglers, organized crime and terrorists.

• (1845)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the \$400 million investment in the budget was a re-announcement of processes that were already underway under the previous government. They are good initiatives, do not get me wrong. They do speed up the flow but that is not what we are talking about.

We are talking about ordinary people who travel across the border once in a while, maybe for tourism or for business. We can say that we will have special documents that will get recognition but we do not know what that means. We have not even developed the

documents yet and this initiative is to be implemented in 18 months. What are the Americans going to implement? What will we implement? How much will they cost? Will they be as expensive as a passport or more expensive? Will they be as readily available or more readily available? We do not have any of that information.

My riding depends greatly on the American tourist. We have a huge tourism industry in the Maritimes. It is the second or third largest industry in Nova Scotia. Because of market conditions that have been happening since September 11, 2001, we have seen a reduction in tourism. One ferry has completely closed. We have had Bay Ferries do a great initiative this year. We are seeing signs of improvement in the number of Americans who want to come into our country but we need to be welcoming. We need our government to be forcing the Americans to take our side.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, this government has clearly made this issue a top priority and has moved forward with an approach that balances strong advocacy with effective action.

Canadians expect that their government will not turn its back and hope for the best. They expect their elected representatives to use whatever resources and influence they have to promote their interests. This government has done just that.

The Prime Minister made this issue a top priority with his announcement in Cancun and by tasking the Minister of Public Safety with moving this file forward in such a way that puts Canadian interests first. The Department of Public Safety is actively involved in this matter, as are the Canada Border Services Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Privy Council Office, Foreign Affairs, Passport Canada, Industry Canada and others.

The full weight of this government's efforts has been brought to bear on this issue. Canadians expect their government to stand up for their interests and this Prime Minister and this government will continue to do that here at home and around the world.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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