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Tuesday, June 5, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to four petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

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

The committee has studied Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Quarantine Act, and has agreed to report it to the House with amendments.

* * *

UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR-GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE DAY ACT

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-450, An Act respecting a national day of remembrance of the Ukrainian Holodomor-Genocide.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with solemnity that I introduce my private member's bill, the Ukrainian Holodomor-Genocide Remembrance Day Act.

The purpose of the bill is to establish the fourth Saturday in November as a day of remembrance for the estimated seven million to ten million Ukrainians who died a horrifying slow death from starvation in 1932-33 during the famine masterminded, organized and carried out by the Soviet regime under Stalin.

This Holodomor-Genocide inflicted a deep and lasting scar on the Ukrainian community throughout the world. Many survivors of the famine and their descendants later immigrated to Canada. This famine was an attempt to crush the longing for freedom and to erase all aspirations for an independent Ukrainian state.

Part of the Soviet strategy also involved suppressing, distorting and wiping out all information about the Ukrainian famine, now and into the future to be known as the Holodomor-Genocide.

By enacting this legislation and recognizing a day of remembrance of this horrific tragedy, Canada will reaffirm her core values of defending human rights and condemning all injustices committed by humans against their fellow human beings, and to condemn the greatest of all evils, genocide.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this petition is with regard to the broken promises from the Government of Canada on income trusts. The petition represents another group of citizens who have been hurt by the income trust fiasco and the broken promises. The petitioners are mostly concerned with the recklessness of this and the fact that there was an emphatic promise that there would be no tampering with income trusts.

With expert witnesses now providing clear evidence that the finance minister's decision has been based on flawed methodology, the petitioners trust that the government will rectify income trusts and make good and undo their broken promise.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***POINTS OF ORDER**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN
DEVELOPMENT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: Before going to orders of the day I would like to give the ruling on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Wascana regarding the use of Standing Order 56.1 to timetable the proceedings on a bill in the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

On May 31, 2007 during routine proceedings the government House leader sought, but did not obtain, unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, when the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development convenes a meeting, it shall not be adjourned or suspended until it completes the committee stage of Bill C-44 except pursuant to a motion by a parliamentary secretary and, provided the bill is adopted by the committee, agrees to report the bill to the House within two sitting days following the completion of the committee stage.

He then moved the motion again pursuant to Standing Order 56.1 and the motion was adopted when fewer than 25 members rose to object. A short time later, the hon. member for Wascana raised a point of order regarding the use of Standing Order 56.1. He was supported by interventions from the hon. member for Joliette and the hon. member for Hamilton Centre, while the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons argued that the motion adopted earlier had been appropriately presented under Standing Order 56.1.

Given that a meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development was imminent, I delivered an immediate ruling promising that the Chair would return to the House later with reasons. I am now prepared to do so.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

First, the Chair would like to thank all hon. members who intervened on the point of order for their contributions on this question and is particularly grateful that members have taken note of certain key rulings, specifically those the Speaker delivered on September 18, 2001 and October 3, 2006.

[*English*]

A key element in my ruling today is the fundamental precept that standing committees are masters of their own procedure. Indeed, so entrenched is that precept that only in a select few Standing Orders does the House make provision for intervening directly into the conduct of standing committee affairs. In addition to the power the House has to give instructions to committees by way of a substantive motion that is subject to debate, there are, of course, Standing Orders 57 and 78, which can be used by the House to allocate time or for closure proceedings on a bill in committee. It is toward the use of these very instruments that the Speaker directed the House in his ruling of September 18, 2001, on *Debates* page 5257, where, as the hon. member for Wascana pointed out, the Speaker stated:

The expanded use of Standing Order 56.1 since 1997 causes the Chair serious concern. The government is provided with a range of options under Standing Orders 57 and 78 for the purpose of limiting debate.

[*Translation*]

Let us now turn to the Speaker's ruling of October 3, 2006 allowing the use of Standing Order 56.1 to extend, in an open-ended fashion, the debate on Bill C-24, the Softwood Lumber bill.

[*English*]

It should be noted at the outset that when Standing Order 56.1 was used in reference to Bill C-24, the bill was then before the House at second reading, not before a standing committee. In allowing the use of Standing Order 56.1 in that case the Speaker did so with some concern and on the basis that:

The precedents available to me, including my own previous rulings, are [therefore] insufficient for me to rule the motion out of order on this occasion.

This is part of the Speaker's ruling quoted by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. At the time the Speaker had more to say. He also encouraged, as had Mr. Speaker Parent before him, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to examine the appropriate use of this Standing Order, a pretty clear indication of the difficulties with which the House has had to deal when Standing Order 56.1 has been invoked in questionable circumstances.

In the present case, the Chair has looked carefully at the wording of Standing Order 56.1, which states in reference to the House itself that the Standing Order can be used to move motions in relation to "the management of its business" and "the arrangement of its proceedings". Interestingly, the only reference to committees in the Standing Order is one allowing motions for "the establishing of the powers of its committees", suggesting that the rule was meant to be used not to reach into the conduct of standing committee affairs to direct them, but rather in a routine manner, to provide them powers they do not already possess. A review of the previous uses of Standing Order 56.1 appears to support this. The only examples dealing with standing committees or standing committee activity the Chair has been able to find have to do with granting standing committees the power to travel. The power to travel is, as all hon. members know, a power standing committees do not possess and so the use of Standing Order 56.1 in that regard falls squarely within the parameters of the rule.

Accordingly, to repeat the words I used when this matter was first raised, the use of Standing Order 56.1 to direct the business of the committee, of any committee, is a new development in the House and one that I find out of order.

I thank all hon. members who intervened for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from June 4, consideration of the motion that Bill C-35, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (reverse onus in bail hearings for firearm-related offences), be read the third time and passed.

Government Orders

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today at third reading of Bill C-35, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (reverse onus in bail hearings for firearm-related offences).

Bill C-35 proposes that, at the appearance stage and in some cases even at the preliminary investigation stage, the onus be placed on the person charged. Before the trial, the accused has to be able to show that he can be released. At present, as a general rule, the crown prosecutor has to demonstrate that the accused should not be released on bail because he poses a danger to the public. The Criminal Code provides for some exceptions, however, and in those cases the accused must prove that pre-trial detention is unjustified. These exceptions are: breach of release conditions, involvement in organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling or production, murder, treason or war crimes.

With Bill C-35, the Conservative government wants to expand this list of exceptions. So it will be up to the accused to prove to the judge that he may be released without causing concern for society in connection with any and all of the following offences: attempted murder with a firearm, discharging a firearm with intent to wound, sexual assault with a weapon, robbery, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage taking, extortion, firearms trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking, or any offence involving a firearm if committed while the accused is bound by a weapons prohibition order.

The Bloc Québécois is reluctant to expand the list for reverse onus, since this approach affects the important notion of presumption of innocence. However, we like the idea of giving police officers the most effective tools for conducting investigations and bringing people to justice. We agree that in certain cases, an accused should not be released and must be detained until the trial starts.

As I was saying to my colleague from Hochelaga, similar provisions existed elsewhere in the Criminal Code, for example the gangsterism provisions passed in 2002. It is true when release conditions have been violated, when someone who was already out on bail or probation violated the conditions. If an individual already tried once to dodge the legal system and violated the conditions, it is completely understandable that he will not be released. There are situations, of course, when it is prudent, justifiable and perfectly comprehensible for the Crown to say that an individual should not be released, for example when evidence might be destroyed, when the individual may not appear as required for his trial, or when the individual poses a danger to the victim or the community.

We had a number of concerns about the relevance of Bill C-35 before it was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Our first concern was the lack of studies or analyses showing that reverse onus effectively deters people from committing crimes with firearms. Second, the bill would have inevitably led to a greater number of incarcerations in institutions that the provinces own and operate. These institutions are often crowded already, and they need funding commensurate with their responsibilities.

Last, we doubted that this bill would help curb the trade in illegal arms. However, witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights provided assurances on two points. First, the bill must be constitutional and must therefore

respect the principle of the presumption of innocence; and second, in practice, a person accused of any of the crimes included in the bill is generally detained before trial. The testimony of two defence lawyers was the determining factor in our decision. They told us that, in practice, amending the act would not bring about injustice because reverse onus would, in actual fact, change very little.

I would like to quote William Trudell, the Chair of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers, who summarized the situation in these words:

The bill provisions, as elucidated now in Hall with a tertiary ground of public confidence in the administration of justice, are already there. It is extremely difficult for someone charged with this type of offence to be released on bail.

● (1015)

In her testimony, lawyer Isabel J. Schurman gave a good description of the situation covered by Bill C-35 when she said that there is de facto reverse onus in the case of firearm-related offences and that, in fact, the chance of obtaining bail is very slim in such cases.

In addition, setting aside the committee testimony confirming the practice of law in this specific situation, it is important to remember that the accused will still have an opportunity to be released on bail. Bail will be granted even if someone is accused for the second time of one of the crimes listed in the bill.

Reverse onus pertains only to release or detention pending trial. It has nothing to do with guilt or innocence. Bill C-35 therefore will not serve as a shining example of initiatives to improve public safety, something this minority government often boasts about. As well, the passage of new legislation will not necessarily dissuade firearms traffickers from selling weapons. Many of the weapons on the streets of our cities are smuggled into the country. Consequently, reverse onus, as provided for in Bill C-35 on bail hearings for firearm-related offences, seems to pose a real challenge. The question is to what extent the bill will reduce the number of firearms in circulation.

My colleagues will understand that we have a responsibility to consider how to prevent crime. Unfortunately, many questions will remain unanswered, even after Bill C-35 is adopted at third reading. Would taxpayers' money be better spent on preventing crime and putting more police on our streets? For example, would it be more effective to assign more police officers to strategic areas than to throw more people in jail and deny them the right to release on bail?

Government Orders

With good reason, during the previous debate in this House, I said that detention offers a certain degree of protection to society. On the other hand, I added, rehabilitation and the rebuilding of social relations are more difficult to achieve once there is recourse to incarceration, not to mention the fact that prisons are often considered to be schools for crime and a great networking opportunity for criminals.

Those are some areas we might reflect on more deeply. This government wants to be seen as fighting against crimes committed with firearms, but it is ready to dismiss the gun registry on the sole grounds of inefficiency and exorbitant program costs. For example, it is letting the registry go to seed by failing to keep it up to date and by extending the full amnesty for holdouts who refuse to register their firearms. Does this not demonstrate a certain inconsistency in terms of the government's goal of making our society more secure?

In conclusion, the Bloc Québécois will get behind Bill C-35 and will support it at third reading so that it can be sent to the Senate. The reason for our support at the end of the legislative process is that the bill will have no major impact on current practice. However, I repeat, shifting the burden of proof will not solve the problem of the traffic in weapons. Bill C-35 will have no effect on that trend. The approaches that the Bloc Québécois advocates reflect the concerns of the people of Quebec with respect to justice. Providing better protection for our citizens means attacking the root of the problem, in other words, the causes of delinquency and violence.

As I mentioned in some recent remarks concerning Bill C-10, poverty, inequality and feeling excluded will always be the breeding grounds of crime. As a consequence, firearm-related crimes always remain as a difficult social problem to eliminate. Again, and this time I will avoid debating the inconsistency that I emphasized previously, that is the government's claim that it is acting effectively on the problem of firearm-related crimes while at the same time it is weakening the gun registry.

Like my colleagues, I believe that a greater sharing of riches, working toward better social integration and emphasizing rehabilitation represent essential solutions for the prevention of crime.

• (1020)

Unfortunately, this government always has that unproductive tendency to ignore those approaches. It thinks it can achieve security by filling the penitentiaries. What a sad social observation for a government that wants to give the impression that it is doing something, even though what we have here, as Bill C-35 demonstrates, is only the appearance of action.

• (1025)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member on her comments, but as a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I have a question.

I heard testimony from defence lawyers who said that existing practices in criminal courts are the same as Bill C-35 hopes to establish. Indeed, the bill will not bring about any major changes, because judges, attorneys and defence lawyers already practice some of the things set out in the bill.

Does the hon. member intend to accept the lawyers' testimony as true, since they are the ones working on the front lines of justice and they indicated that this is already their practice?

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Indeed, during testimony heard in committee, all witnesses said they were in favour of the bill. Only two witnesses were opposed, namely, William Trudell, president of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers, and Isabel Schurman, who is a defence lawyer. The two dissenting testimonies in committee came from those two lawyers. They told us that this bill could prove to be of no use, because de facto preventive detention is already the norm for all crimes committed with a firearm.

This perhaps explains why the Bloc Québécois did not support this bill in the beginning. Indeed, as we have always said, the reverse onus principle poses a problem for the Bloc Québécois. However, in very specific cases of crimes committed with a firearm, all the witnesses heard in committee were in favour of this bill, and those who did not support it simply said that it was redundant because it was, de facto, already used in all such proceedings.

The committee was nearly unanimous in approving this bill, which is why the Bloc Québécois supported it.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. As she said, and although we will also support it, this bill gives the impression that it will fight gun crimes more effectively. But this is not true since, as we know, judges already have a certain amount of leeway in these cases.

She also talked about how we should focus more on the causes of crimes. For example, I know that in my region, in my riding, we have been trying to obtain funding for a project that aims to help young people obtain not only basic job training, but also life skills: how to dress, how to apply for jobs. We have had many problems finding funding, from the federal government or other sources.

I think these are the types of programs that would really help keep vulnerable young people and youth at risk from joining gangs, and so forth.

I wonder if the member would have any thoughts on this type of program, which would really help prevent crimes.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Government Orders

In fact, the Bloc Québécois is just as concerned as my colleague about this government's approach, which gives the illusion of fighting crime. We find that the amounts invested by the government in this form of repression do not attack the root of the problem. To do that we must ask ourselves if the amounts spent on policing, all these forms of repression and detention in penitentiaries are monies invested in the well-being of all our citizens. Why not allocate monies to the rehabilitation of youth, to prevention and training? Why not provide more means and tools to prevent crime rather than constantly focussing on applying repressive measures and imprisonment?

In my opinion, opening penitentiaries and multiplying the types of detention do not reduce crime; they have the opposite effect. The Bloc Québécois is in favour of prevention, rehabilitation, and social integration.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I realize that the member's intentions are good but this side of the House has put millions of dollars into programs for my province and provinces across the nation to help children stay away from gangs. This is a very important aspect that helps prevent crime.

What would the hon. member say to a family whose mother was killed at four o'clock in the morning in Winnipeg, Manitoba by a group of kids who stole a car and ran into her van? What would she say to the family members when they say that the laws are not strict enough and that these kids get away with absolutely everything?

We also need to have a dialogue about the victims of crime and putting in tough laws that will be a deterrent to this kind of crime happening in the middle of the night in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

What would the member say to the family members who just lost their mother?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I think that there are two aspects to be considered. What is important to this government is giving the appearance of solving everything by implementing very strict laws that increase the rate of detention. In addition, as I was saying earlier, there are all the costs associated with penitentiaries and the infrastructure arising from these laws.

We are keenly aware of what these families go through; it is very unfortunate and we are not ignoring it. However, I do not believe that multiplying these laws truly helps prevent crime. It is not enough to punish. We must look to prevention, especially among youth, because future criminals will be recruited primarily from this group. I believe that is where we should invest our money, and not in penitentiaries.

Having said that, I have a great deal of respect for those who are victims of criminal acts. However, the Bloc Québécois does not agree with the proliferation of repressive measures. We are really in favour of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-35, the main purpose of which is to require an accused, when charged with certain serious offences involving firearms or other regulated weapons, to demonstrate that pre-trial detention is not justified in their case. This is a reverse onus, specifically for firearm-related offences.

From the outset I would like to present the philosophy defended in this House over the years by the Bloc Québécois. We are very respectful of the society handed down to us by our parents, our grandparents and our great-grandparents. It is society's choice to say that we are innocent until proven guilty. And that is the society we inherited from those who came before us.

When a society is built on such a principle or such a philosophy, in other words the presumption of innocence, every time we challenge this presumption of innocence we are also challenging the very foundation of our society. We must do so sparingly and with all due respect to this system. We have to take our time weighing the matter. We have to avoid being swayed by the media frenzy surrounding crimes and try to protect the very foundation of our society.

Our neighbours to the south like to hold highly publicized trials that are the glory of television channels and other information networks because they can sell advertising. When these reports are filed—even special reports are filed—not only do the networks make money from the crime, they glorify it. This is not the type of society our ancestors left us. We have to try to be very circumspect and not be influenced by the media when it blows a specific case or matter out of proportion and tries to influence the entire justice system. That is what the Bloc Québécois opposes, out of great respect for the society we inherited from those who came before us. That is why, when it comes to discussing reverse onus, we like to get to the bottom of things.

In the past, we were very interested in certain specific cases, including the fight against organized crime. We proposed, in this House, reverse onus with respect to the proceeds of organized crime. Now, thanks to the Bloc Québécois' action, criminals are the ones who must prove that their money is not the proceeds of crime. It is not up to the State to prove that it is. This had been very difficult to do in some cases, because these people hired specialists to destroy all incriminating evidence and to prove that their fortunes had been legitimately acquired.

I think that reverse onus is good for society as a whole. The Bloc Québécois proposed this after conducting thorough research and realizing that the presumption of innocence did not work when it came to organized crime. The State's burden of proof made it impossible to find any evidence about how the money had been acquired.

Government Orders

In this case, from the very beginning, the Bloc Québécois has considered the matter carefully. During first and second reading, before the bill was referred to committee, the Bloc was against it because of the presumption of innocence and the fact that a person who is presumed innocent can be released on bail, and because it was up to the State to prove that the person should not be released on bail. After hearing all of the witnesses in committee, the Bloc Québécois eventually came to the conclusion that this bill reflects existing jurisprudence.

• (1035)

This bill does not actually change anything. People who have committed a crime with a firearm automatically remain in prison until they appear in court. This is why the Bloc Québécois, after having heard the witnesses and experts who came to shed light on the debate, quickly realized that in the end the bill reflected what actually happens.

In this connection, I will simply read the statement by one witness, William Trudell, Chair of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers. He said: "...it's our experience on the ground that people charged with gun-related offences are not released". That means that this bill is not proposing much of a change, contrary to what the government is letting on. It will not change things so as finally to reduce crime. No, this bill does no more than reflect what takes place at present, the current state of affairs in jurisprudence, that is, the court decisions. I will reread this statement by the Chair of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers: "...it's our experience on the ground that people charged with gun-related offences are not released".

Bloc Québécois justice critics have said in this House that all the witnesses, almost unanimously, acknowledged this state of affairs. All the bill before us does therefore is acknowledge a practice in effect in Canada's and Quebec's courts of justice. They very quickly brought us around to this idea.

After having heard the witnesses, the experts in their fields, we are now in favour of bill C-35. The Chair of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers knows what he is talking about. If the bill is acknowledging what actually takes place in the courts, we can only agree with that.

Furthermore, the Criminal Code already includes some exceptions to reverse onus in bail hearings. It talks about breach of bail conditions, organized crime—I was explaining the Bloc Québécois position earlier—terrorism, trafficking, smuggling and production of narcotics, murder, treason and war crimes. When someone commits one of these crimes, it is up to them to prove to the state, to the Crown, that they can be released, and not the other way round. It is not up to the Crown to prove to the judges that this person should not be released.

The following offences will be added to the exceptions to which the reverse onus applies: attempted murder with a firearm; discharging a firearm with intent to wound; sexual assault with a weapon; robbery; aggravated sexual assault; abduction; hostage taking; extortion; trafficking; possession for the purposes of trafficking; and any firearm-related offences committed when the accused was under an order prohibiting him from possessing a firearm.

Henceforth, people accused of any crime committed with a firearm will have to demonstrate to the Crown that they are not a danger to the lives of their fellow citizens in order to be granted pretrial release. This is actually an established practice, a reflection of what happens now in our legal system. Since this is what really happens, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of it.

However, we need to watch the Conservative government's position very carefully, especially in regard to firearms. On the one hand, it has decided to eliminate the firearms registry, while on the other, it is reversing the onus of proof in crimes committed with a firearm.

This is important because it helps me further clarify our position on the gun registry: the Bloc Québécois is still in favour of keeping it. I know that some hunting enthusiasts are listening to me now.

• (1040)

In Quebec, 94% of gun owners have registered their guns in accordance with the law. The problem we have with the system is located in western Canada, where a majority of the citizens have not obeyed the law.

For all those people who registered their firearms, paying for renewal was a major irritant. The government decided, with the Bloc's support, to eliminate this charge. We were happy with the government's decision to keep the registry but not make users pay for it. In Quebec, 94% of firearm users registered their weapons and were quite happy to obey the law. That left 6%. Some got all worked up because they were told that the registry infringed on their rights. But people know that once their guns are registered, their rights will be respected. The people who use the registry, especially the police, do it before going to a certain address in order to determine whether there are any guns in the house, and if so, what kind.

When this is explained, citizens, even gun owners, fully understand that, in rare situations of violence, it is very important that the police have access to this information before they go to someone's home. If the registry were maintained and respected by all citizens, including Canadians in the west, there would be no problem. The problem is that there are gun users who decided to protest the system for a variety of reasons.

In Quebec, when I sit down with gun owners who have registered their weapons and I explain the situation, it does not bother them. They fully understand that this makes sense. If they committed violent crimes themselves, it would be important for the police to know that they have weapons at home, for the safety of police officers and the people in the neighbourhood.

In a society, we must set important benchmarks and make a distinction between individual and collective rights. Yes, every individual has rights, but their neighbours also have the right to know if they have any weapons, and for several reasons. The ideology that individual rights allow citizens to keep weapons in their homes, while others do not need to know about it, is an American ideology, common among our neighbours to the south.

Government Orders

But here, we have the right to create a society that protects individual rights and that allows citizens to own firearms for the purpose of a certain sport, for example. However, it is also important to know that the individual who practices that sport uses an attack weapon and that he or she can harm other individuals. This is important, even if it is a handgun used for hunting.

People talk to me about many things, such as duck hunting, where you use a .12 gauge shotgun. You can use this gun to rob a bank or corner store. You can do a lot of things. It is important to stop making that distinction and to look at the emotional capabilities of individuals. We have to look reality in the face. People have the right to practice a sport with a gun. However, they must realize that the community is entitled to know that they own guns in case there is a robbery at their home. It could be a case of home invasion. When the homeowner is away, someone could enter their home. It is important to know if there are guns inside the residence.

Things are always a little complicated with the Conservatives because we never know in what direction they are headed. One thing is certain. Increasingly they have this unfortunate tendency of aligning themselves with what is happening in the United States and with Americans. In relation to crime, that is not a model to be adopted. Let us not go there. Americans have increased sentences and they have more crime than in Canada. That is the reality.

That is not the type of society that our ancestors—our parents, grandparents and great grandparents—wanted to leave to us. The Bloc Québécois has a great deal of respect for this way of life that we have adopted. We will always be there to defend the interests of and respect for individuals in the justice system and to defend the presumption of innocence, among other things, which is one of the tenets of our society.

• (1045)

People are always presumed innocent until proven guilty. That has served us well in the past. Today, the problem is that the media have seized on that, as we have seen. I keep repeating this, and I know it may be a bit redundant, but the Americans and their media make a lot of money when a crime is committed by giving it as much media coverage as possible. That is not the sort of society we want to live in.

Clearly, when we make this distinction and take away all the media coverage of a crime, we need to be able to strike a balance and decide what type of society we want to live in. Quebeckers and Canadians have chosen to live in a society where people are presumed innocent.

As I explained, there are some cases that call for the presumption of innocence and others that call for the reversal of the traditional burden of proof. The Bloc Québécois did not hesitate to suggest reverse onus in cases such as crimes committed by biker gangs or organized crime, especially in relation to the accumulation of property by organized crime. At the time, the State had to prove that property had been acquired through the proceeds of crime, whereas now criminal organizations must prove that they acquired property legitimately.

Obviously, this has caused a major shift in how these people are defended. More and more, their property is being seized, and they

have no money to defend themselves. I believe this is as it should be, because it was too easy for them to use this money to deny justice or thumb their noses at the justice system. They told themselves that they would get lawyers because they had money to go to court and so on. The Bloc Québécois therefore proposed a major step forward.

My colleagues heard witnesses and our critic, the member for Hochelaga, whom I commend on his excellent work on the committee. After hearing the witnesses, he realized that this bill was putting in place a reality that already existed in our courts. And witnesses told us that this bill will not change anything, because even now, when people commit crimes using a firearm, they are not released pending trial.

Once my learned colleague realized that this was the case, he recommended that we change our position and support this bill, which we are doing. We are serious democrats, we are very mindful of what is happening in Quebec society. For that reason, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-35.

However, this bill will still be very, very, very suspect in terms of the advances made by the Conservatives in relation to justice, because—I will say it again and it cannot be said often enough—they have this annoying tendency to become very Republican in how they interpret justice and very American-oriented when it comes to increasing minimum sentences and not giving our society or our judicial system a chance to hear the members of this House, and in fact filling up the prisons.

Believe it or not, the fastest-growing industry in the United States is prison construction. It is a very profitable industry and it is running very well, except that this is not the type of society that the Bloc Québécois wants. On the contrary, when we see the crime rate, we realize that crime does not go down when sentences go up. It is a proven fact: crime goes up. In fact, when a criminal has decided to commit a crime, the criminal does not bother to read the Criminal Code before committing the crime, to know what sentence he or she is going to get. Forget about that. If people think that, their imaginations are—

An hon. member: Very fertile.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Very fertile. You are entirely correct. Well, the Conservatives have a lot of imagination.

• (1050)

To protect the interests of Quebeckers and of the society passed down to us by the people who came before us, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-35. We will also be very vigilant when it comes to the advances made by the Conservatives in relation to justice.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, most members understood during the last election campaign that the Canadian public wanted some changes, but Bill C-35, in my opinion, is simply codifying what the justices of our country are doing already. In fact, to some extent, it is window dressing.

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One of my concerns is that it is easy to run on a law and order platform, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that rehabilitation is one of the most important avenues of protecting the public, because we know that convicted criminals will one day be back on our streets. I ask the member if he would support the fact that it is essential for our government to make sure that rehabilitation gets equal time in its law and order platform.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is entirely correct, punishment will always be bad counsel when it comes to the entire criminal justice system.

When an individual, for whatever reason, has decided to commit a crime, the way to ensure that the person does not commit more crimes is to rehabilitate and supervise him or her. But we must be careful. There are indeed changes, but we must put more into rehabilitation.

When it comes to parole and that entire system, we must ensure that there is as much staff as possible, so that the analyses done are the best they can be. Rather than building prisons to try to set up factories to turn out criminals, if there is no rehabilitation, we must invest the money that is needed in rehabilitation so that the entire parole system has the staff that are needed and is capable of doing the analyses that are called for. We have to avoid putting people back on the streets who should not be there.

This is what we should be tackling, rather than trying to amend the Criminal Code and increase sentences and trying to replace judges by mandating minimum sentences. That will change absolutely nothing. We have to rehabilitate young criminals to try to ensure that they do not stay criminals. As well, we have to ensure that we are not releasing people who should not be released. That is the philosophy that the Bloc Québécois has always argued for and that it will continue to argue for.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to speak about programs that would help to prevent crime. This bill, as has already been said, does no more than codify already existing practices. This government slashed literacy programs and summer jobs programs. Yet, those are the very programs that would help young people who are vulnerable or at risk. Those programs would help to prevent crime and would convince young people to follow a different path.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on those cuts. The government not only slashed programs that could otherwise have been useful for creating a more inclusive society, but it is refusing to do long-term planning on literacy and it refuses to implement a long-term funding program for literacy.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question because it allows me to talk about the street gang phenomenon.

Today, the government is attacking the street gang problem with prison sentences, but we must ask why street gangs have developed. It is because young people did not know what to do and the system marginalized them.

These are programs that people tried to establish and that the government has abolished. Afterwards, questions were asked and a range of measures has been proposed, trying to combat street gangs by means of prison sentences, while the real problem of street gangs is that there was poverty on our streets and we did not concern ourselves with our young people.

This social problem was ignored by the Liberal Party and has become worse today with the Conservative Party. We left young people with social problems on the streets of our big cities and, now, we are very surprised to learn that those young people have become criminals.

The young people who lived in our cities told us that they had problems but we did not deal with them. We really need to try to start over, to wipe out the past and make a new beginning. We have to restore support programs for the young people in our big cities.

• (1100)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel on his erudition—let us not fear words—and on his willingness to dedicate himself so generously to the work of this House. He never declines an invitation to share his point of view, and I am sure that this is greatly appreciated by all of our colleagues.

Bill C-35 was the subject of much debate in the parliamentary committee. It seems to me that the underlying principle is a good one. The government is seeking to ensure that people who might be a menace to the safety of our fellow citizens cannot be released on bail before trial unless we can be certain that they do not present a danger to society. It is important to understand where Bill C-35 is coming from.

There are various stages in our criminal proceedings: arrest by a peace officer, court appearance, and preliminary hearing. At this stage, a magistrate or justice of the peace—in Quebec, at least—decides whether there is sufficient evidence to allow the Crown to take the matter to trial. So we have arrest, bail hearing, preliminary hearing and, of course, the trial. If the case involves murder or one of the offences set out in section 469 of the Criminal Code, there is a good chance that the trial will be held before a jury of the accused's peers, a group of individuals selected for that purpose.

If the case involves an offence set out in section 553 of Quebec's code, the trial takes place before the criminal and penal division of the Court of Quebec. There too, the stages are familiar: arrest, bail hearing, preliminary hearing, trial and, after that, sentencing submissions. Then, if necessary, a certain number of appeals processes are available.

The Bloc Québécois had some concerns about this bill. What does it say? We should start with the beginning. Under our legal system, bail is generally granted at the hearing stage. In some cases, though, bail cannot be granted by justices of the peace. Only superior court judges, that is to say, judges of the Superior Court of Quebec, can grant pretrial bail to an accused.

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This occurs when a person is accused of a crime under section 469 of the Criminal Code. Justices of the peace cannot grant bail when the accused has violated the conditions of release. If a person is on probation, therefore, and is supposed to comply with a certain number of conditions but violates them, he cannot be given bail. For example, if a person is not supposed to be in possession of a firearm but is found with one, that person has failed to comply with one of his conditions of release and cannot be granted bail by a justice of the peace.

When someone is arrested by a police officer, taken before a justice of the peace and charged with an offence related to organized crime, of course, that person cannot be granted bail. For a very long time, all the organized crime related offences were listed in the Criminal Code. Actually it was not the Criminal Code but the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act where all the offences related to the possession of narcotics, drug trafficking, and the exportation and importation of narcotics were listed.

•(1105)

Around 1995, we had an extremely worrisome clash among criminal motorcycle gangs: the Hell's Angels, the Rock Machine and the Bandidos. There were 35 Hell's Angels chapters. It is not that there were an awful lot of them—just a few hundred people—but they were obviously very dangerous.

I can recall some conversations I had with senior public servants who thought that the criminal motorcycle gangs could be disbanded using just the existing conspiracy provisions in the Criminal Code. The former Bloc Québécois member for Berthier—Montcalm, who was elevated to the bench because of his great talents and had gone to law school at the University of Ottawa in the 1980s and 1990s, was our justice critic and was as convinced as I that new legislation was needed and some new provisions had to be added to the Criminal Code.

I remind the House that in the 1990s there was one thing that triggered our realization of the need to create new legislation in order to deal with criminal biker gangs. This was of course the car bomb attack that occurred in my area, Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, on August 9, 1995, and that took the life of young Daniel Desrochers. From then on, there was a call by citizens seeking anti-gang legislation. Obviously we could not follow Italy's example, since Italy did not have to worry about compatibility with the Canadian Charter of Human Rights. In Canada, however, we had to be concerned about compatibility with the Canadian Charter of Human Rights, which—I would point out—was never ratified by the National Assembly when it was patriated in 1982.

I digress here to remind you that René Lévesque, one of the greatest premiers in the history of Quebec—as we all know—was opposed to the unilateral patriation of the Constitution, because he was worried about language rights. There was the possibility of removing whole chunks of Bill 101, one of the first bills that René Lévesque had passed by his government following the adoption of the Referendum Act and, of course, an act on democratic election funding.

So we had to be concerned about the compatibility of the new provisions of the Criminal Code and the Canadian charter, which has never been accepted by the National Assembly because of the

incompatibilities regarding language. Of course, with regard to section 27 respecting multiculturalism, there were some very great concerns. In any case, we will recall that René Lévesque became the spokesperson for this long line of premiers who wanted, before the charter was patriated, to give the National Assembly new powers. This was Jean-Jacques Bertrand's position; it was Robert Bourassa's position; it was Jean Lesage's position; it was the position of Quebec's intellectuals. Even a man like Claude Ryan who, as we know, was not a sovereignist, wanted there to be a new distribution of powers before patriating the Constitution, which was—we agreed—a colonial relic. Of course this was not normal, but it was not a priority.

I do not want to wander too far away—you know my discipline is legendary. Still, I want you to know that it is extremely important to remember that, in the 1990s, the Bloc Québécois rallied in order to obtain anti-gang legislation. The first anti-gang legislation was passed in 1997. We had created a new offence. I mentioned the Canadian charter. But it was not possible to make it a crime to belong to a group.

•(1110)

We cannot say that belonging to the Hells Angels, the Rock Machine, the Bandidos, the mafia or an Asian crime group, that simply belonging to a criminal organization constitutes an offence. This would never pass the Charter test and would not be compatible with the freedom of association. This was the challenge facing the public service and parliamentarians.

I was part of the committee that examined these things to find an offence that would work with the Charter. At the time, a new offence was created: gangsterism. Five individuals having committed an offence punishable by a five-year term, for a criminal organization within the last five years, could be charged with gangsterism.

As unbelievable as it may be, with these provisions, among others, municipalities can play an extremely important role in dismantling organized crime networks. I hope my colleagues will remember this. Municipalities legislated against bunkers. They legislated against fortresses in urban areas. Under municipal bylaws it was not possible to have fortified houses with cameras and bulletproof windows. Believe it or not, this is a good example of the link between federal law, criminal law, and municipal affairs.

If I may digress, one thing that makes a municipality dynamic is festivals. I am sure that the Minister of Labour will agree with me. There is nothing more important than tourism to our communities.

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Take the example of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. It is a working-class neighbourhood with a rich heritage. I could tell you about the botanical garden and the Château Dufresne, the historic middle-class residence. It is important to provide public funding for festivals. I will conclude on this point by wishing all my colleagues a most cordial welcome to Montreal this year and this summer. I hope that the funding that will make it possible for us to spend a beautiful summer with tourists and all of the events we can organize in our communities will materialize. Of course I am counting on all of my colleagues to ensure that this scenario comes to pass.

This is the situation we found ourselves in in the 1990s. Criminal motorcycle gangs were running wild and the public was worried. I and other people persuaded the then justice minister, Allan Rock, to add new provisions to the Criminal Code. Those provisions made it possible for us to end the war that had caused several hundred deaths and claimed an innocent victim, Daniel Desrochers, who died on August 9, 1995.

Thus we can see that the Bloc Québécois has never been unwilling to legislate when it was necessary. The goal of Bill C-35 is to add a number of offences, the seriousness of which we can recognize as a society. I will list them: attempted murder with a firearm, discharging a firearm with intent to wound, armed sexual assault, robbery, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage taking, extortion, trafficking, possession for the purposes of trafficking, and any offence involving a firearm if the accused was under a firearms prohibition order.

We have to acknowledge that these offences are in fact serious in terms of criminal law. At the show cause stage, the trial has not yet been held. In Quebec, you appear before the justice of the peace. The accused will have to call evidence, because there is a reverse onus. Reverse onus does exist in the Criminal Code now, as I mentioned, for organized crime, terrorism offences and offences relating to section 469. Reverse onus exists. That does not mean—and we must be very clear on this point—that it will not be possible for the accused to be released.

What it means is that the onus is on the accused, and not the Crown, to prove that he or she is not a threat to society. The judge will then take a number of criteria into consideration.

• (1115)

If the individual is released, the judge must be sure he will appear for trial and will not destroy the evidence, abscond, reoffend or engage in violent behaviour. If the judge is satisfied that all these conditions will be met, in light of the submission by counsel for the accused, the individual can be released. If the judge is not satisfied, the individual—the accused—who will be tried for one of the offences I have mentioned, must remain in custody.

I repeat that this is not the rule in our legal system. As a rule, individuals are released pending trial. Hon. members may remember a famous ruling from early this decade, the Askov ruling, concerning a case in Ontario. The legal system was backlogged at the time.

When the Constitution was repatriated, the National Assembly did not subscribe to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Among the legal guarantees in the charter is the right to be tried within a reasonable time. Waiting for a trial causes anyone anxiety.

Waiting for a trial is stressful, and there is also the risk that witnesses' memories will fade. With time, people called to testify could be slightly less accurate in their testimony.

The Bloc Québécois heard the witnesses who testified before the committee, and my colleagues know how reasonable, moderate and cooperative the Bloc is. We ask only to work in the spirit of brotherhood.

I take great personal pride in the fact that I have no enemies in this House. Mr. Speaker, if you were to ask members who consider themselves my enemies to so indicate by a show of hands, I am sure you would see none. I was afraid the member for Jonquière—Alma would raise his hand. That would have made me sad.

The Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-35 because, in committee, witnesses told us that in any event, the general practice at bail hearings for firearm-related offences is for the judge not to release the individual, or grant them bail. The Minister of Justice's bill confirms or recognizes something already being done by judges and the courts.

We do not see why we would be against this bill. A witness from the Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers even told us this was the current practice. There are very few witnesses who oppose the bill, two in fact. A University of Toronto professor, Anthony Doob, opposed the bill, saying there needed to be more focus on prevention. The Canadian Bar Association also voiced some reservations. For the rest, the witnesses were extremely favourable toward the bill.

The Bloc will support this bill since it recognizes a practice the courts have formalized. Of course, that does not mean we are not calling on the government to invest in prevention.

I recently learned that the Prime Minister entrusted, not to the Minister of Health, but to the Minister of Justice, the modernization of the national anti-drug strategy. I hope when the format of this new strategy is known, hopefully a few months from now, that money could be sent to the provinces for prevention, which is still our best defence as a society for living in safer communities.

Since I am running out of time, I will stop here. I want to reiterate my call for money to be allocated to this summer's festivals, more specifically those in Montreal, which is a major tourism centre. I hope my call will be heard.

• (1120)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Hon. Jason Kenney (for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration) moved that Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to propose several important amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

I know all members will agree that immigration is the lifeblood of Canada and, therefore, vital to its future. New Canadians bring us new ideas, new cultures, new skills and, above all, a fresh vibrancy and energy to our great country. To remain progressive and competitive, Canada needs to sustain and maintain this essential infusion of skill and commitment.

For some time, the prospect of becoming a Canadian is first realized when they apply for and receive a temporary work permit. For hundreds of thousands, such permits have been a doorway to opportunity, hope, security, prosperity and realizing a dream of becoming a Canadian.

It is not only our responsibility as elected representatives to debate and craft the laws that govern entrance to our country, but it is our duty to ensure that these laws reflect a modern, compassionate, flexible and responsible process as well.

The government has brought about a number of significant changes to that process. It has proposed and implemented a number of initiatives and policies that clearly demonstrate a commitment to innovation and improvement. We have also demonstrated compassion and understanding to those in need of a helping hand.

Today I intend to outline to hon. members how the government will help prevent applicants for work permits from being exploited or abused. The amendments would give immigration officers the authority to deny work permits in situations where applicants may be at risk.

Bill C-57 addresses an important gap that currently exists in Canadian immigration law. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, or IRPA as it is known, provides the Government of Canada with authority to allow an individual to enter this country even if they do not meet all of the requirements and are inadmissible. We do this to ensure that we are able to take into account that each applicant who enters Canada represents a unique situation. Unfortunately and paradoxically, the act does not provide a similar authority to deny a temporary work permit to an applicant who meets the entry requirements.

Other countries, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, have varying forms of discretionary authority over and above their general inadmissibility provisions but we do not.

Essentially, the current rules allow officers to refuse work permits based primarily on what is or has been happening, for example, if the applicant has a communicable disease or has criminal conviction.

These proposed amendments, however, will allow an officer, based on instructions issued by the minister, to refuse a work permit based on reasonable concern for what will happen, namely, that the person could be in danger of being trafficked, exploited or degraded once in Canada. Immigration officers would make their decision on a case by case basis. Each application for a permit would be assessed on its own merits.

The proposed changes could be used to prevent abuse in a number of possible scenarios, which could include low skilled labourers and exotic dancers, as well as other potential victims of human trafficking. For example, some applicants for work permits may be inexperienced, without a support network and overly dependent on their employer. In many situations, this would not be a problem. However, in some situations this could lead to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation.

Where there is evidence that these concerns are serious and well-founded, ministerial instructions would provide the government with the mechanism to protect applicants from abuse and exploitation they might otherwise experience.

Making Canada a safer place for everyone is our objective and the authority is intentionally broad to allow for future unanticipated situations.

Human trafficking is another example of the kind of abuse and exploitation we are trying to prevent. Ministerial instructions issued under this new authority would give us another tool to help stop trafficking at our borders and prevent foreign nationals from becoming victims of this heinous crime.

Because of the broad parameters of the authority, I would like to assure hon. members that we have built a high level of accountability into its use.

I would now like to review the government's commitment to accountability on this matter. First, any instructions issued by the minister under the authority in the proposed amendments would be based on public policy objectives and evidence that clearly outlines an identified risk of abuse or exploitation. The instructions would also need to be linked to the objectives of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and they would need to comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

● (1125)

Second, any decision by an immigration officer to use the new authority to refuse a work permit in Canada would require the concurrence of a second officer. Ministerial instructions would also be published in the annual report to Parliament and in the *Canada Gazette*. As members can see, these amendments stand on the principles of openness and accountability that are a hallmark of our government.

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Since our government was sworn in, we have worked tirelessly to strengthen Canada's immigration system. The last budget highlighted our commitment to making Canada a more welcoming place to newcomers who are so critical to Canada's success. It includes important measures that will help ensure our immigration system is more responsive to the needs of local economies and make Canada more attractive to immigrants who can contribute to our growing economy.

It reaffirmed, for example, our commitment to increase settlement funding to help newcomers succeed. That is a \$1.3 billion investment over five years. We want to be sure that the tools are there for those who come to our country and wish to succeed.

The budget confirmed the creation of the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, which will be an important service for immigrants overseas and newcomers already in Canada. As announced by the minister on May 24, the office will give applicants information about the Canadian labour market, credential assessment and recognition requirements. It will help them connect with the appropriate assessment bodies.

The budget also included an important change to our immigration program. This change will allow eligible foreign students who graduate from post-secondary institutions and have Canadian work experience and qualified temporary foreign workers with Canadian work experience to apply for permanent resident status from within Canada. This will allow us to tap into a pool of talented people who have the skills and experience to succeed in our country, our economy and our communities.

Currently, temporary workers and recent graduates usually need to leave Canada to apply for permanent resident status. As a result, many of them end up pursuing other options and do not return to Canada.

Allowing these people to apply for permanent resident status from within Canada will open up an important source of skilled and talented newcomers. This includes skilled tradespersons who may find it difficult to qualify under the current skilled worker program.

The Canadian experience and credentials that individuals who qualify have will enable them to more quickly and effectively integrate into Canadian society and the workforce. This will also help ensure all regions benefit from immigration. Many newly arrived immigrants go to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver but those who have been studying or working temporarily in smaller centres are more likely to stay where they are already established.

Over the past few months this government has introduced various changes to the temporary foreign worker program to ensure the program is more responsive to Canada's labour needs.

Budget 2007, for example, included funding for further improvements to the program, making it faster for employers to get the people they need in regions and sectors facing the most critical shortages. These improvements include negotiating agreements with the provinces and territories to allow them to play a more direct role in helping their employers access temporary foreign workers that they so desperately need.

We have extended pilot projects enabling workers with less formal training to work in Canada for up to 24 months instead of 12 months. We have also extended work permits issued to live-in caregivers to three years and three months, up from one year.

We have also acknowledged and developed lists of jobs where there have been labour shortages to make it easier, quicker and less costly for employers in certain regions to recruit the foreign workers they need.

As our economy grows and the demand for temporary foreign workers continues to rise, we need to ensure that these growing numbers of workers enjoy the respect they deserve for helping to fill our labour shortages. We need to speed up the processing of applications and strengthen monitoring and compliance mechanisms to help ensure that employers respect commitments to wages and working conditions.

Budget 2007 is the second budget in a row that featured important measures designed to help immigrants to Canada get started on the right foot and to succeed.

In 2006, as members will recall, we cut the right of permanent resident fee in half, reducing it to \$490. The government has refunded more than \$40 million to date. This measure applies to immigrants who become permanent residents under all social, humanitarian and economic classes. It is designed to lessen the financial burden associated with immigrating to Canada.

● (1130)

As well, the government has demonstrated compassion to victims of human trafficking by authorizing immigration officials to issue temporary resident permits for up to 120 days. Individuals who receive these permits are also exempted from the processing fee and are eligible for trauma counselling and health care benefits under the federal interim health program.

These measures have been carefully designed so that only bona fide victims of human trafficking would benefit from them. No one is removed from Canada without consideration of their need for protection.

While I am proud of the progress we have made to date, there are still many challenges ahead and much work to be done. The government is working to ensure that Canada's immigration system can meet our current and future labour market needs and facilitate the integration of newcomers to Canada.

With respect to Bill C-57, it is worth noting that it has been well received by groups working to eliminate human trafficking. Irena Soltys, co-chair of the Stop the Trafficking Coalition, said:

Stop the Trafficking Coalition supports [the minister's] announcement regarding changes to the IRPA to protect vulnerable workers. Included in this are women that may be exploited as exotic dancers and forced to work as sex slaves...Canada, as an international human rights leader, owes them the protection they are entitled to.

Sabrina Sullivan of The Future Group said:

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[The] Immigration Minister has taken an important step to protect women from sexual exploitation and end a program that made Canada complicit in human trafficking...It is clear that [the] Prime Minister's government is serious about combating human trafficking—

There are other groups that have stepped up to the plate as well and have indicated that the announcement proposed in the act is something that is well received and is something that will protect vulnerable workers from exploitation. M. Christine MacMillan, territorial commander for The Salvation Army in Canada and Bermuda, said:

This announcement is an excellent advancement towards the protection of women from sexual exploitation. It is another positive step in the fight against human trafficking, and we are encouraged by the leadership shown by the Federal Government.

Even those in the adult entertainment industry are acknowledging the need for Bill C-57. It is truly unfortunate that the Liberal immigration critic, the member for Mississauga—Erindale, was dismissive of Bill C-57 when he said it was frivolous legislation regarding so-called exotic dancers' work conditions.

Instead of dismissing Bill C-57 as frivolous, the Liberal immigration critic should have sought the opinions of respected organizations, such as Stop the Traffic Coalition, The Future Group and The Salvation Army, who have offered support for the legislation.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration expressed dismay that this legislation would be treated so flippantly. There is no doubt that it is an important piece of legislation that would protect vulnerable foreign workers coming to Canada and those who need protection from being exploited or being subject to human trafficking.

Our government will not apologize for having brought this legislation forward. We will not apologize for introducing added protections that would help prevent situations where temporary workers in Canada, including strippers, may be abused, exploited or possibly become victims of human trafficking.

I would ask that all members support these proposed amendments. They were designed to protect vulnerable persons. They would help ensure that Canada's immigration system is not used by criminals to victimize people. They are intended to prevent the exploitation and the casting of individuals into a life of misery and degradation.

Without these amendments, immigration officers could not deny a work permit to someone who met all the requirements to enter Canada, even if they believed that there is a strong possibility or a reasonable concern of exploitation or abuse.

Strengthening the minister's authority would provide the Government of Canada with a tool to respond to situations where a permit applicant could be at risk.

To sum up, our proposed amendments would go further in helping prevent vulnerable foreign workers from being exploited or abused.

These amendments would further our efforts to strengthen our immigration system. They would give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the authority to instruct immigration officers to deny work permits to individuals, including exotic dancers, who

could be subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation in Canada.

• (1135)

It is unconscionable that the previous government gave blanket exemptions to foreign strippers to work in Canada despite warnings that women were vulnerable to forced prostitution and other forms of exploitation.

We are taking real action to help prevent the exploitation of women and children while protecting other foreign workers who could be subject to abuse and exploitation.

Canadians do not want an immigration system that can be used to exploit people. They expect their government to take all necessary steps to deal with problems associated with exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers and the crime of human trafficking.

No longer shall our government be complicit in facilitating human trafficking by permitting foreign strippers into the country when they could be potential victims of abuse or exploitation.

Canadians are justifiably proud of our reputation for fairness around the world. It is unacceptable to allow situations of exploitation that existed under the previous government to continue.

If we truly value the freedoms and ideals that our wonderful country was founded upon, we will support these amendments.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member continues his government's unexplained fascination with sex and drugs, having mentioned the buzzwords more than once in this legislation. In his remarks he referred explicitly to exotic dancers and strippers, when this legislation clearly applies to every work permit for every work situation that exists across the board.

I have two questions. The member said the government would ensure there is compliance with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms when clearly the impact of this legislation will be on individuals abroad who make application. In the ordinary course of events, of course, our charter does not apply to people outside Canada. So, how is the government going to ensure that his statement and commitment here that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms would be complied with, will be?

Second, the member has referred to accountability. Quite clearly, the ministerial instructions referred to in this are referred in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act where it states that they "are not statutory instruments". As he knows, a joint committee of this House reviews every statutory instrument that is produced by the government. How will he ensure that the standing joint committee will have the ability to properly scrutinize any ministerial instructions issued under the statute?

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Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do not know what the hon. member would have against legislation that is aimed at preventing temporary foreign workers from being abused, exploited or even becoming victims of human trafficking. It is something that the previous government turned a blind eye to when it was quite clearly advised that there is a connection with humiliating treatment, degrading treatment and so on in some of the persons who were being allowed to come forward through the work permit program.

It is only responsible to have a look at that connection and protect those who are not able to do that, especially when they are in categories where they are inexperienced, they have a lack of education or youth is involved, or lack of language skills.

That is an appropriate thing to do and obviously the instructions will be gazetted. They will be put forward so persons can see them. They will be quite open. They will list what the public policy objective is and what the connection is in terms of the potential refusals that these officers may want to deal with and how they may come to that conclusion. It will also be reported to this House when those instructions are going forward to see what actions have been taken.

It will require the concurrence of two of these officers before the denial is made, but overall, it will indeed be charter compliant in the sense that it will not be based on frivolousness. It will be based on evidence. It will be based on a nexus between the occupation that is proposed and the potential for abuse, the potential for degradation, and the potential for humiliating treatment. That will be shown to exist by a causal connection.

It will withstand the test of the charter. It will withstand the test of our courts. It is something that we are proceeding with in an open fashion to put forward before the House. As one of the lawyers relating to immigration is indicating, it is proceeding with something through the front door rather than the back door, so indeed there is an openness there, a transparency, and persons will be able to comment on the process as it goes forward.

• (1140)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know increasing pressure is being put on the government to have more foreign workers come to Canada. I have spoken to quite a number of people, for example foreign workers, newcomers who have come to Canada and are now involved in home care and working under very difficult circumstances, and agricultural workers. We also know there have been in deaths in British Columbia.

I am wondering what the government is going to do with foreign workers, once they are in Canada, by way of monitoring how they are treated to ensure that they are protected from abuse by employers within Canada. The law that the government is proposing is all well and good, but I am wondering what the government is actually going to do to protect newcomers and foreign workers once they are in Canada.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the government intends to take a multi-faceted approach. First of all, we want to ensure that before individuals come into Canada that protection is in place, and when they are in Canada, that procedures are in place to make it as safe and orderly as possible.

As the member well knows, with respect to the live-in caregiver program that she just mentioned, a contract needs to be signed which clearly sets out the hours of work, the conditions of employment, and the provincial legislation protection measures.

These people are provided with a pamphlet setting out all of this information. They are also provided with third party support groups that they can utilize if they have any issues or questions. In addition to that, there is an assurance that they have a certain measure of competency in one of the two official languages. Counselling is provided before they even leave for Canada.

Those are the types of measures that are taken in Canada, but it is the process that we must look at in the broad spectrum, such as taking steps provincially and encouraging the provinces to do so. If there are any violations, or if there is any criminal activity, we would proceed with the law enforcement agencies.

As the member well knows, there is a special provision for those who have been trafficked to Canada to provide them with the opportunity to receive counselling and to be protected while they are here.

We take a combination of factors into account. It is a combination of steps that look at the broad spectrum of those who come into our country and want to succeed. We want to be sure that they can succeed. We want to be sure that they have the tools with which to succeed. We have committed \$307 million over two years to help people integrate into our society. Language training is an important aspect of it.

We are taking a comprehensive approach that will start even before entrants come into our country to ensure that they are safe, that they are protected, and have every chance of succeeding at being valuable additions to our country.

• (1145)

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am just wondering if the parliamentary secretary could confirm the fact that immigration officers abroad have the discretion to deny work permits or visas to foreign temporary workers if they have serious concerns about that application, regardless of health or security concerns.

I am familiar with several cases involving individuals whom employers had applied for, and who did not have any health or security concerns, but immigration officers, for perhaps legitimate reasons, decided not to grant them visas.

I do not expect the parliamentary secretary to speak to specific cases, but I am just wondering if he can confirm that currently our immigration officers abroad have the right to deny visas to temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, the member quite correctly states that a number of conditions have to be met before anyone can enter the country on a visa. Those conditions are documented. Security is one of them as is criminality. Health concern about a communicable disease is also another condition. A number of conditions are set out for a person to obtain a visa or a work permit and those conditions must be met.

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This legislation does not deal with that. It says that if all of those conditions are met, then the visa officer is obliged to allow the visa to proceed. However, there is no provision presently for an officer to deny entry if there is any possibility that the individual is involved in humiliation, degradation, sexual exploitation or human trafficking. This legislation would allow the officer to deny entry, and that is the importance and significance of this legislation.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand before the House today to participate in debating Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

While I, along with my colleagues, try to debate this bill objectively and examine its components seriously, I have to admit that I am hugely disappointed that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the Conservative minority government continue to neglect a wide array of immigration files that deserve serious attention and immediate action.

In late February, the House of Commons debated and adopted a motion which stated that the Conservative Party has been failing immigrants and new Canadians and, in fact, all Canadians. The House expressed the concerns of many Canadians about the direction or, more specifically, the lack of direction, that this Conservative government has taken toward helping immigrants and new Canadians reach their optimum potential in society.

Canadians are quite rightly proud of our diversity and our reputation for welcoming immigrants. Immigration is more than just a symbol to Canadians. It is also an economic necessity. Given the dynamic nature of our immigration system and the diverse character of our nation, the federal government, regardless of the party in power, must recognize the magnitude of its responsibility toward these challenges and opportunities.

New challenges arise as our needs for immigration change. The adjustments that many immigrants face are numerous. The opportunities that immigrants bring to our country's skilled labour force enhance the cultural richness of our society and increase the knowledge base of our economy and communities.

I want to take some time to go through a number of challenges and opportunities that the government could be and should be focusing on, but it has unfortunately shown little will or desire to do so.

For example, on foreign credentials, during the last federal election campaign the Conservatives continually stated that if they were in power they would fix the difficulties that many immigrants and new Canadians face when attempting to have their foreign credentials assessed or when obtaining professional domestic licences.

The Conservatives made an explicit promise to eradicate barriers that some new Canadians face and blamed the Liberals for neglecting this issue. The promise to fix the problem of foreign credentials was written into their platform despite the fact that many told them, and in fact many Conservatives knew, that this promise was bogus.

What happened? Once the Conservatives assumed office, they employed delay tactics and deceptive tricks to pretend that they are still committed to fulfilling that promise. A year and a half later, the

Conservatives admitted that they are breaking that promise and have abandoned Canadians who took their word at face value.

It is not that the Conservatives have changed their minds about the importance of this real and serious problem, but they have chosen to go from one extreme to another, from promising to take on the whole matter and fix it once and for all, to refusing to accept the role that the federal government can play in facilitating a solution. After repeated promises and a year and a half of claims that they are fulfilling their promise, the Conservatives have decided to shake off their responsibility and pass the blame on to others.

I am sure the Conservatives are aware that Canadians are not pleased with their handling of this file. Canadians continue to expect them to step up to their responsibility and take a leadership role in facilitating a resolution to this complicated matter.

Let us move on to family reunification, another missed opportunity for the Conservatives. They have the opportunity to address the mounting backlog of family reunification applications. Many Canadians continue to wait too long to sponsor their spouse, parents or grandparents, which raises the level of anxiety and frustration among many.

We as a country have made a conscious decision to help Canadians and permanent residents reunite with some of their immediate family members in order to help them in their settlement process and reduce family separation anxiety. The Conservatives appear to have a nonchalant attitude toward this increasing pressure on our system and have yet to articulate a plan and a process to address it.

● (1150)

Also, what about the lost Canadians? There is the matter of the so-called lost Canadians, on which the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration has been conducting a comprehensive study, because many Canadians are starting to realize that due to old and archaic clauses within the 1947 Citizenship Act and other unintentional flaws, they have lost their Canadian citizenship.

Unfortunately, rather than stepping up to the challenge and dealing with this matter expeditiously, the Conservatives chose to spend a lot of time attempting to minimize this problem. They expended a lot of energy on arguing whether there were only 400 Canadians affected or upward of 50,000 Canadians affected.

Regardless of the number of Canadians affected, it was clear to any intelligent observer that many Canadians were caught in some unfortunate circumstances and the government should have acted quickly to assist them. If it were not for the determined work of our committee members at the citizenship and immigration committee, and the heart-wrenching stories of many Canadians who were affected, the Conservatives would have completely ignored these laws.

What about the points system? Many stakeholders have been arguing that our points system to attract immigrants needs reform and adjustment. The Conservatives are ignoring that matter.

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What about the Immigration and Refugee Board? Our Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration has tabled a report articulating and describing the state of crisis that the IRB is going through. At least a third of IRB members have not been appointed and the backlog has tripled.

What about citizenship application delays? Many permanent residents have been waiting for months, in fact more than a year, for their citizenship applications to be examined. The backlog continues to mount.

What about temporary workers? A lot of stakeholders have been lobbying on this and arguing that our temporary foreign workers program needs reform.

I deliberately have spent a lot of time highlighting the various pressing issues that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration needs to address. These are all serious and urgent matters that Canadians expect the minister responsible for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to be focusing on and resolving.

I have to admit, though, that when I was briefed on Bill C-57, I was disappointed. I was hoping that the minister was going to offer solutions to any of the challenges I have mentioned today. Instead, the Conservatives and the minister have chosen to play cheap political games.

Let me be very clear. I support any and all initiatives to protect Canadian and foreign workers from exploitation and abuse. That is why we will give the bill a chance to achieve what it is intended to accomplish, but we have a lot of unanswered questions. We will be consulting and listening to experts and stakeholders at committee to ensure that we end up with a bill that has real substance, not broad and ineffective unchecked political powers.

I will not hide my disappointment with the fact that the minister appears to have chosen to play politics rather than implement real and sound policies. There are many other pressing issues that deserve the highest level of her attention and energy. As an opposition member of Parliament, regardless of how the parliamentary secretary feels about my performance, I am expected by Canadians to critically evaluate the performance of the Conservative government and to test legislative proposals thoughtfully and deliberately to ensure that Canadians receive effective policies and laws from their government.

I do not think anybody is fooled by the fact that this legislative proposal's main goal is to create the perception that the previous Liberal government was condoning the exploitation of temporary foreign workers who came to Canada as exotic dancers and that hundreds of them were arriving at our borders annually. In fact, the hon. member just mentioned it in his speech.

Having said that, I, along with my parliamentary colleagues, have a responsibility to rise above petty partisanship and posturing and ultimately decide whether we are supporting the bill based on its merit and substance, putting aside all the rhetoric that is based on false perceptions.

There is room for partisan differences, however, during our debates and the exchange of ideas, in order to challenge ourselves to do better and to seek to improve what we have. The Liberal Party

strongly believes in protecting women against exploitation and human trafficking. The previous Liberal government made substantial changes to restrict visa applications to foreign exotic dancers.

● (1155)

My Liberal colleagues at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women endorsed a report that called on the government to do more to address the systemic problems that may exist when it comes to vulnerable members of our society. This leads me to the conclusion that the government's approach to this matter only confirms my concern that this bill has more to do with political motivation than a genuine desire to protect exploited women.

The bill, regardless of its declared objectives, does very little, and in fact nothing, to address the systemic problems of exploitation that exist in Canada. If the Conservatives agree with many who say there is a high risk of exploitation, why are they not instructing the human resources and social development department to examine the industry itself?

Why are they choosing to avoid dealing directly with the establishments and employers who are implicitly accused of committing these exploitations? Who is doing the monitoring? Who is protecting the foreign workers who are in Canada now? How will the minister reach a conclusion when allegations are made about abuse? What about other industries that need temporary foreign workers? If we have allegations of abuse, will the minister take measures to deal with these allegations? Again, what is the role of HRSD?

These are very legitimate questions and deserve real answers.

This bill alone does not address the root causes of the problem. I want to urge the Conservatives to expand their policy to include addressing the systemic issues if they are really serious about eradicating causes for abuse and exploitation. If these conditions continue to persist, other women will be victimized, and this should no longer be acceptable to any of us.

The Department of Human Resources and Social Development must have a bigger role in monitoring and verifying working conditions and protecting workers. As it stands right now, the bill provides the minister with unchecked and broad powers that could have serious impacts on our industries. Currently, all classifications under the foreign worker program could be adversely affected, including those of agricultural workers and live-in caregivers. We will be calling for further clarification and restrictions at committee.

If the Conservatives are serious about protecting foreign exotic dancers, why not restrict the mandate of the bill? I want to reiterate that we in the Liberal Party stand firmly against allowing or condoning any form of abuse or exploitation of all women, be they Canadians, permanent residents or foreigners, and we will work diligently with any party on combating it.

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We will put partisanship aside and offer thoughtful and constructive ideas that will advance this cause. We are determined to eliminate any causes that may place anyone in a vulnerable position of exploitation and/or abuse. Even though the bill is incomplete, and even though we know it is motivated by petty partisanship, we are prepared and in fact keen to remain a constructive voice in this debate.

I am looking forward to listening to all arguments and to discussing with my colleagues and other interested and concerned Canadians how we can improve the bill. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my thoughts with the House.

• (1200)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite spent a fair bit of his speech not talking about the bill, which I think is important and progressive legislative, but rather criticizing the government's management of the immigration system.

I remind the member that when the previous Liberal government took office in 1993, it inherited an immigration waiting list of some 35,000 files. Thirteen years later, it gave to our new government an immigration waiting list of over 830,000 files. It increased by over 1,000% the immigration wait list in our country and handed it off to this government. Now it blames us for the challenge we have to try to clean up the mess with which it left us.

I further point out that not only did the Liberal government increase the immigration wait list by over 800,000, it actually collected hundreds of millions of dollars in a head tax that it imposed on new immigrants, \$1,000 per person.

That means, prior to the Liberal government coming to office, a family of five arriving in Canada did not have to pay a head tax. As soon as the Liberals came to power, they had to pay a \$5,000 collective head tax, a family head tax for a family of five, making it extremely difficult to get ahead and make the first down payment on rent, buy the first used car, just to get ahead. That was the Liberal record on immigration.

We have kept our word not only to increase funding for integration and immigration settlement services, but to cut in half the right of landing fee, and we will cut it yet again further.

The Liberals have not endorsed cutting in half the right of landing fee. In fact, they voted against that in our the budget. I therefore infer, and perhaps he could confirm this, that if the Liberals were back in power, not only would they take away the \$100 a month per child choice in child care credit, they would also, once again, double the rate of landing fee.

However, the member, and he can respond to this, says that the bill is about petty partisan politics. The bill is the direct result of the tireless and principled efforts largely of the member of the government caucus for Kildonan—St. Paul, who, and I will reveal a caucus confidence, would get up in the government caucus and demand that we take action to stop the exploitation of foreign exotic dancers in our country. The government responded with this bill, and she deserves a bit of credit for that.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I often wonder what my colleagues across the floor would do without the Liberal Party. They

are obsessed with pointing the finger at the Liberal Party. I think they do such a good job of being in opposition, they probably need to go back to that. They are incapable of accepting their responsibility as a government. They are incapable of articulating a vision for our country. They are incapable of telling people what their ambitions are. They are incapable of saying, "This is what we want to do". They are incapable of fixing challenges. They are incapable of taking advantage of opportunities that exist, and this is exactly my point.

We had to deal with a \$40 billion deficit the last time the Conservatives were in power, and now he is talking about preventing exploitation. I concur with him. We have to work together on preventing exploitation, but what are they really doing about preventing exploitation in Canada? Why are we not instructing Human Resources and Social Development to work with the industries and employers that are allegedly conducting these abuses?

We know it is not an allegation. We know there are real cases of abuse in the country. What are we doing about that? Why are we not fixing the root causes of this problem? That is fine if we want to have a piecemeal solution. We need to attach that to a comprehensive approach. We need to fix this problem once and for all and not pretend that by just restricting foreign workers with broad powers, that we are fixing it. We still have a lot of work to do.

• (1205)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was really appalled when I heard the Liberal immigration critic, the member for Mississauga—Erindale, be so dismissive of this extremely important bill. It is about protecting our most vulnerable citizens, no matter who they are, protecting foreign workers coming into our country.

When the member said that he thought we had the safeguards in place, that this was just an attempt to change the channel, grab some headlines, or when he said it was frivolous legislation about the so-called work of exotic dancers, this flies in the face of people who have worked on the human trafficking issue and the vulnerable workers' issue for years.

People like Irena Soltys, co-chair of Stop the Trafficking Coalition, says that she supports the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's announcement. She is very happy that women who are exploited, such as exotic dancers, are included in that. People like The Future Group, people like John Muise, director of public safety for the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, people all over the country are saying this is past time.

This should be supported by members opposite. Will the member support the bill?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I wish the hon. member would listen to everything I said. I am glad she had quotes from the newspaper, but it appears she is selective in the quotes she uses.

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Throughout my speech I said we would send the bill to committee. What does that mean? It means we will support it at second reading so it can be strengthened in committee. We feel it is incomplete and not serious.

If the Conservatives are really serious about exotic dancers, why are they not restricted in the legislation? Why does the legislation give the minister broad and unchecked powers? As well, why is the minister not addressing the root causes of the problem?

Yes, the Liberals are willing to work with the government on this legislation to make it better, but we are also asking for a much more comprehensive, inclusive and logical approach to dealing with this problem, not just basing it on political petty partisanship.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my official opposition colleague's presentation.

Personally, I think this is another example of a bill that, in order to solve certain problems, affects any innocent bystanders who may be directly or indirectly linked to the problem. We also see this in the case of mandatory minimum sentences, which judges will have to impose in order to ensure that everyone who appears before the courts will be sent to prison afterwards.

Naturally, this bill aims to solve a problem, but it will also affect many innocent people, or people who can legally immigrate to Canada and who could later be monitored.

I would like to ask my colleague a question concerning a measure that the government could take if it really wants to protect immigrants working here. Through the existing live-in caregiver program, people receive lots of support, but they have no recourse for defending themselves. They cannot take the necessary legal action in the event of assault or abuse. Thus, they have no means of defending themselves from any abuse they could suffer, even though they are involved in an existing program.

The government could take action to look after such cases. I would like to hear my hon. colleague's opinion on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, I echo the concerns raised by my hon. colleague. There are a lot of concerns about the bill as it stands because it offers broad powers and may have negative impacts on various industries, applicants and situations.

We want to work with the government, but right now the bill as it stands needs modification. It can impact agricultural workers and live-in caregivers. We need to know how the minister reaches a conclusion. How does she or he make a decision that these workers should not be allowed to come into the country? Will the minister conduct a study? Will the minister base her or his argument on logic or on political partisanship considerations?

The Liberals have concerns. We want to ensure that we stop any exploitation and that when foreign workers come here, they are not abused. However, we also want to ensure the bill is balanced, fair and scientific.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-57, a bill that seeks to deal with the issue of sexual exploitation and to make amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

On the basic objective of the bill, we share the same values. We find it completely unacceptable that, here in Canada, people can suffer degrading treatment, be denied their dignity and be subject to sexual exploitation. We agree that legislation is needed to implement measures to protect foreign nationals.

In the past, we have attempted to deal with this issue on several occasions, regardless of which government was in power. If memory serves, around 1991, Barbara McDougall also expressed her desire to amend and strengthen the law—including the Criminal Code—and to introduce other measures to stop this shameful practice. This problem has resurfaced sporadically in recent decades. At present, the RCMP says that between 600 and 800 women are subject to abuse each year. As my colleague opposite has said we are talking about 800 people every year. Surely, we cannot be insensitive to the situation of these women.

On the subject, we think that measures must be taken. However, we must not go overboard. The bill tabled by the minister is incomplete. The definitions are not clear and a lot more work will be needed in committee to clarify some definitions set out in the bill. The manner in which an immigration officer could act and the simple fact that mere suspicion could be taken as proof seems inadequate to us and could cause harm to other women who wanted to come to Canada for completely legitimate reasons.

As I said previously, this bill reminds us of many stories that have come to light in the past two decades and caused great embarrassment to ministers of Citizenship and Immigration.

At present, in terms of immigration, there are no figures available concerning the possible entry method of people who might be subject to this kind of treatment. When we look to the past, around 1991, there was reference to about 600 women who were applying for permits to work as exotic dancers. Over the years, the department has issued directives to different embassies, with the result that immigration officers have been more restrictive, more limiting. Currently, we are talking about some fifteen cases of this type at the embassy.

We believe that the problem has moved elsewhere and that people are arriving in Canada legally. Some women enter Canada with a work permit to be waitresses or to work at other jobs. They may fall into the hands of individuals who misrepresent themselves or persons who will take advantage of them.

We might even take a look at some advertising. My Conservative colleague for Calgary—Nose Hill told us about explicit ads that appeared in African newspapers. These ads were recruiting young women with the promise of a study permit. Women are arriving in Canada under this pretext as well.

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•(1215)

Recent measures allowing students to earn income make it possible for some women to come to Canada as students and to work in the evening as dancers.

Another example is that of domestic help. Successive governments that have reviewed this program have always retained the live-in criterion, whereby the individual must live in the employer's home. This does not minimize the risk of abuse and degrading treatment. The list is long. When we examine the cases presented by the RCMP and we ask them questions, we realize that there are many avenues.

It is not enough to pass immigration laws and to believe that the problem is solved. There should be additional legislation dealing with the other aspects of the issue. As I have already mentioned with regard to current immigration, I believe that we are taking the wrong approach to the problem. We should be dealing with the criminal elements and employers who exploit their employees.

There are still too many people in Canada who find themselves involved in illicit activities. These people are subjected to degrading treatment and are exploited by their employers. The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration must study this issue. I am sure that it would uncover situations in which women are being sexually exploited or subjected to degrading treatment. By failing to take action on the issue of people without status, the government is increasing the number of women in Canada who are mistreated.

The intention is good. Nobody wants women to be sexually exploited. Nobody wants women to be subjected to degrading treatment. Everybody wants to condemn this kind of attack on women's dignity. Unfortunately, the proposed solution is inadequate.

There is also a problem with this bill in terms of transparency, as I said at the beginning of my speech. The wording of the Immigration Act in the bill would give far too much power to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in instructing immigration officers. There are already problems related to granting work permits and visas. Many immigration stakeholders have criticized the arbitrary authority of immigration officers.

I am sure that many of my colleagues here in this House have had cases in their ridings where people were turned away, cases whose outcome they do not understand.

This bill gives immigration officers even more discretionary power, which makes us wonder how these officers will be equipped and to what degree the fear of being slapped on the wrist for having made a bad decision will make the system even more restrictive than the bill intended.

•(1220)

The ministerial instructions, and therefore the bills, will be published in the *Canada Gazette* and will be part of the annual report to Parliament. This measure is important to transparency. We will be able to follow the progress of the problem or situation.

We would be in favour of referring this bill to committee for a more thorough study and in order to complete it. We will try to do so by working on the grey areas, such as the definitions, for example.

We will ask the department to provide us with further details in terms of the figures. We could also hear from other stakeholders such as the Canadian Bar Association or professors in the field of the status of women. We could thus determine the best way to address the issue.

This bill's greatest weakness is that it will discourage people who want to obtain a work permit, and they will then come illegally. They will continue to use other avenues. The parliamentary secretary can attest to this, since we heard witnesses who work with refugees near the borders. They gave testimony about what people will do to get across the border. We are only encouraging this practice. In order to escape extreme poverty or even more severe abuse in their own country, people are willing to find other ways to come to Canada. We run the risk of increasing the number of people living here illegally.

As for the work permit, we must do everything in our power to better define, in the bill, the role of immigration officers. The Canadian Council for Refugees issued a press release, which states: “—closing the door on valid work permits may expose women to greater vulnerability by forcing them underground”. Thus, we would only be shifting the problem and it would be even more difficulty for the authorities to act to counter the problem. The human trafficking network is becoming more and more sophisticated at this time, and it often uses other means to smuggle people in.

The study in committee will allow the minister and department officials to better define their intentions and supply figures. Then we would be better equipped to work on this issue. I know that the issue of human trafficking was studied by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We could probably refer to the testimonies heard there.

I will leave it at that for now. We will be in favour of referring the bill to committee. In light of what we hear there and improvements that could be made, we will find a way to eliminate this problem more effectively.

•(1225)

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I listened today, it reminded me of what immigration lawyer Richard Kurland said on *The Verdict* on CTV Newsnet:

What is striking about the new government's approach, unlike the former government, the new government is going through the front door. I have never seen this in 15 years of immigration policy, a very controversial plan that has [been] brought before Parliament. Normally, in years past, it was done behind the bureaucratic doors or through a fait accompli regulation with no public debate. That is what is remarkable today.

Today I am hearing the opposition parties, who are responsible to their members, who are responsible to the people who elected them. Here in Canada, in Ontario and in Quebec, we have had recent arrests of human traffickers within the last month.

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Today we are seeing stalling tactics. A favourite way of stalling is for a member to say, "I like what you are saying", because the member is afraid to say, "I am going to ditch the bill", so what is said instead is, "We need to review it". Possibly this means for the next three to five years, or a member will say that it is incomplete, or dream up some other thing.

We are a government that takes action. The minister has put together Bill C-57 to protect our most vulnerable citizens to ensure that they are safe when they come to Canada.

May I ask the member opposite, will your side of the House support Bill C-57, acknowledge what is happening in your province and support the constituents who have elected you to this Parliament?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I just remind the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul not to ask questions directly, but to go through the Chair. The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I never said I was against Bill C-57. People know that immigration is an important issue to me and that I am currently working very hard for the most vulnerable. Even the parliamentary secretary sometimes finds that I am very difficult because the measures I propose are to serve and protect a greater number of people. I do not want the member opposite to think that we are against this bill. However, the bill as worded is not effective. As long as we are studying a bill, we can only work with the clauses that are open. We will propose changes to deal with this problem.

Human trafficking is an issue I am interested in. I can talk about my contribution in committee. This issue was addressed in discussions on the live-in caregiver program, which was at the heart of Amnesty International's campaign on human trafficking. I am one of the signatories and one of the people who promoted this campaign to denounce aspects of the immigration program and protect women who are already here on Canadian soil. I was very critical of the Liberal Party and the measures proposed by the government in the previous legislation.

My colleague can also take note that I was close to the political machinery in 1989, 1990, 1991 and beyond. I am familiar with all the problems involving the trafficking of women since then, hence the quote on the problems Barbara McDougall had to deal with in 1991—

• (1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the member. The member for Victoria has the floor.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I would like her to answer my question. Would it not be a better use of our time to try to solve the problem of jobs in Canada and the conditions to which certain workers, such as new immigrants or workers from abroad, are subjected than to discuss this bill which, she believes, does not really meet the needs of very many people?

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, that is what I was saying just now to my colleague when she asked if we wanted to deal with the issue.

Difficulties with the domestic help program were raised at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I also participated in an Amnesty International campaign to point out the problems with this program.

The government has all the information required to deal with the problem of women who are subjected to degrading treatment here in Canada. We are waiting for policies on the matter. One does not preclude the other. People are familiar with the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. We work very hard and we even hold additional special hearings that are currently planned for other matters. The subject is very broad, but this bill requires special attention. I do not believe that the committee will block such an important issue. However, we are limited by the sections of the Act that are amended by the bill. We will have to do some gymnastics to make the bill effective. Nevertheless, I do not necessarily expect that we will have any difficulty identifying individuals who could appear before the committee and we should proceed quickly with Bill C-57.

At this stage, we wish to do everything in our power to make this an effective piece of legislation. For this reason, we support sending it to committee. I agree with the member that the government has everything it needs to tackle the problem of domestic help and temporary workers.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Vaudreuil-Soulanges for her excellent speech. In the Bloc Québécois, our colleague is an inexhaustible source of information.

I would like to ask her a question about the purpose of the bill, which is to protect people coming from outside Canada who are at risk of being subjected to humiliating or degrading treatment, but without any specific definition of those terms being given.

I am thinking of the people who might be covered by those descriptions. We might consider exotic dance bars and escort agencies. I was reading more recently that with the Grand Prix of Canada coming to Montreal on the weekend, the escort agencies cannot keep up with demand. The rate charged is very high because of that demand. So we can see that there is a market. We all know people who are living in these situations; they do not have to be people coming from outside the country. Personally, I know several people who have been caught up in these rings and in this kind of activity because of financial or family or other kinds of problems.

The Immigration Act is really being used to deal with people who come from outside the country to remedy a situation that actually seems to be tolerated in this country, since it already exists. Does the member believe that this is really an effective way of regulating the problem when the issue is human dignity and degrading treatment?

• (1235)

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. As I was saying in my speech, I do not believe that by addressing the port of entry the bill settles the matter in its entirety. This may not be the most effective way to protect women who are already here and who are already victims of degrading treatment.

Government Orders

There are programs. Year after year, the government evaluates those programs. There are groups and people who work in immigration, with refugees and with women who are victims of violence or degrading treatment. I think that the government should rather take on the task of establishing programs or improving and reviewing the existing programs. That would be a good step in the right direction.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the first debate on Bill C-57. I have been sitting here listening to the debate and, frankly, I was quite appalled to hear the Conservative member within an hour accuse the opposition of stalling tactics when we are debating the bill. I get the feeling that the member would be quite happy if the opposition completely disappeared off the face of the earth and then the government could run on its high-minded agenda with no one in the House to debate legislation on what it is doing. It is an outrage that within 50 minutes of the bill being debated, the member had the gall to stand and say to the Bloc member, and the Liberal member who just spoke and who legitimately raised concerns about the bill, that they were using a stalling tactic.

I would say shame on the Conservative members for being so arrogant in their attitude that they will not even tolerate debate in the House on a bill that we are sent here to deal with representing our constituents and public interests. However, we have come to expect these kinds of tactics from the government. Any time debate takes place in this House the government makes accusations and allegations that the opposition is doing a political job.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that we are here to debate this legislation and we will do exactly that. The sad part of this is that this bill, which does raise a lot of serious questions about the Conservative agenda, will probably be over in a few hours and it will be sent off to the committee. I do not know what will happen after that but that is the sad commentary on what is taking place.

I felt like I had to begin with those comments because I was sitting here feeling a sense of outrage about the political spin and the messaging that the Conservatives were engaging in when we had barely begun debate on the bill. I say shame on them for doing that. It is quite offensive the way democracy seems to take a back seat in this place.

I will now make a number of comments on the bill because I think it has some fundamental problems. At this point we in the NDP feel that we cannot support the bill.

First, the bill itself purports to propose amendments that would give authority to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to instruct immigration officers to deny work permits to foreign strippers. I noticed the government seems intent on using the pejorative term “strippers” as opposed to exotic dancers, which is what they are actually called. Again, that gives us a little understanding of the government's agenda. This authority would give enormous powers to the minister, on what basis it is hard to know. Giving the minister the power to cast a yea or a nay on a permit that comes on her desk raises the question as to whether or not this is really a ban.

The minister has been reported in the media as saying that she would like those permits to go down to zero. Even the government's own press release points out that over the last year it has significantly cut back on the number of people coming to Canada as exotic dancers so we know it has been doing this. This raises the question as to whether we are actually dealing with a ban, in which case the government should be up front and say that this is something it will not allow as opposed to saying that it is a discretionary thing because it has already cut permits back. I think only 17 permits were approved in the last year. This is something that is a serious concern to us in terms of the bill's real intent.

Second, as was pointed out by the NDP women's critic, the member for London—Fanshawe, when the bill was first introduced a few weeks ago, she said that if the issue is exploitation and harm, then instead of banning workers and the program, we should be focusing on workplace safety and on the rights of workers, whether they be exotic dancers, other foreign workers or domestic workers. Surely that is the issue.

● (1240)

When I read in one of the news reports that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration was introducing this bill as a humanitarian response, I just about fell off my chair laughing. I spent three years on a subcommittee of the justice committee studying the sex trade in Canada. We held extensive hearings across the country and heard from sex workers, in camera and in public, and we heard from police and advocates. When we finally issued our report, although I must say that it was a disappointing report, the government's response was quite pathetic. It completely ignored the danger, the exploitation and the incredible risks that sex workers already face in this country because of our laws.

I find it incredible that the minister would pop up and say that she was introducing this bill, in which she uses the term “strippers”, based on humanitarian reasons. This is nothing more than part of the Conservatives' moralistic agenda. They see enforcement, the Criminal Code and sanctions against people as the answer to everything, instead of focusing on what the complex issues are.

I must point out that even the government, in its response to the subcommittee's report on prostitution, the Minister of Justice told the committee:

...the Interdepartmental Working Group on Trafficking in Persons...coordinates all federal anti-trafficking efforts. The IWGTIP is composed of 16 participating federal departments and agencies and works in collaboration with its provincial and territorial partners, as well as civil society and its international partners, to prevent trafficking, protect its victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

The government goes on to point out that Bill C-49, which dealt with new trafficking specific offences, was passed in 2005 under the previous government. I remember debating that bill in the House of Commons. In 2006, Citizenship and Immigration Canada announced a further series of measures to deal with the vulnerable situation of trafficking victims.

Government Orders

Therefore, by the government's own admission, a bill had already passed through the House and further measures were taken to deal with the serious question of trafficking, which must be dealt with, and we supported those measures. I know that the Status of Women committee has looked at that and studied it.

We now have this weird little bill before the House and we are being told that it is a most important bill. I would agree with the Liberal member for Mississauga—Erindale who pointed out all the other issues that the Conservative government has failed to address on immigration and citizenship, and the list can become very long.

With all the problems that do exist within the system, whether it is foreign credentials, family reunification or the massive backlog, none of them are being dealt with. However, all of a sudden we have this bill before us even though the government, in its response, said that it had taken significant measures in previous legislation that was enacted to deal with trafficking. One has to question what is behind this bill.

We cannot support the bill because it does not actually deal with the problem that exists. If we want to deal with exploitation, abuse and people's rights, then we should deal with that, but to simply give the minister power, with no accountability, to accept or deny permits when she feels like it, is a completely irrational legislative response. I do not see how we in this Parliament can support that kind of legislation. I would much rather see us focusing this debate on the real exploitation that is taking place and on what the government is prepared to do about it.

• (1245)

Again, I will come back to the subcommittee of the justice committee that dealt with our laws on prostitution, where there are very serious issues, where we have seen a high rate of violence because of law enforcement and because of the way laws operate. Women have disappeared. Aboriginal women have disappeared at an alarming rate, a rate higher than that of any other sector of our society.

I represent the riding of Vancouver East, the downtown east side, where we have had 63 women who were missing and murdered. The evidence is piling up that the prostitution law itself, because prostitution is not illegal but all the activities around it are, is one of the main contributors to the harm these women are suffering. In fact, just yesterday in Vancouver a new report was unveiled as a result of a two year community process called "Living in Community", which tried to grapple with this issue in a very holistic, comprehensive and sensitive way in terms of dealing with safety in the community and the safety of people involved in the sex trade.

This bill has nothing to do with that. This bill will not address any of those issues. All it will do is allow the Conservatives to say they were responding to the issues of women's equality and violence against women, to say that this is what this bill is about, but the bill does not even come close. In fact, it is offensive in terms of the way it lays out its purported response.

I want to say in today's debate that we in the NDP believe this bill is very short-sighted. There were already mechanisms in place that allowed the government to take action in terms of dealing with visas. We know that because the Conservatives themselves admitted that

they were cutting down on the permits for exotic dancers. It seems to me that rather than focusing a ban on those individuals and what may be legitimate situations, what they have chosen to do is basically bring in a ban on the whole program. That is what really underlies this, because that is what the minister has told us in the media. That is what the real intent is.

Instead of focusing on the issue of the workplace and abusive employers, no matter what workplace it is, whether it is for exotic dancers or in other areas that employ foreign workers or Canadian workers, what the government does is separate out the problems into little boutique bills. It creates a sort of moral high ground around them and then claims that this is how the government is moving forward when really it has not done anything. What it may do, by an unfortunate consequence, is actually drive the sex trade further underground.

Instead of focusing on the workplace and violations that may take place, instead of focusing on the rights and the safety of sex workers or exotic dancers, because those are real situations that could be dealt with, this bill has moved in a completely different direction.

In our caucus, we have had a lot of debate about this bill. We believe it is important to deal with exploitation and abuse. We believe it is important to focus attention on women's equality in this country. We believe it is critical to ensure that foreign workers are not exploited.

In fact, I find it ironic that the government is actually accelerating the foreign worker program. Pilot studies have taken place in Alberta. We have seen a huge acceleration of the program in British Columbia, because there now is a demand from employers who want foreign workers for the Olympics, for construction and the service and hospitality industries. We actually have seen an acceleration of the foreign worker program.

In fact, it is the NDP that has been calling for a review of this program because we are concerned with the exploitation and abuse of foreign workers that is taking place as a result of this program. However, to bring in this bill and say that it is going to resolve these problems flies in the face of reality.

• (1250)

We in the NDP will not be supporting this bill. I think the other two opposition parties have laid out some very good issues and arguments as to their concerns as well. We of course will be participating in the discussion at committee, where I am sure there will be witnesses, and there may be amendments.

We find that the bill as it is now is not supportable. We are not prepared to support a bill that gives such open-ended powers to a minister. We are not prepared to support a bill that in effect bans these particular workers, the exotic dancers.

Government Orders

The NDP is not prepared to support a bill that really is based on the Conservative government's political ideology. The NDP would much prefer to deal with this issue in a real fashion. We would much prefer to deal with exploitation and to deal with, for example, the prostitution laws that have been ignored by the government. That is where the debate needs to be focused.

I would urge the minister and the parliamentary secretary and others in the government who are supporting the bill to read the report that came out of Vancouver just yesterday. It is called the "Living in Community Action Plan". I would urge them to take a look at what a genuine community debate is all about in terms of the sex trade and what needs to be done. Government members could see how different stakeholders came together, whether it was police, government representatives, city representatives, community advocates, or sex workers themselves, and produced not only a process but a report with recommendations and conclusions that actually make some sense. That was genuine. It has a lot of merit and a lot of legitimacy because of what the individuals went through.

Something like this bill, which almost seems to have been pulled out of a hat because it serves a political purpose, needs to be called what it is, and that is what we are doing here today. The NDP will not be supporting this bill. There are a lot of problems in the citizenship and immigration department. A lot of things need to be fixed. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, this bill ignores all of those issues.

We certainly will debate this bill on its merits. We will deal with it in committee. We will debate it when it comes back. However, we believe that we have a responsibility to tell the Canadian public that this bill is a sham and that it is not going to deal with those harmful situations. All the bill is going to do is ban those workers instead of focusing on safety and rights in the workplace, which is really how this intervention should be made.

NDP members are not in a position to support this bill. I have given the reasons why. I certainly am now expecting a barrage of indignation from the Conservatives as they once again get on their little pedestals, but that is okay. We understand what that political spin is about.

I am just glad that there are members in the opposition who understand that debate is not about stalling. Debate is debate. Dialogue and different points of view are legitimate. That is why we are here. Part of our job is to hold the government to account and to look at legislation with a lens as to whether or not it has merit. We take that very seriously.

I look forward to questions and comments. I will respond to them as best I can.

• (1255)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, NDP members love to get on their soapboxes and rant about Conservative motives. Rarely do they miss an opportunity to claim themselves the champions of minority rights and women's rights. They claim to be the moral compass for society, especially to the disenfranchised.

Here we have a bill that would make a real difference in the sex trade industry, the most vulnerable of groups, and yet we hear that

the NDP is not going to support it. I find that incredible. I find that repugnant. I find that offensive.

The RCMP tells us that 800 to 1,200 sex workers are coming through. NGOs are telling us that it is as many as 15,000.

If NDP members are really the champions of the oppressed, and if they are really the voice of repressed women, why would they not work with the government and work with this legislation to stop the sexual exploitation that exists in our present immigration act? I welcome the member's response.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would love to get a copy of those speaking notes. Obviously they have been lined up for each party. It would be fascinating to have them and see the arguments that are presented: this is what we say to the NDP, this is what we say to the Bloc, and this is what we say to the Liberals.

That aside, I believe that in my comments I made it very clear that Bill C-49, passed in 2005, which was a bill that amended the Criminal Code dealing with trafficking, was a very significant bill. It was passed in the House. It had significant hearings. It was based on the concerns about exploitation and trafficking. Does that bill need to be amended?

In the subcommittee that I mentioned, of which I was a member, in our study of Canada's criminal prostitution laws we had a recommendation on trafficking that stated:

The Subcommittee recommends that the Government of Canada ensure that the problem of trafficking in persons remains a priority so that victims are provided with adequate assistance and services, while traffickers are brought to justice.

It was a unanimous recommendation from all parties.

As I also pointed out to the member, the response we got from the government, his government, was as I actually read it into the record. It talked about the interdepartmental working group and it referred to the legislation in 2005, and apparently things were in order.

What I am saying to the member and to the minister is that if there are continuing problems in terms of dealing with trafficking and abuse, then the government should bring forward that amendment to the Criminal Code. Certainly the status of women committee has been looking at it. The subcommittee that I was on was looking at it. We said to keep it as a high priority.

However, the bill that we are debating today, Bill C-57, does not deal with that. The bill is about the Conservatives' moral agenda to basically ban exotic dancers, that is what it is, or to give the minister incredibly broad powers to do I do not know what. It does not really spell it out. That is not good legislation.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her statements. I find it passing strange that the Conservatives are busy masquerading as those who are concerned about the inequality and vulnerability of women at the same time as they have changed Status of Women Canada so that research, lobbying and advocacy are no longer permitted. That clearly is undermining women and women's equality.

Government Orders

However, my question arises from the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, entitled “Turning Outrage into Action to Address Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation in Canada”. I want to ask the member for her sense of a couple of recommendations, the first, of course, being that the committee recommended that “the federal government develop a national framework to address poverty in Canada”. Certainly we have not seen that.

More importantly, the committee recommended that “Citizenship and Immigration Canada increase access to and information on migration channels in order to increase women’s ability to migrate independently and safely”. In other words, the recommendation was to bring down those barriers that prohibit women from coming into this country to seek the kind of employment that is safe and provides them with a quality of life.

I would be most interested in the member’s response.

● (1300)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, the member for London—Fanshawe has really focused the attention on what the debate needs to be about. There is no question about the irony here. This is the government that has done more than any other to turn the clock back on women’s equality. The cuts we have seen to programs and the elimination of advocacy from the mandate have been quite stunning.

I am familiar with the report of which the member speaks. It seems to me that to focus on immigration and settlement and to allow women to come to Canada independently is again where we get into the debate of how the immigration system needs to be reviewed and changed. Right now that is not happening. If we did have a system that was more open and allowed immigration to happen, because we do have worker shortages in the country, then maybe programs like this would not exist at all. I do not know.

However, the priorities the member for London—Fanshawe has identified are the real ones we should be debating in terms of legislation and changes, rather than Bill C-57.

On the question about poverty, this is a fundamental truth in realizing that the more women fall into poverty, the more we see inequality grow, then the more abuse and exploitation we see takes place in our society. If we were addressing the underlying issue of poverty and promoting women’s economic and social independence, whether they are in Canada or through the immigration system, then we would really be addressing the priorities in the country.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Vancouver East when she said that this was not the sole solution to the problem. However, I can assure her that this is a step forward in the right direction.

I attended the Asia-Pacific forum, at which 27 countries were represented. The issue of human trafficking came up. It was not only first and foremost, but it was a major concern for every country there. It is literally pandemic throughout the entire region right now. The countries attending the forum suggested that the legislation we were proposing was what they have asked for. They said that we had a problem as did they. They said that while this is not the total solution, it was a step forward to address the problem.

Are the government and the other 27 countries all wrong and is she right?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member has read the report from our Standing Committee on the Status of Women, an all party committee of Parliament. A couple of the recommendations were just referenced by the member for London—Fanshawe. In that report, as well as in the subcommittee report dealing with prostitution, these issues had been canvassed, had been seriously debated and recommendations were made to the government. I was incredibly disappointed with the government’s response to our subcommittee report. I do not know what the government’s response was to the Status of Women’s report, but I think it was probably pretty minimal.

What we are saying is, yes, a lot needs to be done, but those recommendations have already been made to the government and we have not seen the government respond to the work coming out of committees, which is kind of the backbone of Parliament.

I agree that this is one element, but it is getting a lot of attention from the Conservatives. They are holding this up and saying that this is what they are doing, that this is how they are solving this problem. I do not think so. They should pay attention to the legitimate work that has already been done and respond to it. If they did, maybe we would get somewhere then.

● (1305)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I join the debate on Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

The proposed amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act are much needed measures. Bill C-57 addresses an important gap that currently exists in Canada’s immigration law. In fact, Christine MacMillan, territorial commander for the Salvation Army in Canada and Bermuda has this to say about Bill C-57:

This announcement is an excellent advancement towards the protection of women from sexual exploitation....It is another positive step in the fight against human trafficking, and we are encouraged by the leadership shown by the Federal Government.

With respect to current provision in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the existing legislation provides the government with the authority to allow an individual to enter Canada even if they do not meet all of the requirements and are inadmissible. Unfortunately, the act does not provide a similar authority to deny a temporary work permit to an applicant who meets entry requirements, but whose presence in Canada may put them in harm’s way.

The proposed Bill C-57 will give the minister the authority to instruct immigration officers to deny work permits to individuals who might face humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation. Without this authority, immigration officers cannot deny a work permit to someone who meets all the requirements to enter Canada, even if they believe there is a strong possibility of exploitation or abuse.

The proposed Bill C-57 will help us to prevent individuals from entering into situations where they may be abused or exploited, or where in fact they could become victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, it will help ensure our immigration system is not used by criminals to victimize people.

Government Orders

The Government of Canada should have the authority to institute measures to deny permits if there is evidence that individuals, including exotic dancers or anybody else, would be subject to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation.

It is time for us to step up and be accountable. This legislation is all about that. Some may ask the question, why should we be concerned? Why do we need this legislation? The answer can be found in one word: accountability.

As elected representatives of an open and democratic institution, we must demonstrate our collective and unified resolve to ensure as much as possible the safety of anyone entering our country. We must be vigilant in protecting vulnerable individuals against potential exploitation, even though these individuals may not be Canadian citizens, but are considering temporary employment in Canada. We must take every measure possible to ensure that unsuspecting foreign workers are not subject to abuse or exploitation. The Government of Canada cannot be complicit in this kind of activity.

I find it most unfortunate that the Liberal immigration critic, the member for Mississauga—Erindale, criticized Bill C-57 by saying that he thought that we already had enough protection for vulnerable foreign workers who could be subject to sexual exploitation. To quote the Liberal immigration critic, he said, “I think we have the safeguards in place. It is a cheap attempt to change the channel and pretend to do something while they are really doing nothing”.

Before rushing to judgment, I wonder if the Liberal immigration critic bothered consulting with key stakeholders who welcomed our government's initiatives, stakeholders such as Sabrina Sullivan of The Future Group, who said:

[The] Immigration Minister...has taken an important step to protect women from sexual exploitation and end a program that made Canada complicit in human trafficking...It is clear that...[this] government is serious about combating human trafficking.

For those members of the opposition who think Bill C-57 is not needed, I urge them to consult stakeholders such as The Future Group, Stop the Trafficking Coalition and the Salvation Army. Perhaps then they will realize how important the legislation is and how critical it is for them to support it.

Let us be mindful of what we are debating today. We are in part debating the granting of a discretionary authority to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to deny the application of a foreign national for a temporary work permit in Canada. Like any authority granted or legislated to a minister, such a proposed or new authority must be reviewed, debated and enacted in the most open and accountable manner. That is what this government is committed to doing.

• (1310)

In fact, to demonstrate our openness to accountability on this matter, Richard Kurland, as I talked about before, an experienced and well-known immigration lawyer said, and I want to quote this again because this is very important:

What is [absolutely] striking about the new government's approach, unlike the former government, the new government is going through the front door. I have never seen this in 15 years of immigration policy...Normally, in years past, it was done behind the bureaucratic doors or through a [fait accompli] regulation with no debate. That's what remarkable today [for immigration policy].

That is quite a statement.

We are committed to not only an open debate, but also a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Allow me to review the government's commitment to accountability on this matter. First, I will reiterate and support the minister's assurance that a high level of accountability is attached to any exercise of authority proposed in the legislation. As the parliamentary secretary stated earlier, any ministerial instruction would be based on public policy objectives and evidence that clearly outlined an identified risk of abuse or exploitation.

Any decision by an immigration officer to refuse a work permit in Canada would require the concurrence of a second officer. Ministerial instructions to deny any such permit would be published in the *Canada Gazette* and would be reported in the annual report to Parliament on immigration.

I ask all hon. members to understand the basic principles behind the legislation. These principles are openness and accountability. I further ask this essential question of all members. Would any member support or approve the granting of a work permit to a foreign national knowing that he or she might become vulnerable to any form of exploitation or degradation? The answer, of course, is no.

As previously said, the authority would help target the networks that would profit from human trafficking. It would also stop the flow of individuals who were their prey and ultimate victims.

I submit, as a responsible government, that we should be able to say no to those applying for temporary employment who may not realize that they are being duped and misled. I believe it is only right that we should be able to prevent a human being from entering into a situation that would result in harm.

It is the Canadian way to warn an individual that he or she is about to make a mistake, which could have irreversible negative effects on their future. Above all, it is a Canadian tradition to stand up and be accountable among our friends and help them in a fight against exploitation.

Hon. colleagues will agree that making Canada a safer place for everyone is our objective. The instructions have the flexibility to allow for future unanticipated situations. Human trafficking is but one example of the kind of abuse and exploitation we are all trying to prevent.

Canada does not want to remain a destination country for human traffickers. Ministerial instructions issued under this new authority would give us one more tool to help stop trafficking at our borders and prevent foreign nationals from becoming victims. They build on Canada's existing efforts to protect victims of trafficking by giving them access to a temporary resident permit, health care benefits and trauma counselling.

Government Orders

Canada's immigration legislation includes stiff penalties of up to life imprisonment and fines of up to \$1 million for traffickers.

In conclusion, I would like to cite John Muise, Director of Public Safety for the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, who said that Bill C-57 "is part of the response that needs to occur in terms of protecting women and children in this country".

I urge all members to put aside their partisan views and do the right thing and support this very important Bill C-57.

•(1315)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the speech by the member for Kildonan—St. Paul and I understand her concern about jobs which subject people to humiliating or degrading treatment. However, in order to better understand the objective or merits of the bill, I have some questions to ask for information purposes.

I would like to know what percentage of immigrants is already included in the system for this degrading work. Also, what are we doing for those people already included in the current system and already admitted into Canada? In this case, what do we do if we find that it is a degrading job? If the bill were applied and would prevent any foreign resident from taking this job, does she think that they would be replaced by local workers or existing Canadians? If so, what would the government or the bill change, at the end of the day, if all workers were not prevented from doing this job?

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. This is not just about exotic dancers. The bill is about all foreign temporary workers who cross our borders.

Right now 800 to 1,200 victims of human trafficking are here in Canada, according to RCMP statistics. Non-governmental organizations say that 15,000 people were probably trafficked across Canada this year. The NGOs know about these things. They have sheltered these people.

I worked in this area for close to 10 years. In this country, when vulnerable people have been exploited, our government has put in 120 days for them to be sheltered, fed, counselled, have medical care and be protected. We are taking real action to make that happen.

The need is there. It took me two elections to finally get this particular issue on the status of women agenda.

I would invite the member opposite to read the blues of those witnesses who came from all across Canada to talk about their experiences and to talk about this growing crime in Canada. I would urge the member to listen to the police officers, to the international model who gave the testimony. It is very educational.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, on her work in the status of women committee and in particular on the issue of the trafficking of humans. Her work is very commendable. She has done a lot of hard work over the years.

We debate bills from time to time in the House and we try to get it right. I think we have got this one right for the most part. There may be something we could say about any bill that has ever been debated here.

I want to ask my colleague if she agrees with me that we have had inaction on this issue for years, just nothing. There was strippergate a few years ago. Young women, particularly from Romania, came over here looking for a better life and it was not a better life in a lot of cases.

We have to move ahead. Will the bill eliminate the situation where women who came from Romania and other countries were exploited? What will it do further to that to help protect against human trafficking? I ask the member for her comments.

•(1320)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is very timely and full of insight.

There are many things that are happening right now that we need to address. The crime of human trafficking is alive and well in Canada and it is growing.

Bill C-57 is one piece that will help address the problem. Our government is doing other things to help out on that. I applaud members on all sides of the House who supported my Motion No. 153 to stop human trafficking. All members of the House supported the motion so today I am quite dismayed. We need to send this bill to committee to examine it. I would urge members not to stall it. I would urge members not to hold it up. People's lives are at stake. I would urge members to get on board, to support the bill and help our most vulnerable citizens.

I do not want it to get off track. It is not just about exotic dancers. It is not just about the sex trade. Young girls and young boys are coming into the country unaware of what is going on. There are criminals who are helping them get through the border and helping them answer questions correctly. When they get here they are taken into confinement and are forced into the sex trade. This is what we are talking about today.

Bill C-57 addresses that. The 120 days is a piece of it, as are other issues that we are working on in Parliament to enable vulnerable victims to be saved. The reason we are so tentative about things being held up is that a record number of bills have been held up in Parliament throughout the year. In fact, we have had the first anniversary of one bill that has been held up for the better part of a year.

Now we are talking about Bill C-57. People's lives depend on it. It is very important that we take leadership roles as members of Parliament and pass this bill.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the member wants to stop human trafficking. That is very honourable and something which we would all like to see in the world.

Government Orders

I sat in on the status of women standing committee one time when someone talked about the film, *The Natashas*, and spoke about the trafficking of women. Women were coming from Romania and they had no idea that they were coming to be sex trade workers, exotic dancers or other things. They thought they were coming to be nannies and child care workers. We know this goes on in the world and it is something that needs to be stopped. I commend her on this bill.

The status of women committee made a full report in February. It had many recommendations in it. I would like to ask the hon. member if her party will be following up on the recommendations, recommendations such as giving border guards adequate training so that they can ask the right questions and recognize women who are being taken across the border, possibly against their will, into professions in which they do not want to work. Will the government be implementing those recommendations?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government is very aware of the report and is working with it every day. It is not just one minister. All the ministers are working on this very important issue.

I have to say that we have done more than the previous government did in 13 years. We have done it in just over a year. We are taking action. We are working fast.

All these recommendations are being looked at. They are very important recommendations. We can see that with the 120 days that has been put in place since we got into government. We can see that with Bill C-57. Those are the things that we are pushing through right now, along with the stiff criminal laws for people who perpetrate those crimes.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to make some comments on Bill C-57. Certainly it is an issue which I know a fair amount about and I am glad to have the opportunity to comment on it.

Bill C-57 is about a page and a half long. It makes an amendment to our immigration laws. Certainly on the face of it, it should not take very long for any of us to deal with it, whether we are debating it at length or not. Part of our role in Parliament is not just to take something at face value and say that it looks good, it is an area that many of us care about and that we would like to see some improvements to strengthen it. Parliament is about debate and discussion to make things better.

For a bill to pass without our having a full opportunity to debate and discuss it, frankly, would be viewed upon as our not carrying out our responsibilities to ensure that legislation brought forward accomplishes what the intent of it clearly is, and if possible, to go further than that. That means we should look for areas to add further strength in the bill and make sure it is going to achieve the same goals that all of us in the House want to achieve.

I am pleased to take a few minutes to comment on this important issue today in an attempt to move the bill forward to committee so we can ensure that it accomplishes what we all want it to accomplish. The bill is an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which recognizes quite clearly, "Whereas Parliament recognizes the importance of protecting vulnerable foreign nationals who come to work in Canada from exploitation and abuse". That is very clearly

written into the Immigration Act and I know all of us want to ensure that happens.

This bill proposes to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to allow immigration officers the ability to refuse or authorize foreign nationals to work in Canada based on if they are considered to be vulnerable persons and/or at risk of exploitation or abuse. That very much is left up to the person who is doing the interviewing.

Currently, the visa officer can explain to individuals that they have certain rights when they go to Canada. The visa officer can hand them pamphlets outlining that they may be asked to do certain things and that they do not have to because they have certain rights under their visa applications. That does not always sink in with the person on the other side of the desk who is fleeing poverty or for whatever reason desperately wants to come to Canada and is willing to take a chance. This bill would end that opportunity. It would give the visa officer the opportunity to decide that the person would be exploited. It gives the officer a huge power. It is something that needs to be seriously looked at.

The bill would also allow immigration officers to determine if granting authorization would be contrary to public policy considerations that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has specifically outlined or based on evidence that people are at risk of exploitation. Often it is a feeling that someone gets. When we ask why a visa was refused, the visa officer will say that it was instinct, just a feeling that a certain person would find himself or herself in a vulnerable position. It puts a lot of emphasis and trust on the minister giving visas on judgment.

I do not see where there is harm in doing that as long as we make sure the checks and balances are in place. In reading at least the beginning of this bill, I see it is going to require a second person to comment and that is helpful.

Under the proposed amendments to the IRPA, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration could issue written instructions to immigration officers giving them the authority to deny work permits to applicants who appear very vulnerable to them. The instructions would be based on clear public policy objectives and evidence that outlines the risk of exploitation that the applicants face.

Written instructions could help identify, for example, individuals who would be vulnerable to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation. All of us as parliamentarians have been around for a few years and we have certainly had an opportunity to hear firsthand about the exploitation of many people who come here on a variety of different permits. They are very vulnerable and do not have a lot of support or resources, or even know where to turn to get help. They often end up in our offices, sometimes even our campaign offices.

● (1325)

These could include low skilled labourers as well as potential victims of human trafficking. Immigration officers would make their decision on a case by case basis. Each application for a permit is always assessed on its own merits.

Government Orders

Without this authority, immigration officers cannot deny a work permit to someone who meets all the requirements to enter Canada, even if they believe there is a strong possibility of exploitation or abuse.

Clearly, if we have licensed establishments that have a labour shortage, and through our process through HRDC, they can apply to have someone come over to fill that shortage. That is a problem for those of us who are trying to find ways of tightening up the system.

Either we start to ban some of these businesses and decide we are not going to have them. But if we have them, we have to recognize that they have the rights under the law to apply for workers to come to their legitimate businesses.

Strengthening these rules will hopefully provide a tool to respond to situations where a permit applicant could be at risk. Again, it puts a lot of effort and a lot of trust into the visa officer who is making that decision.

Here in the House I am sure that all parliamentarians support the protection of human rights and the prevention of exploitation of foreign nationals, and in particular, women who are at risk.

I must point out that we talk a lot about the exploitation of women, but it certainly goes on with the exploitation of many men who are in positions who do not know any other way out. They are fleeing again from poverty, looking for money to send home to their families, and often find themselves doing work that would be quite unacceptable to Canadians who are born here.

I would like to assure Canadians who are watching at home that the Liberal Party is committed to working closely with the international community to prevent human trafficking. Bill C-49 was an excellent piece of legislation that was just enacted at the beginning of 2006 specifically on the issues of human trafficking. We all recognize that it is a very important area that we need to do all we can to prevent that.

Previously, we had made substantial changes to restrict visa applications to temporary foreign workers who we believe to be at risk.

We also endorse the recent Standing Committee on the Status of Women report, "Turning Outrage into Action to Address Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation in Canada". It calls on the government to do more to address existing systemic problems involving the most vulnerable members of our society. Clearly, on this side of the House we are waiting to see what kind of action the government takes to address those very issues.

As the former chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and throughout my political career at the municipal and the federal levels, I heard heart-wrenching stories from marginalized women who fell victim and also heard many constructive suggestions for solutions to this grave problem.

I believe that we need strong laws to protect the most vulnerable, so I will be supporting sending the bill to committee for further review and study. We need further consultation and possible amendments that I am sure will come from some of the members of the House to strengthen the bill.

Although the intent of the legislation is critical, it no doubt needs to be improved and we will do that at committee, which I hope will be done quickly and hastily.

There are considerations that first must be made to ensure the legislation truly achieves the goal of protecting all foreign workers. This is why I believe it should go to committee and I am confident that the work will get done there.

A serious shortcoming of the bill is that all classifications under the foreign worker program could potentially be adversely affected, including agriculture workers and live-in caregivers. If the bill were enacted as it is written today, these workers would have to be denied entry to Canada, exasperating temporary foreign worker shortages in certain sectors of the labour economy.

Therefore, the committee needs to find that balance to ensure protection and avoid exploitation, but still allow people to come into the country to carry out the needs that we have as far as labour shortages. It must ensure that these people know what their rights are and that they have an avenue to complain, to make changes, and to change an employer if the employer is abusive.

Refusing foreign workers entry to Canada based on the potential risk for abuse does not decrease the demand for these workers. This has the potential to create underground economies which render temporary workers even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse which is exactly what we are trying to avoid with the intent of this legislation.

● (1330)

We need to ensure that blame is placed on the abusers, not on the victims. This is so important because victims of human trafficking, which my colleague continues to refer to, are often so frightened to come forward and admit what has actually happened to them.

I look forward to the bill being sent to committee, for improvements to be made, and for it to be referred back as soon as possible. I hope that we will be able to work together in a non-partisan way to prevent temporary foreign workers from being subjected to exploitation or abuse in Canada and for people to clearly know that they are welcome.

We need them to come to Canada. We want them to come and do well, and to move forward.

● (1335)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly applaud my colleague from York West. I know my colleague was the chair on the status of women committee when our witnesses came forward to talk about the human trafficking issue across this country.

I am gratified to hear about her support to get the bill to committee as quickly as possible and to have the debate. As she said earlier, we all know that the parliamentary process definitely is to make sure that we do have the debate to examine every bill in committee very thoroughly. That is what we do here on Parliament Hill.

Government Orders

The reality in Parliament this year which concerns me as a member of Parliament is how many bills have been dragged out for the better part of a year with stalling tactics and so on. Having said that, with Bill C-57 it is very gratifying to hear how concerned the member opposite is about ensuring that this does get to committee, so the debate can carry on and also her concern about making sure that the debate continues on very quickly and thoroughly, but to get it back here.

I was really quite taken aback at what the critic for immigration said about the bill. This is why perhaps the issue has come up today about how quickly the bill would go through. Could the member comment whether there is a division among the Liberal caucus in terms of what we should do with the bill and could she explain some of that to ensure we get the bill debated as soon as possible?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, clearly these are issues that matter to a lot of us. Bill C-49 covered off an amazing amount of the issues when it comes to human trafficking that many of us care about. The whole issue of exploitation of temporary foreign workers is something that is very important to everyone in my party on this side of the House. I assure the member that there is no division.

We all want to make sure that legislation is strong, effective, and accomplishes what I believe both the hon. member and myself and others want to see happen. My concern, and I would expect that of my colleagues, is that it accomplish what the intent is and does not simply turn around be a band-aid solution on something that we all consider to be an important issue.

Let us not forget that the reason many of the people that are applying for temporary work permits in a variety of categories are coming from poverty-ridden countries and are looking for an opportunity to make some money to feed their families. Hence, that is the reason we do not want to penalize the very people who need the help.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member if she would agree that this bill, while it has the intention of dealing with a problem that has been cited in the House and by committees of the House, actually does not do anything to protect foreign workers at all because all it does is prevent people from becoming foreign workers?

Would the member agree that the challenge of dealing with exploitation, sexual or otherwise, of people in Canada is a job that goes way beyond the immigration department and involves society generally, and our police forces and communities?

Would she also agree that the name of the game with the Immigration Act is to enhance the movement of people in and out of Canada with appropriate protections, of course, but that the bill must do everything it can to facilitate the movement of labour into Canada because it is that labour that is needed and it is that labour that the general sections of the Immigration Act were originally enacted to facilitate?

• (1340)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, once temporary foreign workers arrive in Canada, they are subject to the same kind of protection that other workers are subject to. When individuals are applying with a visa officer to get a temporary work permit, it is important that they

be given both verbally and in a pamphlet form or booklet form information outlining their rights in Canada.

They must be informed that they have the right to say no to things that are over and above what they clearly understood their job to be. They must be informed that they have the right to go to HRDC and seek out an alternative employer. That is very important once they arrive in Canada.

Far too often people are unaware of their responsibilities and their rights. Employers must understand that they cannot ask an employee who is here under a temporary work permit to carry out various things. They have the right to say no.

People are desperate to come to Canada. They get here and then are asked to do things they did not intend to do. Language is a problem. Fear is a problem. It is important for us on this side of the border to do more for those workers who wish to come to Canada.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this bill effectively deals with a problem facing not only our country, as I mentioned at the Asia-Pacific forum where 27 countries were represented, but is a universal problem and it is a problem that demands action.

One of the biggest challenges with respect to this problem, which members on both sides of the House have come to terms with, is the balancing act. It is about balancing on one side the elimination of the abuse that is going on and balancing on the other side the opportunity for people to come to this country and take advantage of the magnificent opportunities that we have here.

It has basically been stated that the pendulum is out of balance right now. We just have to swing it back a little bit. That is why legislation is needed throughout the world in order to bring some more serious attention to the fact that this abuse has to be handled. We need regulations. We need laws. We need restrictions to such an extent that humanity can act in a bit more favourable manner.

In this particular case, I not only commend the member for Kildonan—St. Paul but I commend the member for York West for working to find a solution, to find acceptable amendments that will move this legislation forward. I would caution my colleagues as well to recognize that this is a serious problem that demands serious action now. This is why I think we should move as expeditiously as possible to try to find amendments that will protect citizens both internationally and in Canada.

I worked in the crime and punishment field for years, and I can assure the member that this problem has to be addressed.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, all of us who have been doing work in our ridings or elsewhere know this is a problem. It seems that the more laws we bring into play, the more people there are who find ways to get around them.

It is important that we move forward as legislators to ensure that our judicial system has the kind of laws required and that the laws have teeth. People who get involved in the exploitation of our temporary workers in whatever category need to know that there are severe penalties and that they will have to pay for doing that.

Government Orders

More important, we have to make sure that people have all the information they need prior to coming here, know what their rights and their opportunities are, and know what to do if they face a clearly exploitive opportunity by someone else.

We need to continue to work together all around the world on these things. We need to help countries like Romania and elsewhere, where there are a lot of issues, to make sure that their economies are strong so their own residents are happy to stay there because they know they can raise a family and earn a good living. It is up to us to take care of our own issues here and find our own labour workforce opportunities for people.

We must remember that these are legal businesses that are asking for workers to come to Canada. As long as they are legal companies and licensed establishments, they have the right to apply.

• (1345)

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have this opportunity to join the debate on Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Canada's immigration and refugee system is an important part of our identity, economy and society. For those people who are applying to enter our country, Canada represents hope, safety and a new start.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has the authority under the act to grant entry to individuals who would otherwise not be permitted to enter Canada. This authority is an important tool, as it ensures that we are able to take into account the unique situation of each applicant. It helps us to remain fair, balanced and humane.

As hon. colleagues know, this authority is designed to be exercised in a transparent and accountable manner and the use of instructions is reported annually to Parliament. However, what the government cannot do under the current legislation is deny a work permit to someone who meets all the entry requirements; that is to say, under the current legislation, we cannot deny a permit even if we are convinced there is a strong possibility that a person may be exploited or abused in Canada.

Under the previous Liberal government, some applicants for work permits found themselves in situations leading to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation. As I raised in this House repeatedly during the infamous strippergate scandal of the previous Liberal government, women were degraded by being forced to provide nude photos of themselves. The hypocrisy of the previous Liberal government on this matter was stunning. While the Liberals stood in the House and for years acted out a routine of defending women, they did nothing to help, while some of their staff literally enjoyed the show.

Going back about 13 years, I had the privilege of volunteering at a sexual assault centre for just shy of seven years. Through that opportunity, I learned that one out of three women will be assaulted at some point in her lifetime. I think it is important to point out that now, 13 years later, that statistic has not changed. In fact, there is concern that it has increased and that one out of two will experience this.

At the height of the Liberal strippergate scandal, the price for one applicant was to work as a volunteer on a former Liberal cabinet

minister's campaign. At one point the former Liberal minister of immigration said that admitting strippers under the temporary foreign work program was necessary to protect women. Then she flip-flopped and said it was exploiting women.

Essentially, the previous Liberal government gave blanket exemptions to foreign strippers to work in Canada despite warnings that women were vulnerable to being forced into prostitution and other forms of exploitation. It was shameful that the previous government helped facilitate what was in essence human trafficking by permitting foreign strippers into the country regardless of whether they could be potential victims of abuse or exploitation. This was all in spite of warnings that these women were vulnerable to being forced into prostitution and other forms of exploitation.

Of particular concern to me is the fact that the Liberals, despite being booted out of office, still do not seem to get it. The Liberal immigration critic, the member for Mississauga—Erindale, was dismissive of Bill C-57 when on May 17 he said:

I think we have the safeguards in place. This is just an attempt to change the channel to grab some headlines.

He also said:

It's a cheap attempt to change the channel and pretend to do something while they're really doing nothing.

On May 29, the Liberal immigration critic, the member for Mississauga—Erindale, dismissed Bill C-57 and said that it was frivolous legislation about so-called exotic dancers' working conditions.

Instead of dismissing Bill C-57 as frivolous, the Liberal immigration critic should have sought the opinions of highly respected organizations, but of course what would the Stop the Trafficking Coalition or the Future Group and/or the Salvation Army know?

What those groups do know is that this legislation is long overdue. All of those organizations have offered their support for this legislation.

I echo the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who expressed her dismay with the Liberal immigration critic who so flippantly dismisses Bill C-57, especially in light of the trouble the Liberals found themselves in during strippergate.

I am surprised that the Liberals would attack legislation that protects vulnerable foreign workers. I suspect the Liberals do not want a new law that protects workers coming to Canada from being exploited or subject to human trafficking, as a means to deflect from their own embarrassment and record of inaction. The Liberal Party, in my opinion, is out of touch.

Government Orders

Our government is very proud of having brought this legislation forward. We are proud of putting forward protections that will help prevent these situations for temporary workers in Canada, including strippers, who may be abused, exploited or possibly become victims of human trafficking.

• (1350)

Fortunately, this government is doing things differently and is getting things done for Canadians. Under our legislation, ministerial instructions would provide the government a mechanism to protect applicants from abuse and exploitation that they might otherwise experience. I should point out that this legislation only creates the legal authority to issue instructions and does not create actual instructions or target specific occupations. Instead, it sets out areas of concern and offers a set of possible risk factors for officers to consider.

The amendments we propose would include strong measures to ensure that the government is accountable and transparent as it uses this new authority. Each time the minister issues instructions under the authority, there will be transparency, as they must be published in the *Canada Gazette*. Furthermore, they must be published in the department's annual report to Parliament. This will finally cast light on the shadowy approach of the previous Liberal government.

Additionally, any decision by an immigration officer to refuse a permit would require approval by a second and more senior immigration officer. Canadians do not want an immigration system that can be used to victimize or exploit people. The new authority would also help stop human trafficking by ensuring traffickers cannot exploit the hopes and dreams of those who are seeking a better life in Canada.

This legislation is the latest of our ongoing efforts to strengthen Canada's immigration system. As I have said, this government is committed to transparency by ensuring that any instructions used under this authority are included in the annual report to Parliament. We are committed to ensuring that Canada's immigration and refugee system continues to have a positive impact on our economy and our society. Everyone who enters Canada should have a fair chance to find what they are looking for: hope, safety and a new start.

I think it is important to note what the NDP has said respecting the issue of the previous Liberal government facilitating the sexual exploitation of temporary workers. Here is what the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre had to say about the previous government's record:

The door is still wide open for the type of wholesale exploitation that existed with the eastern European dancers, and, in reality, the minister of immigration is still pimping for the underworld...by providing an endless stream of fodder for the underworld of pornography and prostitution under the guise of legitimate dancing.

Regarding the Liberals' allowance of a visa for exotic dancers, the member for Winnipeg Centre also said:

I condemn the government for allowing this program to exist. I cannot believe how callous and uncaring it must be.

The leader of the NDP, commenting on the so-called exotic dancer program, said:

Now the government might not any longer be pimping for the sex industry and that is a good thing and it never should have been doing that in the first place.

Given the strong statements by the NDP, I would hope that the leader of the NDP and his caucus will vote in favour of Bill C-57. Surely the NDP recognizes that our government is taking necessary action to deal with this issue, which once again is something the previous Liberal government failed to do.

As for the Bloc Québécois, its former status of women critic said:

When a nation...gives out temporary visas for so-called artists who are generally headed for the male entertainment industry, do you think we are opening the door to trafficking?...I feel that this is a sort of somewhat disguised legal trafficking.

Also, the Bloc member for Chambly—Borduas said:

—we are wondering if there could actually be policies unwittingly promoting human trafficking.

—the gist of what the member for Winnipeg Centre said...was that when offshore labour is imported in response to a shortage...like in the case of bars looking for exotic dancers and importing them from Rumania or elsewhere, these individuals often get mixed up with organized crime.

—I am talking about the Canadian government, of course. Is it not contributing to getting individuals, in this case exotic dancers, mixed up with organized crime?

Members of the NDP, the Bloc and the Conservatives all previously raised concerns about the previous Liberal government's lack of action on affording protection to foreign workers subject to abuse and exploitation. I hope their previous comments are followed up with action by voting in favour Bill C-57.

• (1355)

Canadians do not want an immigration system that can be used to exploit people. They expect the government to take all necessary steps to deal with the problems associated with the exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers and the crime of human trafficking.

Bill C-57 is an important step toward that goal. I urge all members of this place to do the right thing and support this very important legislation.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to address Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which allows immigration officers to refuse to authorize foreign nationals to work in Canada.

I have to say at the outset that I believe this is an unusual proposal from the government. It is a strange piece of legislation. As proposed, the bill gives the minister discretionary authority to issue instructions allowing immigration officers to refuse foreign nationals work visas if they are seen to be at risk of being subjected to humiliating or degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation.

That is the basic premise of the legislation. It is discretionary to give the minister the opportunity to issue instructions, which would then be taken into consideration by a visa officer overseas when issuing a work visa.

The stated purpose of the act is as follows:

Statements by Members

The instructions shall prescribe public policy considerations that aim to protect foreign nationals who are at risk of being subjected to humiliating or degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation.

The bill does not provide instructions directly. It merely makes it possible for the minister to issue such instructions.

My question is about how this protects women in particular, women who might be subject to trafficking, since that was one of the stated goals of the legislation when it was presented by the government.

I would contend that we should never get to the point of having someone apply for a work visa if there is any evidence whatsoever that the workplace that wants to hire them is connected to trafficking, if the employer has any connection to trafficking, or if the work being done is degrading or humiliating. There is absolutely no reason to issue a work visa to someone if any of those conditions exist, yet the legislation does not address any of those conditions directly.

It seems to me that the appropriate place to stop this concern is at the point of the labour market opinion prepared by the Department of Human Resources and Social Development. A labour market opinion is required every time a foreign worker is sought to work here in Canada as a temporary foreign worker. How does a job vacancy that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration might find exploitative, degrading or humiliating get approved in that process? Surely the process of doing a survey of the workplace and the specific job is the appropriate place to make that determination.

Mr. Speaker, I will resume after question period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas will have about 17 minutes after question period to finish his remarks.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was honoured this past weekend to take part in the Canadian Cancer Society's Relay for Life in my hometown of Peterborough. I was joined by hundreds, if not thousands, of determined constituents who raised more than \$115,000 toward cancer research.

While we have made great progress in the fight against cancer, we have not yet won the war. Having lost my father, two uncles and an aunt to cancer, all well before their time, my commitment to the cure could not be stronger.

I salute all those who have survived cancer and carry on the fight for others. I salute those who have lost loved ones and continue to fight for the cure in their memory. I salute the Canadian Cancer Society for its tremendous contributions to research and care.

I commit, in memory of all who have lost their battle with cancer, to be an undaunted force in the fight for a cure. I will be at next year's Relay for Life, I hope, to compete for top fundraising team, as well as best campsite.

I congratulate Peterborough on the Relay for Life and for the great job it did.

* * *

• (1400)

[Translation]

THE TURKISH COMMUNITY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 28, 2007, I had the pleasure of attending the children's festival organized by the Turkish community in my riding, Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel. Also, last month, community leaders from Montreal's Turkish community centre organized an outdoor event for children and families. Both gatherings were hugely successful.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the Turkish community's exceptional degree of involvement in greater Montreal, in Quebec and in Canada, and their contribution to society.

This group and other associations also play a leading role in Canada-Turkey relations. They are an important cultural, academic, economic and political bridge between our two countries.

I would like to thank them for their contribution to Montreal and to the entire country.

* * *

THE 1995 REFERENDUM

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the wake of the Grenier report on Option Canada, federalists have once again scorned Quebec's laws and democracy.

Prince Edward Island recently elected a premier who, in a show of Canadian patriotism, committed fraud on the day of the 1995 referendum. In Lennoxville, not far from where I live, hundreds of students from all over Canada illegally placed their names on the list of voters so that they could vote "no". The new premier, Robert Ghiz, was one of them.

Now that I see what becomes of cheaters, I am prouder today than ever before to be a sovereignist. I am proud that as sovereignists, we are playing by the rules of democracy to get ourselves a country.

Enough is enough. That is why we are demanding a public inquiry into Option Canada.

* * *

[English]

TIANANMEN SQUARE

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, people around the world paused to remember the 18th anniversary of the massacre at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China.

From April to June in 1989, pro-democracy and labour activists, intellectuals and students gathered in a series of protests in the Beijing square. Eighteen years ago yesterday, on June 4 the military cracked down on protesters and several hundred to several thousand were killed.

Statements by Members

Recently I had the opportunity to travel to Beijing. For 10 minutes I stood in Tiananmen Square and paid homage to those who were killed, injured or imprisoned for something that we Canadians sometimes take for granted: freedom of speech.

It would be ideal if one could stand here today and say that there have been great improvements in respect for and promotion of human rights in China. Even as China prepares to open its doors to the world for the Beijing Olympics in the summer of 2008, its record is abysmal.

Falun Gong practitioners continue to be targeted and claims of organ harvesting are being investigated and corroborated by international investigators. Ethnic minorities, like the Uyghurs, continue to be persecuted. Canadian citizens, like Huseyin Celil, are kept in detention and denied their consular rights.

Before, during and after the Beijing games, the world will turn its attention on China in a way as never before. I would encourage the government to take every opportunity to engage in respectful dialogue with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

* * *

CRAFT BREWERS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, much of the world's best beer is brewed in Canada and some of Canada's best craft beers come from eastern Ontario, including my hometown of Carleton Place.

Canada's craft brewers are leading the revolution in value added production that has, in recent years, given our country: a host of artisanal cheeses, a growing range of organic and heirloom fruits and vegetables, world domination in ice wine and the invention of entirely new products, like cidre de glace.

It is in these value added products, rather than in the ever more efficient production of indistinguishable commodities, that our entrepreneurial future lies, whether it is the future of the family farm, of wine trails or of revived industrial neighbourhoods along the lines of Toronto's distillery district.

It is for this reason that last year's budget delivered long overdue tax relief to Canada's craft brewers. It is for this reason that I invite members from all parties to join me in my office today to sample some of eastern Ontario's best craft beers and to show their support for Canadian innovation, entrepreneurship and quality of the highest order.

* * *

● (1405)

AUTISM

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is regrettable that we have seen little action by the government toward implementing a national autism strategy.

It has been more than a year since I introduced Motion No. 172. My private member's motion called for evidence based standards,

innovative funding arrangements for diagnosis, treatment and research, and a national surveillance program.

The motion was adopted in good faith and supported by the government. However, it was very disappointing to see no reference to a national autism strategy in the recent budget or any discussion this spring.

Recently, I joined my colleagues from Charlottetown and Sackville—Eastern Shore and Senator Munson at a rally in Halifax that reinforced that there are families with autistic children across Canada who need the government's help.

The Conservatives should move off their default position of jurisdictional excuses, show creativity and compassion and start helping these Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FERNAND BOUDREAU

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Fernand Boudreau, a distinguished FTQ unionist and long time sovereigntist, president of the Montreal FTQ, commissioner representing workers at the Employment Insurance Commission in Ottawa, attentive husband, father and grandfather, considerate neighbour, involved citizen, and remarkable man, passed away on May 23. Everyone misses him and wants to express their admiration for him.

Following a stint as a baker, he became a dockworker at the port of Montreal in 1960. This is an interest he would come back to after taking on a number of different responsibilities.

He was active in the unions and the community and just as concerned about social housing and poverty as he was about the environment. He was a devoted sovereignty electioneer and was pleased to perform any task he was assigned. He was a sincere, devoted, generous, simple and great man. He survived leukemia thanks to a bone graft at the Maisonneuve-Rosemont hospital, but then succumbed to pneumonia.

Thank you, Fernand, for the example you set for us all.

* * *

[*English*]

TOURISM WEEK

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we are celebrating Tourism Week in Canada. We all know tourism is important to all regions of the country, employing over 634,000 people, nearly 4% of the total workforce. There are 160,000 businesses in Canada's tourism sector and most are small and medium size enterprises.

However, tourism's impact goes far beyond creating jobs and providing foreign exchange and revenue. It gives Canadians the chance to explore their heritage and celebrate their culture as they travel across the country. It strengthens Canada's brand and international profile.

Statements by Members

Canada's new government recognizes the importance of tourism and supports it through a variety of programs and services. Last year we spent over \$400 million on projects, programs and activities that have a direct and positive impact on the tourism sector.

We are dedicated to ensuring Canada's tourism industry remains vibrant and competitive and that is to the benefit of all Canadians.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, residents of Surrey are dismayed by the arrival of Paul Callow, the balcony rapist, in our community. Citizens are left with no choice but to accept into their midst a serial rapist deemed too dangerous for Ontario.

Last night, more than 1,000 people rallied at a local gym to express their outrage and seek answers from elected officials. People are scared. Even though the National Parole Board deemed Callow a high risk of reoffending, Canada's present laws left the government powerless to keep Callow behind bars.

Canada's new government is committed to making our streets safer by getting tough on criminals. That is why we introduced Bill C-27, which seeks to fix the dangerous offender process. Our amendments would place greater constraints on repeat offenders like Callow and help to ensure dangerous offenders who are not rehabilitated are kept behind bars indefinitely.

We must put aside our partisan differences and pass Bill C-27.

* * *

[Translation]

LA FRANCOPHONIE AND OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, francophone and Acadian communities are pleased today, but not because of this Conservative government's commitment. The Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages announced on Friday evening before 700 francophones that she wanted to consult yet again—no commitment, no highly anticipated word of encouragement for these communities.

Journalist Adrien Cantin summed it up well in *Le Droit* this morning, "What does a government do when it does not know what to do or has no intention of doing anything right away? It consults".

The community also received the leader of the Liberal Party, who did not disappoint. He made it clear that official languages would be promoted as a valuable resource and an opportunity for growth. He announced that a Liberal government would renew the action plan for official languages, invest in francophone community infrastructure, reinstate the court challenges program, double its annual budget and include linguistic clauses in federal-provincial agreements.

The choice became quite clear for the participants of this wonderful summit. The Liberal Party will always be there for them.

● (1410)

FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the media are talking about funding for the festival industry from the Government of Canada.

In spite of opposition from the Liberals and New Democrats to Budget 2007, we have announced an additional \$30 million, and we are now transparently establishing the framework and criteria for this new program, which will target small and medium events, and not just large festivals. It will be in place at the end of the summer.

In the meantime, our government is showing that its priority is to help communities celebrate arts and heritage, and not to fill Liberal coffers. For example, this year, the Festival international de jazz de Montréal will receive more than \$850,000, the Just for Laughs Festival will receive \$900,000, and the FrancoFolies de Montréal will receive more than \$375,000.

A number of festivals have been suffering for some years, because of the incompetence of the former Liberal government. One thing is sure, the Bloc will never be able to help them, but we want to and can take action.

* * *

[English]

TORONTO WATERFRONT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Trinity—Spadina in downtown Toronto is abuzz with great events and I am particularly proud of our waterfront community.

This Friday, the HTO Park, Toronto's first urban beach, will have a grand opening. This park is the first step in our waterfront transformation.

Ireland Park will open on June 21 and the president of Ireland will be in Toronto for the celebration. The sculptures and the park honour the 38,000 Irish immigrants who overcame unimaginable hardship and suffering and speak to the kindness and generosity of Canadians.

The Luminato, with *Pulse Front* and *L'Art Boat*, is at the Harbourfront Centre, a huge, creative arts festival that allows us to see the world in a new light. There is the great waterfront yard sale that raises funds for the residents association to enhance the neighbourhood.

I send a big thanks to the dedicated volunteers who made greatness happen. Jane Jacobs would be proud.

However, a dark cloud hangs over the waterfront. The Toronto Island Airport continues to create more pollution in what should be a beautiful neighbourhood and a cultural hot spot. When will the Conservatives take action and close the Island Airport so that all Canadians can enjoy Toronto's magnificent waterfront?

DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 25, 2005, royal assent was given to a bill that passed in the House and the other place. That law mandated the government to create a do not call registry, a registry that would finally permit Canadians to protect their names and numbers from telemarketers.

The minister of industry, who is now the Minister of International Trade, said at that time that it was a fair and cost effective way to deliver on something that the majority of Canadians wanted. Even the Canadian Marketing Association supported that bill.

It was a Liberal government listening to Canadians and acting. Sadly, under the Conservative government, nothing has been done to implement the registry, no political will has been shown and no money has been provided. The Conservatives have let this legislation wither causing countless Canadians to continue to suffer through unwanted and intrusive phone calls. Canadians deserve better.

On behalf of all Canadians, I ask the government to take action, follow the law, respect this House and get a do not call registry implemented now.

* * *

[Translation]

GUY LALIBERTÉ

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Guy Laliberté was named World Entrepreneur of the Year last Saturday in Monaco. He is the first Quebecker to receive such an honour and, by sheer coincidence, his fifth child was also born that same evening.

Once an accordionist, stilt-walker and fire-eater, Mr. Laliberté envisioned and staged a new conception of circus art that combines various cultures, and artistic and acrobatic disciplines. Since its inception in 1984, Cirque du Soleil has continued to grow and innovate, and to amaze spectators around the globe.

This award comes in addition to the Ordre national du Québec, the Order of Canada and the title of Grand Montréalais.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I am very proud to offer my congratulations to Guy Laliberté. This entrepreneur of the year award symbolizes Quebec's influence around the globe. His success is ours.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize the United Nations World Environment Day 2007. This is a day when Canadians join people around the world to mark their concern for the environment.

Appropriately, this year's theme is "Melting Ice—a Hot Topic", a problem exacerbated by global warming, which the Conservative government continues to ignore.

Oral Questions

Sadly, this World Environment Day, Canada is being represented at the G-8 meetings in Germany by a climate change denier. Even yesterday, the World Wildlife Fund singled out the Conservative government as having "taken up a policy stand, which puts it sharply at odds with its Kyoto obligations".

It is important for all of us as citizens and as parliamentarians to continue to raise awareness of the challenges facing our environment and to seek solutions to those challenges.

I encourage all Canadians to be active agents of sustainability and good environmental stewardship.

* * *

ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, June 3 to 8 is Canadian Environment Week and today is Environment Day worldwide. There are great opportunities to reflect on how the environment affects us all. As Canadians participate in various activities across our great land, I urge them to continue to protect our precious resources and natural wonders.

What better way to recognize Environment Week than to be on the global stage at the G-8 demonstrating to the world how seriously Canada takes the climate change challenge. After years of waiting, Canada finally has a concrete plan to significantly reduce smog and greenhouse gases.

Yesterday the Prime Minister and the German chancellor, as president of the European Union, signed an important agreement on a variety of issues, including climate change. We agree with the European Union to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by at least half by 2050.

The government is clearly taking responsible and effective action, both here at home and on the world stage to fight climate change. The Conservative Party has always been dedicated to clean air, clean land and clean water. We continue to demonstrate that commitment by taking action and getting the job done.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while out of the country, the Prime Minister is inventing things that do not exist. In Canada, we were not aware that we had a plan to reduce our absolute emissions by 50%, 60% or—why not—70% by 2050. The only plan we have claims that emissions will be reduced by a much lower rate and does not have provisions beyond 2014. According to all assessments, this plan will not achieve its very weak objectives.

What was the Prime Minister thinking when he proposed such a pale plan to the world?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising that the Leader of the Opposition thinks that a plan to reduce greenhouse gases is strange.

[*English*]

We do not think it is strange. We think it is important and it is what we should be doing. That is why we have a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country by 20% by the year 2020 and to have a long term commitment, which was reflected in our agreement with the joint declaration with the European Union yesterday, by 2050 of 50%, 60%, 70%, the kind of long term commitment to which all these countries have agreed.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): The sad thing, Mr. Speaker, is that this so-called plan is criticized from all sides. It is criticized from the Suzuki Foundation to the CEO of the Montreal Stock Exchange. It is criticized from the adviser to the governor of California to Al Gore.

The Pembina Institute said that this failed plan would deliver six to seven times less greenhouse gas reductions than the Liberals' project green, which the Prime Minister killed.

What was the Prime Minister thinking when he proposed such a pale plan to the world?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us start with the Liberal plan. The Liberal plan produced a very simple increase in greenhouse gas emissions of one-third over the targets. I do not know how the member gets six to seven times that. I hate to think what that is.

However, we have received positive reviews for our position. I will quote José Barroso, president of the European Commission, who has said that Canada and Europe agree on the need to act swiftly on climate change and step up the scale of our commitment to cut back greenhouse gas emissions:

—the EU and Canada underline the need for reducing global greenhouse gas emissions by at least half by 2050...To achieve these objectives, we are committed to work actively and constructively together...

We are taking action on this side for a change.

• (1420)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister figures that Germany has a plan. Canada had a plan in 2005, but the Conservatives killed it, and they have no plan now. The Deutsche Bank has denounced their plan. It has said that with Canada's plan, greenhouse gas emissions will go up not only until 2012, but beyond 2020, that the good plan they are proposing will not create an incentive for businesses to invest in new low carbon technology and that their plan drastically overstates the costs of complying with Kyoto.

Again, what did the Prime Minister have in mind?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was, but I did hear the hon. member say that the Liberals had a plan and we saw their plan in action. Their plan was to let greenhouse gases go through the roof to 33% above our targets, while they wined and dined, travelled the

world, talked the talk, loved to grandstand, but never delivered results.

Canadians do not want that kind of leadership. They want leadership that takes action and delivers real results on the reduction of greenhouse gases. That is what we are doing. That is what we are doing together with other countries. That is what we are trying to do at the G8+5 where we are going to try to engage other major emitters, which are not right now committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to do just that.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has declared that Canada is “on the same page” as Germany and France on climate change. That would only be true if we were talking about a joke book.

While Europe has denounced President Bush's call for a parallel process outside of Kyoto, the Prime Minister has called for a debate “over the best course of action...after the end of the Kyoto process in 2012”. However, Kyoto does not end in 2012.

If the Prime Minister is on the same page as Germany and France, why will he not join them in denouncing President Bush's effort to water down the final declaration of the G-8?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is kind of sad that the deputy leader of the Liberal Party has declared the joint declaration of Angela Merkel for the EU and Canada yesterday as a joke. It is not a joke. It is a serious commitment to reduce greenhouse gases among some countries that actually care and actually will do something about it. That is what Canada is doing now.

It is also a commitment to go beyond that to try to encourage other major greenhouse gas emitters, which we need to have included if we are to do positive things for the environment in the long term, and get them engaged in the process as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claimed yesterday that he supports a reduction in emissions to 50% below 1990 levels by 2050. However, he then stated that we are using intensity targets. Everyone knows that they would allow emissions to increase indefinitely.

If the Prime Minister is so committed to reducing emissions by 50%, why is he not denouncing American efforts to remove this commitment from the G-8 declaration?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not speaking out against things; we are speaking out for things. We are speaking out for a cleaner environment, for a better environment, for getting countries like the United States, India, Brazil and China involved in a commitment to reduce greenhouse gases.

Our commitment is an absolute commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% to 70%. It is nothing new. The hon. member said that it was nothing new and then he proceeded to analyze it by saying that it had intensity targets. I think he was thinking of the old Liberal plan that did rely on intensity targets for great emitters.

* * *

[Translation]

FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first it was the Government of Quebec and event organizers, and now the mayor of Quebec City, Andrée Boucher, and the mayor of Montreal, Gérald Tremblay, are calling on the federal government to immediately distribute the \$30 million earmarked for festivals.

When the survival of many festivals, both large and small, is at stake, will the Minister of Canadian Heritage finally distribute the money promised to the festivals, as everyone is asking? The festivals are on this summer, not this fall.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is already \$20 million in this year's budget for festivals. And there is an additional \$30 million in this budget. Many festivals will receive funding now. For example, there is the Montreal International Jazz Festival, the Just for Laughs Festival and the FrancoFolies de Montréal. The money is here now.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at a time when the dollar is steadily going up and is discouraging tourism, the festivals in Quebec represent a very important tourist attraction. The festivals cannot wait until the fall for funding.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage reverse her decision, as the government did on the summer career placements program?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we intend to stick with the \$20 million for festivals that is already there.

Furthermore, in budget 2007 we announced additional funding of \$60 million over two years. We are now in the process of establishing, in a transparent and accountable manner, the framework and criteria for this new program, which will target small and medium-sized events, not just the major festivals. Every festival with legitimate needs will receive funding.

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of ignoring Quebec, which is asking for a transfer of its share of the new funding for festivals, the minister must understand that the sponsorship program, which is making her a little paranoid, lined the pockets of middlemen, friends of the government, but did not make the festivals rich.

How can she refuse to provide the funding that is necessary for Quebec festivals to survive and grow?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many of the festivals have been going on for many years. I know they do bring benefit to Montreal and to

Quebec. In fact, that is why, in concert with my associate, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, we support all the festivals and activities in Quebec to a total of \$13 million this summer.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's request is not a fantasy, it is a reality.

After our film industry, museums, tours and the Canada Council, this means the end of a number of our festivals in Quebec.

Why is the Minister of Canadian Heritage so intent on gradually destroying culture, the arts and tourism in Quebec, given the substantial economic spinoffs they generate?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we look at the cultural and artistic community in Quebec and take pride in its successes and its unique artistry.

That is why we have continued our support. That is why we have given \$50 million to Canada Council and part of that will go to Quebec.

The other thing is that we sustain the television fund by \$100 million over two years. We have increased the funding for société Radio-Canada for two years by \$60 million.

We recognize the unique culture of Quebec.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's attempt to cancel the Atlantic accord is nothing more than a slap in the face for the working families in Atlantic Canada. It has got to stop and there is an opportunity for that to happen now.

Whether they are in Nova Scotia or in Newfoundland and Labrador, people are furious because they were given a promise and then what did they see? They see the government breaking its promise when it comes to the sharing of resource revenues and equalization.

All they are looking for is a little fairness. They simply want the government to honour the word it gave at election time.

Which will it be, will the government break its promise or will it amend its budget, which is what it should do?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are keeping our promise on the budget. Our budget delivers a lot of things for working families.

Oral Questions

In addition to protecting and fully meeting our commitment to respect the offshore accord, we are also providing things that are benefiting real families in Nova Scotia, the working families the hon. member just spoke about. There is the new \$2,000 child tax credit which will save Nova Scotia parents \$39.6 million. There is the working income tax benefit which will allow Nova Scotians to pocket \$17.8 million in tax relief.

Those are the benefits to the real working families in Nova Scotia that the leader of the NDP is against.

•(1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the child tax benefit, the Conservatives taxed half of it back. They grabbed it right back from those working families.

Things have become so bad that premiers are taking out advertisements against the Government of Canada. That is what is has come to.

We hear heckling from the members in the backbenches over there, but a lot of them are squirming because they are thinking about voting against the budget that their government put out. At least they have had a moment of reflection about whether they should honour the promise that they made to the voters during the last election.

If the Prime Minister is just going to break his word, will he at least let his members vote against the budget?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the NDP should take a moment to reflect on what he has been opposing in Bill C-52, the budget implementation bill. If we do not pass it by June 30, here are some things that would be put in jeopardy, almost \$3.9 billion in spending measures that would be lost if we do not pass it by June 30, tied to the previous fiscal year: \$612 million for the patient wait time guarantee trust would be lost; \$1.5 billion for clean air and climate change for the provinces would be lost; \$400 million for Canada Health Infoway would be lost; \$225 million for the Nature Conservancy of Canada would be lost.

We do not intend to vote against those things. We do not intend to lose things. We do not intend to change those things.

* * *

AFRICA

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the Gleneagles summit in 2005, G-8 leaders committed to double aid to Africa by 2010.

Appalling reports are coming out of Germany that our Prime Minister is actually blocking any specific financial commitment to Africa.

Estimates show that the government is putting in less than 20% of its commitment to the continent.

Why has the government offered only a fraction of the money needed to save lives and double aid to Africa?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what sources the hon. member is using. I can confirm that, yesterday, the Prime Minister clearly stated that we are on track to double our assistance to Africa by 2008-09.

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the information is from the government's own estimates. The Conservatives should look at it sometime.

According to Debt AIDS Trade Africa, the Canadian government is short 50% of being on track to double aid to Africa by 2010.

Why is the finance minister, who is the highest spending finance minister in Canada's history, willing to keep Canada's wallet welded shut when the hat gets passed around to save lives and double aid to Africa?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the opposition said they were against the budget before they even read it.

That said, this is where we stand right now in terms of our budget for Africa. Based on the figures released in 2005-06, we have reached \$1.7 billion, which is already over halfway to our goal of \$2.1 billion in 2008-09.

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to hitting international targets, Conservatives shun greenhouse gas reductions but have no qualms about giving us foreign aid reductions. Instead of a firm commitment to Africa, we are getting nothing but cookbooks, monopoly money and now international obstruction from this good for nothing Conservative government.

Bob Geldof said, "I think that's a shame for Canada to take that role." Why is the Prime Minister, this so-called leader, turning Canada into a G-8 reprobate?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I prefer to take the Prime Minister's word for it, particularly when it comes to statements made on the international scene. Here is a report released on June 1, 2007, by the G-8 research group from the University of Toronto and another research group from the University of Moscow. They congratulate Canada and state: "Canada has fully met its commitments in terms of debt relief to Africa and security".

•(1435)

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives do not understand is that nobody believes them anymore.

Oral Questions

Day after day they preach about real decisive action but they do not even have a clear plan of how they will achieve these targets.

Some leader. What is the government planning to do? We had a pledge of \$2.8 billion. It came up with \$2.1 billion. Why is the cupboard bare in the government's own estimates for aid to Africa?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. The baselines presented in budget 2005, that is, the previous government's budget, contained errors. The real baseline used at the G-8 summit at Gleneagles was in fact \$1.05 billion.

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FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Status of Women is still saying that the new festivals program will not be ready until the end of the summer. There are already two major events in my riding, the Festival international des rythmes du monde and the Festival Saint-Honoré dans l'vent, that are counting heavily on these grants.

Does the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Status of Women realize that through her stubborn refusal to transfer funds to the Quebec government, she is putting many festivals at risk in all the various regions?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated before, the festivals referred to, the large festivals in Montreal are receiving money and have been receiving money. This year they will receive the same amount of money.

In fact, the Just for Laughs Festival will be receiving \$1.2 million from the federal government and there will be \$825,000 for the Montreal jazz festival.

This program will be there to support all festivals in every province and territory across Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC CITY SUMMER FESTIVAL

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year the Festival d'été de Québec is celebrating its 40th anniversary. To mark this event, the festival submitted a special request to the Economic Development Agency of Canada—a request that was supported by the minister responsible for the Quebec City region. However, the organizers still have not heard anything, and the festival takes place in just a few weeks.

Will the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec follow the recommendation of his colleague from the Quebec City region and quickly accede to this request?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions

of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, my fellow minister and member for Quebec City never made any such recommendation. This flatly contradicts what the hon. member just said. Second, I would like to say that the Festival d'été de Québec is currently getting \$907,890 over three years. The Economic Development Agency of Canada does a tremendous amount for the various people who organize festivals all across Quebec. We help with the marketing as well as the renewal of the product. We are going to continue supporting these festivals. Currently we are giving them about \$7 million a year.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister keeps saying that we must take particular situations into account in implementing the Kyoto protocol because not all countries are starting at the same place. If there is one point on which we could agree, however, it is the reference year and the territorial approach.

If it is possible to adopt the country by country approach at the international level, what is there to prevent us from doing the same thing in Canada, so as to take into account the efforts made by Quebec and its manufacturing sector since 1990?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we signed an agreement with the European Union yesterday. It is an agreement that contains a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Angela Merkel, President of the European Union said that she was heartened by Canada's plans to bring down greenhouse gas emissions. Our approach has been well received.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's approach is more megatonnes of pollution and no fewer megatonnes of GHG emissions. That is the reality. Every group of ecologists and all of the opposition parties in the House are rightly calling for the resignation of the Minister of the Environment. The government has to understand that by failing to set absolute targets and a ceiling on prices for each tonne of CO², it is preventing the creation of a carbon exchange in Montréal.

Why is the government not applying in Canada what it is preaching on the international scene?

• (1440)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is well aware that we have a concrete plan for the ultimate reduction of greenhouse gases by 20% by 2020. We will be happy to discuss our plans with our G-8 and G-8 plus 5 counterparts to share that commitment with the other countries, in particular the big emitters like the United States, India and China. We must have commitments from all the big emitters in order to achieve success for the environment.

*Oral Questions***FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS**

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities believes that festivals contribute to the economic development of all regions and is therefore calling urgently for the money earmarked for festivals to be distributed. But the Conservative government and the Minister of Canadian Heritage are turning a deaf ear.

Why does the Minister not adopt the solution suggested to her and transfer the money earmarked for Quebec to her colleague at Canada Economic Development, who has a program for festivals and who would be able to deliver the funds this summer?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are two departments involved in assisting festivals: the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. At Canadian Heritage, \$60 million is on the way to assist festivals. The criteria are being developed and will be ready at the end of the summer. At Canada Economic Development, we give \$7 million to assist festivals every year. Again this year, there will be assistance for a number of festivals, not just the festivals in Montreal and Quebec City. I have a few here. The Festival du film de Mont-Tremblant will receive \$177,900 over three years and the Festival des rythmes du monde is receiving \$21,791 for 2006-2007. It continues like that.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has confirmed exactly what I said. Why does his colleague not transfer the \$30 million to him, since she is not capable of deciding on criteria at this time? Why does she not transfer the money to him? He has criteria and he has clear objectives. The festivals could have the money this summer. Why not honour the promise they made in the budget? Why not have an interim procedure for giving the festivals the money this summer? *[English]*

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response to the question is very simple. If there is a sincere support for festivals in Quebec, in Canada, if the member would like to see more support for festivals, I suggest she support the budget. There is going to be no increased funding for festivals unless the budget passes.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget bill is coming back to the House for a vote. Conservative members of Parliament and Progressive Conservative premiers agree that the budget guts the Atlantic accord for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Conservative MPs from these provinces know that supporting this betrayal would be akin to walking the political plank and some are getting cold feet.

Will the Minister of Finance deal with the growing problems over this budget betrayal and will he fully honour the intent of the Atlantic accord?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is very kind, especially coming from a Liberal member.

That is the party that is led by the current leader who said that there is no fiscal imbalance in Canada. The Liberal leader said in 2006 that “the fiscal imbalance is a myth”. Here is what he said in 2007:

Don't ask me to pretend there is a fiscal imbalance and elect me and (hope) I will fix it. I don't want to create these kinds of expectations.

We do not need any lessons from a party that does not even believe that there is a—

The Speaker: The hon. member for West Nova.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister did not hear the question.

A philosopher said, “figures lie and liars figure”. The people of the accord provinces know that his answer is a sham and so do their members of Parliament, regardless of political stripe.

I ask the minister again. Will he support those members of his caucus who have the courage to stand up for their constituents? Will he fully honour the intent and the letter of the Atlantic accord?

• (1445)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let the record show that everyone got up but Ralph.

The Speaker: Order. I am not sure who the Minister of Finance was referring to, but I suspect it might have been the hon. member for Wascana. If so, I know he would want to refer to him by that title rather than any other nomenclature. The hon. Minister of Finance will want to comply with the rules in every respect.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member from Nova Scotia raises the budget. This is the budget he is going to vote against. This is the budget the Liberal Party is going to vote against. Here is the announcement in the budget—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order, please. We have to be able to hear the answer the Minister of Finance is giving. He has the floor. I know he enjoys the applause, but we have to have some order, please.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member opposite from Nova Scotia is going to vote against an increase in funding for the province of Nova Scotia of \$313 million in 2007-08, more money for equalization, more money for health, more money for education, more money for labour market training, more money for infrastructure, and more money for a clean environment, all of which the member proposes to vote against.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal stalling on important government legislation continues. The Liberals want to delay passing the budget implementation bill which delivers the funding outlined in budget 2007.

Can the Minister of Finance tell this House and all Canadians what will happen to the year-end funding if passing of the budget is delayed?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I swear I heard that question earlier. •(1450)

The measures in the budget bill that the Liberals opposite propose to vote against include: \$1.5 billion for environmental measures through the ecotrust; \$600 million to support provinces and territories to put in place the wait times guarantee for health care; \$570 million to Ontario for post-secondary education; \$54 million for the Northwest Territories to cover payments relating to the previous formula arrangements; and environmentally, \$30 million to the Great Bear Rainforest and the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia. All of these fine measures we need to have—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the summer festival debacle is not the only area in which the Minister of Canadian Heritage has shown her incompetence.

In the most recent budget, she promised a new summer internship program for local museums. But once again, she has taken no action on this issue. There are no criteria, no forms, absolutely nothing to help museums.

Does the minister not know how to do her work? Does she need help, or does she not even care?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the apprenticeship program for museums is there. We are receiving applications for support to those museums and to the youth.

In fact, I find it very difficult to understand why the member keeps advocating, keeps blustering, about what is needed for festivals, for museums and for the arts. Yet, he is not supporting the budget and that is where the money is.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, supporting or not supporting the budget will not help our museums when we are dealing with an incompetent minister. The fact is that the money is not flowing to the museums' interests.

She had two simple jobs to do this spring. Number one was to get the money flowing to the festivals. Number two was to get the interim program up for museums.

Does she really think that, given her dismal performance, she is still going to be sitting around the cabinet table come this fall, or should she be getting her bags packed for the long, slow train back to Palookaville?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this is obviously typical of the NDP. The member does not understand what is responsible management of taxpayers' dollars. He does not recognize the fact that we must have a budget and a budget process with a vote so that people will support the budget. We will make sure that there is a government governing this country that will take care of tax dollars and ensure that they are used responsibly with accountability.

CORPORATE TAKEOVERS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that Gwyn Morgan is the Prime Minister's favourite business leader, if only because he threw a tantrum when Parliament rejected him for a job.

Last week Gwyn Morgan came out with a carbon copy of the Liberal proposal on foreign takeovers. So, here is the deal. If we promise never to call it a Liberal plan, will the finance minister atone for his terrible budget and come out in support of the Gwyn Morgan plan for a quick review of the Investment Canada Act?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the fact that since our government was elected there are more than 450,000 new jobs in Canada, that we have the lowest unemployment rate in 33 years, that we have the highest rate of labour participation in the history of Canada, and that we have reduced the public debt in this country in only 16 months at a record level.

That is what we have accomplished so far, unlike the member opposite who is not sure whether he wants to raise the GST again or not.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us just say that I have not had enough time to mess things up yet.

He is talking hypothetical from the *National Post*. Let us talk reality.

In reality, he raised the income tax of hard-working Canadians. In reality, his interest deductibility plan was so bad he had to rip it out of his budget. In reality, the experts called his feebate scheme stupid. In reality, his disastrous broken promise on income trusts has been ridiculed around the world.

How long can Canadians afford this out of his depth finance minister?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite obviously did not notice that in the month of May we had the highest new automobile sales in the history of Canada.

But let us go back to the member for Markham—Unionville's statement in Paris. He is from the party that said it would scrap the GST. Then last year he became the president of the save the GST club. Now, in Paris, not Paris, Ontario but Paris, France, he said he wanted to raise the GST. So, now he is the president of the raise the GST club over on that side of the House.

*Oral Questions***INCOME TRUSTS**

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tonight we vote on legislation which will destroy the hopes and savings of millions of Canadians. When the Conservatives and their NDP buddies support the taxing of income trusts, they will betray more than two million Canadians, many of them seniors, with a broken promise.

These victims have been asking the Minister of Finance for two things: proof that his crushing tax was necessary and some compassion. So far he has given none.

I ask him for the last time. With just a few hours left, will he release the data justifying this tax?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member for Halton talking about just a few hours left to keep a promise. Is it just a few hours? He has all the time he wants to keep his promise when he said, "I think anyone who crosses the floor should go back to the people for ratification". We were happy for him to have kept that promise a couple of months ago, but we will keep it tonight if he wants to keep it tonight.

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a profound sign of disrespect, not to me, I do not care, but to Canadians that the Minister of Finance will not even rise to answer this question.

He talks about pension splitting, but 70% of Canadians have no pension. He is taking \$25 billion from Canadians with income trusts.

I ask him one more time. What is the purpose of the government taking \$25 billion from seniors? Why should we be taxing the life out of them? Minister, withdraw.

• (1455)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is enjoying his cross-Canada campaign to provide for a tax free corporate sector in Canada. I know he thinks that companies should not pay taxes. We believe they should.

However, we also know what he thinks when he talks about respect for the voters and respect for Canadians. Here is what the member for Halton said on April 19, 2007, in the government operations and estimates committee, "No one cares what I campaigned on".

* * *

[Translation]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first we had the Quebec City chamber of commerce and then Mayor Boucher. Now the Conference Board is asking for a feasibility study for high-speed train service in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor, putting wind in the sails of the Bloc Québécois proposal.

Now that support is growing for high-speed train service for Quebec City, does the government intend to back the project by contributing financially to the feasibility study?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a marvellous comeback. What a reincarnation. Now the Bloc Québécois is the great defender of high-speed train service, not between Montreal, New York City and Quebec City, but between Quebec City and Montreal. You will recall that the Duceppe Express was to travel to New York City.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is strange because when talking about the high-speed train project between Calgary and Edmonton, the Harper Express, the Prime Minister calls it an interesting project; but when it is a question of rail service for the Quebec capital, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities says the Bloc is dreaming in technicolour.

Why does the government have one standard for the west and another for Quebec?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member speaks of a double standard. Poor Bloc Québécois, poor Bloc Québécois.

In the past 16 months, this side of the House has been able to steadily deal with several issues, including the fiscal imbalance, calmly and efficiently. In 17 years, our friends in the Bloc Québécois have not been able to do anything.

We will deal with issues as they arise.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's ideological attack on the Canadian Wheat Board is having a negative impact on our commercial reputation globally.

With the Canadian malting industry being the second largest exporter of malt in the world, the minister fails to respond to any requests for answers. The industry's president, in a letter, states his request "to highlight the significant contractual financial liabilities and consequences...that they may face through no fault of their own". The fault is the government's.

Why will the minister not respond to these questions?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course what we have done is listen to barley producers across the Prairies. They were consulted in a plebiscite. They came through. Over 60% of them say they want to have more marketing choice for their barley products.

What is really interesting is that not only is the hon. member for Malpeque ignoring the barley producers, but he is now taking the side of the multinational grain and malting companies, against the farmers.

Who is going to benefit come August 1? The farmers are. The farmers finally will get a decent price for their barley. They are finally going to make a buck.

Oral Questions

Let us have freedom of choice for barley producers and let us do it now.

* * *

[*Translation*]

WAGE EARNER PROTECTION PROGRAM ACT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 16 long months have gone by since all parties in this House unanimously passed Bill C-55, which received royal assent during the previous Parliament. Wage earner protection provisions will ensure that workers get paid if their employer goes bankrupt.

Can the Minister of Labour explain what has changed since all of the parties agreed to fast-track this bill and why hard-working Canadians and Quebecers still do not have this important protection?

● (1500)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. All parliamentarians unanimously voted for that bill. It was sent to the Senate. The Senate passed it with some technical amendments. We amended it accordingly. The Bloc Québécois members agreed to fast-track it, but they changed their minds, just like their leader recently changed his mind about going into provincial politics.

Today, they are still making amendments to delay the bill. They do not want to support workers, but we are asking for their cooperation to make this happen as soon as possible.

* * *

[*English*]

POVERTY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is National Hunger Awareness Day. The Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank reports that use is up for the seventh year in a row and it saw nearly one million people last year. Since 1989, the food bank has seen a 99% increase.

We know the reasons: lack of secure income, unstable work, low government benefits and lack of social supports such as child care and housing. This will never go away without a national game plan to fight poverty.

Ireland and the United Kingdom have had success. Will the government commit to showing leadership to fight poverty?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's commitment on this issue.

It is true that today more people have jobs than ever before, and that is a pretty important way to battle poverty, but this government has been very active in making sure that we provide services for people who need help, with a \$1.4 billion housing trust and, every year, \$1.8 billion devoted to affordable housing, as well as a \$270 million homelessness partnering strategy. We have improved employment insurance benefits. We have done a number of things because we know it is our obligation to help those who need help.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not hearing anything that sounds like a plan there. We need leadership from the minister, not empty words. The Daily Bread Food Bank director said:

It's not enough to know 'if' politicians support making poverty reduction a priority; we need to know 'how' they plan on doing it.

Over here we have a plan: a national housing strategy, quality child care, justice for first nations and equity for women. That is just a start. Will the government join us and commit to a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty or will we hear more empty words?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member has a plan, but we are acting. We have already delivered the universal child care benefit that goes to almost 1.5 million families on behalf of two million children.

The member mentions aboriginals. In the budget we doubled the funding for the aboriginal skills employment program, a program that is really working and is helping aboriginals on reserve get to work.

This is real action. I know the member wants to talk about it, but in the meantime we are going to get things done.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would now like to acknowledge for hon. members the 15th anniversary of the birth of CPAC, the Canadian Cable Public Affairs Channel.

First created in 1992 and made up of a consortium of 27 Canadian cable companies, CPAC's primary mandate was to broadcast House of Commons proceedings to millions of Canadian cable households at no cost to taxpayers or cable subscribers.

[*Translation*]

In 1996, the network was renamed the Cable Public Affairs Channel because of its expanded public affairs programming.

[*English*]

We have with us today in the gallery the members of the CPAC board, including its founder, Mr. Phil Lind. On behalf of all members, and indeed all Canadians, I would like to thank them and CPAC for their invaluable contribution to Canada's democratic process.

You will all have the opportunity to meet the members at the reception being held in honour of CPAC's anniversary in the East Block courtyard later this afternoon.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Point of Order

● (1505)

[Translation]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In replying to a question from his own party, the Minister of Labour made remarks about the evolution of steps taken to adopt the Act to establish the Wage Earner Protection Program Act, once known as Bill C-55.

In May 2005, the Liberals tabled Bill C-55 in this House. The bill had two elements. In one part, it created a wage earner protection program in the event of the bankruptcy of an employer and, in addition, it made amendments to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. The bill was adopted through a fast-track mechanism in the month of December 2005, on the eve of an election campaign. However, technical problems were later discovered. That is why, when the Conservatives were elected January 23, 2006, they asked for time to revise this bill and deal with the technical problems.

As a matter of fact, the Quebec Minister of Finance had raised a serious technical problem in a letter to the Minister of Industry. The Quebec Minister of Finance asserted that this government was intruding on Quebec's field of jurisdiction and was changing the Civil Code by making it possible that RRSPs could be seized in the future.

For the Bloc Québécois this was uncomfortable, to say the least, and definitely unacceptable. We therefore asked the Minister of Labour to table his bill so that we could, once and for all, do what had never yet been done, submit the bill to clause by clause review in committee.

The Minister of Labour refused to do so. He tabled notice of a Ways and Means motion on December 8. Tabling of the bill, in proper form, followed this notice of a Ways and Means motion. With the cooperation and good faith of the Bloc, matters might have proceeded smoothly. We would have been able to propose our amendment on the seizure of RRSPs and everyone would have been happy. I would not be standing here today to talk about this bill and the Minister of Labour would not be answering questions from members of his own party about why he is right and everyone else is wrong.

The Bloc Québécois is here to protect the interests of Quebec, and that is what it is doing. We also want to protect the interests of workers, and we are doing that too. The minister has refused to table his bill. He will only agree to table it if we agree to fast-track it, that is, if we go through first, second and third readings in one day with no amendments. That is blackmail, it is undemocratic, and it is unacceptable. We have to be able to amend bills that need it, and this bill needs it.

The minister said several times in the House that he wanted the Senate to do the work of members of Parliament, which is also unacceptable. Every time we asked, he told us that we would have to fast-track it, then send it to the Senate where they would study it thoroughly and make amendments. That is unacceptable. Members of Parliament are here to vote on bills, amend them, improve them and study them.

Mr. Yves Lessard: The Senate does not have a mandate from the people.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: As my colleague from Chambly—Borduas says, the Senate does not have a mandate from the people.

The Bloc Québécois wants to make one single amendment to this bill to prevent changes to Quebec's Civil Code. Changing Quebec's Civil Code is no small matter. The Code is Quebec, it is part of Quebec culture and the Quebec nation. As a nation, we have our own Civil Code and we do not want the federal government to change it unilaterally.

Once again, I would like to introduce a motion to adopt this bill at first, second and third readings immediately with the Bloc Québécois' amendment to ensure respect for Quebec's Civil Code. I ask for the unanimous consent of the House.

● (1510)

I would like to know if the opposition parties agree before the government speaks. I will read the amendment—

The Speaker: Yes, but we have already had a speech by the hon. member with regard to the motion.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: May I dispense with reading the motion again?

The Speaker: If it is the same motion as yesterday, there is no need to reread it. I can put it to before the House and see if there is unanimous consent to move the motion. Is it the same motion that was presented yesterday?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, it is the same motion that was presented yesterday.

Is there unanimous consent?

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to present this motion?

The Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to give a brief history of the issue raised today in order to speak to the motion that the member wishes to present.

The Speaker: It is difficult to debate a motion if it is not presented to the House.

Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of this House to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: A point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on a point of order.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be only fair, in the circumstances where you did allow the hon. member to go on for some 10 minutes discussing this matter, that at least the Minister of Labour be allowed an opportunity to briefly reply before indicating whether or not there is consent.

The Speaker: The member may have got away with more. I thought she was reading the motion and, of course, I was having a discussion. I regret that is the case but we cannot have debates because if we have one member replying, we will have a dozen members replying and we cannot have a debate on a motion that is not before the House.

As the hon. House leader is well aware, debates take place in the House on motions that are presented.

[Translation]

We now have a request for a motion. It is the same motion as that moved yesterday by the hon. member. I ask the House if there is unanimous consent to present the motion. If that is the case, we can debate the motion immediately.

Does the hon. member now have the unanimous consent of this House to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent.

[English]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to resume speaking to Bill C-57.

Before question period, I was saying that the appropriate place to stop someone coming to Canada to work in a degrading or humiliating workplace surely was at the labour market opinion stage where Human Resources and Social Development Canada puts forward an opinion about that workplace and that particular job.

Doing the survey of the workplace and the job would be the appropriate place to make the determination about whether it was an appropriate place to work and an appropriate job to do. The process should be ended before anyone even applies for a work visa overseas.

However, it seems to me that this has largely been accomplished. It is my understanding that the number of work visas issued

specifically for exotic dancers has already been dramatically reduced. My understanding of the statistic is that there were 423 such visas issued in 2004 but that last year, in 2006, that number was only 17. I do not believe there is a serious problem at this point. It seems that it has been largely addressed through existing programs and existing legislation. I do not believe, therefore, that this is serious attempt to deal with important issues of human trafficking.

It seems like now this is a rather minor program in terms of overseas workers and certainly a very minor attempt to deal with the important issue of human trafficking that exists here in Canada and around the world.

More than that, it feels like it is entirely a politically motivated piece of legislation. When the bill was first announced, it seemed like it was an opportunity to write the rather pejorative term “stripper” in a press release, to write it almost 10 times over the course of one press release and to drag up an old scandal that faced the previous government.

Rather than a serious attempt to deal with issue of human trafficking, I think this was a rather sad attempt by the Conservative government to drag up an old scandal of the Liberal government.

The stated goal of the bill is “to protect foreign nationals who are at risk of being subjected to humiliating or degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation”. In reality, it does nothing to accomplish that since all it would do is deny people a visa to come to Canada to work.

If they were under the influence of traffickers or unscrupulous people who were exploiting them for degrading or humiliating purposes, the bill would do nothing to remove them from that influence or from those circumstances. It merely denies them work visas to come to Canada. It leaves them in the clutches of the trafficker or the person doing this exploitation.

The bill does nothing to break trafficking rings. It does nothing to improve the situation of those people who seek this kind of work. It does nothing to address the working conditions in the sex industry in Canada or for exotic dancers in Canada or elsewhere. It does nothing to address their human rights. It does nothing to address flaws in criminal laws. It does nothing to address attitudes toward women in Canadian society.

The bill seems to say that there are some workplaces in Canada that are inappropriate for foreign workers but, because it does nothing to address the apparently serious problems of those workplaces, that it is all right for Canadians to work there. Surely this exposes the flawed approach of the government with this legislation. If this is an inappropriate workplace for a foreign worker, it should also be an inappropriate workplace for a Canadian worker, and this legislation does absolutely nothing to address that situation.

I believe that in some quarters there is hope that the bill might be able to improve it or amend it but, frankly, I am not optimistic about that but I will not slam the door shut on it. I believe this bill is likely to make it to committee and I will do my job there to see what comes before the committee in terms of amendments and improvements. However, it does not change my mind about the bill. I am still opposed to the bill before us but I will do my job when it comes before the committee.

Government Orders

Many of us believe that many foreign workers, including temporary foreign workers, agricultural workers and live-in caregivers, are exploited in Canadian workplaces. Those concerns have been expressed time and time again over many years without any action being taken on that exploitation that happens already here in Canada.

• (1515)

The concerns include: wages that are below the Canadian wage standard in many industries; employment standards such as hours of work; inappropriate accommodation; special charges; workplace safety; restrictions, such as the requirement that makes it impossible for a live-in caregiver to change employers; and temporary foreign workers inability to address permanent resident status and, ultimately, the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship.

Those concerns are all well-documented problems with our temporary worker program here in Canada. This bill, by seeking to only address a tiny piece of the problems facing temporary foreign workers, misses the point.

Many people believe that these concerns that have been expressed about other temporary worker programs amount to degrading and humiliating treatment because they are conditions that would be absolutely acceptable to Canadians working in those industries. It is no surprise that Canadians are often unwilling to work for instance in the agriculture industry because of some of the working conditions there. Canadians are unwilling to work as live-in caregivers because of the conditions of work that are in that profession.

The bill does nothing to address degrading and humiliating workplaces in Canada. If these workplaces are unacceptable destinations for foreign workers, they should also be unacceptable for Canadian workers.

For those reason, the NDP cannot support the legislation. We say that we should be focusing on the harm caused due to the problems of those workplaces. We should change the unacceptable conditions that plague these workplaces and these particular programs that temporary foreign workers face when they come to Canada.

Instead, what we are offered by the government in Bill C-57, I believe, is an attempt at moralistic legislation that bandies about the pejorative term strippers as a way of mobilizing support for something that I think is a very small piece of the problem. It is also paternalistic in that it seems to indicate that an immigration officer knows better than, for instance, the woman overseas who is applying to come to work in Canada.

If we had better employment standards and tougher requirements for employers who want to employ temporary foreign workers, the bill would be completely unnecessary.

I want to talk a bit about the report of the Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights with regard to Canada's solicitation laws. The report was called "The challenge of change: A study of Canada's criminal prostitution laws" and was tabled here in December of last year.

The report makes a recommendation on human trafficking. It was the second recommendation of the report and I would like to read

that into the record because I think it was a helpful intervention. It states:

The Subcommittee recommends that the Government of Canada ensure that the problem of trafficking in persons remains a priority so that victims are provided with adequate assistance and services, while traffickers are brought to justice.

Unfortunately, the bill before us today, which purports to deal with the issue of human trafficking, addresses none of that. It does not ensure that traffickers are brought to justice in Canada. In fact, it only prevents someone who the minister may feel might be subjected to trafficking, from escaping the clutches of that person in their country of origin. It also does nothing to improve the assistance that is available to victims.

We need to ensure we are identifying and prosecuting people who engage in human trafficking. Why are these people not being identified? If they are, why would any of them be able to have a job vacancy certified here in Canada?

The special committee on solicitation also made other recommendations. One of them was to ensure that police had the training resources that are necessary. They also talked about the need for a good understanding of prostitution and the sex industry in Canada.

The subcommittee's sixth unanimous recommendation was:

The Subcommittee recommends that the Department of Justice coordinate research on prostitution on a priority basis with other levels of government, institutions, and non-governmental organizations, as well as persons selling sexual services. This research should include an examination of best practices adopted in Canada and abroad.

• (1520)

What that recommendation goes to is the fact that we do not clearly understand the workings of the sex industry in Canada. We do not clearly understand what is the most helpful approach to prostitution and to the sex trade here in Canada and sex work here in Canada. The research is incomplete. We do not understand what sexual exploitation really means in our society. There is contradictory research on those issues.

The subcommittee on solicitation said that we must be clear, that we have to develop good public policy alternatives and that we need to do that work. Again, Bill C-57 does nothing to ensure that that work is undertaken, so that we come to a clearer understanding of that in Canadian society and here in Parliament.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women also recently tabled a report that made 33 recommendations on human trafficking and on trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. That report is, "Turning Outrage into Action To Address Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation in Canada". It was tabled in February 2007.

I realize there is some concern about some of the recommendations and about the thoroughness of the study that the committee was able to undertake, but it is very interesting to look at the report. I think there is a helpful discussion.

Government Orders

I note that in its over 58 pages not once does it suggest the course of action taken by the government in Bill C-57. Not once does it suggest that the way of addressing human trafficking is to deny visas overseas to people who might come to Canada to work in a degrading or humiliating workplace. Instead, it discusses anti-poverty measures but interestingly not in a global context, but which is surely an issue when we are dealing with international human trafficking.

That report also discusses gender equality, sexual exploitation, Criminal Code changes, sexual tourism, increasing awareness of trafficking, women in migration, immigration policies and regulation, the need for a Canadian counter-trafficking office, training for law enforcement officers, victims services and resources for the police.

Not once does it suggest denying visas to women who might potentially be trafficked. Instead it outlines a long and detailed agenda of many other issues which go to the heart of human trafficking in Canada and around the world.

Again, I have to say that Bill C-57 seems a very paltry contribution to the whole issue of human trafficking, especially given some of the recent work done by subcommittees and standing committees of the House of Commons.

I would contend that poverty is an issue when we are looking at human trafficking. Therefore, our foreign aid commitment is an issue.

Canada's determination to lead wealthy countries to address poverty is also an issue when we are trying to address the issue of human trafficking. If the economic situation of women and of all people worldwide improved, it would put a huge dent in trafficking and make it less attractive as a mechanism to escape poverty, a less attractive mechanism to finding a more hopeful future for some people and women around the world.

We should also be addressing immigration possibilities for women and ensure that women's success as independent applicants addresses the financial disadvantages that many women face in the immigration process. Again, there is nothing in Bill C-57 to address that kind of problem.

In fact, I would rather see a program that would help immigration officers overseas when someone has come to them to apply for a visa to escape either poverty or exploitation as a trafficked person. Those officers should have options available to them to ensure that something is done to protect the person and to ensure that the person is safe, that something is done to ensure that action is taken against the trafficker or the exploiter and something is done to help that person establish himself or herself successfully in his or her own country or even here in Canada.

It would be better to look at Criminal Code amendments here in Canada. Surely it is through the Criminal Code that we would deal with issues of trafficking and exploitation, and issues of humiliating and degrading work. Surely those are issues that demand Criminal Code attention and not just the action of an immigration officer overseas.

We also need to make sure that international agreements are promoted by Canada and upheld by Canada to ensure that human trafficking is addressed in those kinds of forums around the world.

• (1525)

Trafficking and sexual exploitation are serious issues that demand serious action. Unfortunately, this bill is not that action and we in this corner cannot support it.

We do not see it as a serious attempt to stop trafficking, to prevent people from being exploited in degrading or humiliating workplaces, or to address sexual exploitation. We have to address the workplace here in Canada, deal with the exploitative employer, deal with the work situation that causes someone, anyone, to be degraded or humiliated for whatever reason, not just sexual exploitation.

We need to deal with the flaws in the approval process that allow temporary foreign workers to come to Canada. How does an employer who operates a degrading or humiliating workplace get approval to seek temporary workers in the first place?

We need to deal with Canadian employment standards. If there are degrading and humiliating workplaces here in Canada, then they should be shut down, plain and simple. If a workplace is a legitimate workplace suitable for Canadians, then there should be no problem in allowing foreign workers to make a living there either.

That is the problem that must be solved. I think the bill misreads that problem and proposes no solution to that serious matter. Other organizations agree with that.

The Canadian Council for Refugees is the most widely respected organization working with immigrants and refugees in Canada and includes representatives of almost every refugee serving organization in the country. Its position on this legislation is particularly enlightening. The CCR says very clearly that Bill C-57 takes the wrong approach to the problem of trafficking. I want to quote from the council's press release where it says:

"This bill does nothing to protect the rights of trafficked persons already here in Canada," said Loly Rico, chair of the CCR's Anti-Trafficking Committee. "Worse, the bill takes a condescending, moralistic approach, empowering visa officers to decide which women should be kept out of Canada for their own good."

That points very clearly to a serious problem with the legislation. The Canadian Council for Refugees also goes on to talk about five other ways that it believes this is flawed and wrong legislation. The council points out that the bill fails to address the root problem of the existence in Canada of jobs that humiliate and degrade workers. The council believes that parliamentary time would be better spent to address the broader spectrum of the exploitation of non-citizens in Canada.

Government Orders

This is a very problematic piece of legislation. We in this corner of the House cannot support it because we do not believe that it gets to the heart of the issue, dealing with human trafficking, dealing with issues of exploitation in degrading or humiliating workplaces.

● (1530)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas for his very eloquent discussion on the problems with this piece of legislation.

The member highlighted a number of areas of concern. One is around the issue of what a safe workplace would be. I certainly know there are Canadians who are being exploited. I know the other house has a current study under way on the commercial sexual exploitation of aboriginal children. It is not just foreign workers who are subjected to that; Canadians are as well.

The question I really want to ask the member is about some of the larger problems with the temporary foreign worker program itself. The live-in caregiver program, for example, is an area where largely women are exploited on an ongoing basis.

In my own riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan currently there is a situation where a worker is with an employer who is exploiting her. The case is well documented. She is attempting to transfer to another employer, but it will take weeks for that to happen. She has to continue in that situation.

Could the member specifically talk about some of the mechanisms that need to be put in place to address some of the serious problems with the temporary foreign worker program?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, there is a problem with temporary worker programs here in Canada. Sadly, it is a long term and historical legacy of Canada. We all know about the problems that were experienced by Chinese workers who came to Canada to work on the railways and the lack of concern for their safety and well-being.

Sadly, I believe that legacy continues through to this day. We see it with agricultural workers in Canada who often work under very difficult conditions. We see it with agricultural workers facing racial discrimination. We saw very blatant racial discrimination recently in Quebec. We see it in terrible working conditions and living conditions for agricultural workers. We see it in limitations on their ability to change jobs.

We often see employers interfering in the basic human rights of temporary foreign workers by doing things like seizing passports and not allowing them access to their travel documents.

We also see that legacy in the example that the member gave of the live-in caregiver program, where a live-in caregiver is not able to change employers. It has been said in the past that those workers are often like an indentured servant to one particular family. They do not have the ability to change employers even if there are problems with the working conditions in that workplace.

The government has expanded and has speeded up the approval process for temporary foreign workers even though there are continuing problems. We have seen that recently with exploitative brokers, who charge foreign workers huge amounts of money to find them temporary positions here in Canada. We saw it with Chinese

workers in the tar sands who were recently killed on the job. There are concerns about safety standards in some workplaces and the ability to communicate appropriately with foreign workers who may not have English or French as their first language.

We have also seen it on the rapid transit project in Vancouver where workers were brought in offshore from Central America and South America. They were paid at a rate that initially was something like \$3.27 an hour, much below the minimum wage here in Canada.

Many of us are concerned that temporary foreign workers can be used as a way of driving down employment standards and wage standards here in Canada. The example of the temporary workers working on the rapid transit project in Vancouver certainly draws our attention to those specific problems and makes it patently obvious that that seemed to be what was going on there.

There are all kinds of problems with temporary foreign worker programs here in Canada. Sadly, this bill does nothing to address any of those very major concerns for any of those workers.

● (1535)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my good friend the member from the NDP who so eloquently put forward the facts about foreign workers. He spoke about people getting killed on the job. He has expressed those views in committee. We look forward to discussing undocumented workers in committee when we come back in the fall.

In committee there was a motion about having a moratorium on the deportation of undocumented workers. The surprising fact was that when I rose in the House last week to ask for unanimous consent to move this motion forward, the Conservatives were not in the House. This was a great opportunity. This was not a problem for the Liberals. This was not a problem for the Bloc. Who ran in to say there was not unanimous consent? The NDP member for Trinity—Spadina. We are talking about a pink champagne drinking socialist. We are talking about the people who pretend to back workers. If the NDP members really back the workers, if they really are for the workers, if they really do not want to have foreign workers mistreated, then they should have supported my unanimous consent request.

Mr. Peter Julian: You don't really like anybody do you?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, we started out well when the member described me as his good friend. It kind of went downhill from there, unfortunately.

I know the member tried to seek unanimous consent for that motion last week, but my understanding was that he did not do any negotiating ahead of time, so it took everybody by complete surprise.

Government Orders

The good news is the motion introduced at the committee, the report on stopping deportations of undocumented workers until a new policy was in place, a motion that New Democrats put forward, was approved and reported to the House. The member for Trinity—Spadina moved concurrence on that several weeks ago. It was debated in the House, and it will come to a vote tomorrow night.

Therefore, we will be able to see exactly who in the House supports ensuring that undocumented workers, who make a huge contribution to the Canadian economy and who are absolutely necessary to the functioning of the Canadian economy, can stay on the job. We will also see who is supporting their families being able to continue the important contributions they make to Canadian society. That opportunity is coming up tomorrow night.

The member for Trinity—Spadina has a very keen interest in the situation of undocumented workers. I know from her work in Toronto that she has been incredibly supportive of those people and has done a lot of work to recognize their contributions and the contributions of their families to Canadian society. I am glad she took that initiative. We will have the opportunity to act in the House on the recommendation put forward by the NDP.

• (1540)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to prevent vulnerable foreign workers, including strippers, from being exploited or abused.

I understand my New Democratic colleague has said it does not go far enough and he has given all kinds of examples, which I suppose he is free to do in committee. However, let us think what this stemmed from. The previous Liberal government gave blanket exemptions to foreign strippers to work in Canada, despite warnings that the women were vulnerable to forced prostitution and other forms of exploitation.

These amendments would give the authority to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to instruct immigration officials to deny work permits to foreign strippers.

Notwithstanding that my colleague says it does not go far enough, and he has the right to raise that in committee, what is wrong with that general principle?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with it is the job essentially has already been done. The initiatives were started by the previous government and are continued by the current government. As I said, back in 2004, 423 such permits were issued. Last year, there were only 17. The bill would really add nothing to the protection of foreign workers in Canada.

As the Canadian Council for Refugees said in its press release:

Only a handful of work permits have been issued to “exotic dancers” in recent years. Parliamentary time would be better used to address the broader problem of the exploitation of non-citizens in Canada.

Bill C-57 does not do it. It is a waste of our time. In this corner, we cannot support it for those reasons.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in this important debate on Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

First, I thank my colleague, the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, for having the foresight and integrity to propose this important and badly needed amendment. It takes courage to turn back the clock and go back to what spawned this whole issue.

We had a Liberal government in place for 13 years. It had a policy that allowed strippers, foreign nationals, to come into Canada under a blanket exemption. Canadians found this completely abhorrent, that we would allow foreign nationals to come into Canada where more often than not they were exploited sexually. Therefore, I really admire the minister's courage for having undertaken this very small but significant step.

A number of hon. members have already spoken about the need to protect foreign nationals, who may be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse through their application for temporary work permits in Canada. I commend those speakers for their participation and I am hopeful they will all support the legislation.

We just heard from members of the NDP. They do not support the legislation. They do not support putting up some safeguards to ensure that foreign nationals going into the stripping industry do not get into Canada. They would like to see them come into Canada first and then deal with the problem after the fact.

At first glance, this issue may appear to be quite simple to some. However, it is not that simple as there are many dimensions and perspectives which add to its overall complexity. This is evident by the number of stakeholders who are involved and affected by this matter. In fact, many of those stakeholders have appeared before various committees of the House. Naturally, each one has a different approach to a solution to the problem. However, I believe they all agree on one thing, and that is a comprehensive approach is needed to significantly reduce the risk of exploitation of foreign nationals, including exotic dancers who are seeking temporary work in Canada.

I believe Bill C-57 is the responsible, measured and accountable approach to the problem of sexual exploitation of foreign nationals and the whole issue of human trafficking, which I will get to in a moment.

As other members have already pointed out, a number of countries have adopted similar legislation to ours. If we talk to stakeholders who daily provide assistance and support to those who have been victimized, I believe we will find them agreeing with the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That partly addresses the comments we just heard from the members of the NDP, who suggest that we let them come into the country and then create all kinds of social programs to try to help them.

I urge those who have doubts about the legislation to talk to the ultimate stakeholders in this matter, the victims. Women and children who have been trafficked from around the world are being victimized time and time again.

Government Orders

I want to talk about a colleague of mine, the member of Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul, who has taken the whole issue of trafficking of human beings very personally. She even introduced in the House a motion which asked governments across Canada to move forward in addressing the whole issue of human trafficking. I was privileged to speak to that motion. Bill C-57 is simply one small but significant response to that cry for help from the victims of human trafficking. Kudos to the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for taking this issue on.

I had a chance to sit in on one of the meetings of the Status of Women committee. Numerous stakeholders involved in the whole issue of human trafficking provided testimony. Their stories really touched our hearts, people who have been victimized to their core and not only once, but time and time and time again.

● (1545)

What is interesting is the fact that not only are foreign nationals being trafficked into Canada. Canadians, usually Canadian girls and women who in some cases go into the modelling industry, end up going abroad to places like Milan. Suddenly they find themselves involved in the whole issue of sexual exploitation and are trafficked. It is very unfortunate. It is something that occurs around the world, and we have to address it immediately.

When I listen to the stories of the victims about how they were abused and exploited, I cannot understand how Canadians can not do something about it. It is unconscionable that we in Canada are not going to take some concrete steps to address this issue. If we were to ask the victims, if they would be willing to repeat their experiences, we know what their answer would be.

Bill C-57 would provide the government with the authority to save individuals from such a fate of victimization at the hands of human traffickers. It would also strengthen our ability to protect Canada's immigration system from being abused by traffickers and shady immigration consultants, those who know there are vulnerable victims around the world who can be abused, especially here in Canada.

Without the authority of this bill, a gap will continue to exist in the legislation that governs our immigration and visa system. That gap must be closed. I suggest that not doing anything about this problem would be abdicating our responsibility as government, as Canadians. That responsibility is to ensure the safety and security of all individuals within our borders and those who come to our borders.

I know some members may be concerned that such additional authority could lead to an abuse of power. An abuse of power on whom, the victims? More likely it will be the traffickers who are upset that we have interfered with their business. This is not an issue of abuse of power. We are dealing with pimps and human traffickers who abuse human beings.

In response to that allegation, the legislation once again proves that our new Conservative government is committed to being open, transparent and accountable when we bring forward legislation like this. We are being open in the sense that any denial of entry by foreign nationals must be based on clear public policy objectives and evidence that backs it up. We are also being transparent in that any decision by an immigration officer to refuse a work permit to a

foreign national would require the concurrence, in other words, the agreement, of a second officer.

Finally, the proposed legislation will introduce accountability, as well, in that the ministerial discretion to deny work permits would be published in the *Canada Gazette* and reported in the annual report to Parliament on immigration.

The days of the Liberals' strippergate scandal are over. Canadians were horrified when that scandal occurred. They asked how it could happen in a civilized country. Today we are closing the door on that.

To demonstrate our government's commitment to being open, transparent and accountable, I will quote immigration lawyer Richard Kurland. He said:

What is absolutely striking about the new government's approach, unlike the former government, the new government is going through the front door. I have never seen this in 15 years of immigration policy a very controversial plan that has [been] brought before Parliament. Normally, in years past, it was done behind the bureaucratic doors, or through a [fait accompli] regulation with no public debate. That's what's remarkable to day [for immigration policy].

Those are the words of Richard Kurland, a noted immigration lawyer. He made those comments on *The Verdict*, CTV Newsnet, May 16, 2007.

That was our commitment to openness and accountability, and that is exactly what the bill will do. Canadians know what they are getting from a new Conservative government.

● (1550)

Some of my colleagues have already referred to positive and supportive remarks made by representatives of several stakeholder organizations. In many cases they represent those organizations that actually intervene on behalf of the victims of human trafficking. They intervene on behalf of those foreign nationals who, one way or another, come into Canada and are now being exploited sexually.

I would like to reiterate the support we have received from key stakeholders concerned with the very important issue of human trafficking. For example, Irena Soltys, who is the co-chair of the Stop the Trafficking Coalition, said the following:

Stop the Trafficking Coalition supports [the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's] announcement regarding changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to protect vulnerable workers. Included in this are women that may be exploited as exotic dancers and forced to work as sex slaves...Canada, as an international human rights leader, owes them the protection they are entitled to.

Sabrina Sullivan of the Future Group said:

—[the] Immigration Minister has taken an important step to protect women from sexual exploitation and end a program that made Canada complicit in human trafficking. It is clear that [the Prime Minister's] government is serious about combating human trafficking.

John Muise, director of public safety for the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness said that Bill C-57 was "part of the response that needs to occur in terms of protecting women and children in this country". That was from CTV Newsnet's *The Verdict* of May 16, just this past month.

Then, of course, we have the Salvation Army, which also welcomed the May 16 announcement of these proposed amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Christine MacMillan, territorial commander of the Salvation Army in Canada and Bermuda, said:

This announcement is an excellent advancement towards the protection of women from sexual exploitation. It is another positive step in the fight against human trafficking, and we are encouraged by the leadership shown by the Federal Government.

That is from no less an organization than the Salvation Army. I think all of us in this House can agree that the Salvation Army has spent not only decades but a couple of centuries addressing the issues of human poverty, of addiction, and of people who are in deep distress and need and in many cases are being exploited. The Salvation Army supports our legislation, Bill C-57.

It is interesting that even some in the adult entertainment industry support this bill. They are the ones who are mostly likely to be hurt by this. They may have fewer resources available, at least initially, to be able to carry on their business, but some of their members have actually expressed support with what we are moving forward with, which is to address the root causes and the issues that arise out of human trafficking around the world. As Canadians, we do not want to be complicit in assisting human traffickers to ply their trade in our country.

It is clear from the support of these key stakeholders that this legislation is not only important but essential to help deal with the very serious problems associated with the abuse and exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers.

Canada's government is taking real action to help prevent the exploitation of women and children, while protecting other foreign workers who could be subject to the same kind of abuse and exploitation here in Canada at the hands of our own traffickers.

Facilitating human trafficking by permitting foreign strippers into the country, regardless of whether they could be potential victims of abuse, is not acceptable. In Canada we do things differently. We respect human rights.

Canadians are justifiably proud of our worldwide reputation for fairness. It is unacceptable to allow the situations of exploitation that existed under the previous Liberal regime to continue.

I am pleased to hear that the Liberal and Bloc members apparently have seen fit to support our legislation, although some of the comments from the Liberal benches are really paying lip service to this bill.

An hon. member: The bill is too skimpy.

Mr. Ed Fast: The member across the way says the bill is too skimpy. It is one small but significant step in the right direction. The bill does exactly what the motion of my colleague from Winnipeg did, which was to ask this House and governments across Canada to support efforts to stop the trade of human trafficking.

• (1555)

Unfortunately, we have heard the NDP speak out against the legislation. The member for Vancouver East and the member for Burnaby—Douglas have spoken out against it. That is unfortunate. I would ask NDP members how they square their current position with the previous commitments of their own NDP colleagues such as, for example, the member for Winnipeg Centre, and even their own leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth. I would like to quote those members. It is instructive.

Government Orders

For example, the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre said the following about the appalling record of the former Liberal government:

The door is still wide open for the type of wholesale exploitation that existed with the eastern European dancers, and in reality the minister of immigration is still pimping for the underworld.

He went on to say:

Five successive ministers of immigration have been pimping for the underworld by providing an endless stream of fodder for the underworld of pornography and prostitution under the guise of legitimate dancing.

Whose comments were those? They were from the NDP's own member, in the *Winnipeg Sun* of October 30, 2005.

With respect to the previous Liberal government's allowance of a visa for exotic dancers, this blanket exemption, the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre also said:

I condemn the government for allowing this program to exist. I cannot believe how callous and uncaring it must be.

That is pretty categorical, I would suggest, coming from an NDP member.

Even the leader of the NDP, the member for Toronto—Danforth, said the following about the so-called exotic dancer program that resulted, of course, in the Liberal strippergate scandal:

Now the government might not any longer be pimping for the sex industry, and that is a good thing, and it never should have been doing that in the first place.

In light of these previous statements by the leader of the NDP and the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre, I am very disappointed and quite surprised that the NDP now has chosen to oppose Bill C-57. That is shameful. How can they flip-flop like that?

I would ask the NDP to reconsider its position, recognizing that our Conservative government is taking real and necessary action to deal with this important issue, which is something the previous government failed to do.

I appreciate having the time to share my feelings on this issue with my colleagues here in the House. I strongly support Bill C-57 and I know that my government does. I know that members from some of the opposition parties do as well. As for those members of this House who still do not support it, I ask them to reconsider.

We as Canadians take pride in protecting the most vulnerable in our society, our children, the disabled and, yes, foreign workers who are being trafficked around the world, who want to come into Canada and ply their trade here.

Let us make sure this does not happen. I urge all members to do the right thing and support quick passage of Bill C-57.

• (1600)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my comment and question are for the member for Abbotsford. The reality is that the problem has to a large extent been solved and there are quite a few problems with this proposal.

However, since the member is from Abbotsford, let me say that dealing with issues like this really takes oxygen and the time of the House away from issues such as those he should have some concerns about given his moralistic stance.

Government Orders

This relates to the Mennonites. Approximately 50,000 Mennonites went from Canada to Mexico. The position of his government on this particular issue, which I hope he has a chance to influence, is that the Mennonites who went to Mexico had religious marriages and church weddings. Many of the Mennonites did not have a civil ceremony in Mexico. The situation is that derivative citizenship, which affects tens of thousands of them, is not passed on to the offspring of Mennonites who had a church wedding but failed to have a civil ceremony.

The Conservative government has indicated that it is going to be dealing with issues related to lost Canadians. Mennonites fall into a category, but the government has said that in dealing with the problem of lost Canadians it is not going to deal with the problems of Mennonites who lose derivative citizenship because they did not have a civil ceremony while they had a religious ceremony.

I know that the member comes from an area that has a fair number of Mennonites. I would like to ask him what is he going to do to get his government, supposedly the champion of religious institutions, to stop discriminating against religious marriages, which affects approximately 50,000 Mennonites with regard to their derivative citizenship.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for recognizing the Mennonites and the role they play in Canada. I happen to be a Mennonite. I do not know if the member knew that, but I am. I understand very well the issue of the Mennonites who left Canada and went to Mexico. I understand this particular issue.

Unfortunately, the member mischaracterized our government's position on this. It is unfortunate that he is trying to introduce that issue into something that is quite different, which is the trafficking of human beings into Canada, which is of course in Bill C-57.

What is even more disappointing in the member's question is that he refers to the debate we are having in the House today on the trafficking of human beings into Canada as taking oxygen and time away from the House, as if the issue of human trafficking is insignificant and not worthy of the House's consideration.

I think the member is going to have to reconsider those comments. I do not believe that is what he intended to say, but we have to clarify that point. Today's bill addresses the issue of trafficking human beings from other countries into Canada and then those trafficked victims being exploited in Canada. The bill addresses that. We as a government are getting things done.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to my colleague that he may have gone too far in his attack on the member for Kitchener—Waterloo. My colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo makes a non-partisan contribution to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and what he was saying was completely accurate.

I would like to ask the member who had the floor about Canada's existing legislation against trafficking. Can he explain what provisions for trafficking already exist in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and in the Criminal Code? Could he explain what is not working and what the new bill would accomplish? I

would also like him to explain why Canada has still not ratified the migrant worker convention, which would ensure that the rights of workers are better protected.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, this bill, of course, is not a migrant worker bill. This bill actually closes a loophole or a gap in our laws that address the issue of temporary worker visas for those who come from other countries.

Under the current legislation, which was not changed by the previous government to close this particular loophole, the minister has a positive discretion to allow people to come into Canada. What is not in the legislation right now is a negative discretion, and I believe the member knows that.

We are trying to specifically address the plight of those who are being exploited right within Canada. We as a government made a commitment not only legislatively but financially in our last budget to address the issue of human trafficking within Canada. We can only do so much within Canada. What we can do, we are going to do.

We are going to follow through with it because there are people in Canada from around the world who may find themselves in poverty, in difficult circumstances, who human traffickers can get their claws into. There are a few countries around the world who will pay a lot of money to have these victims brought into their country where they will be exploited.

I have yet to find one Canadian who, when the bare facts are laid out and there are no politics at play, will say they do not want this to happen. I would venture to say that most sensible Canadians support this legislation. They do not accept human trafficking in Canada and they want us as a government to do everything possible to fulfill the commitment that we made to address this scourge across our country.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue on the line of questioning that the member was just addressing and that is the international realm of this problem.

We all know, of course, that human trafficking is a problem not only in this country but in other countries as well. I am reading a report that has to do with organ harvesting and it is somewhat of a grizzly situation that we are encountering. The efforts to combat it are working internationally.

My question to the member is this. How would this type of legislation be helpful to other countries? How would this possibly send a message to other countries that are dealing with the same problems and are possibly even involved in human trafficking? How can we send a message that this is going to stop and that Canada is going to be at the forefront of that direction?

•(1610)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question because he raised an issue that I was hoping to raise in my initial speech but did not get around to it because of time constraints.

Government Orders

My colleague is right. Canada has an opportunity to be perhaps a beacon of hope around the world. In fact, we are known around the world as being one of the great defenders of human rights. Our Prime Minister has gone out on a limb to defend human rights around the world. People around the world are taking note of that.

Foreign workers are being brought into Canada in an attempt to exploit them through a so-called legal process. When other countries take note of what Canada is doing in the way of stopping this, they are going to say that Canada is doing something right. They are going to say that we are standing up for human rights and protecting the most vulnerable in our society. They are going to say that Canada is sending a message for them to do the same thing.

This is a good news bill. We are sending a strong message to the rest of the world that we are going to be a beacon of hope.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join in this debate.

Let me say that at the citizenship and immigration committee there has been a real lack of legislation coming to us from the government.

We recently dealt with Bill C-14, the international adoption bill. Even though the government made a lot of hay about recycling a bill that was before the House under the Liberal government, it has held it up for well over a year. We have very few bills coming before us in committee. The committee, nevertheless, has been spending a great deal of time dealing with very serious issues that need to be addressed.

The bill that is before us today is probably the least serious of something like over a dozen issues that we have identified as a priority. We are disappointed that we are essentially dealing with a bill, the political theatrics of which tries to delve into a problem that for the most part has been solved. We are also concerned about the moralistic tone it takes on.

If the government wants to speak in code to its supporters and say it is against strippers, I would suggest that it introduce a bill in the House to amend the Criminal Code and put forward that amendment. It should not try to be moralistic with back door bills to try to solve a problem which, for the most part, has been solved as far as it pertains to strippers being able to come into this country.

I want talk about some of the other issues that we have been dealing with. We have been dealing with undocumented workers. This has been raised in debate. It is a problem that has been before the government and the government has chosen to ignore it.

When we deal with the issue of undocumented workers, instead of 10 visas that might have been granted in 2005 for strippers, exotic dancers coming into the country, we are talking between 200,000 and 500,000 people who are working in the underground economy because of the dysfunctional nature of our current points system that determines who gets to come to Canada.

I say it is dysfunctional. We need people in the building trades. They cannot get in under the points system. There are many other occupations in which we have a shortage right across the country, and those people cannot come to Canada under the points system.

We heard talk about agricultural workers. It was not too long ago, up around Abbotsford, where the previous speaker comes from, where we heard about members of the Indo-Canadian community getting killed, not on the work site but getting to the work site. It shows us to the extent that agricultural foreign workers are not protected.

We heard about the challenges for live-in caregivers, their working conditions, and how they are virtually indentured to work for an employer. We do not have regulators. We do not have inspectors checking out their working conditions.

We hear about employers being charged every once in a while in very spectacular cases, but the reality is that we are not doing enough to ensure that those people are protected.

● (1615)

Getting back to this bill and getting back to my challenge in terms of talking about stopping strippers coming into this country and using the Criminal Code to outlaw stripping, if it is unacceptable for foreign workers, surely it would be unacceptable to Canadian workers. I do not think the government really has addressed that.

Luckily, I have checked the media and this bill received the kind of coverage that it deserved. For the most part, most major media have dealt with the bill as a political bill, a moralistic bill, and really quite a joke.

The Canadian Council for Refugees says the bill does not address the issue of dealing with trafficking in human beings. As a matter of fact, it falls far short. It essentially says:

The government's focus on "strippers" betrays a moralistic approach. Instead of passing moral judgment, the government should work on ensuring that non-citizens' rights are protected and that they have the freedom to make informed choices about their own lives.

The bill fails to address the root problem of the existence in Canada of jobs that humiliate and degrade workers. Work permits can only be issued by visa officers after the employer's job offer has been validated by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). Why is such work available in Canada if it humiliates and degrades workers?

If Conservatives really believe what they are trying to do, I say to them to pick up my challenge and come in with a bill that addresses that particular industry.

I mentioned there are many issues we have been dealing with at committee and one of the issues was lost Canadians. I drew particular attention to what is happening to the Mennonites in terms of their derivative citizenship. I find it rather sad that a party opposite which has the member for Abbotsford, who is a Mennonite, the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park as well as the President of the Treasury Board, that they have not brought the plight of the Mennonites to their caucus. They have not had their government make any changes that are so very necessary.

As I said before, the basis of denying derivative citizenship to Mennonites who move from Canada to Mexico is solely on the fact that these folks, with a church wedding, failed to have a civil wedding. Can members believe that? People get married in a church in Mexico and their marriages are not recognized by the government and we deem their offspring to be born out of wedlock.

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That is a terrible smear to put on the Mennonites. I really hope that those members, who I have named, will speak up in their caucus and make this a priority issue because it is having an impact, not just on one, two, three or 10 families, but it is having an impact on thousands of people in this country as well as tens of thousands of people who are being denied their rightful derivative citizenship in Mexico. They have ties to Canada but they are told they were born out of wedlock and therefore, they are not entitled to Canadian citizenship.

• (1620)

The other group we dealt with, a group that is of great concern to me, particularly when the government talks about supporting our troops, was a group of war brides and their children. For those who do not know who they are, they are the wives our Canadian soldiers met overseas in Holland, England or someplace in Europe when they were fighting for this country in the second world war. We had just under 70,000 war brides and their children's citizenship is at risk, particularly if a child was born out of wedlock.

While the government promised that it would bring in amendments, those amendments do not apply to these folks. It is not going to apply to Canadian veterans of the second world war who we have been honouring as a nation because the government does not see it as a priority.

At the citizenship and immigration committee we listened to heart-wrenching stories about how people are fighting for their birthrights because they have found out, after living in this country for over 60 years, that they are not citizens and the government refuses to move on that and to change the legislation.

I spoke in the House about Joe Taylor, the son of a Canadian veteran who went to Europe to defend this country and help defend western civilization. He met his girlfriend in England. They were involved and she became pregnant. When Joe Taylor Senior went to his commanding officer to ask for permission to marry, his commanding officer said no because he was going to France to fight and that Canadians did not want to be responsible for widows.

Mr. Joe Taylor Senior went to France and fought but after the war, luckily, he went back to England, married his wife and brought her and their son to Canada. However, because Joe Taylor Junior was born out of wedlock, the government refuses to recognize his citizenship.

Joe Taylor Junior took the refusal of the government to court and, on September 1 of last year, Justice Luc Martineau ordered the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to give Mr. Joe Taylor his citizenship. The judge said that the ground cited by the government that he was born out of wedlock contravened section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The fact that there was an obscure regulation that a person had to apply to retain citizenship if born out of the country, violated section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is the section on fundamental rights.

What did the government do, the supposed defender of our soldiers? On September 26 the government withdrew the court intervenor program, which the House dealt with.

• (1625)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, I have a tremendously high regard for the member and I know he is very passionate about the things of which he is speaking, but I am wondering if there is relevance to the bill that is under debate at this point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member for his point of order and I am sure the hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo will come back to the topic under discussion. While I am at it, I would advise the hon. member that there are five and a half minutes left in his time.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, if the member were here for the earlier part of my speech he would know that I was talking about some of the important work we have been doing in the committee, how we rank them in priorities and that this legislation would not have made our priority list in terms of what we see as important to get done.

In any event, the government got rid of the court intervenor funding program that allows Canadians to access justice based on the merit of their case and not the size of their pocketbook.

After the government got rid of the program, it turned around and appealed the decision. In appealing the decision, when it asked for an injunction against the court order it also told the court that if it were to lose at the Federal Court of Appeal that it would take it to the Supreme Court.

For the average Canadian to get to the Supreme Court has crippling costs as they relate to having to pay the legal fees. In terms of trying to bring in legislation that has relevance and could unite Canadians, we have a piece of legislation that must have been co-authored by Jimmy Swaggart and plays to a moralistic base.

We will be dealing with this bill before us in committee but I want to alert members on some of the important issues that we are dealing with, and will be dealing with in committee, and that relate to the lost Canadians.

A book entitled *Voices of the Left Behind*, is a particularly good book dealing with children overseas who are now in their 60s whose fathers were Canadian soldiers. One case that is of particular interest is the case of Mr. Willy Van Ee who is the only status Indian in Holland. He has his recognition as a status Indian but he does not have Canadian citizenship.

If we want to deal with issues pertaining to trafficking in human beings, what we should be doing is taking very seriously the proposals brought out by the Canadian Council for Refugees. If that is the intent of the legislation, it does not do it.

In spite of all the rhetoric that we get from the government side, this legislation does not address those issues. As I read into the record as to what the Canadian Council for Refugees had to say, it will be one of the important groups that will be coming before the committee to give us input on this particular legislation.

In wrapping up I make a plea to the government side to try to bring in legislation that is immediate, that has priority and that has relevance. Also, if the government wants to be moralistic, it should amend the Criminal Code and bring it before the House, instead of trying to do through the back door what it cannot do through the front door.

As I said, the bill will come to committee and, as the parliamentary secretary will attest, the committee works diligently on all bills that are brought before it and we look forward to much relevant legislation coming to our committee where we can make meaningful changes to the operation of both the Canadian Citizenship Act and the Immigration Act because they are very much needed.

• (1630)

We look forward to much relevant legislation coming to our committee and that we can make meaningful changes to the operation of both the Citizenship Act and the Immigration Act because it is very much needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 West Nova, Afghanistan; the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Saint Hubert Airport.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the member speaking with respect to what should have been this bill but he talked pretty much about everything else except this particular bill.

I think it is a diversionary tactic in some measure but I cannot help but mention, with respect to the lost Canadians, that while the previous government was in office for 13 years, and while he was there as a parliamentary secretary and chair of the committee, none of these problems he raised were addressed. For the first time, they are being addressed by our minister in a constructive way and continue to be addressed with proposed legislation.

I just want to quote what some people had to say. Mr. Chapman said, “Obviously there are a lot of things in there that please me. Overall it’s a wonderful start. This is a jump forward”.

Another person with whom the member will be familiar, Charles Bosdet, said, “It’s the most extensive proposal by far of anything that I know of proposed for the Citizenship Act in the last few years short of actually rewriting the entire Citizenship Act”.

I find it quite interesting that he would think that the legislation before us is a joke. Certainly the previous government permitted foreign strippers into the country regardless of whether they could be potential victims of abuse or exploitation.

I wonder what the member has against legislation that is aimed at preventing temporary foreign workers from being abused, sexually exploited or becoming victims of human trafficking. How dare he say that it is not a significant issue of importance. Many groups have indicated that this type of legislation is long overdue.

Sabrina Sullivan of The Future Group said:

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Immigration Minister...has taken an important step to protect women from sexual exploitation and end a program that made Canada complicit in human trafficking.

It is clear that [the] Prime Minister[s] government is serious about combating human trafficking.

She called the exotic dancer program, which existed in the previous government since its inception, “an international beacon of exploitation that eased the way for human trafficking of vulnerable young women”.

The member for Winnipeg Centre said that the door was wide open for this type of wholesale exploitation that existed with eastern European dancers. He said that in reality the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration was still pimping for the underworld and that it was five successive ministers in the previous government.

How dare he say that this is not an important issue to those who are vulnerable and that it should not be addressed?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I wish the parliamentary secretary had heard my whole speech where I essentially said that the problem has largely been solved. It has been quite properly ridiculed in the media for the political nature of what it is trying to do.

As I mentioned, in 2005 the number of strippers coming into Canada was down to 10. It therefore is certainly not the raging problem that the member wants to talk about. If he is looking for a Conservative connection, let me refer him to his previous government, the Conservatives under Barbara McDougall. The problem was much greater but the reality is that the previous Liberal government, for the most part, solved the problem.

As the Council for Refugees would say, the government's focus on strippers betrays a moralistic approach. Instead of passing moral judgment, the government should work on ensuring that non-citizens' rights are protected and that they have the freedom to make informed choices about their lives.

In terms of his reference to the lost Canadians, both the present minister and the previous minister, since they came into office, had no intention of doing anything. The reason they are doing something is because the committee brought in people to talk about their problems and the heat became too much.

I am very pleased that the government has responded but it still falls short and that is what is very important. It falls short in the case of the Mennonites and it falls short in the case of the war brides and their children. The government is dishonouring, by its lack of action, the service that our men and women rendered to this country when they put their lives on the line in the second world war.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to make a comment, if I may.

There is literature available on human trafficking, on international crime in particular, that presents every kind of trafficking in the world and a portrait of the victims of these crimes. It also explains the pros and cons of the various measures on trafficking taken by different governments.

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It is important to note that prevention programs, like the ones the Conservative government is getting ready to announce, often discourage immigrants from taking the legal route to get work, or discourage them from filing claims.

This may be the solution to processing the backlog of cases in the workers category. However, this will not get women out of their precarious situations in their home countries, where charlatans find sources of potential trafficking victims: women and children.

A number of countries are reacting by fighting this scourge with stricter immigration policies. Practice has shown that this does not necessarily improve the economic situation of women or make them less vulnerable. It also makes things easier for smugglers and traffickers, who find the market increasingly lucrative.

In my opinion, we have to work on the conditions that are conducive to trafficking. That is important. It is therefore necessary for the bill to be considered in committee so that we may debate it. Then we could hear from people who work in the field of international crime, and again table our amendments based on these premises.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I already dealt with the parliamentary secretary from the official opposition.

I agree totally with the critic for the Bloc, who has done wonderful work in the committee and she is one who fights for human rights and the rights of women to be free from exploitation. What we have to understand is when we are dealing with the whole problem of trafficking, we are committed to working with the international community. The bill does nothing to address that.

I think we will greatly benefit from the paper from the Canadian Council for Refugees on its proposal as to how we might do that. In that sense I hope something will come out of this legislation, which I expect will go to committee.

• (1640)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with passion to what my colleague had to say. I know of the work that he is doing in committee.

When we talk about the case of Joe Taylor and the other cases that are held in abeyance because of Joe Taylor, if I were to seek unanimous consent from the House for this case to be dealt with immediately, I am sure he would agree with me.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would, and I dare say I would imagine all the opposition members would agree with the member. The question is would the government? I am sad to say no because the Conservatives do not match their rhetoric with action when it comes to supporting our soldiers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We are under questions and comments. I think I heard a member ask for unanimous consent for something or other. I think I heard the hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo say no. Therefore, there is no unanimous consent.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I did not say no.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): He did not say no. Is there a motion?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, my question to my colleague was that if I were to ask the House for unanimous consent that the minister deals and grants citizenship to Joe Taylor and all the cases that are held in abeyance, would he be willing to entertain it?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we rise to debate the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Bill C-57. I thank my colleague, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, for tackling this very important issue. Canada's immigration system, historically, is something that we are all very proud of.

We are all immigrants to this country. My father was an immigrant. We have to ask, why do people come to Canada? Why do they choose Canada over so many other choices in the world? What do they expect when they come to Canada? Is it hope? Is it a new life? Is it a safe place to live? Is it a future? Is it an opportunity? I would say yes. However, do they expect to be exploited and abused? I definitely say no.

Today we are talking about Canada's reputation. I am proud of Canada and I am proud of Canada's role in the world, but I am very concerned because Canada's reputation is being harmed. Canada is being seen as becoming a haven, a country now linked to an industry of abuse and exploitation. It is unacceptable to allow situations of exploitation, which used to exist under the Liberal government, to continue.

The previous Liberal government did nothing to stop human trafficking. It allowed foreign strippers, foreign nationals, into the country, regardless of whether they could be potential victims of abuse or exploitation. The Liberal strippergate scandal must never be allowed to repeat itself.

It is not acceptable for a government to knowingly authorize vulnerable foreign workers, such as strippers, to enter our country, enter potentially abusive situations and potential criminal activity. The proposed amendments before us address the contradictions and help prevent vulnerable people from being abused.

Human trafficking is a global problem and it requires a global response. Canada has to do its part. The UN has put forth recommendations. There is a UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. It provides an international framework to address human trafficking. Canada has ratified the protocol and we encourage other countries to do so. Countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have taken action on this very important issue.

We have international standards. We have multi-pronged approach, a response to human trafficking, what they called the three Ps: first, prevention of trafficking; second the protection of victims; and third the prosecution of offenders.

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Canada's new government is taking its international obligations seriously. We are working to combat human trafficking. We are strengthening criminal law to repress and stop human trafficking. We are looking at the RCMP's human trafficking national coordination centre, which provides a focal point for facilitating human trafficking investigations and helping to protect victims.

The government has enhanced training for law enforcement, for border officials and NGOs, on victim identification. We have released new guidelines for immigration officers in May 2006, unique to the needs to help victims.

Canada works with its partners internationally. For example, Canada works with the United States in a binational assessment of trafficking in persons. We are there to help increase awareness of this problem. Internationally, Canada is providing leadership, including prevention and awareness raising efforts for all countries, but particularly source countries. We are taking action.

However, I am very concerned at the stance of some of the members in some of the speeches that I have heard here today.

I listened to the NDP speeches today. The NDP, with its extremely radical left-wing agenda, claims to be in favour of women's rights. Yet it is against more money for women in need. Instead those members are in favour of increased money for advocacy groups, not the people who really need it.

● (1645)

We also noticed the languages of the NDP members in their speeches. They keep repeating "sex trade workers". It almost sounds like they would like to unionize these unfortunate, disadvantaged women. I have never heard anyone say that "when I grow up I want to be a sex trade worker". These women and children are victims. It is up to the Government of Canada to take a stance and do what we can do to help these victims, who find themselves in these incredibly unfortunate situations.

I listened to the member for Burnaby—Douglas who said that this was a minor attempt at improving the issue on human trafficking. It is a positive step forward. Why will the NDP not support this very important step forward? By members not stepping forward, they are actually leaping backward. They are against women's rights. They are against the disenfranchised. They are against those who are outright abused in the sex trades.

NDP members are being intellectually dishonest with their philosophical basis. This issue is about people being sexually exploited and about human trafficking. No matter how one wants to pervert the argument, distort the facts, the legislation is about closing loopholes on human trafficking, about human exploitation.

I implore the NDP and the other members of the House to change their position.

We see on the record that there has been some flipping and some flopping and some changes. I will to read into the record what the member for Winnipeg Centre from the NDP had to say about the previous government's record. On October 30, 2005, he said:

The door is still wide open for the type of wholesale exploitation that existed with the Eastern European dancers, and in reality the minister of immigration is still pimping for the underworld.

He went on to say:

Five successive ministers of immigration have been pimping for the underworld by providing an endless stream of fodder for the underworld of pornography and prostitution under the guise of legitimate dancing.

Today we hear that the NDP will not be supporting what the government is moving forward.

With respect to the government's allowance of a visa for exotic dancers, the member for Winnipeg Centre also said:

I condemn the government for allowing this program to exist. I cannot believe how callous and uncaring it must be.

Even the leader of the New Democratic Party, the member for Toronto—Danforth, on the so-called exotic dancer program, said on December 2, 2004, in the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Globe and Mail*:

Now the government might not any longer be pimping for the sex industry and that is a good thing and it never should have been doing that in the first place.

I hope the leader of the NDP and the NDP caucus will vote in favour of Bill C-57, recognizing that our government is taking a real and necessary action to deal with this important issue, something the previous government failed to do.

I am very proud of members of the House and the work they are doing on human trafficking.

I need to continue my speech by acknowledging my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, for all the good work on this issue. I note she has been an advocate for victims, for people who have been exploited coming into our country. I know she has travelled extensively and has identified the problem of human trafficking in virtually every community in which she has been. She has worked tirelessly and she has spoken, and more important, listened to the victims of the sex trade industry. They have told her that we need to change our system of closing our eyes and looking the other way.

Bill C-57 has been well received by groups working to eliminate human trafficking. I will read into the record some of the things that have been said about Bill C-57.

Irena Soltys, co-chair of the Stop the Trafficking Coalition said:

Stop the Trafficking Coalition supports [Minister of Citizenship and Immigration] announcement regarding changes to the IRPA to protect vulnerable workers. Included in this are women that may have been exploited as exotic dancers and forced to work as sex slaves...Canada, as an international human rights leader, owes them the protection that they are entitled to.

● (1650)

John Muise, director of public safety for the Canadian Centre of Abuse Awareness, said that Bill C-57 "is part of the response that needs to occur in terms of protecting women and children in this country".

Sabrina Sullivan of the Future Group said:

[The] Immigration Minister...has taken an important step to protect women from sexual exploitation and end a program that made Canada complicit in human trafficking.

It is clear that [the Prime Minister's] government is serious about combating human trafficking.

Government Orders

Even those in the adult entertainment industry are acknowledging the need for Bill C-57. Dale Pidluzny, a booking agent for Independent Artists, stated in the *Calgary Herald* on May 18:

If there's girls being taken advantage of out east because of that, then yes, they should shut that door on it.

Immigration lawyer Richard Kurland said on *The Verdict* on CTV Newsnet:

The idea is to prevent any degrading, humiliating treatment, including sexual exploitation. There is nothing in the proposed law about abandoning exotic dancers or strippers....

—for the first time in immigration policy we're going to see a debate where it belongs, in Parliament.

Here is what I am asking of all members in the House, particularly the NDP. It is the NDP that claims to stand up for women's rights, the NDP that claims to stand up for victims and the NDP that claims to stand up and look out for the disenfranchised and those who fall through the cracks, yet due to some NDP members' radical left-wing agenda, today they say they will not be supporting this bill. They will not be supporting this positive step forward.

This issue is about closing the loophole in trafficking in human beings. Canada's international and domestic reputation depends on this action. This is about the protection of innocent women and children. I ask all members to stand with us and support this bill.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of comments that I think we should also put on the record. I would refer the member to a couple of articles.

On Wednesday, May 16, canada.com in Ottawa stated that “the number who applied for temporary work permits in 2005 dropped by 82%”. That was for strippers. On CTV we heard, “Keeping foreign exotic dancers out of Canada will not address the issue of exploitation”. Annie Temple, who runs NakedTruth.ca, told the Canadian Press that. She said:

If the Conservative government is truly concerned about exploitation of exotic dancers, they should focus on ensuring health and safety standards exist in stripper clubs.

I could go on, but the one thing that really sticks in my mind is the article in the *Globe and Mail* on May 17, which stated that people “accused the Conservatives of pandering to their morally traditional voter base by making much fanfare about a relatively redundant bill”.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary would acknowledge the fact that this is such a skimpy bill and that the government is using this bill in order to divert the focus from important things, such as lost Canadians, undocumented workers, and other bills that need to be addressed, and that what the minister is doing is grandstanding. She is presenting this in a bill and it certainly does not even need to be in a bill because it can be worked on administratively in the department.

● (1655)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, what the member does not seem to understand is that this is about Canada's reputation. This is about how Canada is seen in the world. Yes, this is only one part of what Canada's new government is doing. We are trying to pass laws domestically, and of course we all know how the Liberals are trying to slow every single bill that we put through, but we are going to

continue to move forward because we believe that Canada's reputation is very important.

He talks about being moralistic, but does the hon. member believe in the rule of law, in the rights of and the protection of the vulnerable? Is it not a government's responsibility to look out for and protect those who cannot protect themselves?

This is a step forward. There will be other steps forward. I ask the hon. member for his support in moving forward on this very important bill.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's excellent speech.

Albeit this may be about a smallish part of the overall problem, I read a book a couple of years ago called *The Natashas*, by Victor Malarek, and I commend it to my colleagues in the House. It addresses the topic of exploitation, slavery and so on in developed countries like Canada, the United States and the European countries.

I wonder if my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, has any information on the gross numbers we are talking about, not just of strippers but of people overall who are being affected by the slave trade, the sex trade and the exploitation of young women in particular.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. My colleague brings forward a very important problem with this entire issue. It is almost impossible to get numbers on how much of this is occurring in this country because it is an underground trade.

We do not know how bad it is, but as I said earlier, my colleague from Kildonan—St. Paul has been working tirelessly on this. She has travelled across this country and internationally. Everywhere she goes she has the opportunity to listen to people who are affected by this very important issue of exploitation through the sex trade. It is everywhere. She has spoken to young people and also to old people who have been in this country a very long time and who have been victims.

The member brought up a very important point. We do not know how bad it is, but we know that it exists, that it is rampant, and that certain trades lead are more likely to lead people into becoming victimized.

This is the government's step forward. As I say, I am encouraging all members to support us on this very important bill, Bill C-57.

● (1700)

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member a question. I have worked in committee with the member a number of times and I know that he really does care about Canada.

The Canadian Council for Refugees is asking a fundamental question about this. Why is such work available in Canada if it humiliates and degrades workers? That is a key issue.

While the government is doing a lot of things that are not unimportant, what I am having a significant problem with is that it appears that some of what the government has tried to do is for political gain rather than addressing the root question of where we are going wrong as Canadians in allowing this sort of work.

Government Orders

I would ask the hon. member to tell me and all Canadians exactly what the government of the day is doing to address that. It is very important, much more important than the Conservatives calling themselves the new government or trying to brand themselves as something different. I think Canadians want to know what the government is going to do to help us in this matter and to make a better Canada. That is what is important. That is what is at stake.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I have worked with the member in committee and I know that her heart is in the right place too. The difficulty is that some of these jobs are legal in this country. What we want to do is take steps forward to improving this for all workers. I look forward to her support in the future with other things the government brings forward.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister brought forward Bill C-57 in order to distract attention from other problems the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is facing.

I am going to continue from where I left off when I asked my question of the parliamentary secretary. I am going to read a paragraph from an article from May 17 saying that people accused “the Conservatives of pandering to their morally traditional voter base by making much fanfare about a relatively redundant bill”.

This is a clearly a move by a Conservative government that wants to keep calling itself the new Government of Canada. If one buys a suit today, it is new, and after a week it is a bit older, but after a year and a half it is old. Those members can only brand themselves as being a Conservative government.

On May 24 an article in the *Toronto Star* said:

Talk to the skilled professionals driving cabs, the doctors working as orderlies and the lawyers making telemarketing calls. They need Finley's attention too....

Wouldn't it make more sense to focus our energy on the vulnerable people who need Canada's protection, rather than devising ways to keep people out?

Bill C-57 is a skimpy bill for a skimpy issue. I am sure that if the department looked carefully at this, it could administratively bring forth an issue that could certainly prevent strippers from coming to Canada.

The minister is bringing forward this bill in an effort to camouflage other difficulties the department is facing under the Tories, such as the length of time it takes to process a spousal sponsorship. For example, a Canadian meets someone who is visiting Canada, they fall in love, they get married, and the Canadian decides to sponsor his or her spouse inside Canada. Under the Liberal government, the process was finished in six or nine months. Under the Conservatives, proven by documents given to the minister, it is taking up to two years. This prevents a young couple from starting their lives.

Lo and behold, if it is the wife who is sponsored and she gets pregnant, it is going to cost that couple anywhere between \$10,000 to \$15,000 for that child to be born, because that young lady would have absolutely no health coverage. This is going on while the Conservative government is dickering around with Bill C-57. Imagine that. I am talking about a Canadian citizen, an individual born in this country, and his or her father would have to pay \$10,000 to \$15,000. The Conservative government is putting people at risk by not working fast enough on spousal sponsorships.

There are other things that the Conservatives are trying to mask, such as the issue of lost Canadians. There are facts and fiction about lost Canadians. I would like to take that route.

There are thousands of Canadians who have lost their citizenship and are trying to get it back. There are thousands sitting in silence saying nothing, fearing that their family secret will be disclosed. Some just do not even know they are not Canadian citizens due to archaic and unjust legislation.

I have to admit that there are others more knowledgeable on the subject than I. However, I have become very familiar with this file. Some might say I have become too familiar with the effect this file has on Canadians.

Under section 8 of the 1977 Citizenship Act, unless children born abroad to Canadian parents reaffirms their citizenship by the time they are 28, they could lose their right to hold a Canadian passport and claim citizenship. They could end up being stateless and the Conservative government would not give a damn.

This was the case with my fourth daughter. She was born outside Canada. I quickly learned about the file of lost Canadians and of people like Joe Taylor, who has been fighting the Department of Citizenship and Immigration for the last five years. Joe Taylor wants his right to citizenship. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration has appealed a decision, thus holding in abeyance a few hundred cases. The number depends on who we ask. The minister says 250, but departmental officials say 400.

Fact: the minister does not know which end is up.

Fiction: people born in Canada are Canadian citizens.

In January I wrote a letter to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration asking that she take steps to resolve the matter of lost Canadians.

Fact: four steps were suggested to the minister, among them that the department advertise to advise Canadians that they might have lost their citizenship.

Fiction: when she appeared in January the minister and deputy minister advised the committee that they indeed had advertised. The deputy minister later advised members of the committee that this was not the case.

● (1705)

As the committee on citizenship and immigration began hearings on the issue of lost Canadians, the members heard stories that astounded Canadians as to how the Department of Citizenship and Immigration was screwing around with people's lives.

Canadians heard horror stories of people who had been misled and given half information, people who had lost their citizenship for a variety of reasons, or never had Canadian citizenship, and people who had lost jobs because they could not get a passport to travel abroad. Many people have lost everything.

Government Orders

Fact: a lost Canadian who has to apply for citizenship has to wait for a long time to get the matter resolved.

Fiction: according to the Citizenship and Immigration website, those cases deserve immediate attention and the minister is making these individual cases a priority.

The minister has attempted to disrupt the work of the committee. The last time her officials were testifying before the committee, they were even giving half facts. When the department officials were pressed for answers, the chair of the committee adjourned the meeting. This was followed up by letter to the chair of the committee from the minister telling committee members how to carry out their work.

Fact: “—I will ask my Deputy Minister indicate that, if the witnesses have any doubt about answering a question put to them by the Committee members, they should not answer immediately, but provide a response, in writing, at a later date”.

Fiction: Joe Taylor, a positive response from the minister is in the mail. What a shame.

In order for people to receive citizenship, whether they are lost Canadians or naturalized Canadians, they must undergo background checks by RCMP and CSIS.

Fact: it takes six to eight months and the standard answer from the RCMP inquiry states that the processing time is currently in excess of 120 days from receipt of the application. Note that processing times can vary due to incoming workloads. I will be tabling such a letter that I have received a little later on.

Fiction: the minister stated in committee that she has a verbal agreement with her counterpart minister, the Minister of Public Safety, in which the cases of lost Canadians will be handled in two weeks. The minister further stated that she had a proposal for new legislation which would take care of the problem. Again, she is disrupting the work of the committee in putting forth a real ill-conceived plan.

Fact: the new act proposes anyone born in Canada on or after January 1, 1947, will have citizenship even if they lost it under the provisions of the 1947 Canadian Citizenship Act.

Fiction: this part of the proposed legislation looks after the war brides and war babies. According to the minister and the proposed legislation, World War II happened after 1947.

The minister goes further in the proposed legislation and states that on or after January 1, 1947, Canadian citizens will have their citizenships confirmed if they are first generation born abroad, but no further. This means that second generation Canadians born abroad are not recognized by Canada. They will be illegitimate Canadians. They will be stateless.

Fact: we brought back a few thousand people from Lebanon last summer and the Conservative-Reform-Alliance Party, or CRAP, the base of this new government, is screaming that people should not have dual citizenship.

Fiction: the minister stated, “Despite widespread media cover- age...the number of cases of individuals in Canada whose citizenship

status needs to be resolved is still limited”. The minister simply does not know the file.

Time and time again, she tried very hard to convey a message that she knows what she is talking about and that the department officials, on her instructions, are working for our interests, and advertising and looking for every opportunity to contact lost Canadians.

Fact: the minister is playing to her Reform agenda that pits one Canadian against another. The real fiction is when the minister states:

My heart goes out to all those who have been affected by this issue due to outdated laws that have been on the books for many years. While the previous government chose not to act, we are taking action and moving forward to help those whose citizenship is in question.

I would say to the minister the following. Get on with the facts and drop the fiction. Canadians want the facts. Canadians deserve the facts.

● (1710)

There is also another topic which the minister is trying to circumvent and it deals with undocumented workers. Undocumented workers are people that have come to Canada and have for many years tried to settle and work in Canada, and raise their families.

The past Liberal government was on the verge of doing just that, regularizing these individuals. We were on the verge of streamlining policies and working with stakeholders to make sure that these people found a home in Canada.

It was but a few days after the last election that Canada's new government, this heartless Conservative government, showed its true colours and started deporting thousands of people.

These were people who were doing jobs and filling positions which were badly needed. Stakeholders, community groups and unions have come forward and asked the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to study this matter.

I am proud to have moved a motion that the citizenship and immigration committee study undocumented workers. In committee we went even farther and asked for a moratorium on the deportation of undocumented workers until the committee reports.

I sought unanimous consent last week on this matter to stop the deportation of undocumented workers. It was very unfortunate that the bastions of the worker class, the champagne socialists, the NDP, did not give consent. The NDP did that not because it does not believe in it, but because it wants to take political expediency.

We have seen very clearly that the government does not know fact from fiction. The fact is that it takes 120 days. The fact is that an individual who was born in Holland was granted—

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of personal privilege. Twice now the hon. member for Scarborough—Agin court has stated that the member for Trinity—Spadina objected to the bill.

I want to be very clear that I was not in my seat. I was not in the House at the time when this member was seeking whatever consent he was seeking without talking to anyone.

Government Orders

I wish this member would stop talking about something that is absolutely not true. He should check the record as to whether I was actually in my seat or not. The last time I checked, members have to be in their seat to say anything or to object to anything.

Mr. Speaker, I believe you know the rule and that is in fact the rule.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I thank the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina. I am sure all members appreciate her clarifying that. I will remind all members that we do not make specific references to the absence or presence of members in the House.

I will return to the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that is a debate for another time and another place.

I would like to refer to a letter that was given to a Canadian by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. It states:

Dear [Sir]: I refer to my letter dated December 10, 1997, regarding your entitlement to registration as an Indian pursuant to the provisions of the Indian Act. I have now received the required documentation.

I am pleased to confirm that you are now registered as an Indian in the Indian Register in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6(1)(a) of the Indian Act under the name of ... born on ...

Your Registry Number is ...

Here we have a letter issued to a son of a veteran who was born in Holland, that recognizes him as an aboriginal Canadian, and yet the Department of Citizenship and Immigration does not have the fortitude, does not have the gall, and does not have anything between its head to say why it is not recognizing him as a Canadian?

Certainly and clearly, the bills that we should be debating in the House are far more important than the little skimpy Bill C-57.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to my colleague, I wonder if he finds it passing strange that a Conservative government takes leadership from the United States? If the government had its way, Canada would be in the war in Iraq and whenever something is happening down there on the far right, the government will support it.

Does the member not find it passing strange that the United States, which is now going through a process of regularizing undocumented workers and giving them a chance to work toward citizenship, recognizing how important they are to the American economy, just as our undocumented workers are very important to the Canadian economy, does he not find it passing strange that for once the Conservatives are not following the American lead and that they should to regularize undocumented workers?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, indeed, it is very strange that the government is doing things on a whim and on the fly. I find it even stranger that when it comes to issues that we have to deal with in our every day life, issues that affect people such as the undocumented workers, that members of the Conservative Party and certainly members of the fourth party are not supportive of those workers.

They are not doing the best that they can in order to make sure that these workers are regularized in Canada and that these workers have their spot in the sun in this country as the rest of us do.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to set the record straight. We know that the member for Burnaby—Douglas spoke at length in the House about the need to take a very serious look at the temporary foreign worker program.

He talked about the fact that certainly we have workers who come into the country, and the terms of the bill talk about work conditions that are unsuitable, and argued quite strongly that if the conditions are unsuitable for temporary foreign workers that they are also unsuitable for Canadians.

The member for Burnaby—Douglas explained at length the very serious problems that currently exist in the temporary worker program.

Despite the allegations of the member for Scarborough—Agincourt that the fourth party in the House has not worked tirelessly to take a look at some of the examples of how fundamentally flawed some of these programs are, I spoke earlier about the fact that in my own riding we have had some very serious problems with the temporary caregiver program. For example, there has been exploitation of workers and it has taken an inordinate amount of time to deal with some of the issues that are facing some of these workers. They are being exploited by agencies that are charging huge amounts of money.

Therefore, I would like the member to talk about how he would like to see the temporary program fixed and what steps should be put into place immediately.

• (1720)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear from the bleachers in the House of Commons.

It is very simple. The only thing that the government has to do and the only thing that should have been done through unanimous consent was to stop reporting undocumented workers. If her party would have supported that motion, we would not even be talking about it right now. Unfortunately, it did not.

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Bill C-57 there is no doubt and it is indisputable that there are some areas that need to be looked at, but there are so many other areas that are so very important as well. My hon. colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt talked about doctors working as cab drivers.

I know that this new government, as it wants to call itself, talked a lot about that in the last election campaign, how it would fix that up, and how it would help those people. I make that appeal to this new government which really is not very new any more. It really is quite old and it is getting a little tired.

People are telling me that they are still out there working as cab drivers. They still need the help and they are not getting that help from the government. I am glad that my colleague is continuing to push this issue because I know he has for a long time campaigned on this very thing.

Government Orders

The lost Canadians again is a very important issue which the government is not addressing. I think that it really needs to do so. I ask my hon. colleague who spoke about this what his thoughts are on it?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the election in 2005 when the NDP along with the Conservative Party, the unholy alliance, pulled the plug, there was a major conference that was supposed to be taking place in December 2005 in Toronto. We were bringing together over 600 stakeholders, all the provinces, all the associations and all the departments in order to deal with the issue of undocumented workers. I, along with my colleague from Vancouver and the two parliamentary secretaries under the Minister of HRSDC were working diligently to make sure that the voices that we were hearing were answered.

We are talking about undocumented workers. It is not an easy solution. We cannot say, "Here is \$100 million. We are going to fix it". It takes all the provinces and territories, all the associations, be it the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, B.C., or the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Ontario and their counterparts all over Canada to come together in order to find a solution on how to move forward.

The Conservatives call themselves the new government, but certainly it is a Tory Conservative government and is the same thing as the government of Brian Mulroney. We remember that book *On The Take*. Certainly the government does not deserve any credit for speaking on the issue of immigrants.

The Conservatives certainly demonstrated time and time again that they do not care. The only thing they demonstrated they want to do is pit one community against another community. They did that right after they were elected when there were floods in the Philippines. They did that when we were bringing people out of Lebanon. They did not act quickly. It was not until the voices from the opposition and after the pushing that we did that the minister finally woke up and said that we had to do something.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs was told that this would not work. They botched it up. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration was told that this would not work. They botched it up.

They have an opportunity to do the right thing right now with what is happening in Lebanon. There are people living beside an area that has been bombed. Tragedies are happening. What can the minister do? She could ask her officials in Damascus and in Beirut to expedite family class cases in Lebanon. Has the minister acted? Absolutely not. Is the minister asleep at the switch? You bet, Mr. Speaker. Is the government asleep at the switch? You bet even more, Mr. Speaker.

Canadians from all walks of life will see one thing: This is not a new Canadian government. This is an old Conservative Government of Canada that is leading Canada down the garden path.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member give his speech and I am somewhat troubled in the sense that there were things that really dragged the hon. member's party and the previous old government down. I want to clarify as well that the party in question, the opposition Liberals, were in power for 13 years. The Liberals certainly had copious opportunities to make these changes, so it is highly ironic that we, having been in office for

15 months, are being accused of being old somehow, when they had 13 years, certainly a much longer time, almost 12 times as long, really.

It comes down to this: One of the scandals that happened under the old government's watch was this whole question of women being brought over and exploited. I heard a Liberal minister previously defend in this place the practice of bringing over and exploiting these young women for lap dancing and various things. We are trying to fix that.

Does the hon. member want to address that at all?

• (1725)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, addressing that particular question is very simple. We just need a directive in the department. We do not need a whole brand new bill. We do not need to have a charade in the House. The only reason for the charade in the House is to divert attention from the real needs that the department is not addressing: lost Canadians, undocumented workers, and the list goes on and on.

If I were the hon. member, I would go to his minister and tell her to get on with the work of recognizing lost Canadians and to get on with the work of stopping deportation of undocumented workers.

That is what the hon. member should do versus stating that we need to cover things up. The only thing that needs to be covered up is the inefficiency of the department.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

FISHERIES ACT, 2007

The House resumed from May 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-45, An Act respecting the sustainable development of Canada's seacoast and inland fisheries, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important bill and I am honoured to rise to speak to it. I represent the large fishery riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's in Nova Scotia and this is an important debate for that area.

I would like to take 30 seconds to talk about the hoist motion which the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor moved, which delayed this bill finishing second reading and going to committee. Unfortunately, I do not think the Liberals really understood what the hoist motion was doing. I do not have time to talk about this today but I will another time. In the meantime, I move:

That this question be now put.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We would now resume debate, but the time has expired.

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2007

The House resumed from June 4 consideration of Bill C-52, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We are going to move on to the deferred recorded division and if the member for Scarborough—Agincourt has a point of order dealing with Bill C-45—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, it deals with Bill C-57. I mentioned that I would like to table something. Since I have read it into the record, I am sure members would like to see it. Therefore, I would like to seek unanimous consent to table the document that I read from.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt perhaps can come back to the House to request unanimous consent to table it, but we have to move on to the deferred recorded division on the motions at report stage of Bill C-52.

Call in the members.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

And the bells having rung:

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 5.

[*English*]

The vote on this motion also applies to Motions Nos. 6 to 9.

• (1800)

(The House divided on Motion No. 5, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 195*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison

Ambrose
Anderson
Asselin
Bachand
Barbot
Batters
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance
Bevington
Black
Blaikie
Blaney
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brisson
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooghe
Byrne
Cannis
Carrie
Casson
Chan
Chong
Christopherson
Comuzzi
Crowder
Cummins
D'Amours
Davies
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Doyle
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fast
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Galipeau
Gaudet
Goldring
Goodyear
Gravel
Guarnieri
Guergis
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Ignatieff
Jean
Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Keeper
Khan
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lauzon
Layton
Lee
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Maloney
Mark
Marston
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Masse
Matthews
McCallum
McGuinity
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Minna

Government Orders

Anders
Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Barnes
Bélanger
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bernier
Bigras
Blackburn
Blais
Bonin
Boshcoff
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrier
Chamberlain
Charlton
Chow
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner
Davidson
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Dewar
Dosanjh
Duceppe
Easter
Epp
Faille
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Freeman
Gagnon
Gallant
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Guay
Guimond
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jaffer
Jennings
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lalonde
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Malo
Manning
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Mayes
McDonough
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merasty
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)

Government Orders

Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nadeau
Nash	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Owen
Pacetti	Pallister
Paquette	Paradis
Patry	Pearson
Perron	Peterson
Petit	Picard
Plamondon	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Proulx
Rajotte	Redman
Regan	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Robillard	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schellenberger	Scott
Sgro	Shipley
Siksay	Silva
Simard	Simms
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stanton	Steckle
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Telegdi	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Tonks
Trost	Turner
Tweed	Valley
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Wallace
Wappel	Warkentin
Wasylycia-Leis	Watson
Williams	Wilson
Wrzesniewski	Yelich
Zed— 265	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

André	Baird
Bezan	Cardin
Clement	Finley
Gauthier	Lemieux
Lussier	Menzies
Mourani	Ouellet— 12

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 5 carried. I therefore declare Motions Nos. 6 to 9 carried.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that Bill C-52, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007, as amended, be concurred in at report stage with further amendments.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 196*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Asselin	Bachand
Barbot	Batters
Bellavance	Bernier
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinoooge
Brunelle	Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Carrier	Casson
Chong	Comuzzi
Crête	Cummins
Davidson	Day
DeBellefeuille	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Devolin	Doyle
Duceppe	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Faille	Fast
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Gagnon	Galipeau
Gallant	Gaudet
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Gravel
Grewal	Guay
Guergis	Guimond
Hanger	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest
Laframboise	Lake
Lalonde	Lauson
Lavallée	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malo
Manning	Mark
Mayes	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nadeau
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai

Oda
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shipleigh
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Storseth
Sweet
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warkentin
Williams

Pallister
Paradis
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Roy
Schellenberger
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
Stanton
Strahl
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Watson
Yelich— 158

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Atamanenko
Barnes
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevington
Blaikie
Boshcoff
Brown (Oakville)
Cannis
Chamberlain
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies
Dhaliwal
Easter
Folco
Godin
Guarnieri
Hubbard
Jennings
Kadis
Karygiannis
Layton
Lee
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathyssen
McCallum
McGuinty
McTeague
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Pacetti
Pearson
Priddy
Redman
Robillard
Russell
Savoie
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St. Amand
Steckle
Telegdi
Tonks
Valley
Wasylcia-Leis
Wrzesnewskyj

Angus
Bagnell
Bélanger
Bell (North Vancouver)
Black
Bonin
Brison
Byrne
Casey
Chan
Chow
Comartin
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Dewar
Dosanjh
Eyking
Fry
Goodale
Holland
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Keeper
LeBlanc
MacAulay
Maloney
Marston
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Masse
Matthews
McDonough
McGuire
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nash
Owen
Patry
Peterson
Proulx
Regan
Rota
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Private Members' Business

PAIRED

Members

André	Baird
Bezan	Cardin
Clement	Finley
Gauthier	Lemieux
Lussier	Menzies
Mourani	Ouellet— 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6:15 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1815)

[English]

YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC) moved that Bill C-423, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act (treatment for substance abuse), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to discuss, with my colleagues from all parties, Bill C-423, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act (treatment for substance abuse).

As the summary of this bill outlines, it would amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act to require that a police officer must, before starting judicial proceedings or taking any other measures under this act against a young person alleged to have committed an offence, consider whether it would be sufficient to refer the young person to an addictions specialist for assessment and, if warranted, treatment recommendations.

The second aspect of this proposed legislation is that if the young person enters into a treatment program as the result of such a referral and fails to complete the program, the outcome may be the start of judicial proceedings against that young person.

With my time today, I would like to communicate a few things. First, I would like to talk about the addictions problem we are facing in this country. Second, I want to offer some general, big picture thoughts that I have regarding the solution to this problem. Finally, I will talk about the bill itself, its logical place within the current Youth Criminal Justice Act and how it contributes as one small but significant step toward the solution.

I will first talk about the addictions problem and the significant cost it inflicts on Canadian society. To help us understand this incredibly ambiguous, cumulative societal cost, it is helpful to think of it as something more tangible, like a calculation, let us say the total number of people addicted to all types of drugs, including alcohol, multiplied by the average severity of consequences of the addiction, both to the individuals addicted and to the people indirectly impacted by the addiction.

Private Members' Business

These consequences can range from early death to drug induced mental illness, to domestic violence and family breakdown, lost productivity, increased crime rates, et cetera. The list is truly endless and complicated by the fact that most of the items on the list are somehow interrelated.

If we could calculate such a total societal cost and come up with a final quantifiable number, we would need to give it some context, perhaps post it against the net worth of something on a giant balance sheet. If we could do that, then what would be the equally ambiguous something that we post it against? It would be our very quality of life as a nation, all of the exceptional things that make Canada the greatest country in the world in which to live: our strength, our unity, our independence and our freedom.

The total societal cost of our addictions represents a major withdrawal every day from Canada's greatness in human terms. That is problematic enough, but the challenge is exacerbated by a substantial compound effect.

The Canadian addictions industry is a powerful marketing machine. Most of the entry level customers are under 18 years of age. They are introduced to entry level products to ease their fears, both natural and learned, about drugs and their effects. Once they experiment and discover that they did not spontaneously fall over dead or immediately lose 40 points off their IQ, they are open to increasing their purchases, increasing their frequency of use, upping the strength of their chosen drug or moving on to new and better products.

All of this is very productive for the industry but then the real strength of the marketing plan kicks in. Like a great new song, television show or video game, the kids cannot wait to share with their friends. Their testimonials are very strong. Usually this part of the process occurs when the kids are still very new users and the downside of drug use is not yet evident.

For some kids, as they are drawn deeper and deeper into the world of drugs, their relationship with the business side is formalized and they join a gang. There are all sorts of benefits to this: money, esteem and power, among others. Those kids who do not show such business acumen often simply become customers for life, addicted to the highs but becoming frustratingly numb to the substances and doses that used to work so-called magic. They are unable to work, at least not regular jobs, because of the increasing effects of their addictions. Instead, they turn to petty theft to pay for their habits, adding the element of crime, often for the very first time in their young lives.

Now we see the spiral of escalating drug use and crime as the addiction progresses both the need for cash and the propensity toward violence increases. As the criminal activity increases and negative relationships develop, new drugs are introduced, depression grows and the cyclone spins out of control.

This scenario is playing out in thousands and thousands of lives across our country, in big cities and small towns, in affluent communities and in the inner city. Depending on who we talk to, estimates range wildly from 40% to 80% of criminal activity in Canada being related to drugs or substance abuse.

We have a growing problem that is increasingly eroding a quality of life that has been built up over several hundred years by generation after generation of Canadians. What can we do about it? At the macro level, in the big picture, how can we attack a problem that is so developed, so entrenched, so pervasive and so overwhelming?

• (1820)

As with any significant challenge, our first step is to simplify our view of the problem, to break it into logical components to help us to understand it.

No model is ever a perfect representation of the original but I would suggest that it is helpful to view Canada's addiction problem in terms of four groups of people. First there is the organization consisting of the gang leaders, the producers, the dealer network and everyone who supports that network. Our goal in dealing with this group must be to cutoff Canada's supply of illegal drugs, plain and simple. This is where the tough on crime part of the national anti-drug strategy fits into the equation.

It involves increasing penalties for drug and gang related crime and properly training and equipping our police officers to recognize and deal with illegal drug production and distribution operations, among other things. To this end, I was pleased to see budget 2007 provide \$21.6 million over two years in this important area.

The second group is the customers, the individuals who use drugs, many of whom are the kids I spoke of earlier. Some will eventually be promoted into the first group, the organization, but others will simply become lifetime addicts, victims in relation to the dealers who prey on them and feed their addiction.

Often individuals in this group will also be involved in criminal activity, although not in the same context as those in the organization group. Rather, they will steal to support their own habit or become violent when under the influence. Since my private member's bill deals with a specific subset of this group I will come back to it later.

The third group is the prospects. This group is almost entirely comprised of kids under 18 years of age. Like every good industry, the addictions industry knows it needs to cultivate future customers and so it is always looking for new ways to draw in our youth.

Recently, I had a meeting with one of my constituents, Maralyn Benay, a youth worker who is also a co-founder of a group called Parents Empowering Parents, or PEP. She told me about a new drug that is particularly being marketed to young girls. It is referred to as "strawberry quick" and is basically a pink version of crystal meth, a perfect example of the new ways that the organizers are looking to market to our kids.

Private Members' Business

I will say that I may seem young in this place but things have changed considerably in the 20 years since I was in high school.

With this third groups, the prospects, obviously the main goal is prevention. As part of the money set aside in budget 2007 for the national drug strategy, \$10 million over two years were set aside specifically for a national prevention campaign aimed at youth.

The fourth group is comprised of everybody else. Some may think of us as unaffected because we are not addicts and hopefully we are beyond the period in our lives where we are susceptible to peer pressure when it comes to drugs. However, all Canadians are affected by this problem. Some have family members who have addictions issues. As a parent myself, I cannot imagine what it would be like to be a parent dealing with a child who is addicted.

Some have been victimized by someone in the second group, the users stealing to support their habit, a vandal under the influence or a drug impaired driver.

We all pay the price in terms of increased pressures on the health care system, the increased threat of crime and lost national productivity because some of our most promising minds are lost to addictions, or worse, using their talents to help fuel the addictions industry.

Where does this fourth group fit in terms of the solution? We deal with the first group, the addictions industry organization, through tough on crime legislation and cut off the drug supply. We deal with the second group, the customers, through treatment or intervention and kill the market for the industry. We educate the third group, the prospects, to eliminate the future growth of the industry. However, the fourth group, we are the ones left to drive the solution. We must treat this addiction problem with the urgency it deserves.

There are several groups of people in my constituency who are doing just that: the Mill Woods Community Patrol, a group of citizens who spend hours late on weekend evenings patrolling Mill Woods in partnership with the Edmonton city police; the RCMP officers in Beaumont who work through the DARE program to reach out to young people and educate them about the dangers of drug abuse; the folks in the various youth drop-in centres around the riding who give their valuable weekend nights to give young people a fun, safe drug free environment in which to hang out; and the aforementioned Parents Empowering Parents group that provides support, education, information and hope for families dealing with or concerned about substance abuse and addiction and whose work provided part of the impetus for this private member's bill.

I thank all of those groups and groups like them across the country for the important contribution they make to protect the quality of life of all Canadians.

I promised to come back to the second group of individuals, the customers for the addictions industry. The math behind this group is pretty straightforward. As the number of customers grows so do the organizations that profit from feeding their addictions. If we can help these customers to recognize and deal with their own addictions issues, then, in addition to helping the individual people, we starve those same criminal organizations of their business and their eventual workers.

Budget 2007 rightly provided the most dollars, \$32.2 million to be exact over two years, to support this important part of the national anti-drug strategy.

• (1825)

Moving now to the bill itself, Bill C-423 deals with one subset of this customer group, young offenders. It is a simple bill, only one page long, and apart from some editorial cleanup, basically adds two new phrases to the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

I want to be very clear that the bill is in no way an endorsement of the Youth Criminal Justice Act as it stands right now. I agree wholeheartedly with our campaign pledge to strengthen the act, something that cannot properly be done comprehensively through a private member's bill.

What I can do is strive for improvement in the legislation and the bill works with the existing provisions of the act to take a step forward. It is also consistent with our statement during the campaign that we need to "give young people better opportunities for rehabilitation".

The first thing the bill does, and it gets a little bit technical here, is add referral to substance abuse treatment to the list of extrajudicial measures available to police officers when dealing with a young person, particularly first time offenders accused of committing non-violent offences.

To give some context to this, the first 10 sections of the Youth Criminal Justice Act under the title and definitions, sections 3 through 12, are under a heading called "Extrajudicial Measures". The changes I am proposing both occur in section 6 but to fully understand the bill, one needs to review the principles and objectives laid out in sections 4 and 5.

One particularly important principle set out in section 4(c) is that:

extrajudicial measures are presumed to be adequate to hold a young person accountable for his or her offending behaviour if the young person has committed a non-violent offence and has not previously been found guilty of an offence;

Section 6(1), the section impacted by the first change proposed by the bill, currently states the following:

A police officer shall, before starting judicial proceedings or taking any other measures under this Act against a young person alleged to have committed an offence, consider whether it would be sufficient, having regard to the principles set out in section 4, to take no further action, warn the young person, administer a caution, if a program has been established under section 7, or, with the consent of the young person, refer the young person to a program or agency in the community that may assist the young person not to commit offences.

Bill C-423 would add the following at the end:

or

(ii) if appropriate, an addiction specialist to assess whether the young person is engaged in substance abuse and, if so, to recommend a treatment program.

Private Members' Business

The rationale for this change is that, given that the correlation between drug use and youth crime is very high, there is a huge gap in the legislation so long as the act does not explicitly include substance abuse treatment as an option under this section.

The second part of my bill would add a new subsection (3) at the end of section 6. It reads:

If a young person has been referred to an addiction specialist under subsection (1), and, as a result of that referral, has entered into a treatment program, the failure of that young person to complete the requirements of that program shall be taken into consideration by a police officer in deciding whether to start judicial proceedings against that young person.

This is an absolutely crucial piece of the bill. The young person affected has been shown some grace by the police officer. He, for the sake of illustration I will use "he", has been given an opportunity. He probably will not recognize the opportunity until he has had a chance to clean up, to be separated from the influence of the drugs. This clause compels him to get through this initial difficult period, to accept the grace, until he is at a point where he can make a rational decision about his drug use. If he chooses not to accept this opportunity, the police officer can choose to initiate judicial proceedings.

I want to appeal to my colleagues from all parties to support this important legislation. I want to reiterate the main purpose for the bill. It is not about punishment. It is about getting our young people the help they need at a time in their lives when they may not realize they need it.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to thank the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for his initiative in introducing the bill and for his interesting speech.

For my part, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-423, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act (treatment for substance abuse). As mentioned by the member opposite, my speech will be rather technical in nature in order to pay proper service to the intent of the bill.

As the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont stated, the bill proposes amendments to the Youth Criminal Justice Act which would require a police officer, before starting judicial proceedings or taking other measures against a young person, to consider referring that young person to an addictions specialist for assessment and possible treatment recommendations. In proposing the referral of a young person to an addictions specialist, again for assessment and possible treatment, the bill is consistent with one of the goals of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, as was noted by the member opposite.

The goal of the Youth Criminal Justice Act is to create opportunities for holding youth accountable for their crimes outside the formal justice system with the understanding and knowledge that early intervention can save valuable resources and more effectively address the root or underlying causes of youth crime.

Unquestionably, a percentage of crime committed by any age group is triggered by substance abuse difficulties. We have likely all heard examples of individuals who have developed such an addiction or craving for a particular substance that they will go literally to any lengths in order to feed their addiction. Those lengths or means will often involve criminal activity, be it theft of money in

order to buy the substance to which they are addicted, the breaking and entering into a house or pharmacy where they know a substance is being kept or stored, and other such actions.

It is fundamentally in the best interests of society and certainly in the best interests of the individual that the individual's dependence on substances be remedied on a permanent basis, as ridding or curing the individual of the substance abuse problem by extension rids society of the need or desire of the individual to engage in criminal activity in order to feed his or her craving.

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, "Early detection, diagnosis and treatment results in better treatment outcomes, shorter episodes, and fewer relapses".

It is simplistic in the extreme to conclude that harsher punishments automatically result in a decrease in criminal activity, particularly when it comes to individuals with substance abuse problems. We do not need for the purposes of this bill to examine the rate of crime in Canada relative to other jurisdictions except to make the point that Canada is by and large one of the very safest countries in which to live.

The trite suggestion from some quarters that our principles of sentencing or punishment or criminal justice generally should follow the example of the United States for instance has no basis in fact or in logic.

The fundamental purpose of criminal justice is to protect society and not only on a transient or immediate basis. Society is best protected ultimately when the root causes of anti-social or criminal behaviour are eradicated. Certainly, we can and must do all that we responsibly can to eliminate substance addictions.

Automatically processing an individual through the justice system is no guarantee that the individual will as a result be motivated to alter his behaviour. In fact, an individual may well be more motivated to accept the necessary treatment if he is aware that his refusal to accept such treatment may result in a criminal charge or charges being laid against him.

The principles and objectives of the Youth Criminal Justice Act are reflected properly in the bill under discussion. These principles and objectives include a principle that the youth criminal justice system must reflect the fact that young persons by and large lack the maturity of adults.

● (1830)

The youth system is different from the adult system in many respects. Measures of accountability are consistent with a young person's reduced level of maturity. Procedural protections are enhanced. Rehabilitation and reintegration are given special emphasis. Most important for our purposes, the importance of timely intervention is recognized.

Overall the youth criminal justice system is intended to prevent crime by addressing the circumstances which underlie a young person's offending behaviour. It is further intended to rehabilitate young persons who commit offences and to reintegrate them into society. Certainly it is designed to ensure that a young person is subject to meaningful consequences for his or her offence in order to promote the long term protection of the public at large.

Private Members' Business

There are procedural principles, so to speak, within the Youth Criminal Justice Act and Bill C-423 is a proper reflection of those procedural principles.

For example, section 4 of the act creates a presumption that non-violent young offenders should not be charged with a criminal offence. It stresses that police officers considering extrajudicial measures should examine the nature and seriousness of the offence, the youth's prior record, if any, his or her attitude, the views of the victim, the likelihood of recidivism and protection of the public.

As with so many components of our criminal justice system, both for young persons and for adults, there is always considerable discretion given to the arresting officer, to staff sergeants, to crown attorneys, justices of the peace, judges and virtually anyone involved in the system. This is not to suggest that the system is too discretionary or too subjective, but it is simply stating a reality.

The bill requires that a police officer, before starting judicial proceedings against a young person alleged to have committed an offence, consider whether it would be sufficient, bearing in mind the principles of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, to take appropriate steps, to take no further action, to warn the young person, to administer a caution, or to refer the young person to a program or agency in the community.

Simply put, there is absolutely nothing obligating a police officer to always pursue the path of not laying a charge. The only obligation on the officer is to consider whether or not laying a charge would be most consistent with the principles of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

There are some who will undoubtedly suggest that Bill C-423 is not required, that the thrust of the bill is already covered by section 6 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act which already obligates a police officer to consider whether it would be sufficient to consider referring a young person to a program or agency in the community that may assist the person not to commit offences. It could realistically be argued that an addictions specialist is already covered by the phrasing of "program or agency in the community that may assist the young person not to commit offences".

At a minimum, this bill is consistent with the principles of the Youth Criminal Justice Act and is consistent with section 6 which deals with measures outside of formal judicial proceedings.

Although it may be suggested that the bill is superfluous and that its measures are already by implication covered by the act, my leaning at this point is to vote in favour of sending the bill to the justice committee for further scrutiny.

● (1835)

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few brief comments on the bill. First, I would like to congratulate the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont on the excellent bill he has introduced. This bill strikes a good balance between the possibility of rehabilitation and the vigilance required when people refuse to take advantage of opportunities they are given.

I think I speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois when I say that we will support this bill at referral stage and that we will support it at third reading if we have the opportunity to do so.

I was in the House when the former member for Edmonton tabled the bill on the juvenile criminal justice system. We had concerns at the time about the new legal system being incompatible with practices in Quebec. As you know, we do not generally send youths to adult courts, and we have a definite preference for rehabilitation.

The thing I like about this bill is that it gives young people the chance to undergo rehabilitation in the form of drug treatment under a probation order before laying charges and before referring them to adult courts.

All manner of circumstances could lead someone to drug addiction. When his colleague Randy White was a member of this House, he tabled a motion calling for a study into the non-medical use of drugs. I contributed to the work of that committee. Our findings led us to recommend legalizing the simple possession of cannabis. Of course, that is another debate altogether, and I understand that the bill will not lead us in that direction. However, our work in committee helped us understand that there are many factors that lead young people to develop dependencies. The most important thing is that services and treatment are made available. It is a very good idea to provide young people with this opportunity.

Our colleague pointed out that the uncontrolled use of drugs, or drug addiction, has serious repercussions on society. He talked about domestic violence, mental illness, lost productivity, violence in the community, street gangs, crime rates and drug supply. He is quite right to remind us that, all things considered, uncontrolled drug use is not an asset to our society. In committee, I even remember examining what drug addiction can mean financially. Economic studies show that it can translate into \$16 billion in lost productivity for Canada's gross national product, because of the investments needed in police forces and the negative repercussions on society. Several billion dollars could be on the line.

We are therefore pleased to support this bill. The Conservative caucus needs more members like this hon. member. He helps the social democratic cause of his party and I hope his voice will be heard on other issues. I offer him our full cooperation.

● (1840)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me thank the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for bringing forward Bill C-423 because he has obviously put a lot of thought into the bill and there are some interesting provisions in it. I have been listening to the debate and I heard his remarks. He has been thoughtful and reflective about why this bill is coming forward and what he intends to do.

Private Members' Business

From the NDP's point of view, we will be supporting the bill in principle. We think it should go to committee and certainly, the principle of diversion and ensuring that young people have other options than just going through the judicial system is something that is important and actually needs to be emphasized.

Looking at this bill, which would amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act, it would require a police officer, before starting judicial proceedings or taking any other measure, to consider whether it would be sufficient to refer that young person to an addiction specialist and treatment. This is something that we think is useful to do.

I want to put on the record that we do have some reservations. I am the drug policy spokesperson for the NDP. I probably am in that position because it is an issue that I deal with very frequently in my riding where we have a crisis of HIV-AIDS among injection drug users. We have a very high rate of conversion to HIV-AIDS. We have a crisis among injection drug users.

One of the things that really bothers me, and I want to point this out to the member because there is a bit of a philosophical difference, is that we always use the lens or the tool of the judicial system to deal with these interventions.

For example, in Vancouver we have had the drug court and that has been widely accepted by a lot of people. I actually do not support the drug court because why do we actually wait until someone is at the point of making the decision that they are going to go to jail or to treatment. Why would we make the intervention so late? Why would we wait until they have been charged and at the point of maybe being convicted to provide that as an alternative. It becomes almost a coercive kind of thing.

I do have to say to the member that while in principle this can work, I do have some reservations about it because it is using the criminal justice model to make the intervention. We need to be aware that primarily, when we are dealing with substance use, particularly for young people, we are dealing with a health issue. We should be focusing our intervention, our public policies, the treatment, the community development and the prevention from that point of view.

My question would be this. Why would we wait until that point that an officer then has to make that decision and say is it better that this young person go to a treatment program, which obviously it would? At that point I would say yes, that is the preferable course of action, but why would we wait until that point?

When I look at the Conservatives' drug policy or what we expect it to be and I have looked at the 2007 budget, it appears to us that basically they dropped harm reduction. I know there is a lot of concern out in the community about where the Conservatives' drug strategy is going to go.

The member needs to understand that the deep concern that people have is this reliance on the justice system as opposed to recognizing that we need an intervention that is a health based intervention. We need prevention programs.

It seems to me in terms of where the dollars go, and again there are concerns about the fact that prevention and treatment have been completely inadequately funded in this country, why again would we

wait until we get to that point of it becoming a criminal justice issue and making that intervention?

I heard the member speak about the DARE program. I have the same problem with the DARE program. Why would we have police officers going into schools attempting to educate young people about drug use? Would we have officers going to schools for sex education? I do not think so. The only reason we do it is because drugs are illegal. They are deemed to be harmful and illegal in our society.

● (1845)

I have to tell the member, I deal with this issue so much. I have honestly come to the conclusion that some of these prohibitionist policies themselves have become more harmful than anything else in terms of criminalizing young people, criminalizing adults, criminalizing users, and sort of waiting until we get to this point where it becomes a justice issue.

So, while on the one hand I do appreciate what the member is doing, and we will support it in principle, I do want to put on the table this other viewpoint. It worries me, frankly, where it is that the Conservatives are going overall, not with just this bill but when we package them all up.

We understand that there are going to be a number of new bills coming forward regarding the Conservative drug strategy and I can tell members I am really worried about where it is heading because it becomes this sort of political agenda.

To me it is the oldest game in the book to play this sort of politics of fear because people are concerned about drug use. Parents are terribly concerned about what happens to young people. However, I think if we talk to most parents, they do not want their kids becoming criminals. They want to see an early intervention in the schools in a way that is realistic, in a way that is honest.

I can tell members that when we make it kind of a law and order message, even in the schools, where the kids are told, and I have heard cops say this, "If you smoke marijuana, you're going to become a cocaine addict", they know it is not true. That is like saying that everybody who drives a car is going to kill somebody.

There are some different approaches and I actually hope the member would be open to some dialogue and some responses around this because it is genuinely given here tonight in this debate.

This bill in and of itself at that point where a young person is faced with a criminal charge or treatment, I would agree, it is a better choice to get them to treatment. But let us back up. Let us really back it up to where we need to do the work. That is why I have a lot of concerns about things like the DARE program and drug courts. We need early intervention. We need it on the street.

I see the drug users in the downtown east side of my riding. They actually need what we call low threshold interventions where the bar is not so high that they are not going to fail because unfortunately a lot of the programs that we have are based on that.

Private Members' Business

The same is true for young people. Even the treatment regimes that we have in this country, if we talk to drug users, they will tell us that they are often not very accessible. Again, the rules can become so stringent that people are almost sort of designed for failure before they even can get in the program or get through the program.

I really do want to get this point across, that we need to have a different perspective. We need to have a health perspective and we need to recognize that the use of the judicial system, the use of the police in terms of education and the use of enforcement has been shown to be quite a failure.

We only have to look south of the border to see what has happened in the United States, the massive incarceration of young people, particularly African Americans. I think something like 50% of all incarcerations or more are now related to drug use. This so-called war on drugs is a completely failed model. I know that the member is not precisely advocating that, but because it is still focusing on the justice system, it becomes part of that sort of perspective and view.

I hope that my comments have been helpful. They are presented in that way in order to offer some feedback and some different perspectives to this bill. Nevertheless, we will support it in principle to send it to committee. Then I hope at committee, if it ever does come up for debate, we can hear from some witnesses and actually look at some ways to improve this bill. Certainly, I would be very interested to do that from the point of view of the NDP.

• (1850)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured tonight to speak to the bill moved by the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, a fine colleague who is doing outstanding work. This bill is just another representation of that fine effort.

Given the increasing number of our youth who are involved with drugs and this government's commitment to a national anti-drug strategy that focuses on prevention and treatment as well as broader enforcement issues, Bill C-423 is both important and timely.

The bill would amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act to allow police to refer youth charged with less serious offences to addiction specialists to determine if treatment is needed.

Too many young people get lured into drugs, succumb to addiction, and then commit minor offences to pay for their drugs. The member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont is proposing a constructive response to the plight of these troubled youth. Their plight has long been a challenge for the youth justice system.

Many of those young people charged with criminal offences are marginalized in society and face significant problems, such as homelessness, drug or alcohol addiction, or physical or sexual abuse. The fact that some young offenders have special needs does not absolve them from responsibility for criminal conduct.

At the same time, those needs should not result in a greater sentence than is justified by the offence the youth has committed. If a longer intervention under criminal law were imposed based on needs rather than deeds, the state would be punishing the needy and not the culpable.

The limits of criminal law indicate that many are implicated when a youth commits a crime. The preamble of the Youth Criminal Justice Act recognizes that. It states:

WHEREAS members of society share a responsibility to address the developmental challenges and the needs of young persons and to guide them into adulthood;

This legislation also encourages communities, families, parents, and others interested in the development of adolescents to prevent youth crime by addressing its underlying causes, responding to the needs of young persons, enforcing disciplinary measures, and providing good guidance and support.

When the youth justice system itself addresses needs through rehabilitation, safeguards are in place to ensure that interventions and penalties are proportionate to the seriousness of the offence and a young person does not incur a greater penalty because he or she has needs.

When the youth justice system recognizes that a youth has such needs, provisions exist which allow for referrals to particular child welfare agencies. For example, section 35 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act provides that "a youth justice court may, at any stage of proceedings against a young person, refer the young person to a child welfare agency for assessment".

This is independent of the criminal proceedings against the young offender. Whether services are provided or not is an issue for the child welfare agency and the young person.

The member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont proposes a similar referral power for the police. The police have, through section 6, the ability to refer a youth to a program in order to reduce the chances of recidivism.

Bill C-423 would aim to broaden the application of this measure to include the referral of a youth, with his or her consent, to a drug addiction specialist to ensure that he or she is in fact a drug addict and to recommend the proper treatment for his or her addiction.

This bill also suggests that police must consider the fact that the young person has respected the terms of his or her treatment when they are deciding whether or not to pursue criminal charges.

We should question whether the threat of the criminal law could or should be used to encourage treatment in these circumstances and whether the measure respects proportionality requirements of the criminal law.

However, providing police with the express option of referring youth with suspected addictions or substance abuse problems to an addiction specialist should be supported.

Drug use among young Canadians is increasing and there is a strong correlation between drug use and other criminal activity.

Private Members' Business

●(1855)

An express referral option for the police might encourage a more constructive response for youth with addictions and drug problems than would otherwise be caused by simply applying criminal charges. It is important, however, that the referral of young offenders are accompanied by appropriate safeguards.

The proposed amendment will require the police to take into account whether the youth has complied with a treatment program when considering whether to charge the youth for the original offence. This component of the bill should be amended as it would render the proposed amendments vulnerable to accusations that they were inappropriately attempting to coerce treatment through the criminal law. It would be a shame to see such a generally positive reform jeopardized by this aspect of the bill.

Bill C-423, with some positive adjustments, would assist the police in connecting troubled youth with the substance abuse services they need. I am proud to stand here today and say that will support Bill C-423, with the amendments needed to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place.

I congratulate the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for taking concrete steps to help young people who have become involved with drugs and are committing crimes.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise in support of Bill C-423, a very important bill that seeks to address the serious problem of drug addiction among Canadian youth. This is a good bill. The amendments proposed to the Youth Criminal Justice Act in affirm our belief that the best way to fight the use of illegal drugs is the treatment of addiction.

In my riding of Newton—North Delta all one has to do is speak to some of the police officers who do such great work with youth to understand the seriousness of this problem, police officers like Staff Sergeant Barry Hickman, my community's selection for Police Officer of the Year. He works with social services and community groups to get the message out there.

The message is that dangerous drugs like crystal meth, crack and cocaine have devastating effects on our young people and our communities, but it is a problem that requires a real infrastructure for recovery. It is a terrible disease that affects too many Canadians, so it is crucial that our laws reflect our goals of treatment. Simply jailing young people does not make the situation any better. This is why I am glad to see that the bill supports the best practices of youth justice.

We know that the courts and police officers should focus on the recovery of young Canadians. We know that there are real solutions through this approach. The bill makes it clear that police should consider how best to help young Canadians in the criminal justice system.

Recovery and treatment programs have proven to be far more effective than any other form of drug use prevention. Treatment is the real intention behind the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and this bill is drafted in that spirit. It uses clear language and will be a great help to police officers.

The bill also reflects the compassionate and caring values of Canadian society, values that really mean something to my constituents of Newton—North Delta. One way we can measure ourselves is to examine how we treat our weakest members of the society. Young, wonderful people addicted to drugs should have every opportunity to get off the drugs and lead productive, healthy and safe lives.

It is obvious that the most effective way to fight the drug problem is the treatment of drug addiction. I have brought some statistics to add detail to this debate.

According to study by Rydell and Everingham, domestic enforcement costs four times as much as treatment. Treatment is 15 times better in a cost benefit analysis than the next most effective funding option. This is exactly what the Youth Criminal Justice Act was designed to do, to help youthful offenders break out of their habits.

To be clear, the act states in its preamble that:

—communities, families, parents and others concerned with the development of young persons should, through multi-disciplinary approaches, take reasonable steps to prevent youth crime by addressing its underlying causes...

The act describes this approach in further detail in section 3, where it states that the following principles are the intent of the act: the youth criminal justice system is intended to address underlying circumstances of offending behaviour; rehabilitate and ensure meaningful consequences; emphasize rehabilitation and reintegration and timely intervention; and reinforce respect for social values, encourage repair for harm done, respect special needs and family need, and respect the demographic uniqueness of the youth.

●(1900)

Unlike adult criminal law, which places more emphasis on the protection of society and the deterrence of the crime, the act takes special care to attempt to intervene in the destructive behaviour of youth.

Any bill that proposes to clearly outline how the police should seek to aid young offenders to overcome an addiction is in keeping with the spirit of the Youth Criminal Justice Act and should be supported.

I have spoken about treatment as the most cost effective way of fighting addiction, and I have spoken about the purpose of the act being the same as the purpose of the bill currently under discussion.

As well, it is important to note the importance of extrajudicial measures described in the youth criminal justice system. These measures are understood in the content of the act, but Bill C-423 seeks to clarify and emphasize the importance of extrajudicial measures for police officers. These measures can be an important part of recovery and the fight against drugs.

The importance of extrajudicial measures in the act is clear in section 4, which says that “extrajudicial measures are often the most appropriate and effective way to address youth crime” and “these measures allow for effective and timely interventions focused on correcting offender behaviour”.

Private Members' Business

This points to what is best about the bill. We are really talking about Canadian values. As Canadians we are very careful about the country we leave to our children. Our forward thinking and progressive social policies are our foundation. We are, in fact, a very caring society.

I believe one way we can measure our success is to look at how we treat our society's weakest members. Despite the strong performance of our economy and our strong competitive workforce, we still face the challenges of poverty, drug addiction and crime. Some of the most vulnerable Canadians are young people born into poverty, violence and addiction.

The Canadian approach to youth criminal justice therefore considers the circumstances of those young people who break the law. The goal of criminal law, with respect to these minors, is to consider how to best address their situation. A bill that instructs police to consider treatment is a well-considered change to improve upon the intent of good Canadian law.

We must try to protect and help the most vulnerable Canadians. The bill seeks to do precisely that.

I am convinced this is a good bill and I am happy to support it. As I said, it places the emphasis on treatment, which is the best way to spend our money fighting drugs.

The bill also emphasizes the recovery of offenders, which is the expressed intent of the Youth Criminal Justice Act. The proposed amendment therefore is in keeping with the original intent of the act and it improves upon the clarity of the language of the act. Hopefully, it will be instructive for police officers when considering treatment as an extrajudicial measure. Most important, the bill reflects the Canadian value of care for the youth. It is a good proposal that puts the interests of at risk youth in the minds of officers who encounter them.

For all these reasons, I will be voting in favour of Bill C-423. I congratulate the member from Alberta for putting this bill forward.

• (1905)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to the second reading of Bill C-423, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act (treatment for substance abuse). I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, for his excellent work on this bill.

Bill C-423 is consistent with this government's national anti-drug strategy. Canada faces some serious drug problems. Chief among them is the growing number of our youth becoming involved with drugs at younger and younger ages.

Many communities across Canada have indicated that youth drug use is a priority concern. For several communities, the lure of highly addictive drugs like crystal meth is a real challenge for their youth. We have heard these concerns and we have been working to respond to them.

Combating drugs is a complicated problem that needs a targeted approach. This government knows that the best way to tackle complex issues is to establish the most important priorities and act decisively on them in order to achieve results. Unlike those of

previous governments, our drug strategy, as with all the strategies and programs we implement, will establish clear, measurable goals and priorities.

Budget 2007 signalled that this government will be investing in a national anti-drug strategy. The strategy provides new funding of \$64 million for a focused approach to address illicit drug issues based on three concrete action plans: first, preventing illicit drug use, with \$10 million over two years; second, treating illicit drug dependency, with \$32 million over two years; and third, combating illicit drug production and distribution, with \$22 million over two years.

I would like to talk about prevention, because we all know that the best treatment is prevention. Our efforts in the area of prevention will focus on youth and include community based drug use and crime prevention initiatives as well as a public awareness campaign.

Next is enforcement. The national anti-drug strategy will also target the production of drugs in Canada, including marijuana grow ops and clandestine labs. It will target those organized criminals who exploit for profit our youth and other vulnerable citizens.

Of course, there is treatment. I have a background as a health care provider and I can say that all successful programs include treatment. The public often views the police role as one of enforcement only. This government recognizes the broader contribution of police in dealing with community problems. Police do excellent work in the area of drug prevention. With the introduction of Bill C-423, police will also be encouraged to assist youth in conflict by referring those with drug problems to treatment programming.

This bill is consistent with the budget resources under the NADS, which provides funding to the Department of Justice to support extrajudicial diversion and treatment programs for youth offenders with drug related problems at the various stages of the criminal justice system, to the RCMP to implement new tools to refer youth at risk to treatment programming, and to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to develop new treatment models for crystal methamphetamine use.

It is all about working together. This government recognizes that success in addressing Canada's drug issues will require the combined efforts of many, from both the private and the public sectors, and across different disciplines like health, education and the justice system.

Police have always played an integral role in dealing with the drug problems facing our communities. They will continue to be relied upon under the national anti-drug strategy.

Adjournment Proceedings

Bill C-423 recognizes the role that police can play on the treatment front and provides one more tool to help youth overcome their problems and make our communities safer.

By working together, we can effect positive change across Canada.

I will end by saying that kids are our most important resource and their future is in our hands. I hope everyone will support this wonderful bill, Bill C-423.

Once again, I would like to thank the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for all his good work on the bill.

• (1910)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 7:13 p.m., the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for West Nova not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is therefore deemed withdrawn.

The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[Translation]

SAINT-HUBERT AIRPORT

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I will be speaking—"Not again", some may say—about the Saint-Hubert airport. Perhaps you will not say it, but the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities will undoubtedly say it or at least think it. I have been asking questions about this for a few months. My Bloc Québécois colleagues, my leader in particular, and I have asked the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec a number of questions about development plans for the Saint-Hubert airport.

This development plan is extremely important, not only for the future of Saint-Hubert but also for the future of the south shore and its economic development.

The runway must be lengthened by 1,200 feet and widened, and the tarmac must be improved and upgraded. Larger aircraft must be able to land at Saint-Hubert and with good reason, including the fact that Pratt & Whitney Canada, with some facilities located at Saint-Hubert, is carrying out engine test flights and shortly will purchase a new wide-body aircraft.

Pratt & Whitney has changed the type of aircraft it uses for its engine test flights, and these new aircraft require a runway that is

1,200 feet longer. In any case, even without Pratt & Whitney the Saint-Hubert airport would have to undertake this work.

The federal government was asked to contribute \$70 million. The Minister of Transport told me, "For the first phase we are talking about \$9.5 million; and for the second phase, \$60 million. We have to sit down and talk".

Obviously that means they have to sit down with the various departments to decide together how to come up with the other \$60 million. Indeed, it seems there are currently enough programs to invest \$9.5 million in the Saint-Hubert airport.

That is my first question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Is the \$9.5 million investment a sure thing?

Furthermore, I think I understand that the minister does not want to commit right now to the entire project without being sure of having the \$60 million for the second phase. But I want to know whether things are rolling along. Who is he talking to? What developments are there in finding subsidies for the Saint-Hubert airport?

The minister's response that I cited, concerning \$9.5 million for the first phase and \$60 million for the second phase, was obtained on May 6. Today is June 5. It has been almost a month. Perhaps this evening we could celebrate the first anniversary of this response, but it has been too long.

It is time to see some developments, to hear the minister's representative confirm that the Saint-Hubert airport file is still on the top of the pile. Who is he talking to and who is he sitting down with? When will we get an answer?

I have a suggestion as to where and when we could hear the answer: here and now.

• (1915)

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be here a third time on the same topic. As the member mentioned, she has asked a couple of questions on it before.

On May 15, I talked about the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities actually meeting last March with the representatives of the City of Longueuil, the Saint-Hubert Airport Development Corporation and Pratt & Whitney. They presented a proposal for runway enlargement and expansion as well as other improvements to the Saint-Hubert airport. We do believe it is a good project.

Among other things, it was pointed out at that time that not all of the other modifications being proposed for the airport meet the criteria of the airport capital assistance program, which of course is intended for all airports across every province and every territory in Canada. All Canadians should benefit from this program and that is the intention of this government.

Adjournment Proceedings

This program provides assistance to eligible airports in financing capital projects related to safety, asset protection and operating cost reduction. It includes precise criteria, which is very well laid out in the program itself, to ensure the safe use of aircraft used for regular flights, which is so important to Canadians.

This program provides investment of approximately \$30 million per year. About 100 airports in Canada actually share that financing. In Quebec alone, around 30 airports that meet the criteria of this program, including Saint-Hubert airport, share in that funding. It is not a lot of money to go around to every airport across Canada and we have to be fair to all Canadians in all provinces.

As for Saint-Hubert, the aircraft used for regularly scheduled flights, the Pilatus 12, only requires 4,500 feet to operate safely. This standard applied across Canada is to provide equitable funding, as I said, and to rehabilitate only the length of runway necessary to ensure safety. Safety is the concern for ACAP funding. Safety is first; it comes before all else across Canada equally.

In the current context, Transport Canada is not in a position to finance the entire project presented by Pratt & Whitney and the City of Longueuil through ACAP, which is the only funding program currently available provided by the department. However, the department will conduct a careful review of the elements of this project that do fall under ACAP once a formal application has been made. There has not been an application made yet for any of this funding, so we would appreciate a formal application. It would be a good first step.

As for the concerns expressed by the member in regard to job losses, which she has expressed before, Pratt & Whitney has been specific that there will be no job losses. In fact, it is having a banner year and is doing very, very well. That, of course, was forwarded to the Montreal *Gazette* and indeed other newspapers in Quebec.

Those two documents, particularly the one document regarding job losses, sets the record straight for my colleague. Indeed, there were some questions raised by my colleague and other members on that side of the House.

Pratt & Whitney explained that as a user of the airport, the company was approached to support the project and to consider if it could find additional investment opportunities. The company did respond, "Whether it goes ahead or not, this project will have no adverse impact on Pratt & Whitney Canada's current manpower level". Things will go ahead as normal for the company, and it is doing very well, we understand.

As for financing, given that this project does contribute, as I mentioned last time, to the economic development of the greater Montreal area, the government could assess such a request as part of another program under which it would become eligible under the criteria, once it has been included in the new budget. We are all waiting with bated breath to see what that new criteria is.

However, as the member already knows, if Canada—

• (1920)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his answer.

In response to that answer, I would say that everyone, including me, knew that the budget for ACAP, the airports capital assistance program, was only \$30 million. Moreover, the other assistance program provided by the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is worth \$220 million. I agree with my colleague: asking for \$70 million is far too much in the context of these two programs.

This government must understand that it has to adapt its programs and program funding to projects, to reality, especially when a project, like the one for Saint-Hubert, is so big, so important to job creation and so necessary that it will continue to generate economic spinoffs for decades to come.

Moreover, there will be private investment in addition to government funds. We must not wait—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, if this project goes ahead and uses the funding, other regions of Quebec and the rest of Canada will be deprived of funding and that consequence is not going to be very well accepted by other Quebecers. In fact, we have to be fair to all regions of Quebec. We have to be fair to all Quebecers and all Canadians in relation to this particular project and we are looking at new criteria.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the Minister of Labour have both stated, as I mentioned in the House, that they would be prepared to study a formal application and to take a serious look at what more the government can do to support this business project and the people of Quebec.

To that end, senior officials at Canada Economic Development and Transport Canada met with representatives of Pratt & Whitney last Friday. This meeting enabled the government to better identify the company's needs and objectives and allowed Pratt & Whitney to learn more about available government programs, as well as the strategic issues involved.

In closing, I would like to assure the House that Transport Canada officials are currently analyzing Pratt & Whitney's stated needs and working to identify options that could help to meet those needs. All ministers are working as a government, especially the Quebec—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 7:22 p.m.)

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