



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 141 • NUMBER 173 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, June 18, 2007

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 18, 2007

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

PEARSON PEACEKEEPING CENTRE

The House resumed from May 7 consideration of the motion.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the motion that was introduced by our Liberal colleague from West Nova and is before us today is very positive, in my opinion. The proposal that the federal government fully fund the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre does not seem like a whim to me, because the centre's mission is fully in line with the Bloc Québécois position on foreign development assistance.

As you know, political, geographical and religious conflicts cause serious harm to people, and even one conflict is one too many. The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre was created at the federal government's request in 1994, when a number of countries bordering Germany and Russia were in a rather unstable and fragile state after the fall of the eastern bloc. The centre's mission is to train civilians, military personnel and police officers for peacekeeping missions and to promote research in order to guide public policy debate.

The increasing demands of conflict prevention and resolution, and the growing scope of Canada's involvement in all aspects of peace operations required the creation of a focal point for education, training, and research activities. The teaching environment needed to be multidisciplinary and international, providing a location where persons from different professional, cultural and national backgrounds could learn together. This diversity reflects actual field conditions. The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre was established in Nova Scotia in 1995 and expanded in 1999, opening an office in Montreal to better serve the international francophone community. In November 2003, recognizing the importance of having a presence close to the seat of government, the centre opened a liaison office in Ottawa. Most of the centre's official courses are given abroad, in Africa, eastern Europe and Latin America.

Unfortunately, the centre has always had funding problems. When it was created in 1994, it was supposed to be financially self-sufficient by 1999. It has proven to be difficult for a peacekeeping

training centre to be self-sufficient. The Bloc Québécois thinks it is important for the federal government to subsidize this centre. In March, the Bloc Québécois was pleased with the Conservative government's decision to give the Pearson Centre \$13.8 million over three years, from March 2007 to March 2010. This funding was for the basic infrastructure of the centre: salaries, rent, equipment, etc. The funding does not cover the projects and courses offered by the centre. It is piecemeal. For example, CIDA is responsible for funding conferences in Canada and abroad.

Until recently, the Department of National Defence funded training courses on peacekeeping missions at the Cornwallis office in Nova Scotia. Located outside major centres in a small community, the advantage of this site is that simulations for the purposes of exercises can be held without disturbing people in the surrounding areas.

The Department of National Defence has decided to stop funding the training courses at the Cornwallis office, saying that National Defence will provide training itself at the base in Kingston.

The only purpose of the Cornwallis office was to provide training. Without federal funding for these courses, the Cornwallis office may have to close its doors. Training is at the very heart of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre's mandate. The Cornwallis section is very important and the upheaval that will result from closing this section could be very damaging to the centre.

The importance of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre should not be underestimated. The training and policy directions there are directly related to the policy Canada has been developing since the days of Pearson, whose goal it was in the 1950s to devote 0.7% of gross domestic product to development assistance—an objective I would point out has still not been met, unfortunately.

The development assistance envelope has not stopped shrinking, going from a little less than 0.5% in 1991-92 to 0.45% in 1993 and 0.25% in 2000.

The decrease was particularly significant when the Liberals were in power, but the Conservatives have not managed to do much better.

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Through the debate on the motion, I want to reiterate today that the Bloc Québécois is committed to having the federal government implement a realistic and concrete plan to achieve the UN target of 0.7% of GDP for international assistance by 2015. To reach this, the Conservatives must start increasing development assistance budgets now, at an average rate of 12% to 15% per year.

The Bloc Québécois' desire to see this happen is genuine, since we have worked long and hard to improve Bill C-293 to make the development assistance objectives as clear and effective as possible, by proposing that the federal government make all bilateral assistance dependent on respecting fundamental human rights, but also ensure that the money is not diverted from its original purpose.

The Bloc Québécois believes that, given the importance of the Pearson Centre, the government should work with it to ensure a seamless transition from DND funding of training courses to other funding. The federal government should provide full funding temporarily, until the Centre can find new clients to fund its training courses. The federal government has the means to fund this Centre.

Under no circumstances should the Conservative government reverse its decision to fund the basic infrastructure of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre.

Because the Bloc Québécois has always supported initiatives aimed at resolving conflicts through dialogue and mediation, the Bloc Québécois supports Motion M-311.

• (1110)

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words on behalf of my hon. colleague from West Nova who cannot be here today but who understands fully how important this is to his riding, to the province of Nova Scotia and to the country as a whole.

As we are aware, the peacekeeping missions started over 50 years ago and they have certainly done a lot for this great nation.

Since his election to the House in 2000, my colleague from West Nova has been working to secure long term funding for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, an important Canadian institution.

Motion No. 311 calls upon the House to fully fund the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to assure its continued operation in Nova Scotia.

The PPC was established as an independent, not for profit organization by the Government of Canada in 1994 on the site of former Canadian Forces Base Cornwallis in southwest Nova Scotia. The facility is recognized as a world leader in peace operation research, education and training. The PPC is headquartered in Cornwallis with offices in Ottawa and Montreal. Cornwallis is also the venue for residential courses and military simulation exercises.

There has been ongoing speculation about the future of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre at Cornwallis. A full funding commitment would ensure the centre's continued operation at Cornwallis and assuage the fears of community members and employees throughout the organization.

Cornwallis Park, Nova Scotia is an ideal location for a training facility, given its retreat-like atmosphere. The facilities of the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre and the many services and amenities at Cornwallis support the work of the centre and provide the needs for staff and visitors. The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre generates employment and contributes significantly to the economy of southwest Nova Scotia.

The real work of the PPC is of increasing relevance. Peacekeeping and the environment in which it is conducted has evolved significantly since the peacekeeping mission some 50 years ago. In this changing environment, the PPC's contribution to preparing military, police and civilians to develop and deliver effective peace operations worldwide is more important than ever.

The PPC operates with funding from DND and CIDA. In March 2005, the federal Liberals announced \$20 million in funding to support the PPC over the next five years. In November 2006, the Minister of Defence, during a committee of the whole, stated that his department would meet its share of the funding required to maintain the centre at Cornwallis.

Support for this motion would honour the current government's commitment to maintain funding to the centre. More important, it would send a clear message that the members of this House recognize the importance of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to the province of Nova Scotia and to this nation. It is so important for our international reputation that we ensure the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre is properly funded.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to voice my support for the Lester B. Pearson Canadian international peacekeeping centre.

The motion before the House seeks continued support for this unique institution. This government is doing just that, while also remaining fiscally responsible to Canadian taxpayers.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, or the PPC, is helping to sustain a longstanding Canadian tradition. I am sure my colleagues in the House share my pride in Canada's vast experience and formidable reputation in support of peace operations.

Canadians have been actively involved in peacekeeping since 1947. In fact, since that time there has not been a single year when Canadian troops have not been overseas. They have been deployed abroad to stand between belligerents, supervise truces, demobilize and help reintegrate armed factions, remove landmines, and help provide humanitarian assistance, among other things.

Over the past 60 years, Canada's approach to international security has evolved significantly to meet the challenges of the changing security environment.

As members of the House are well aware, today's operations are more complex. Traditional United Nations peacekeeping missions are no longer as prevalent as they once were. More often, Canadian Forces personnel are involved in multilateral missions that are mandated rather than conducted by the UN.

They are participating in operations as part of a coalition or led by many organizations, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union and the African Union. But regardless of the form they might take, Canada's peace support efforts are a natural extension of our nation's longstanding commitment to the principles of peace and freedom.

Our military personnel have helped to bring stability to the far corners of the earth and to provide the opportunity for lasting peace to take hold. Together with Canadian development workers, police officers and diplomats, our Canadian Forces members have brought to bear unique knowledge and unmatched skills.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre gives these Canadian professionals the opportunity to share their breadth of experience with other Canadians and with our partners and allies. Founded in 1994, the PPC broke new ground as the first training centre of its kind in the world. It has grown to establish itself as an international centre of excellence for research, education and training in all aspects of peace operations.

When one thinks about the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, it is easy to recall its unique approach to thinking and learning that differentiates it from other organizations within the peace operations community. The centre is a progressive, innovative, multidisciplinary, integrated, practical and networked organization. It carries out important research.

The training it has provided, the solid educational opportunities it offers, and its capacity building contributions to civilian, military and police institutions in Canada and around the world are highly respected. More than 10,000 people, military and police officers as well as civilians, from 140 countries have taken Pearson Peacekeeping Centre courses. The centre has offered its training in 31 different countries around the world.

That is why the government fully supports the good work that is being accomplished by the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. We have committed to providing it with up to \$13.8 million, which includes \$12 million in core funding and up to \$1.8 million in in-kind contributions for the next three years.

CIDA and DND each will provide \$6 million in core funding over the next three fiscal years. Additionally, DND will provide up to \$1.8 million in salaries and benefits for a number of military officers to work as staff at the centre.

I must reiterate: Canadians are proud of Canada's military heritage and they are proud of the work the forces are doing to bring about security and stability. The government is pleased to fund an organization that is contributing to peace and security around the world.

These contributions are far-reaching investments. They will help facilitate research, education and training in all aspects of peace operations. They will help sustain an institution that promotes the

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Canadian values of human rights, rule of law, democracy and freedom. They will help protect Canadian interests abroad. It is common to encounter graduates from the PPC in key government posts abroad, in Europe, South American, Asia and Africa.

● (1115)

And government support goes beyond funding.

Over the years, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and DND have developed working relationships or partnerships with the centre. Later this year, the government will conduct a policy review to determine possible future collaborations with the PPC.

Most important, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre is working to become an independent institution. It has presented a business plan outlining increased diversification of its program funding. It is looking to develop opportunities with non-Canadian government clients.

This government is working diligently to support the centre. The funding that this government has committed over the next three years will enable the centre to develop new courses that best fit changing international training requirements. The government's contribution is also providing the PPC with the support it needs to reach its full potential and become a self-sustaining enterprise.

This government recognizes the direct benefits the centre has brought not only to the Atlantic region but also, through its offices in Montreal and Ottawa, to other areas of the country as well. We appreciate the PPC's contributions to the study and practice of peace operations, as well as its success in building the capacity of other nations around the world. The Lester B. Pearson Canadian international peacekeeping centre has helped sustain and contribute to Canada's solid reputation as a leader in peace support operations.

Before I conclude, I would like to share with my colleagues in the House a few quotes from children:

Peace can grow and blossom like a rose but is delicate and has the innate ability to fall apart if it is not provided with all of its necessities.

That was written by a student from Vancouver, B.C.

Another student from Tottenham, Ontario wrote the following:

I know there are people with the same dreams as me. But it takes everyone to save all of us. We are the people, and it is our right to have peace.

Finally, a student from Waterloo, Ontario shared this view:

Another way to simply help stop war is to respect differences in how we look and think.

These are quotes from students who participated in a recent essay contest sponsored by the PPC that asked them to "think about peace". Students from all across Canada, and from as far away as Nepal and Bosnia, submitted essays and posters as part of a contest marking the 50th anniversary of international peace operations.

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The PPC received entries from Brownie and Pathfinder units, from school classes, from YM-YWCA after-school programs, from military family resource centres, and from students who entered under their own initiative. I wish I could share with members right now the phenomenal posters that were also submitted.

This contest's far-reaching impact is symbolic of the PPC's global contributions to improved capacity, to lessons learned, to education and to training. The PPC has enhanced Canada's proud traditions in peace support. This is why this government stands behind its continued operation.

• (1120)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent to suspend until 12 o'clock.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The sitting of the House is suspended until noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:23 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved:

That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint their Honours that this House agrees with amendments numbered 1 to 11 made by the Senate to Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act;

And that this House agrees with the principles set out in amendment 12 but would propose the following amendment:

Senate amendment 12 be amended as follows:

Clause 42, page 17:

(a) Replace line 23 with the following:

“17 to 19 and 34 come into force 10 months”

(b) Add after line 31 the following:

“(3) Paragraphs 162(i.1) and (i.2) of the Canada Elections Act, as enacted by section 28, come into force six months after the day on which this Act receives royal assent unless, before that day, the Chief Electoral Officer publishes a notice in the Canada Gazette that the necessary preparations have been made for the bringing into operation of the provisions set out in the notice and that they may come into force on the day set out in the notice.”

He said: Mr. Speaker, it will surprise nobody that I take great pleasure in having the opportunity to speak to the matter of sending a message to the Senate, but today it is to only send a message with regard to a bill to improve the integrity of the electoral process, Bill C-31.

This bill is part of our agenda to strengthen accountability through democratic reform. While it is by no means headline grabbing, the bill proposes a host of necessary changes and timely operational improvements to the Canada Elections Act that many of us welcome. These are aimed at, among other things, reducing voter fraud, because whenever a person votes who should not, that act diminishes a legitimate vote that has been cast.

The genesis of the bill was the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs which was tabled in this place almost a year ago on June 22, 2006. Over the summer of 2006 the government studied the committee's recommendations and on October 24, 2006 implemented virtually all of them with the introduction of Bill C-31. We have introduced this bill because we, along with the committee, want to ensure that the democratic process continues to hold the confidence of Canadians.

The procedure and House affairs committee reviewed Bill C-31 in detail and reported the bill back with some amendments. In the spirit of cooperation and compromise, the government agreed to those amendments that had been supported at committee by the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois in opposition, even though we had voted against those at committee.

There is a key amendment in them. The bulk of the debate when it came to the amendments was about whether or not to include the birthdates of electors on the voters lists that are distributed to political parties and not just those that Elections Canada officials have. As I said, in committee the Conservatives opposed it, but when it came to the House we felt on election legislation of this type it was important to maintain a spirit of non-partisan interest and support across parties, so we gave up our opposition at that point to support it through report stage and third reading and send it to the Senate.

Then, to our surprise, since this was an amendment advanced and promoted by the Liberal Party, the Liberal senators were aghast and horrified that had been included. They chose to return to the original Conservative Party position of not including birthdates. Irony has no bounds when it comes to the Senate and Liberal Senator George Baker actually praised the senators for amending the legislation to take out the birthdate provision because it could have increased identity theft and allowed telemarketers to prey on senior citizens. Then he had the temerity to say that without the Senate, we would have had a bill that would have been a disaster. I guess what he was saying was if it were not for the Liberal Party, we would have had a bill that would have been a disaster, and that comment was from a Liberal senator.

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I find that amusing because now we are in the circumstance of undoing what the Liberals in the House encouraged us to do. We went along with it in the spirit of non-partisanship to a point where we are responding to these amendments dealing with the birthdate provision. As I said, when we did it in a non-partisan fashion it was to ensure the bill passed to maintain, when it comes to electoral provisions, the spirit of non-partisanship. The Senate obviously felt differently.

The Senate amendments go beyond that. There are five categories. The first category deals with amendments related to bingo cards, which is what they are called. They are a way of helping scrutineers know who has voted. The second category deals with the coming into force provisions of the act. The third category deals with casual election workers. The fourth category deals with the use of birthdates, which I spoke about already. The fifth category is regarding penalties for the misuse of voters lists. I will address each of these in turn. Before I do that, I will say that this government is proposing that the House accept nearly all of the Senate amendments. However, we are proposing a small change to one of the amendments relating to the coming into force of the bill.

[*Translation*]

First, there are the “bingo cards”. The first group of amendments makes technical changes to clause 28 in the bill, which provides for so-called “bingo-card” updating of lists of who has voted on polling day. Essentially, this provision allows lists of those who have voted to be given to candidates' representatives periodically on polling day.

These lists can be used by candidates to assist in getting out the vote among their supporters. Candidates and their supporters are already entitled to keep their own lists of who has voted, but this mechanism will make the process more efficient and reduce the burden on candidate representatives at the polls.

Quebec has had a similar system for quite some time, and the name “bingo cards” comes from the forms used there for this purpose. These forms include numbers corresponding to electors registered in the polling division. These numbers can be easily checked off when someone votes. In this way, the forms resemble bingo cards.

• (1205)

The bingo card provision was not in the bill when it was introduced, but was added by opposition members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when they studied the bill. The government agreed to this amendment in the interests of passing the bill as a whole. The Chief Electoral Officer appeared before the Senate committee studying the bill and asked that the provision be refined for operational reasons.

The senators agreed, and so the provision was amended in two respects: first, to exclude polling day registrants from being added to these lists. Polling day registrants do not have an assigned number and would need to be added to the lists manually, which would be cumbersome for poll clerks.

In addition, the purpose of bingo card updating is to facilitate the process of getting out the vote, which is targeted at registered voters that candidates have already identified through their lists of electors.

Therefore, transmitting the names of polling day registrants would not advance this purpose.

Poll clerks will only be required to provide a list of those who have voted once on each advance polling day, after the close of advance polls. This measure will help reduce the administrative burden of the provision without hindering the effectiveness of the process.

The government agrees with these changes, as they will improve the operation of this provision. I therefore support passage of this amendment by the House.

[*English*]

Second, on the coming into force amendments, the provision in clause 42 was modified when the House committee reviewed the bill. Originally the bill was set to come into force within six months following royal assent, unless the Chief Electoral Officer was ready to implement it at an earlier time. This is the conventional approach for coming into force provisions for Canada Elections Act amendments.

After hearing from the Chief Electoral Officer, the House committee amended clause 42 to extend to eight months the coming into force of the provisions dealing with the national register and list of electors due to the need for updating computer systems at Elections Canada.

In addition, the House committee amended the bill to provide that the other provisions not related to the register, such as the voter identification provisions, would come into force within two months after royal assent. That is fairly easy because those are things that the elections officials already have to be trained to do in the cases where they now have to apply a reasonableness test for requiring identification. They will have to require it all the time. We are actually taking out a step, and therefore, it should not be hard to implement that.

Before the Senate committee the Chief Electoral Officer advised the implementation of the provisions related to the register would actually require 10 months rather than 8 months for implementation to allow time for thorough testing of computer systems. Therefore, the Senate amended clause 42 to allow 10 months for the coming into force of these provisions.

In addition the Senate made an amendment to clause 42 to clarify that the other provisions, such as the voter identification provisions, must come into force within two months of royal assent despite section 554 of the Canada Elections Act, which is the section that says that the six month implementation applies. This would clearly be contrary to the intent of the House committee in requiring that certain provisions of Bill C-31 should come into force within two months of royal assent. That is why we are going with it. The technical amendment ensures that this intent is realized.

The government agrees with these two amendments from the Senate relating to the coming into force provisions. I propose that the House accept these Senate amendments.

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However, I should make clear that there is one we have problems with. The Senate also amended clause 42 to include the bingo card provisions I mentioned earlier within the group of provisions coming into force within 10 months from royal assent.

The rationale was that this change is affected by the register and it needs the same amount of time to implement as the other changes to the register. However, as we all know, there are already line numbers included on the list which are used by campaign volunteers to monitor voting and get out the vote on election day.

In light of the other amendments that we have accepted for facilitating the operation of the bingo card system, we do not see why it would take months to implement these new provisions. Therefore, I am proposing that this amendment by the Senate be amended by the House to require that it come into force within six months from royal assent. Assuming the bill received royal assent some time this month, that would be in place for any election that would occur within the year 2008.

The third set of amendments is related to casual election workers. The government in the Senate proposed this third set of amendments. The amendments deal with the issue of the maximum period of employment for casual workers in Elections Canada.

When introduced, Bill C-31 amended the Public Service Employment Act to permit the Public Service Commission to extend the terms of casual workers beyond the 90 day per year maximum period that is currently set out in the act.

As was very cogently explained by the president of the Public Service Commission before the Senate committee that studied Bill C-31, it is her opinion that the Public Service Employment Act does not provide the necessary authority to allow the terms of casual workers to be extended.

The situation of elections particularly in a minority parliament context clearly demonstrates that it is sometimes necessary. Personnel at Elections Canada nearly doubles during an election and the organization depends heavily on casual workers with previous election experience. In the context of successive minority parliaments, Elections Canada must be prepared for a potential election call with little advance notice. As well, there is the potential of running more than one general election in a year.

Bill C-31 as passed by the House of Commons would have addressed this issue. As well, it would have permitted the Public Service Commission to respond on a case by case basis to other situations where casual workers may need extended terms such as the running of a census by Statistics Canada.

However, senators raised concerns in committee with the scope of the regulatory power because it was not confined solely to the elections context. As a result the committee defeated these provisions.

● (1210)

Given the importance of this matter to the effective administration of elections, the government responded with the introduction of amendments at report stage in the Senate to restore the amendment to the Public Service Employment Act, but to circumscribe it so it would apply only to election workers whose maximum term would

be set out in the statute at 165 days. This amendment was then passed by the Senate.

It is vital to our democratic process that Elections Canada has the personnel and resources it needs to administer elections effectively and efficiently. This amendment would facilitate that objective and I urge all members to support me in passing it.

[*Translation*]

The fourth issue and fourth set of amendments deal with the issue of birthdates on the lists of electors.

As hon. members will recall, when Bill C-31 was first introduced it provided that the dates of birth of voters should be added to the lists used at advance and regular polls by poll workers only. These poll workers could use the date of birth as another tool to ensure the integrity of the vote. For example, they could use it to confirm the identity of voters or to differentiate between voters with the same name. In accordance with the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in its 13th report, Bill C-31 did not provide for the dates of birth to be included on the lists distributed to candidates, MPs and parties.

When the bill was sent to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs after second reading, the Bloc and Liberal members of the committee passed an amendment to add dates of birth to lists distributed to candidates, MPs and parties. The Conservative members voted against this amendment in committee. However, we supported the bill as a whole when it returned to the House for passage because we recognized that sometimes compromise is needed.

When Bill C-31 was in the Senate, senators disagreed with those opposition amendments and effectively restored Bill C-31 to how it was when introduced—in other words, by having the date of birth on lists used by poll officials, but not on lists distributed to candidates, MPs and parties.

Obviously, the government is amendable to this change. It was never our intention to distribute birthdates more broadly to political participants.

Therefore, we propose supporting these Senate amendments as well. That said, in a minority Parliament, this is not our choice alone and it will be up to opposition members to decide.

● (1215)

[*English*]

I must say it is remarkable because I personally had to go to that Senate committee and defend the Liberal amendment to put the birthdates on the lists from Liberal senators who said it was shocking and abhorrent. Again, Senator Baker said that “Without the Senate, in this particular instance, we would have had a bill that would have been a disaster”. The Liberal amendment would have made the bill a disaster, so the Liberals in the Senate have changed it.

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We just want to get along with everybody. We are trying to make things work. We have been trying to seek consensus on this one and I know we keep going back and forth, and I keep going to the Liberal House leader seeking consensus. I think we now have a consensus, or a partial consensus, but at least one that the Senate will accept.

I know members from the Bloc are not happy with it and I know it restores our original position which we were willing to give up in the spirit of compromise because that is indeed the spirit I and this government have always tried to pursue in the House. That is what we will be doing and I am pleased that eventually that game of ping-pong between the Liberals in the House of Commons and the Liberals in the Senate, on this issue at least, will change.

I hope that it can change on Bill S-4, the Senate term limits bill, and hopefully the Liberal senators will listen to their leader and actually make the decision to move forward with that. I also hope in regard to the budget that they would respect the will of the House of Commons, but that remains to be seen.

The fifth issue relates to the higher penalty for misuse of voters' lists. The fifth last and last group of amendments arose out of the Senate's discussion on the distribution of electoral lists generally. Currently, the Canada Elections Act provides that anyone who knowingly misuses personal information on the lists of electors is guilty of an offence. The penalty for that offence is set at a maximum fine of \$1,000 or up to three months imprisonment, or both. The Senate proposes that this be increased to a maximum punishment of a \$5,000 fine and one year imprisonment.

In an era of increasing identity theft there should be serious penalties for the misuse of personal information, particularly when obtained through the electoral process. The proposed amendments would provide a better deterrent to those who may be tempted to misuse personal information on the lists for financial gain. Therefore, I am in agreement with those amendments and I propose that they be accepted by this House.

I proposed that many messages be sent to the Senate, but on this occasion I am proposing we send a message advising that the House accepts amendments 1 through 11, but that amendment 12 be amended further to provide that the bingo cards come into force within 6 months from royal assent rather than 10. It is my hope that this important bill with these changes can be given royal assent before the summer recess.

[*Translation*]

As I have mentioned on other occasions, this bill makes a number of changes to the electoral process that will reduce the opportunity for electoral fraud, improve the accuracy of the national register and the lists of electors, facilitate communication with the electorate and improve the administration of elections.

● (1220)

[*English*]

These are changes that will be of benefit to all parties, to all candidates, and to all Canadians because it will make our electoral system, and in turn our democracy, stronger.

These amendments before us today propose refinements to the bill and I hope they can be dealt with quickly, so this bill can be passed

into law. It is our responsibility as parliamentarians to ensure that the electoral process is updated so that it operates with the integrity that Canadians expect. The sooner that we pass this bill, the sooner its provisions can be implemented and our democratic system strengthened.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is simple. It is about dates of birth. In his speech, the House leader said that the Conservative Party opposed including dates of birth on voters lists for reasons of transparency.

In Quebec, dates of birth are recorded on voters lists and are available to all political parties for verification purposes. This is a safe and transparent way to ensure that, at first glance—at least with respect to age—the correct person has come to vote.

I have a hard time understanding this. It seems that this is an excellent example of the “noblesse oblige” required of a minority government. Still, we should be able to open the Conservatives' eyes. I would suggest that perhaps we should go even further and make dates of birth available not only to Elections Canada workers, but to all political parties, as is the case during provincial elections in Quebec.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think that the member made some good points. This approach is conceivable as long as the rules governing voters lists are respected.

[*English*]

Certainly, we would like to see this information out there. Our concern, when we first approached it in government, when the inclusion of birthdates on the list distributed to the parties was first proposed by the opposition at committee, was that we cannot necessarily expect that people will respect these lists. These lists do get into other hands and there is a possibility that they would get into hands where we would not want them, and that would produce an increased risk of identify theft.

On the other hand, obviously it would make it easier for political parties because, beyond Elections Canada, they are a very important part of the process of scrutinizing the vote. That is why they are called scrutineers, to ensure that electoral fraud does not take place. That is why we provide for each party to have oversight at each polling station.

From that perspective, it would add something to the system. What we have to do is balance these two very legitimate and competing objectives.

In our case, we thought that balancing those two was a very close call. At the end of the day, the approach that we have adopted is one of seeking consensus and seeking the compromise here in the House in order to have this bill become law.

[*Translation*]

Our main objective is to see Bill C-31 become law in Canada.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have concerns about this bill and its potential to disenfranchise voters, especially very low income voters who today are able to exercise their right to vote. My question for the hon. member is this. What is the rationale for bringing this bill in? Where is the problem?

I know there was an allegation, a complaint of a problem in the last election in a downtown urban riding in my city. There was an investigation and there was found to be not one instance of electoral fraud, so my question again is, where is the problem that, in the government's mind, is creating the need for this bill?

•(1225)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, none of the amendments that we are responding to today in dealing with this message from the Senate are related to the issue that has been raised by my friend from Parkdale—High Park. Her concerns were thoroughly canvassed at second reading, at committee, at report stage and third reading.

We have gone there and now we are dealing with some other amendments, none of which relate to the issues she has raised. However, I am happy to address the issue of ensuring the integrity of our electoral process, which is the underlying purpose of Bill C-31.

Society has changed a lot. There used to be a time, and we can still see evidence in some of our old election rules, when people grew up and lived in the same neighbourhood all their lives. They knew all their neighbours, so the ability to commit any kind of electoral fraud was very difficult. People in the neighbourhood would know if someone showed up and said they were so and so. They would know that the individual was someone else. That was the way it was in the olden days. Nowadays, with the mobility of population as high as it is and people not knowing their neighbours as much, the opportunity to succeed in committing that kind of electoral fraud is much higher.

All of the political parties shared a concern about that. At least three out of the four political parties felt strongly enough about that concern to support this bill and its major provisions through the key stages here in the House of Commons.

It is a question of ensuring that we have an electoral process in place that people can trust, so that we do not have these problems and end up trying to resolve them after we have a hung Parliament that has been decided by two constituencies where there has been clear electoral fraud and our entire political system grinds to a halt. This bill is to keep that from ever happening, to protect the electoral integrity that we have, to ensure that electoral fraud does not occur, and to put in place reasonable and balanced measures.

Asking for people's identification is not outrageous. Every election dozens of voters tell me they are shocked that nobody asked for their identification when they went to vote. They said anybody could have said they were them and they would have been able to vote. More and more people are beginning to figure that out.

If we do not bring this provision into place, it will not be long before we see that kind of electoral fraud and the harm that could do to our democratic parliamentary system would be very dangerous.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not have the opportunity to hear the government House leader who just spoke and identified why we want to preserve the integrity of our

electoral system, but I have no doubt that we in the House would have no disagreement on the importance of doing so.

I did hear his comment that if we do not introduce more stringent measures around identification requirements that before long we may get, and I am not sure the exact words he used, a lot of electoral fraud because sooner or later people are going to catch on to the fact that they can commit fraud. Those kinds of allegations have been made, particularly in large urban centres, in a very exaggerated form and found to be completely groundless.

There is no problem in requesting identification, but the concern arises because in real life circumstances in today's world some people do not have the kind of traditional identification that the rest of us have. The government, and other parties as well, seem to have a problem understanding this. That attitude, unfortunately, is related to the fact that the same failure to understand is why we are not doing what we need to be doing about homeless people, people living in dire poverty, and so on.

Does the minister not agree that there are a good many people who are homeless, who are in temporary shelters and so on, for whom alternate provisions appropriately need to be put in place?

•(1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. the government House leader will know that there are 30 seconds left to respond.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, that is so little time to answer such a lengthy question.

To the extent that we have people who do not find themselves with typical identification and are a little out of the system, it is a positive thing they are encouraged to have greater access to the kind of social supports that come with greater engagement in our social support networks with government. When they do that, they are more likely to end up with housing and health care. We want people in those circumstances to have access to health care and become—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country will want to know that, as the government House leader did, he has unlimited time to make his presentation. When we get to questions and comments, time will be limited to 10 minutes.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House to debate the bill before us, Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act.

I believe the central issue of the bill hinges upon two points of view. One is the protection of privacy of the individual Canadian and the other is an increase the integrity and efficiency of our electoral system.

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I believe the amendments from the Senate are appropriate and measured. We are dealing in the minority government situation, but we have a consensus around the amendments to the bill, which I believe will adequately protect the right of individuals privacy and at the same time will go a long way to improve the efficiency of our electoral system by enhancing the voter identification process.

The amendments will remove from the original bill references to the year of birth and to the date of birth, but will include the creation of a unique, randomly generated identifier for each electoral person, which will then be assigned to the Chief Electoral Officer to monitor.

The amendment will allow parties and Canadians to feel confident in our system. They will know that our process will allow for enough transparency in the system. At the same time we will have a reasonable and balanced approach to ensure we have a system about which Canadians can be confident.

During the last election, some issues and concerns were raised in the urban areas in Toronto, I believe it was Trinity—Spadina. Allegations were made that there may have been voter fraud. Some 10,000 Canadians signed up on the day of the election, through a process of serial vouching. People would vouch that the other people were who they believed them to be, then those people could vouch for other people and then those other people could vouch for other people. As this string of serial vouching went along, from a reasonable individual's point of view, there had to be some lapse in the integrity of that string.

I believe the bill tries to deal with those concerns in such a way that one Canadian can vouch for somebody else, but it eliminates the serial process of vouching, which I believe is a good thing.

One of the hon. members earlier in the discussion today raised a concern with respect to the proof of identification. I remember I stood in the House when we originally debated the bill and I talked about the requirement of the acceptability of first nations status cards as proof of who an individual was to allow the person to vote.

The issue we have is a delicate one. We are walking a fine line trying to ensure we are improving the integrity of the system by requiring valid identification from Canadians before they can vote. At the same time, we ensure we open up the process to enough Canadians so we have broad participation in the system.

We have a unique situation. Because we have a minority government, we have parties from both sides of the House agreeing on the amendments to the bill, on the balanced and reasonable nature of the bill and on the enhancement and the transparency of the process. It is a good thing for Canadians that Parliament agree, like we have on this. I look forward to the bill being carried and put into law.

• (1235)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up on a point the member made about allegations of voter fraud in the riding of Trinity—Spadina as part of the rationale for his support for the bill. I am sure, like everyone else, he knows the results of the investigation into that fraud. There were no irregularities in Trinity—Spadina during the last federal election.

Where is the problem? He has alleged there is the potential for fraud, but in fact there has been no fraud. Does he think it is a fair balance to bring a law in that might prevent something that has not occurred in the past? Does he not think the cost of perhaps disenfranchising people, who do not have the means to get back onto the voter's list in many cases, is too steep a price to pay?

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is valid. I am pretty sure she has had the opportunity to read the report came out on the allegations of the potential fraud committed in the Trinity—Spadina riding.

I have read the report and its findings. The interesting thing about the report, like any report, is the devil is in the detail. The way the report was done and the way the audit was performed was based on sample sizes of various voting boxes. It was not a 100% audit that reviewed every ballot box counted. In fact, if we go into the details of the report in the back pages and the fine print, there were areas in which the auditor or examiner could not go any further. There was missing documentation and ballot boxes that could not be retrieved. Therefore, their sample was based on a limited population to begin with.

I agree with the hon. member. The recommendations and the conclusions of the report were they could not find anything that would prove fraud occurred. At the same time, they realized our system had some wrinkles in it and they needed to be ironed out. Because of that, there was some missing evidence that did not allow them to proceed with a full and comprehensive review of every ballot cast in that riding.

The bill addresses ironing out some of those wrinkles, such as the serial vouching that went on in the riding. It will not be allowed to go forward.

As I said earlier, I agree with the member from the standpoint of it being a balancing act. We have to try to ensure we make our system more responsive to the development of our society. As we get more urbanization, it gets a lot more difficult for somebody to say, "My farm is just down the road from Bill, I have lived beside him for 20 years and I can vouch for who he is".

We now live in an urban setting where people move in and out of our cities and it becomes a little more difficult for somebody to say that he or she can vouch for this person and then that person can vouch for somebody and then that person can vouch for somebody else.

We have to put in a little more stringent requirements on the rules of voting to ensure the integrity of the system is preserved and the confidence that Canadians have in our democratic system is enhanced. I believe the bill goes a long way to increase the confidence in our system.

• (1240)

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the member opposite agree with some of the thoughts I have on this issue?

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We require identification for things such as taking a book out of a library. We also require identification for things such as renting a movie from a video store. I think, from what I heard from the member opposite, that he agrees with the stance I have taken on this issue, and that is voting is a democratic privilege in our country and it should be treated with at least as much respect as taking a book from a public library.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Speaker, most Canadians would agree with what the hon. member has mentioned. There is an expectation that identification be at a level acceptable to most Canadians.

At the same time, we have to remember we are in an evolving democracy. We have to move in stride with the way society moves forward. We have to be aware of the fact that there are certain segments of our society where obtaining identification is difficult. We have to understand and be compassionate about people in those situations and ensure that we do not disenfranchise them from the democratic process.

It is not as clear, cut and dry as the hon. member has tried to make it. There is a grey area and we have to ensure, as lawmakers, that we walk in a gradual step by step manner. We need to ensure we walk in tangent with society. At the same time, we need to ensure we provide some leadership as to where we will go. We have to ensure we make the system better than it was when we first started.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear the member opposite talk about the disenfranchising of some Canadians. A significant number of Canadians lack the identification and access to identification. We are very concerned in this party that we protect their rights.

We heard a member refer to voting as a privilege. In our country voting is a right and it is a right that we have to guarantee to each and every one of our citizens. Would the member agree that it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to exercise that right?

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Speaker, definitely voting is a right. Many of our grandfathers have died fighting for that right and maintaining it. As parliamentarians, we have to ensure we maintain the integrity of that right as Canadian citizens to vote in elections.

At the same time, we have to be cognizant of the fact that our society is evolving and things are changing. One of the ways it is changing, and we have yet to address it in Bill C-31, is we are becoming much more of a technological age now. This is something we have to be cognizant of when we discuss the future.

People are on the Internet on a daily basis. Other organizations are using the Internet to electronically vote. We have to be thinking ahead right now at a time when possibly elections in Canada will be held electronically. We have to ensure we have systems in place to deal with that. One item in the bill, which anticipates that coming into phase, is having the unique identification number granted to each individual in Canada.

I am going out into the future here and thinking outside the box, but someday Parliament may decide that Canadian elections can be done over the Internet, if that is the will of the Canadian people and if it is something that will enhance the integrity of our system and help to increase voter turnout.

One of the things we notice right now is young people vote in a disproportionately lower number than those who are over 60 for example. We have to do whatever we can as parliamentarians to ensure we cast a big enough net to have everybody participate in the electoral system. Some of the things the bill would offer is anticipating the future of the Canadian electoral system.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

We are presently discussing amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-31. I would like to start off by reminding members that although we agree with Bill C-31, we feel that the Senate amendments have scuttled the efforts made by all parties, in committee particularly, to find consensus. Therefore, the Bloc will oppose the government motion that includes the amendments made by the Senate, along with some welcome changes.

We were and we still are in favour of Bill C-31 as adopted here in the House, at all stages. For the Bloc, it is extremely important to ensure that we have as many means as possible available to prevent electoral fraud and the errors that can be made in electoral lists. According to the Bloc, it is quite appropriate and desirable that electors to be able to identify themselves when required, in order to ensure that the right elector is voting and that one elector does not take the place of another.

In the past, individuals have arrived at the polling station and found that someone else had voted in their place already. That was just too bad for them; the vote had been cast. A certain complacency had set in, particularly with regard to procedures for federal elections, and especially in Quebec.

Over the years, more tools have been introduced to minimize, if not completely eliminate, electoral fraud. As I mentioned previously, we find it quite desirable that potential voters identify themselves to ensure that the right person is voting. We believe that it is reasonable for the date of birth of electors to be made available on the electoral lists in order to verify firsthand that the person voting is who they are believed to be and whose name appears on the electoral list.

It was proposed that Bill C-31 be amended to ensure that electoral lists given not only to the officials—the deputy returning officers and poll clerks—but also to the political parties, contain this information, as is the custom in Quebec. We believe that this is an additional tool to help prevent electoral fraud.

On election day, if they wish, the political parties are allowed to have representatives at the polls who follow the progress of voting and who can, if necessary, make some telephone calls. Most Bloc Québécois candidates take advantage of that opportunity. Supporters can then get out and exercise their right to vote. Perhaps they had forgotten or did not feel like it at the time, especially if they had any obstacles to deal with, such as transportation and so on.

Government Orders

We think it is entirely reasonable to add the date of birth to the various information needed to authenticate the identity of voters. The Senate decided to amend that, making the date of birth available to government employees, returning officers and poll clerks, but not to political parties. We feel this would eliminate an important tool in preventing voter fraud. I would remind the House that this was, and still is, one of the main objectives of Bill C-31.

In the spirit of compromise, the Bloc Québécois proposed that at least the year of birth be made available, so that party representatives at the polls could have a rather simple indication of the validity of the identity of voters. If the year of birth is 1955, for example, we know right away that this is not a young adult, nor is it an older senior. The age of 52 does not exactly make someone a spring chicken, and I should know. In any case, we thought this was a reasonable compromise.

• (1250)

As far as the political parties are concerned, personally, I felt during the discussions and conversations we had that there was some openness. It seems that, if Bill C-31 were sent back to the Senate with a different amendment—so that the date of birth would no longer be available to the political parties, but just the year of birth—the government was afraid that it would turn into a ping-pong match between the Senate and the House of Commons.

In my opinion, if that is the reason it is a bad reason. Indeed, the government and the majority of members in this House agree that the representatives of the political parties should have access to this information, namely, the year of birth. It is not a case of elements of confidentiality and personal information that are not available. Usually, it is rather easy to guess a person's age.

In order to avoid this game of ping-pong between the House of Commons and the Senate, we must remind the hon. senators—as the Leader of the Opposition did concerning the budget—that once a bill has been adopted here in this House, the job of the Senate is to ensure that the members have dotted the i's and crossed the t's. However, to poke around in the very content of the bill seems to me to go beyond the responsibilities that belong to an unelected Senate.

So, we very much regret this decision by the government not to insist that the year of birth be included, at least for the benefit of the political parties. That is the reason why we will vote against the government motion, which accepts the Senate's amendments as its own.

As we know, the other amendment is the one that extended from two months to eight months the deadline for the coming into force of the register with a unique and permanent identification number.

In our view, the arguments made by the Chief Electoral Officer, which led the Senate to extend the deadline for implementing a unique and permanent identification number from two months to eight months do not hold water. In that sense, we believe that we could have asked the Chief Electoral Officer—perhaps in the space of four months—to ensure that a unique and permanent identification number be used for each voter in the next election. In that regard, the six month timeframe is not suitable to us but nevertheless it could be considered an improvement over the amendment made by the Senate.

This also has a definite impact on the work that political parties could do. If there is no unique and permanent identification number, Bill C-31 will make it possible to have cards that will let political parties follow the progress of voting on election day and know who has voted and who has not.

As long as most of us know who our supporters are, we can be sure that they will vote. So this measure will be a major incentive for parties to “get out the vote”, as we say.

This can only increase overall voter turnout in the next election and in future ones. We know that the higher the voter turnout, the better the democratic health of a society. The opposite shows that there are problems. We participated in a debate on this topic in connection with Bill C-31.

Taking six months to implement this procedure is the lesser of two evils. We can hope that we will have these tools for the next election. However, we are very disappointed that the government is not pushing to keep the year of birth of voters on the electoral list, so it is available to all political parties. We succeeded in convincing the government, but unfortunately the Senate—I will not say destroyed, because that would be a bit too strong—contravened the agreements between the different parties, in a way which I think was completely inappropriate.

• (1255)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before we go to questions and comments I want to thank the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park for lending his steady hand during the presentations by the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country and the hon. member for Joliette.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the person who assumed your chair did do a fine job and I had an opportunity to speak during that time.

One point that was raised during that segment of our debate today was around the Trinity—Spadina vote. I think it is worthy of reading one line that came out of that:

The findings of the audit indicate that election day registration was properly administered during the 2006 federal election in Trinity—Spadina.

There is much more but I will not read it all. I only alluded to that because it had been raised by the member. One of the concerns I have is that voter identification needs to be there to the benefit of the public. The speaker across was talking a fair length about the benefits to the party system if the date of birth is there. I do not think that is where we should be going with this. I understand that it would be to the advantage of parties but we need to be sure we are protecting the public interest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that protecting the public interest means making sure that people who show up to vote are who they say they are.

Government Orders

Making just the year of birth available on the voters list—not the complete date of birth—gives political parties an additional tool to ensure that the people voting are the right ones and to minimize electoral fraud. To do otherwise would be irresponsible.

If this measure were to increase voter turnout as well, I would have no problem with that. We cannot hide out and be hypocritical, thinking that we are here by the grace of the Holy Spirit and thanks to a few prayers. Our political parties worked hard to convince people in our ridings that we were the best candidates to represent them. However, we also need tools to ensure that the people voting are the right people. I see no contradiction in what the member said.

I would like to introduce another element. The system that enables candidates to keep track of who has voted on election day, known as “bingo cards”, is not necessarily linked to the personal identifier number. The Chief Electoral Officer himself has said that it would take at least 10 months, or maybe eight, I do not remember exactly. That is why the Senate replaced the words “two months” in the original version of Bill C-31 with “10 months”. I am told that it is indeed 10 months.

We think that this is about two different things. Clearly, once we have personal identifier numbers, it will probably be easier to implement this system to provide current information on who has voted. However, it would be easy to use current voters lists to implement this system, which has already been used in Quebec for several elections, and which increases voter turnout, which is much higher in Quebec provincial elections than it is in federal elections.

Having the highest possible voter turnout is also in Canadians' best interest. Political parties have a responsibility in this respect, so they must be given the necessary tools. I see no conflict between this measure and the interest of the people—quite the contrary.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ottawa Centre. He should know that there is a minute and a half for both the question and the answer.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend from the Bloc inferred in his comments that it was the role of the political parties to verify whether a voter is legitimate. I want to ensure that is what he was mentioning because from my perspective I would wholeheartedly disagree. Scrutineers are there to ensure the vote is done fairly and to ensure there is oversight.

Would the member not agree that the role lies with Elections Canada to ensure objectivity and that there is no political partisan taint on the process, that we really should be entrusting Elections Canada to verify voters and ensure that voters are correct? I will talk about how I think that should be done if he is able to wait around for a couple of minutes, because I will be speaking to this bill. Does he believe that it is the role of Elections Canada to verify who the voters are and not us?

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Joliette has 20 seconds to reply.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, the law allows political parties to have representatives at the polls in order to fulfil a certain role. Of

course, the primary role belongs to Elections Canada staff. It is quite possible that a representative from a political party could speak up when there is obviously a problem concerning identification. That is also part of our responsibilities as political parties and essential components—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak following my hon. colleague from Joliette, our House leader, who explained the Bloc Québécois' position very well.

First of all, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. As the chief organizer, I would like address my comments to my hon. colleagues from all political parties in this House. As all hon. members know, but perhaps not all Canadians know this, the Bloc Québécois only has representatives in Quebec. We defend the interests of only one group in this House, that is, the interests of Quebecers. We also defend their values. That is what we have been doing, primarily within Quebec's borders, since 1993.

This is why I would suggest that my colleagues from all the other political parties would do well to listen to the Bloc Québécois' recommendations. Indeed, the Bloc Québécois' political machinery is the most formidable of all the political parties, and this goes for elections in Quebec and at the federal level. We have the most organized political machinery.

We participated in the debate on Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act in a spirit of openness. We wanted to share with our colleagues our knowledge, our experience and the strength of our political organization. That is why the Bloc Québécois put forward amendments, which, oddly enough, were derailed by the Senate.

That is why I find it very difficult to discuss changes to electoral legislation proposed by a Senate that is not even elected. I really have a hard time accepting that. Senators do not have to face the same situations that hon. members and the political organizations for every party in this House do.

I want to get that message across. I also want to discuss again two very important amendments that the Senate has proposed with respect to this reform of the Canada Elections Act, amendments we do not agree with. In his speech, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said that the Conservatives were against the date of birth measure, but that out of respect and integrity, they ended up agreeing on this. They voted against it, but they agreed to defend the birthdate amendments in the Senate.

Government Orders

The main purpose of including date of birth on the list of electors is to allow election workers and the political parties present at the voting tables to conduct an initial verification. Of course this is not perfect. A person's date of birth is not stamped on their forehead. Nonetheless, if people arrive to vote in someone else's place and they are not in the same age group, this allows for an initial verification. It is a first step to determining whether people are cheating and voting by assuming someone else's identity. This is the first step and all we have to do is add the date of birth to the list of electors.

This received support from the majority in the committee and was included in the bill. Now the Senate is saying that this list with dates of birth will be allowed, but that it will only be used by the election workers, meaning the poll clerk and the deputy returning officer who are employees of the Chief Electoral Officer. The list will not be available to the political parties.

So they are abandoning any concern for transparency, integrity and respect by not trying to detect people committing fraud. The political parties, the ones that have representatives, that being the privilege that the law provides for political parties, will not have access to the date of birth. The Bloc Québécois can boast of having representatives in every polling station and in the all polling divisions during an election.

Then today the Senate has decided that the representatives of the political parties will not be entitled to see the dates of birth. And the government tells us that even though it agreed when the bill was introduced, it now supports the Senate's amendments. Once again, the senators are not even elected. They have never been through an election.

There is still time for the government to realize that this is progress. This amendment was introduced by the Liberals and supported by the Bloc Québécois to improve the way elections are held in Canada.

• (1305)

This is an example inspired by Quebec. This is how it is done in Quebec. The voter turnout rate is 7% to 8% higher in Quebec elections than it is in federal elections. Why are we not using the approaches that have been tested and proved in other democracies, so that we can move forward? I find it hard to understand the parties that do not support this approach, which has the advantage of being more transparent.

The second amendment concerns the coming into force of the whole polling management system: allowing representatives to provide the political parties with a list of electors who have exercised their right to vote. That list will be available every 30 minutes. That is good. Under the bill, that section of the act was to be brought into force two months after the bill was given royal assent. In a virtually authoritarian move, the Senate has now told us that it will be 10 months after it comes into force.

Once again, I find it very hard to understand how a Senate that is not even elected could tell us that part of the work done by the committee was for nothing. The bill was introduced and agreed to by a majority in this House. Nevertheless, the Senate is deciding when that part of the act will come into force. Once again, this is to facilitate voting. The point is that having this list of electors who

have exercised their right to vote available every 30 minutes is useful to the various political parties. The sheet is available to all parties, and only the voter numbers are released. And there is nothing on that sheet. There is no date of birth. The sheet shows only who has voted in the preceding half hour. Using the voter numbers for each polling station, the parties' representatives who are getting the vote out can bring in people who have not yet voted.

Once again, this already happens in Quebec, and it is one reason why voter turnout in Quebec for provincial elections is higher than the turnout for federal elections. When this House had decided that this measure would take effect two months after royal assent, in time for the next election campaign, why has the Senate taken the liberty of deciding that it will take effect in 10 months, at the risk that this measure will not be in effect in time for the next election campaign? I have a problem with the fact that the unelected Senate is interfering in our election campaigns. What gives it the right? It has no right at all to make such a decision. This is none of its business. Its job is to approve this bill to amend the Canada Elections Act. The bill was adopted by the majority of members of this House and would come into effect in time for the next election campaign. Why did it do that? Maybe it is because, one day, the senators hope to be elected by universal suffrage. I hope we will get rid of the Senate before that day comes. That will save us a lot of money and give us a true, uncomplicated democracy centred on the House of Commons.

Obviously, the goal of the Bloc Québécois was to take part without political partisanship in order to improve Canada's democratic system and the system in our own nation, Quebec. It is as simple as that, and that is what we have tried to do with our strong political organization. We have told our colleagues that they must never forget that in Quebec, the Bloc Québécois has the best political organization, one that has proven itself time and again since 1993 and has sent more members from Quebec to this House than any other party.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start with the points on which I am in agreement with my friend from the Bloc. I agree with the fact that having this come from the Senate is passing strange. I would challenge him on one point, though, in that some senators have gone through elections, some as candidates and many as backroom employees. They raised money and did good services for their party and were rewarded with a seat in the other place.

I would agree with him that it is passing strange to have amendments coming from the Senate on something that affects elections and potential concerns around voter fraud, but my concern, however, relates to the comment the member made, and I want to get this right, that because the Bloc has shown how it is done and has a good machine, and because its members have used some of the facets that are in Bill C-31, this is reason enough for us to adopt it here.

My concern is that when we look at things like sharing birthdate information, I could not disagree with him more.

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When I talk to my constituents about this, and I wrote about it in one of my householders, people are shocked to learn that we actually would share birthdate information not only with Elections Canada, which means throughout the ridings and throughout the country—and that paper could fall off the table and into in the wrong hands—but with political parties. The fact that political parties would have this information shocks people. This came about through the amendment from the Liberals and the Bloc at committee.

People are extremely shocked. They do not want their birthdate information shared with Elections Canada in a public way, and they sure do not want it shared with a political party. They were shocked to learn that the Bloc and the Liberals had joined together on this and then the icing on the cake was having the Conservative Party allow this amendment to go through. People just do not understand.

That is what my question is about. I have a letter from the Privacy Commissioner, who did not have the luxury of presenting her case before committee. I had to write to her after it was fiated through committee. She argues against doing what the member suggests would be helping the system. How can he argue that sharing birthdate information has anything to do with increasing voter participation?

In fact, what increases voter participation is trust in the system. There seems to be a disconnect. People see this as what I call a big brother bill. What we are doing here is making citizens' privacy vulnerable in legislation. Some of the people who have called have said they would remove their names from the voters' lists because this is an invasion of privacy. Then the effect will be that we will have fewer people voting.

I would like the member's comments on this birthdate information and how he connects it with a higher rate of voter participation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Ottawa Centre, who will soon have 20 minutes to speak, took four minutes to ask his question.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has one minute to respond.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to my NDP colleague that this measure is in effect in the province of Quebec and has not caused any public outcry. I realize that the NDP likes to brandish scare tactics; that is its political style. Security is the main reason. When you have a date of birth and the individual approaches, the first step is to compare, have a look and avoid fraud. That is not to say that our date of birth is written on our foreheads. That is the first tool used to detect fraud. It is one way of going about it and it is not anti-democratic and it does not infringe on rights and freedoms.

In Quebec, our citizens have accepted this measure, which has been in force for several elections and has proven to be effective. The rate of voter participation in Quebec provincial elections is 7% to 8% higher than in federal elections. It would be very beneficial for them to listen to what we are attempting to introduce in order to have the democratic system in Canada evolve. In Quebec, our democratic system is working well. Means are always being sought to perfect it, but we also try to pass on ideas to others. If they do not wish to

accept them, that is the NDP's problem. We will see what happens in the next election campaign.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the bill.

I want to start by referring to the comments made by my friend from the Bloc. His answer in response to my question underlined the problem with the bill. Opening up people's privacy has nothing to do with voter participation. He established that with his non-answer to my question.

More people do not vote because their birth date is on the electoral list or shared with political parties. I made it very clear that many people who have contacted me about this big brother bill have said the reason they would not vote in the next election would be because of this bill. It is counterintuitive to have people's privacy put on the altar and say that it will somehow increase voter participation.

It is important to look at the origins and the trajectory of Bill C-31. This bill is the result of a report by the procedure and House affairs committee, which I have in my hand. The report was very general in nature. The committee looked at the previous election to see if voter participation could be improved, how the machinery of government could be improved to allow elections to run more smoothly and to ensure that as parliamentarians we could improve elections by design to increase the number of people participating in elections.

It was interesting that after the committee report was tabled, very quickly there was a response from the government. That is not unusual, but the part that was strange was that the government cherry-picked from the Commons committee report. It came up with suggestions and lo and behold, after the response from the government, Bill C-31 was before us.

I point this out because Bill C-31 was not part of the Conservative Party platform. It was not a suggestion that had been made by grassroots organizations. It was not something that had been on the radar in general for people who are looking at how elections are conducted.

It was very interesting when I heard at committee the witnesses' concerns around the bill. They had concerns regarding the privacy issue. For anyone who is watching, listening or reading the transcripts, what the bill would do is it would require when voters presented themselves to vote, to have voter identification, government issued photo ID. When a voter did not have photo ID, there was a series of conditions regarding other documentation that would be allowed. Finally, if a voter did not have identification, there would be a process by which another person could vouch for the voter.

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We heard from people who deal with the homeless, first nations, aboriginal peoples and people who represent students. They have said that this was a bad bill. Notwithstanding, and I am sure we will hear this from the government in response, there is a method for people who do not have proper ID to be vouched for.

The problem heard at committee was that the government is proposing in the bill that one person can vouch for another person as long as they are on the voters list. I underline this because people who are advocates for the homeless, first nations and students said that this is not necessarily an option for the people they represent, because they might not be able to find someone who is on the voters list or who resides in the riding, which is required in the bill.

The other critical issue, of course, is the privacy issue. I raised it at committee. It is worth noting that according to the bill every voter's date of birth will be published on the voters list for Elections Canada to verify that the person before an elections official is the person who is eligible to vote. That sounds fine, except when we look closer at the bill, there is also a verification number for every voter.

● (1320)

Photo ID is required. There is a verification number for every voter. The birthdate of every voter is on the electoral list. I opposed the inclusion of the birthdate and the NDP opposed the inclusion of birthdate information on the electoral list because of its dissemination. Every riding has hundreds of polls. There are 308 ridings. That is a lot of information being floated around. This is not anything against the good people who work as poll clerks during elections; it is just obvious that this information could fall into the wrong hands.

What has shocked me the most was the amendment by the Bloc, supported at committee by the Liberals and eventually by the Conservatives in the House, that birthdate information would actually be shared with political parties. I want to underline that all political parties, not just the ones in this House, but every single registered political party would have the day and year of birth of every single voter.

It is important to underline that because the Senate wants to make an amendment. While I welcome that, it does not go far enough. This bill at its foundation is flawed for reasons I have already mentioned about those people who might not normally have access to proper identification.

I brought forward these concerns at committee. At the time the Bloc and the Liberals got together to pass this amendment to share the date of birth information with political parties. Members should try to explain that to their constituents. I could not, I would not and I refused. I fought it at the committee. The Conservatives at the committee opposed this amendment, but when the bill came to the House, we heard from the government House leader that in the spirit of cooperation to get the bill through, the Conservatives would not fight this amendment.

I am sorry, but when it comes to issues of privacy, protection and integrity we do not just look the other way. That is exactly what members of the Conservative Party did. They looked the other way on privacy. I have a letter in my hand from Ms. Stoddart, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. The letter suggests that this is a problem for her as well.

There are two parties, the Liberals and the Bloc, that got together to benefit themselves to give birthdate information to their political organizations. Clearly, the political parties see this as a bonanza. They can target voters. For the Liberals I am sure it is helpful because they can do some fundraising. The Liberals have to look to new sources for their fundraising. They will have to fill the void after having relied for so long on big donors. With this information, they will now focus their attention on citizens. It is very tempting for political parties to have this information.

People should not buy the idea that somehow this is going to help with verification of voters. There is already in the bill a verification number and photo ID is required. The idea that we would actually sell out privacy and the government would look the other way in order to get the bill through does not wash.

The amendments from the Senate are in front of us. I will establish that not only do I have a problem with the inherent contradiction with the Senate sending us amendments on elections legislation, but also the Senate amendments do not go far enough. They do not deal with those who, we heard at committee, will be disenfranchised, the homeless, aboriginal people and students.

There is a *Globe and Mail* editorial that talks about the whole issue of privacy. It says:

As Privacy Commissioner Jennifer Stoddart explained in a recent letter to [myself] whose party was the only one to oppose the bill, "One of the basic rules of data protection is that personal information should be collected and used sparingly and in proportion to the problem it is intended to address." But the bill, which sailed through final reading in the House of Commons last evening, pays no heed to her legitimate objections.

● (1325)

Not only is the Privacy Commissioner against the bill, but from this editorial it would seem that *Globe and Mail* editors are against it as well. They underline the importance of why is the bill in front of us, what is the issue, what is the problem?

The government has put forward a notion that there is a huge problem with voter fraud. To be fair, it has been careful to underline it as potential voter fraud. If that is the issue, then I have no idea why the government did not look at other common sense solutions to deal with potential voter fraud. We put forward ideas at committee, at amendment stage, and made suggestions as to what the government could do.

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We all know that voter cards are ubiquitous and often are left lying around in many apartment buildings. There is the potential for voter fraud. The NDP suggested in committee, and received the nod from the Chief Electoral Officer, that those voter cards should be in a sealed envelope. That would make sense. It is not exactly a high tech solution, but it would ensure that voter cards were not left lying around and instead would be sent directly to the voters. That was our first common sense solution.

The second common sense solution we put forward was to have universal enumeration at every election. When the Liberal government brought in voters lists, it was not to make the list more accurate, but rather to save money. In our democracy, if there is one thing we should invest in over anything else, it is the integrity of our voting system, and that means the voters list. That means having universal enumeration.

There used to be enumeration. People would go door to door to make sure that everyone had a chance to get on the voters list. Verification was done and the voters list was more accurate. I do not know a person in this House or in this country who would say that since we have had the centralized computer voters list that we have had more accurate representation.

Those two common sense solutions should have been adopted before we sold out people's privacy, before we put up barriers to the franchise to the most vulnerable, and before we got into this taffy pull between the Senate and the House. I agree with the Bloc and the government that it is passing strange we are waiting on the Senate to tell us how to run elections.

The bottom line is that this is a flawed bill. It is a big brother bill. The fact that it sailed through committee should not pass it off as being a valid bill. In fact, it is vapid in terms of what it is trying to do.

I want to underline what this bill claims to do and what the results will be if it passes. Not only will there be problems with privacy, but I believe the bill will be challenged on two fronts.

In testimony before the committee, the Chief Electoral Officer said that because of the new requirement for photo ID, more than 5% of eligible voters will not be able to vote. They will show up at the polling station perhaps five or 10 minutes before the polls close without their ID and will be told to go home. Therefore, they will not have the opportunity to vote. Others have mentioned this. I think of Duff Conacher, who has written about this extensively.

We might end up with a situation akin to what happened in Florida in one of the U.S. elections. This is not my submission. It is the submission of others. Others will call into question the validity of the election because people will not have been able to exercise their franchise. There will be situations where there are close votes. Those votes will be challenged. In a minority Parliament, that might decide which party did or did not form government.

Elections Canada will do a good job in promoting the required changes, but if we do not have a safety valve like the statutory declaration that the NDP put forward, which works in provinces with high voter turnout, then people will challenge the outcome of the election. That could lead to some unintended consequences.

● (1330)

I am putting everyone on notice that others have looked at this and they are saying that they will need to challenge this bill in court, some for civil libertarian reasons, some because of the private aspects and others because they believe that this kind of legislation is inherently wrong.

In summary, what we have in this bill is a Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs report that looked at elections in general and how to improve things. The report was tabled in Parliament soon after and, this is the part about the Conservative play book, the Conservatives used the committee report to cherry-pick and back a bill they had intended to put forward because that is exactly what happened. There was a response to this committee report very soon after and, more quickly than I have ever seen, a bill was in front of us based on the government's response to a committee report.

In that report we had the requirement for photo ID and then a cascading requirement, for those who did not have photo ID, to use other forms of ID. At the end of the day, people who are most disadvantaged, be it the homeless, aboriginal people or students, would be vulnerable.

It is interesting that a couple of weeks ago the government announced, with great fanfare, democratic reform week. If we were to believe the advertising, the government was doing everything it could to ensure that more people had access to the franchise. They need to look at this bill because what I have just outlined are barriers to franchise.

The Conservatives talked recently about having more young people vote by having an extra day to vote, which they had no scientific proof for. They had a nice photo op with some people in front of the Centre Block and somehow we were to believe that because of this extra day of voting we would have higher voter participation.

What they need to do is examine Bill C-31 and tell me honestly, when they look at the privacy provisions for allowing one's birthdate to be included both on the voters list and shared with political parties, notwithstanding the amendments, the fact that more young people will be required to show ID that they might not have access to, people concerned about privacy telling me they will ask to be taken off the voters list because they do not want big brother and the government, which is kind of strange coming from what used to be a party of libertarian dimensions, they do not want that to happen. They will take their names off the voters list and at the end of the day what we have is a bill that would undermine voter participation and not buttress it.

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When we put this all together, we should keep in mind that the government did not want to listen to common sense, which was to have voter ID cards put into envelopes to prevent the concerns around voter fraud because people are using these cards or could, and the fact that there were four cases of voter fraud during the last three elections. In fact, there was more candidate fraud than voter fraud when members crossed the floor, which we remember, after they advertised that they would run for the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party.

Everyday people are more concerned about that fraud than the potential for voter fraud. They are more concerned about their privacy rights being trashed than they are about having these kinds of provisions put in. At the end of the day, they see that this bill would not improve our democracy. It would undermine it.

I would ask all members to keep in mind that when they go to their constituents or when this becomes a court case, because I believe it challenges the franchise, and many lawyers have said it, that the Conservatives were the ones who sat by and rubber stamped this process.

I urge all members to stand up against this bill, stand for democracy and more voter participation, and ensure we have a democracy we can all be proud of. I urge all members to vote against this bill and send it back. The Senate has made some minor improvements on the birthdate information but at the end of the day this is a flawed bill, a big brother bill and does not deserve to be passed.

• (1335)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech on these amendments made by the Senate. I know the member was present at some of those committee meetings and did an outstanding job in understanding the issues with respect to the bill.

However, I think the member has forgotten how things turned about and I would like to ask for his opinion on this fact.

Originally, the amendment to use birthdates was brought forward by the Bloc members and at committee that amendment to the bill was actually supported by the Liberal Party and ultimately made it into the final version.

I recall that the NDP suggested, as the member is suggesting, that the birthdate be not used at all. However, the committee's original recommendation was that the birthdate be simply used inside the polling station only on election day as a means of helping folks who may not have photo ID as a second or third way that voters could identify who they were, again trying to help folks who may not have photo ID.

I wonder if the member feels that the middle ground was what the original bill by the government said and that was birthdate inside the polling station only and only on election day as opposed to the amendments made by the Bloc and supported by the Liberals.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, it is worthy of repeating that when this was brought forward originally, the birthdate information that the member suggests was only for the use of Elections Canada to verify voters. He is correct in reminding us that the Bloc had brought

forward an amendment to have that date of birth information shared with political parties.

I was vehemently against it, as the member will recall. The Liberals backed the Bloc. His party voted against it in committee but, as I said in my comments, sadly, it turned away from that concern when the bill was at third reading and allowed that amendment to stand, even though I had provided an opportunity for the government to withdraw that amendment. It said that it was in the spirit of cooperation to ensure the bill was passed.

I would point out that when we are talking about issues of privacy, we can never turn the other way. Therefore, the member is right in reminding us that the provision of the birthdate was for Elections Canada employees to verify voters.

My preference would have been not to have the birthdate information at all. He will know that in the bill there is a voter verification number assigned to each voter. The birthdate information was not to replace the photo ID. To be clear, it was felt that it was needed in addition to. Therefore, we have the verification number, photo ID and birthdate information, which, for me, is away too much and is not necessary.

I ask all members of Parliament to look back at the reason for this bill in front of us. It was to deal with potential voter fraud. I underline for any of those who were not at committee to know that there were more cases of candidate fraud, people crossing the floor and saying that they were with one party and ending up in another party, than there were cases of citizens misusing their franchise. That is really evidenced based.

We need to ask ourselves why we have the bill at all. If it is the way it is now, there is no way we can support it because it does not allow for more voter participation. In fact, I have made the argument that it will do the opposite.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am having a hard time understanding my NDP colleague. He is against the Senate, but when the Senate introduces an amendment he approves of, he likes the Senate. That is how the NDP operates, and that will never change.

My question might give him an opportunity, because he has a problem. He is alone in his thinking on dates of birth. One of the reasons that the Bloc supports this is that Quebec's permanent voters list—which is also used by municipalities for municipal elections—includes dates of birth, and so far, no Quebecker has complained about a breach of rights and freedoms. We were giving the government a chance to add dates of birth, which would make it possible to integrate Quebec's voters list into Canada's so that all voters could be on the voters list. There is a problem. Some voters are not on the voters list. There is a problem with the federal voters list, and we are trying to help. That is our message.

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I will give the member one last chance. The NDP just recruited a candidate in Quebec who was a minister in the Quebec government. He has a chance to call him. He should pick up the phone and ask how things work in Quebec. I do not think that he has talked to him. If he had a chance before voting to talk to the candidate they recruited in Quebec, who was in the Quebec government, he would understand the Bloc Québécois' position. He might then try to help our democracy move forward in the same direction as us, in the interest of Quebecers and Canadians.

Voter turnout in Quebec elections is 8% higher than in federal elections. The member and his party should reconsider. They should talk to the people they have recruited in Quebec.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I would love to talk at great length about Mulcair. He is an excellent candidate and will be an excellent member, I am sure, but that is not the subject today.

I will talk to him about this because I think he would believe, as a social democrat, that there is no connection between giving up one's birthdate to whatever election body, Élections Québec or Elections Canada, and voter participation. There is no logic there. If I give my birthdate and put it on the list, how does that affect voter turnout? If anyone listening or watching or reading this transcript can provide me with the logic, I would welcome it, because there is none.

Let me be clear. We will not be supporting this recommendation from the Senate because it does not go to the extent we wished it to. I agree with him on the concerns we have about the source of this and therefore we are not in favour of this motion from the Senate.

I say to my friend from Quebec that we have something called asymmetry as an idea here. They love to use asymmetry, or at least the proponents and principles of it, that when things are in the rest of Canada, they should not always be adopted by Quebec. May I ask for the same logic, extension and provision in this case?

The member has a case where this birthdate information on the voters' lists is shared with political parties in Quebec.

[*Translation*]

That is fine for Quebec.

[*English*]

Maybe it is different for the rest of Canada in this instance. Is that something to divide us over? I would think not.

It is called asymmetry and it is a principle the NDP believes in. I would like to see my friend see the logic and the light in that as well. I still have not heard from him the connection between birthdate information and voter participation and I wait patiently for his response.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver East would be interested to know there is a minute and a half for both the question and the answer.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre because he has brought to light the serious flaws in this bill.

I would like to ask him to maybe put forward some information. I am aware that the former chief electoral officer actually did not believe that there was a significant problem with voter fraud. Whatever problems do exist, they undertake investigations, and in his opinion this bill was never warranted in the first place.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Vancouver for the question and her work on this.

When this bill came in front of us, we had to look at it carefully. I would have to agree with her that this bill is not required. There are facets of concerns around potential voter fraud, which was the language used, but that has more to do with the voter cards I mentioned and the fact that we do not have proper enumeration.

In fact, in committee, when we asked the chief electoral officer, an officer of Parliament, if this was a concern of his, he said that it was not. He had to be put into a corner to comment on the bill as we went through its different facets.

However, on her question as to whether there was evidence for this bill, no, there was not.

● (1345)

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 stand to speak in support of not only Bill C-31 but the majority of the amendments that we have seen coming back from the Senate.

First, I would say that while Bill C-31 is important, it is only one in a suite of democratic reform initiatives that the government has brought in. We have seen, for an example, very important democratic reform initiatives such as fixed election dates which is Bill C-16. It passed and has come into force. It states that the third Monday of October 2009 will be the date for the next general election unless of course by some strange occurrence the combined opposition determines that it wants to have an election before that date.

That was the first initiative that we brought in to try to ensure Canadians that there would be some consistency and regularity in the timing of federal elections. Far too often we saw political parties in power manipulate the voting system to their advantage. In other words, we saw parties in previous years take a look at the polling numbers and if they determined that it would be to their advantage to have an election earlier rather than later, because the polls happened to be advantageous for them, they would call an election at that time.

Subsequently, we saw both federally and provincially from time to time governments of the day go well beyond a traditional four year voting window because the polls were not quite a favourable for them during that four year cycle. What we are doing with Bill C-16 is ensuring that all Canadians will have some certainty as to the timing of federal elections and I think that is a good thing for democracy. I think it is a good thing for Canadian voters.

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Also, however, we saw several other initiatives with respect to democratic reform. We saw bills come forward dealing with expanded voting opportunities in an attempt to get more and more voters to turn out at the polls. As I said in that debate, we have seen over the course of the last two decades or so a decline in voter turnout year after year, or at least election after election.

I think that is a reflection of many factors, the overall probably being the cynicism that most Canadian voters have with the political process per se. What we are trying to do, by presenting a bill that will give increased and expanded voting opportunities for all Canada, is attempt to raise the level of voter turnout because.

I think that we all agree, regardless of our political affiliations, that it is incumbent upon all Canadians to express either their opinions come election day or at least exercise their franchise because if we ever got to the point where we had less than 50% of the people in the country who were eligible to vote electing a government of the day, that would be truly a sad day for the democratic process.

We have also seen other examples of our democratic reform initiatives. Just today in committee we dealt with Bill C-54 on political loans and how we can ensure that all loans given to candidates over the course of an election are done in such a manner that we can ensure accountability and transparency. I think that is a very important initiative, again, one of a suite of initiatives we brought in.

There will be further democratic reform initiatives as we go forward in the course of the government's life cycle. Today I want to speak specifically to Bill C-31, the voter integrity bill. I think there is no greater fraud that could be perpetrated on Canadians than that of an individual voting in a federal or provincial election who pretends to be someone that he or she is not. In other words, I think there could be no greater fraud than someone trying to influence the election results by fraudulent manners. That is what the bill deals with.

In committee, we dealt with many of the things that we felt needed to be corrected to ensure that there was greater accountability, transparency and greater integrity in the voting system. Primarily we talked about things around identification where all voters now, once the bill becomes a law of the land, will be required to show sufficient identification at the polling station to ensure that they are who they purport to be because we have heard on many occasions many examples of individuals fraudulently voting in individual elections.

Anything that we can do, as a House and as individual members of Parliament, to stop that abuse of the voting system is extremely well intentioned and I think will be well received by the voting public. We dealt with that and many other issues of which my hon. colleagues who proceeded me in this debate spoke about.

• (1350)

Primarily, we came up with what we thought was a bill that would accurately reflect the intention of the committee. The committee worked long and hard on the bill and at the end of day when we reported back to this House, we felt that we had a bill which would capture all of the suggestions and recommendations of committee members who dealt with the bill over a period of several months.

However, as is normally the case, and it seems at least these days it is normally the case, when our bill went from our place to the Senate there were additional discussions and additional amendments. While some of the amendments from the Senate are ones that we have some question about, I am pleased to report that the vast majority of the amendments that were made in the Senate will be agreed to, at least by this government.

We are doing so in a manner which we believe we can get the bill passed into law before we rise for the summer because in a minority situation, the length of a minority government is tenuous at best. If we happen to have an election within the next six months or so, we want to ensure that we have a bill that deals with these very important issues, so that we can ensure that voter integrity is at the utmost, that we dispel and dispense with any kind of attempted fraud in the next election that will be held, whenever that may be.

I want to speak for a few moments on the amendments brought back from our colleagues in the Senate. There were about 12 amendments in total but they fit into about five broad categories. The first one deals with what is generally known as bingo cards. Most of us in this House and any politician who has ever run for elected office is familiar with the concept of bingo cards. For those Canadians who may be somewhat confused about what a bingo card has to do with an election, let me explain.

Every political party, certainly every candidate, wants to track their supporters and whether or not they are supporters that they have identified during the preceding number of months leading up to the election and actually come out to the polls and vote. From time to time there are very close election races throughout Canada. When I was first elected in 2004, I was elected by a whopping majority of 122 votes.

One of the elements that really helped my election in that very stressful time was the fact that we had a very good voter identification program within my riding association and within my campaign team. On election day we had a very good "get out the vote" team which tracked people who came into the polling station, find out which of my supporters had not yet made it to the polls, and we brought those people for the most part to come in to vote. Close to 80% of my identified vote actually cast ballots in that election of 2004.

The use of bingo cards is a mechanism by which we can track the voter turnout. As the name suggests and anyone who has ever gone to a bingo hall and played a game knows there are cards with numbers from 1 through 400. When scrutineers go into an election or polling station they are able to mark off on the bingo card the number of the voter assigned to them on the electoral list to ensure that everyone in our campaign team, or get out the vote team, understands who has, and more importantly, who has not voted.

From time to time during the day our scrutineers would go in and pick up these bingo cards from the inside scrutineers, take them back to GOTV headquarters, and phone voters who had not yet made it out to the polls in an attempt to make sure that all of our supporters understood the importance of their vote in that election.

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What we are saying in this provision, at least what Bill C-31 purports, is that the bingo card concept be formalized and that Elections Canada be tasked with the responsibility of developing a standardized bingo card that would be available for all political parties and all candidates, so they could use the same get out the vote techniques that most candidates and most political parties have been doing informally over the course of the last number of years.

We see this being an asset to the political process because it helps engage all or potential voters by getting them out to vote. Yes, some of them might need a slight kick in the rear end from some of the GOTV members, but if we can at least increase the voter turnout we will have done a great service for the democratic process. So the amendments that the Senate brought back in with respect to bingo cards are ones that we agree with.

●(1355)

What are those amendments? Primarily, they say that in the original report coming from this place bingo cards should be available and updated every 30 minutes, so that candidates and political parties would be able to go into polling stations every 30 minutes to pick up the bingo cards and take it back to their GOTV headquarters and start their phone backs.

What the Senate has amended is that during advance polls these bingo cards need only be picked up once a day. That makes perfect sense to me. The time a candidate wants to know is on election day what the voter turnout is like. So that every 30 minutes during an advance poll is almost a bit of overkill. It is certainly not required. Therefore, I think it was a very useful, a very serviceable amendment to suggest that bingo cards during those four or five days that advance polls are open need only be picked up once a day and we agree with that.

That segues nicely into the second major classification of amendments and that deals with coming into force provisions. Primarily, we only have one problem with any of the coming into force provisions as amended by our colleagues in the Senate. That again deals with bingo cards.

What it suggests is that electoral offices be given 10 months to develop these bingo cards themselves and come up with a standardized format that would then be available for use by all parties and all candidates.

We feel that 10 months is too long. We believe that this bingo card format can be structured, developed and printed within a six month period. Therefore, we will be putting our new amendment that we will send back to our colleagues in the Senate, and we hope that they support it, suggesting that the only amendment we wish to make on its amended bill is that the coming into force provision for bingo cards would be six rather than 10 months.

I think that is a very legitimate and reasonable amendment for us to be making. We say that because again in a minority government one never knows how long such a government will last. In other words, if this bill is given royal assent before we rise for the summer, that means if we have an election before December bingo cards would not be available, but if any election is held from 2008 on we will have bingo cards available for all candidates. We think that is reasonable.

Again, the only change to the amendments that the Liberal dominated Senate has made is that we will have a six month window rather than a 10 month window for the bingo cards.

The third provision that is captured by amendments in the Senate deals with casual election workers. Again, as we know in a minority government situation we need a lot of casual workers who work from election to election on standby because there can be an election held at any time.

Currently, the Public Service Employment Act contemplates that casual workers and the broad category of casual government workers could only be classified as such if they work 90 days or less in any calendar year.

We felt that was too tight of a time line because if there happened to be two elections in one year, clearly 90 days would not be enough time for a casual worker to do both elections. Thereby, they would fall outside of that 90 day classification.

What the Senate committee had discussed and amended was that the provision now read that 165 days be the length of time that casual workers would be classified still as a casual worker within the Public Service Employment Act. We think that is reasonable and we are certainly willing to agree to that amendment and recommend that the amendment be passed in this House.

The fourth provision is one that I know will take a fair amount of time. I see that the time—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. the parliamentary secretary, but the time provided for the study of government bills has now expired. When we return to the study of Bill C-31, there will be six minutes left for the hon. the parliamentary secretary to make his presentation and 10 minutes for questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

●(1400)

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Edmonton, Mayor Mandel says that the number one concern for the city is affordable housing. For Alberta, Premier Stelmach said the same.

While much has been done by this government to improve shelters and non-profit housing, the private sector rental industry remains in crisis. Over the past 30 years across Canada, the newly built private sector rental housing numbers have fallen from 90% of new construction of multiple housing units to less than 10%, not even beginning to meet market demand.

In overheated markets the remaining stock of rental units are being splashed with paint and sold as condos at several times the cost of even four years ago.

What caused this collapse of a once viable rental industry? The cities, the provinces and Ottawa must work together to determine the cause and to find solutions. We owe it to all to help.

* * *

SCHOOL SPEAKING TOUR

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the students, staff, parents and teachers who participated in my school speaking tour. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to listen to and speak with over 80,000 students and have benefited greatly from their input.

During this year's tour, the message from the students to the Prime Minister was crystal clear. They want the government to step up its efforts in a number of key areas, by making investments and designing a comprehensive plan of action to address the challenges we face as a country, including our environment, foreign aid, homelessness, immigration, health care, education, poverty, taxation, crime, research and development, community safety, infrastructure, drug abuse, gun violence, animal cruelty, aboriginals, seniors and Canada's place in the world.

The students of the city of Vaughan acknowledge that they live in a city with an exceptional quality of life and standard of living. Their gift is their ability to have a national view of our country and a global view of the world.

I am very impressed by their knowledge and willingness to accept responsibility and seize opportunities to make our country and our world a better place in which to live.

* * *

[Translation]

ECOKIDS PRIZE

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in this House and congratulate the staff and students at École Jeanne-Mance in my riding on winning the EcoKids prize for the greenest school initiative.

The children have taken tangible steps to protect their environment. For example, they have scheduled times at lunch for washing the reusable dishes the school purchased. In addition, the students throw nothing away: leftovers are composted and packaging rinsed and recycled. Some students are using recycled materials to make games that will later be displayed at the Biodome in Montreal, while others are decorating the school corridors with flower boxes. The students hope to make their own recycled paper next year.

When it comes to the environment, the students at École Jeanne-Mance have things to teach this government, which is not even concerned about their future.

* * *

[English]

PALESTINE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tragically, the Palestinian unity government has collapsed. Never in 40 years had a Palestinian political body brought together the views of so many Palestinians. All major political movements were included.

Statements by Members

Instead of seeing the unity government as a unique opportunity to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Conservative government shamefully boycotted, undermining the advocates of compromise, compounding political divisions within Gaza and the West Bank and increasing the insecurity plaguing the lives of Palestinians and Israelis.

The only viable government in Palestine is one that represents all Palestinians. Peace cannot be achieved without Hamas at the table. It is a fraud to pretend otherwise. It is imperative for the Canadian government to provide leadership and push for a unified, multilateral diplomatic front.

The current strife and tragic loss of life in Palestine and Israel will only be stemmed when a policy of peace and inclusive dialogue replaces the politics of militarism, boycott and division.

* * *

MILLENNIUM EXCELLENCE AWARD

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to advise the House that six Millennium Excellence Awards have been awarded to students in my riding of Okanagan—Shuswap for the academic year 2007-08.

The Millennium Excellence Award program is one of Canada's most prestigious national scholarship initiatives. This program is directed at Canadians preparing to enter college or university for the first time. The program's entrance award plays a crucial role in the recognition and encouragement of excellence in the classroom and beyond.

Congratulations go to Erin Crockett of Kalamalka Secondary, Mary Howie of Pleasant Valley Secondary School, Aneil Jaswal of United College of South East Asia, Jasmine Patrick of W.L. Seaten Secondary School, Kam Phung of Pleasant Valley Secondary School and Amanda Shelley of Kalamalka Secondary.

Award recipients, job well done.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

35TH ANNUAL TOURNAMENT OF THE NORTHWEST FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity today to congratulate everyone who took part in the 35th annual tournament of the Association des pompiers du Nord-Ouest, which took place in Saint-Basile.

I have great admiration for the members of this association and the work they do to make our communities safer. These firefighters do not hesitate to risk their own lives when a fire breaks out, and they deserve recognition.

At the tournament banquet, I had the opportunity to speak to the firefighters, and I again pledged my support for Bill C-219, which proposes to reduce taxes for volunteer emergency workers, including volunteer firefighters.

Statements by Members

I want to congratulate the Green River brigade, which won the 35th annual tournament and will represent the northwest region at the provincial tournament.

I also want to thank all the volunteers and the organizing committee members for all their efforts in planning this memorable event.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the session draws to a close, I would like to talk about the leadership this government has shown by announcing a number of initiatives to fight greenhouse gas emissions. One thing that comes to mind is the ecoenergy retrofit incentive.

Our incentive goes further than all the other programs proposed by the previous Liberal government. In fact, 140,000 households can benefit from a grant of up to \$5,000, a 25% increase over the previous program.

Under our incentive program, for every dollar paid out, 90¢ goes into the pockets of homeowners, compared to 50¢ under the old program. The average grant will be 40% higher than it was before.

In conclusion, I would like to say that our incentive program will also help fund a broader range of measures to reduce energy consumption in the home.

Once again, while the opposition is complaining and living in the past, we are taking action and proposing concrete, realistic and responsible initiatives to protect our environment.

* * *

GEORGES THURSTON

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Georges Thurston, known as Boule Noire, died last night at age 55, after a rich artistic career spanning 30 years.

He did not have an easy life. Abandoned at birth, he was raised in an orphanage, then went from one foster home to another, only to become a drifter for years. In his autobiography, published only a few days ago, he admits that music is what saved him.

He worked as a musician or music arranger for artists such as Charlebois, Roman, Dubois, Lautrec, Pagliaro and Workman, in addition to producing his own songs, many of which were recorded by the group Toulouse.

I would like to commend Georges Thurston's courage and determination in his battle with cancer, which he fought very publicly, in order to inspire others who are also battling incurable diseases.

He will be sadly missed.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, on June 15, I along with the Minister of Natural

Resources and the chair of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology had an opportunity to tour Encana's CO₂ sequestration site located in my riding just south of the city of Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

Encana's Weyburn oil field operation covers 70 square miles and on this site it has Canada's largest commercial scale carbon dioxide enhanced oil recovery project and the world's largest geological CO₂ sequestration project.

By the end of 2005, it had safely injected seven million tonnes of CO₂. This is the equivalent of taking one and a half million cars off the road for a year.

Also in my riding, near Estevan, Saskatchewan, prospective plans are being developed to build the world's first near zero CO₂ emission coal-fired plant where the CO₂ will be captured, stored and used to increase oil production, and all of it done in an environmentally friendly manner.

These initiatives represent a bright future for not only my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain but for all of Canada. It is good for the environment, it is good for the economy and it is good for all of Canada.

* * *

SOMALI WEEK INTERNATIONAL SOCCER TOURNAMENT

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to the attention of the House the Somali Week International Soccer Tournament held each year at Centennial Park Stadium in Etobicoke and hosted by the Somali Sports and Cultural Association.

This year the number of teams participating from June 28 to July 15 has grown from 12 to 16 teams. These teams come from Europe, Britain, Sweden and Holland, the United States Boston, Washington, Atlanta, Minnesota and Columbus, Ohio, and Canada, Ottawa, Toronto, Mississauga and Calgary.

The Somali week tournament was established in the early nineties in order to: first, entertain the community during the summer; second, to create an environment where the community can mix together to build social cohesion; and third, to provide youngsters with exercise and camaraderie for a positive, constructive experience.

To date the tournament has been run without financial backing from federal, provincial or municipal governments.

Good luck to all the teams participating. We will see them there.

* * *

● (1410)

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in last year's election we promised we would stand up for British Columbia and deliver results: promise made, promise kept.

Statements by Members

We promised dredging on the Fraser River, done. We promised to back the 2010 games, done. We promised to back the Pacific Gateway, done, and with \$400 million in extra money. We promised to cut taxes and pay down Canada's debt, done. We promised action on softwood lumber and the pine beetle, done. We promised to get tough on crime, done. In fact, we have tabled more meaningful justice bills in the last year than the Liberals did in the previous 13 years. We promised to protect our coast, done. With new coast guard vessels and a ban on sewage and pollution dumping on our coast, we took action.

The facts are clear. Conservatives know British Columbia. We are standing up for B.C. and we are getting results for all British Columbians.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is long past time for the government to start cleaning up the air in my community of Hamilton.

Just a week ago, residents of the beach strip in my riding observed a tall column of black coming their way from across the harbour. This was no tornado. Residents observed this black cloud form and grow as it passed over the coal piles of Stelco and Dofasco.

Soot fallout is so regular in the north end of Hamilton that residents are trying everything from access to information requests to find out what is being done to pursuing legal action to clean up the air.

Randle Reef in Hamilton Harbour needs \$90 million to clean it up, but in the last budget it received a mere \$11 million of the toxic sediment cleanup fund.

It is estimated that poor air quality in Hamilton causes 300 deaths a year. Hoping that air quality concerns will just blow away is costing the Conservative government hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs each and every year, not to mention the environmental impact.

Whether natural or man-made, whether local, regional or international in cause, it is time for the government to step up, work with all parties and all stakeholders, roll up its sleeves, take out its pocketbook and clean up Hamilton Harbour.

* * *

CANADIAN SKILLS COMPETITION

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all the team Nunavut participants in the 13th Canadian Skills Competition held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan from June 6 to 9, where they were received with very warm hospitality.

Sixteen talented students and apprentices from across my riding showcased their skills in a variety of skilled trade and technology contest areas, from carpentry to baking to graphic design.

Nunavut received two silver medals. I would like to congratulate Lucy Idlout, in post-secondary hairstyling, and the TV and video production team of Lauren Solski and Bjorn Simonsen, all from

Iqaluit. Lauren and Bjorn also received the prestigious "Best in the Region" award.

Thanks to all the instructors, advisers, sponsors and volunteers.

I ask all my colleagues in the House to congratulate these talented competitors, along with all my constituents of Nunavut.

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[*Translation*]**CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982**

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to mark the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982, the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously adopted a motion on June 13, 2007, reaffirming its position on this matter. It reads:

That the National Assembly of Québec recall that, 25 years ago this year, the Constitution Act, 1982 was enacted without Québec's approval, and that it formally reaffirm that it never acceded to this Act, whose effect was to diminish the powers and rights of Québec without its consent, and that the Constitution Act, 1982 still remains unacceptable for Québec.

This Conservative government must understand that simply voting in favour of a motion recognizing Quebec as a nation is not enough to show full respect for Quebec. In the past few months alone, the Bloc Québécois and National Assembly of Quebec have had to remind this government on several occasions that Quebec's jurisdictions must be respected and that Quebec is still not a signatory to the Constitution Act, 1982.

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THE FRANCO-ONTARIAN FESTIVAL

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from Friday night to Sunday, Ottawa hosted the 32nd Franco-Ontarian Festival.

Young and old, francophones and their friends turned out in great numbers at Festival Plaza in the heart of the city.

This festival is a collective expression of inexhaustible vitality. It features local as well as international talent and is characterized by good humour, camaraderie and pride.

Local artists such as Véronic DiCaire, as well as stars from other countries, such as Patrick Bruel, thrilled our community.

Kudos to the volunteers, congratulations to the organizers, thank you to the sponsors and partners. Thanks as well to Mother Nature, but above all to the community, which made the 32nd festival a resounding success.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

*[English]***JUSTICE**

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been calling for justice reforms for over a decade and finally they have a government that is listening and acting.

Since coming to office, our government has advanced over a dozen criminal justice reforms that will protect Canadians and their families.

With the support of opposition members in this House, many of these bills have been passed on to the Senate for its consideration before becoming law.

However, the Liberal-dominated Senate seems to be maintaining its hard-earned reputation for stalling and delaying by employing unreasonable tactics to deny Canadians the protection they so rightly deserve.

It is so bad that even provincial justice ministers are demanding that the Senate do the right thing and pass these bills right now. Alberta's justice minister, Ron Stevens, is adding his voice of support, saying that the goals of our federal justice reforms to deter and denounce serious offenders are consistent with the desires expressed by many Albertans during recent public consultations.

I call on all Liberal senators, but specifically Alberta Liberal senators, to do the right thing and pass these important bills so that Albertans and Canadians can have this protection.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week another damning report for the government indicated that its plan for reducing greenhouse gases cannot work. The C.D. Howe Institute said that with this plan, emissions will increase not only until 2012, not only until 2020, but until 2050.

My question is very direct and it is for the Prime Minister, and I am asking him to answer honestly for once. What does he have to say about the report of the C.D. Howe Institute?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is developing an effective plan. We are currently consulting with the provinces and industry to finalize the rules for the new regulatory system. Our system is consistent with the systems in the other major countries around the world.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe the Prime Minister could read that report and the Pembina report, which said that his plan is less effective by six to seven times than the Liberal plan his government killed, or the Deutsche Bank report, which said that indeed with his plan emissions will go up in Canada until at least 2020, or the Tyndall

report, which said that the government's targets are weaker than what the oil sands industry had decided to do anyway.

It is time for the truth. With all this evidence, will the Prime Minister admit that his plan is set to fail and that it is a fraud?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the entire world knows that the member opposite did not produce a plan in an entire decade.

This government has produced a plan. This government is in consultation with the provinces and industry on implementing the regulations, which we expect will be put in place this fall.

We obviously will look at the C.D. Howe report and other reports to make sure that we do in fact meet the targets, because we finally have a government with a plan committed to meeting the targets, just like the rest of the world, and that is a big change.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should definitely read these reports. He will learn that he killed a Liberal plan six to seven times more effective than the plan he is presenting.

He knows this plan is a fraud. That is why he shut down the environment committee last week, as he did before with the official languages committee, following the dirty tricks manual they have: committee manipulation for dummies.

It is time for the truth. Will the Prime Minister allow the committee to do its work, to hear Professor Jaccard and the C.D. Howe Institute and to complete a detailed examination—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

●(1420)

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I honestly do not know what the hon. member is even talking about.

What I can say is that the entire world knows and every expert knows that the member could not produce an emissions reduction plan in 10 years.

In a few months, this Minister of the Environment has produced a plan. We obviously will be refining that plan and we will be moving ahead with the world to meet global targets. The world is moving ahead. It has left that member behind.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the media obtained a Privy Council report from November 2006. It detailed the deteriorating security environment in Afghanistan.

Yet knowing all this, the government put out a report in the House that said the exact opposite.

Canadians are prepared for the truth about Afghanistan and they deserve nothing less. Why does the Prime Minister tolerate his ministers tabling happy fables in the House? Is it not time for some truth in this place?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly there have been incidents that have been tragic, and the circumstances in Afghanistan remain volatile, but let us talk about the truth in Afghanistan.

There are millions of Afghan refugees returning to Afghanistan. There are millions of children now in school, including girls, who were never there before. There are millions of vaccinations taking place for children. Schools are being built. Medical clinics, roads, water: there are a lot of good things happening in Afghanistan that the member and members of his party like to overlook.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week in parliamentary committee, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the Red Cross was investigating allegations of abuse with Afghan authorities. The Red Cross immediately had to refute this false information.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs admit that he once again mislead the House on the treatment of detainees? Has the moment of truth finally arrived?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is false. That is not right.

[*English*]

I said the International Committee of the Red Cross has a right to visit the detainees, which is under existing international law. It is mentioned in the new enhanced arrangement, as it was in the previous arrangement. That is what I was referring to, and in fact, this supplementary arrangement in no way puts obligations on the part of ICRC.

It does, in fact, raise the expectations and put the onus on the government of Afghanistan to work not only with the Government of Canada but with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission as well as the Red Cross.

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[*Translation*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly is bringing in its own legislation governing the possession of firearms, but still the Prime Minister refuses to meet with the parents of Anastasia De Sousa, the victim of the Dawson College tragedy. The government even had the gall to put its bill to eliminate the gun registry back on the agenda.

Will the Prime Minister drop his ideological goals and his plan to abolish the gun registry, as the De Sousa family has asked?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members of the government, like all members of Parliament, condemned what happened at Dawson College. We have all expressed our condolences to the families involved. Government ministers set up meetings with the families, college representatives and students, and we are ready to meet with them again anytime, if necessary.

This government also committed to taking all necessary measures to ensure the effectiveness of the firearms control system and to take action against gun crime.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a month ago, the government renewed the gun registry amnesty, which amounts to condemning the gun registry to certain death. For a year now, the Prime Minister has been depriving police forces and citizens of a very useful tool. As we have found out, the firearms control program costs the same whether it is working or not.

As such, why not fully reinstate it and drop plans to abolish it, as the National Assembly and the Bloc Québécois have asked?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has brought in several measures to make the gun control system more effective, including measures to make it more effective in the future, more effective than it was during these events.

At the same time, several of these measures were in the budget. We proposed funds to improve the gun control system and to crack down on gun crime. I would note that the Bloc supported this budget.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, commissioner Brown released his report, which describes the organizational and structural problems in the RCMP. In light of the report, the Minister of Public Safety is in favour of appointing a task force to restructure the RCMP.

After the pension plan frauds, the failed Air India investigation and the Maher Arar affair, does the minister not think that a full public inquiry is called for under the circumstances?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated today that we agree with all of Mr. Brown's recommendations. We need to act, and the time to act is now. It is not time for another inquiry, an eighth inquiry. We want a strong, open RCMP, and we are going to create one. That is why I agree with the recommendations that a task force be set up to give the RCMP a modern structure.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we understand the commissioner's recommendation when we know that his mandate was limited to management of the RCMP pension and insurance fund. In fact, the commissioner acknowledges this himself on pages 37 and 48 of his report. The recommendation that a public inquiry not be held pertains only to the issue of fund administration. A more general inquiry should be held to examine the force's overall culture.

Oral Questions

Would the Minister of Public Safety not prefer to hold a single public inquiry to restore the RCMP's transparency, instead of holding 10 partial inquiries as further RCMP mismanagement is discovered?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no limit in the recommendations. In fact, the report also recommends that another criminal investigation be held. That is why the RCMP has asked the Ontario Provincial Police to review the previous criminal investigation. As well, as I have stated today, there are other recommendations. There is no limit. It is a good report, and we will follow the recommendations.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year, when the Prime Minister rammed through the softwood sellout, he said that it would end the uncertainty, the bickering and the fighting. It is sort of a familiar phrase.

What are we seeing now? We are seeing the United States attacking our provinces that are simply trying to manage their natural resources. What does the government do? It starts looking at the idea of adding export taxes to this sector which would cost us even more than the tens of thousands of jobs that we have already lost.

How are the working families across the country supposed to trust a government that does such a thing? It delivers pink slips instead of paycheques to the forestry sector.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any disputes that are now occurring between Canada and the United States are occurring within the framework of an agreement that gives Canada ongoing and secure access to the United States' market. That is why the industry across the country wants the agreement to remain in effect and why it would be a terrible thing for the industry if the Liberals and NDP got their way, ripped it up and threw us back into litigation.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, workers in this sector were being thrown out of their jobs this past weekend.

[Translation]

The announcement made by Commonwealth Plywood last week is the latest in a series of job losses that have affected workers in Quebec. Thanks to the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois, 2,400 more jobs have just been lost in the Outaouais, in Low, Denholm, Princeville, Shawinigan and Mont-Laurier, to name a few places.

Why does the government continue to make concessions after the negotiations have ended? How many more jobs must be lost?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP voted against the softwood lumber agreement that was supported not only by all the companies in Quebec, but also by the unions. This industry is facing serious problems, which is why we included significant measures in the budget to help it. Furthermore, these measures have been welcomed by the industry.

The NDP voted against it. The NDP does not represent the interests of Quebec.

* * *

[English]

EQUALIZATION FORMULA

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Atlantic Canadians know all about the government's honesty, imbalance and its culture of deceit. It broke its promise that no province would lose out due to the government's equalization plan.

The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council has proven independently that it is not just Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia but that it is P.E.I. and New Brunswick as well that will be out by \$4 billion.

When will the Prime Minister admit that his pledge that no province would be adversely affected was a scam? Why can he not just admit the truth or is it simply that he just cannot handle the truth?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question but let me point out a couple of things. If he looks at what others say, including other agencies, about the report put out by APEC, they say that the figures it used and the projections it made are certainly not accurate.

I would also let the hon. member know that the commitment has been made that no province will be disadvantaged by the government and we will stick to that.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am relieved that the long era of bickering between the federal and provincial governments is over. How bad would it be if the federal and provincial governments were still bickering?

I have the latest in this saga. On June 4, the finance minister wrote the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and told them that there was an Alberta cap, which is in fact no cap at all, but now he says that was a mistake.

It seems the finance minister has the mind of a squid. He does not know if he is coming or going, or if he is punched or bored. It is time for the truth. Does he even know what that is?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the hon. member of a couple of things. First, clear commitments were made to provinces. Second, if we talk about relations, it takes two to tango. We have been trying to do the dance but we are not getting much go ahead from our partners.

Let me also say that in relation to squid, squid is known mainly because it moves backward. This government is moving forward.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***GUN REGISTRY**

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is about time this government told the truth about what it intends to do with the gun registry.

The government denies that it wants to abolish the registry, but the Conservative member for Yorkton—Melville has stated that he will stand for election again so that his government “finishes the job” and abolishes the gun registry.

When will this government admit that it wants to loosen gun control? When will it tell the truth?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we want to reduce the number of crimes committed with firearms.

That is why, when we proposed a bill for mandatory sentencing of individuals who commit crimes with guns, it was a big surprise to note that the majority of Liberals did not support that bill, which could reduce the rate of gun crime.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberals who established minimum sentences for gun crimes.

The De Sousa family, whose daughter tragically lost her life at Dawson College, understands the true intentions of the Prime Minister. Last week the family stated, “He is doing absolutely nothing...we have been forgotten. The door is closed”.

Instead of ignoring the victims, instead of ignoring the De Sousas, why are the Conservatives not accepting the clear will of Canadians who want tougher gun control?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it certainly was a tragic incident that took place at Dawson College. I met with family members and with another student who was injured in that tragic event and those were very emotional times. That is why we are committed to reducing the possibility of that ever happening again.

The member opposite is quite right when he said that it was the Liberals who introduced an ill-thought out plan to reduce firearm crimes. The Auditor General pointed to almost \$1 billion spent and that it was not working.

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*[Translation]***EXPENSES OF THE FORMER LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF QUEBEC**

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the request of the Bloc Québécois, the government agreed to ask the RCMP to investigate the actions of the former Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec. We now know that Ms. Thibault racked up more than \$700,000 in unjustified expenses.

In light of this information, will the government agree to the Bloc Québécois' request to have Ms. Thibault appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to explain her unjustified expenses?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member has been informed, the government does not control who appears before committee. Committees are masters of their own domain and if they wish to call witnesses they can do so through the proper process.

I am happy to report that we met with Minister Pelletier this morning and we have come to an agreement that we will continue to work with the Government of Quebec to ensure there is accountability and transparency and that the proper steps are taken.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government prides itself on being transparent, but in fact, does little to prove it. Will the federal government do as the Government of Quebec has done and require that, in the future, the Governor General and the lieutenant-governors defend their budget in committee and justify their expenses?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the committee is free to call whatever witness it would like to call before it.

Minister Pelletier and I have agreed that we will be coordinating our efforts as we go forward to ensure there is full public disclosure, transparency and accountability in providing adequate resources to the lieutenant governors across Canada.

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*[Translation]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canada greeted the new emergency Palestinian government sworn in by President Mahmoud Abbas, who said that his primary objective was to have the embargo lifted on international aid.

Yesterday, the minister promised to respond to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. Does he intend to put his money where his mouth is and reinstate financial assistance directly from Canada to the Palestinian Authority?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question. Indeed, our government supports the Palestinian people.

[English]

We, of course, will be working with the international community as well, as we have in the past, to see that funding flows to the Palestinians.

Oral Questions

This has been a very tumultuous time. We commend the efforts of the president and the new prime minister. We look forward to working with them. I had the opportunity to speak with both of them on the weekend to indicate Canada's support and our ongoing willingness to send the necessary resources so they can get on with dealing with this humanitarian crisis.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just a few months ago, the government refused to meet with a Palestinian minister who was visiting Canada and who was not linked to Hamas.

Now that the minister has changed his position on the Palestinian Authority, can he assure us that in future, Palestinian ministers visiting Canada will be received by this government?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has not changed its position. The conditions of the Palestinian Authority have changed.

• (1440)

[English]

This government has been consistent in its position. When it comes to the issue of terrorism, we do not deal directly with terrorist organizations, even if they form part of a unity government, as was the case in the Palestinian territories.

What we will do is work directly with leaders like President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad who is now in place. This will allow Canada to do much more with respect to our obligations with the Palestinians.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. trade representative sent a letter in March requesting consultations on the softwood lumber agreement. Supposedly, consultations were held and yet the issue has not been resolved.

Due to the government's preference for secrecy and withholding the truth, our softwood lumber industry remains in the dark about the results of these consultations. When will the government tell Canadians the truth about what is going on with these consultations?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would like to thank the hon. member for his support in passing the softwood lumber enabling legislation.

We knew that the Liberals were not quite capable of getting that done so it is a good thing that this Conservative government did because we now have an avenue and a venue that we can actually have these discussions with the United States on that very important issue.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess it is a bit of jet lag there because we did not support the softwood lumber agreement.

The Minister of International Trade is so desperate to defend his flawed deal that he is pressuring Canadian industry to comply with new U.S. demands.

I guess leaving \$1 billion on the table, implementing a quota system and throwing out all of our past legal victories at NAFTA and the WTO were not enough. Why will the parliamentary secretary not admit the truth, which is that he is caving in to the U.S. softwood lobby and selling out the Canadian industry?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that could not be further from the truth and, in fact, I believe it was the Liberals who saw the wisdom in this softwood lumber agreement and did indeed help it get through committee. I would correct the hon. member with that.

It is very unfortunate that the housing industry in the United States has softened and we are feeling the pressures from that but we are dealing with the Americans in a face-to-face discussion.

* * *

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORT

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite opposition from many Canadians, including Conservative members, the no-fly list takes effect today.

Who is on this list? Who recommended that these people be on the list and why? What threat do they pose?

Even the member for Leeds—Grenville does not trust the list or the procedure. His colleague from Edmonton—St. Albert has called the no-fly list a "fraud".

Are we to believe them, because their colleague, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, cannot tell the truth about this?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It gives me an opportunity to update the House about the protection that Canadian air travellers enjoy today.

Since this House adopted the anti-terrorism and national security legislation, the previous governments and our government have worked closely with stakeholders to put in place a measure to protect people who travel by air. Today, I am happy to announce that this measure is now in place.

[English]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he still has not really addressed the real purpose of the list. What is the mystery behind who gets on the list and why? The Minister of Transport alone determines that, but his department cannot detain or arrest anybody. If someone is on that list because he is a serious risk, why would that individual not be investigated, charged and given due process?

If the minister is simply acceding to the homeland security department's demands for a no-fly list, why does he not just tell us? His colleague from Leeds—Grenville has called the list a joke. The member for Edmonton—St. Albert calls it a fraud. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the guidelines in making the determination of who is on the list are quite clear.

Let me recall for the members of the House what we are talking about. An individual has been involved in a terrorist group: he is on the list. An individual who has been convicted of one or more serious and life-threatening crimes against aviation security: he is on the list. A person who has been convicted of one or more serious and life-threatening offences against a passenger or crew members: that person is on the list.

The vast majority of Canadians are not on this list.

* * *

●(1445)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to addressing the economic and social challenges facing first nations, Inuit and Métis youth by helping them to pursue their dreams, increase their chances of employment and promote their full participation in Canadian society.

Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House what our government is doing to provide increased opportunities for aboriginal youth?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, across Canada, the National Association of Friendship Centres is making a difference in the lives of the growing urban aboriginal communities, particularly the youth.

That is why this morning I was pleased to announce an additional \$33 million for the association of friendship centres. This will help aboriginal youth to develop their leadership skills, strengthen their cultural identity and gain the experience they need. By gaining these tools and skills, they will be able to go into their future with pride.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety today said we do not need a public inquiry to thoroughly examine the RCMP pension scandal because his hand-picked investigator found all the answers. But the public accounts committee has heard hours of testimony regarding murky dealings over pension contracts and his report does not even look into the contracting abuse.

In fact, even while his report was being printed, our committee was hearing new and conflicting testimony. How can the minister claim to have all the answers when he has not even asked all the questions?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing wrong with vigorous, robust debate, and

we should have that here, but when people are debating they should at least tell the truth about what is being presented.

In fact, at no point did Mr. Brown indicate that he has all the answers. That is why one of the recommendations is to put a task force together and make sure we have a governance structure that allows for transparency and accountability. He also indicates that he does not have all the answers when he indicates that there should be another view to the possible criminality that was involved.

If there is going to be debate, at least the opposition should be truthful about what those points of debate are.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a minister who is clearly afraid of the truth.

The government's hand-picked ad hoc investigator's report did not finish the job and has not told Canadians the whole story. The investigator did not even provide any evidence to back up his personal conclusions. There were no lists of witnesses, no lists of questions, no transcripts of answers, no copies of emails, no copies of records produced, no transparency, and certainly no accountability.

Canadians deserve to see these documents. Will the minister commit today to tabling every one of those documents?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Brown and his team of forensic auditors and others looked at some 400,000 electronic documents, some 35,000 hard copies of documents, and over 3,200 emails, and they interviewed all the witnesses they wanted to interview. Nobody refused. Credit goes to Commissioner Busson for making sure that happened.

I can understand the Liberals being concerned and wanting this to go to a public inquest, because that would carry on for years and would possibly get them past the next election. It would cover the fact that when they had this file, they did nothing. We are taking action.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the government to be truthful about what is going on at Devils Lake. The fact that the U.S. turned on the tap without notifying the government is of great concern to Canadians, particularly Manitobans.

Instead of ignoring the problem, the government has to take real action to ensure that our waters are not being contaminated. Photos show adult minnows in the channel downstream from the outlet. The longer the outlet is open, the greater the consequences. How can Canadians be sure that no alien species have invaded our waters?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know that there was a very rigorous debate on this subject in the House of Commons last week. Our government is of course very concerned about the biodiversity and the health of our lakes and waters.

Oral Questions

This decision by the government of North Dakota is extremely troubling. We have signalled that to the United States on numerous occasions. I know that my counterpart, the Minister of the Environment, has met with his colleague from Manitoba. This has been conveyed at the highest levels to members of the United States government.

We continue to call upon North Dakota to close this gap until such time as the proper technical equipment is in place to prevent any species from entering our waters.

• (1450)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need more than signals and calls.

Under the Canada-U.S. agreement on Devils Lake, a monitoring program was set up. The first year testing results have been completed. These results were presented at the last International Joint Commission meeting on boundary waters, held in Washington in March, and they have not yet been made public.

It is time for the government to tell Canadians the truth. They want to hear it. Why have these results not been made public?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we have stressed repeatedly to members of the United States government, both at the state and the federal level, our seriousness about our desire to have this water pass through a filter. There have been undertakings made.

We continue to call upon North Dakota to allow for this outlet to close until the engineering work on a permanent filter is put in place, as well as the study, which will allow us to put in place a type of ultraviolet filter that will prevent any invasive species from entering Canadian waters.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern to the government's difficulty with the truth. The Prime Minister shifts direction not because he realizes he got things wrong, but because he realizes he got the politics of them wrong.

Then, not a real believer himself, he is so shocked at people who really do believe in the environment, who really do believe in gun control, and who really do believe that a real future for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador needs the Atlantic accord, the trouble begins.

So he delivers a little, spins big and tries desperately to orchestrate an election before people notice the difference. When will the Prime Minister realize that it is time for the truth?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did not see a lot of truth in the Liberal leadership, particularly in the televised debates. We did not hear truth from the member for York Centre. We did not hear truth from the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

We have heard a lot of truth from people like Sheila Copps and people like Christine Stewart and other former Liberal environment ministers. Eddie Goldenberg said the truth, but no more have we

heard the truth than what we heard yesterday from the *Ottawa Sun*, where one of the members opposite said, "We deserved to lose in the last election because of our arrogance".

Do members know who said that? The member for Bourassa.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the problem with a government just campaigning, not governing. Then it is all about politics, about creating divisions, wedges: with me or against me, citizen against citizen, group against group, and province against province. This is a far more divided country now than we were 16 months ago.

When will the Prime Minister realize what the public already knows to be true? This government is not new, was never new and was cynical and politically obsessed from the beginning. This government was born old.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, something that is divided is the Liberal Party. We can see it in the recent book by *Toronto Star* journalist Linda Diebel, who talks about the ongoing divisions in the Liberal Party.

Let me tell members what we are going to do. We actually are going to do something remarkable in this country. We have a plan for an absolute 20% reduction in harmful greenhouse gas emissions. We have a plan to help clean up our Great Lakes. We are taking initiatives to clean up Lake Simcoe and Lake Winnipeg.

This government is getting things done when it comes to the environment, something the Liberals opposite failed to do for 13 long years.

* * *

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Commonwealth Plywood, a company in the forestry sector, has announced that it will close 18 plants indefinitely, putting 2,400 workers out of work. After working their entire lives for that company, many of those workers were only a few years from retirement, and retraining will be nearly impossible for them.

What is the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development waiting for to present a real income support program for older workers who have been the victims of mass layoffs, to make it possible for them to live a decent life until retirement?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first thing we do when there is a layoff like this is that Service Canada contacts management and employees and informs them of their entitlements.

But we have gone beyond that. Because of the leadership of the government, we now have in place a targeted initiative for older workers, which will help 3,500 workers over the next two years in Quebec alone.

On top of that, new labour market agreements offer resources to the provinces to provide people with the training they need to upgrade their skills so they can be successful and not just be relegated to the dustbin because their industry closes down.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about workers who cannot be retrained. A real income support program, as the Commonwealth Plywood union representative reminded us, would allow older workers to transition towards retirement, while preventing young people from leaving the regions because of a lack of work.

Does the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development realize that such a program would cost the federal government only \$75 million, for all of Canada?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the member is entirely too pessimistic. We think older workers have tremendous skills and experience that they can share with the rest of the country and we want to make sure they get the chance to do exactly that.

That is why we have in place the targeted initiative for older workers and, soon, new labour market agreements that will provide the help and support to people so they can go on and share this with the rest of the country and help us build a better and stronger Canada. That is what should happen.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, Mr. Din Ahmed was deported from the United States to Bangladesh, where he faces execution. This follows a trial in absentia that was severely flawed and without due process.

Despite the efforts of a number of NGOs and members of Parliament, we were unable to have Mr. Ahmed come to Canada, where he has family and a welcoming community.

I ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs if he would make representation to his counterpart in Bangladesh, a recipient of Canadian foreign aid, to ensure that human rights, due process and the rule of law are followed and that Canada does everything possible to ensure that Mr. Ahmed does not face execution.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question and for the notice that he gave me before question period, and yes, I can assure him that Canada has been following this case very closely.

We will undertake to make representations to the Bangladesh government with respect to Mr. Ahmed. Given some of the public statements about what may face him upon his return, I know that he finds himself in very dire circumstances.

He did go through a very rigorous process in the United States, of which the hon. member is aware. Within those parameters, given the fact that he is not a Canadian citizen, we in fact will undertake to make those representations the member has referred to because of

Oral Questions

our strong stance on human rights and the protection of individuals facing the death penalty.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an article published in the newspaper *La Presse* revealed that, of the 342 criminal groups identified by Quebec police forces, 57 street gangs work exclusively in Montreal and, of these, about 20 are considered major players.

The chief of the Montreal police force also stated that the mafia, bikers and gangs are working together to an increasing extent.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what our government is doing to fight organized crime and street gangs in order to make our streets safer?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has decided to take action by proposing a justice agenda that targets organized crime and gangs. Bill C-10 will impose longer mandatory sentences for criminals found guilty of serious gun crimes. Why are the Bloc and the Liberals not supporting this bill? Why?

* * *

[English]

AIRPORT SECURITY

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the no-fly list came into effect today. We are hearing there are about a thousand names on the list.

My question is for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. If in fact there are names on the list of people who belong to terrorist groups, why does the government not see that they are charged, prosecuted, put in jail so they will not only stop being risks to airlines, but also to all the rest of Canada?

● (1500)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this list not only supports domestic air travel, but also international travel. First and foremost, the list's objective is to ensure that the vast majority of Canadians who, on a daily basis, take aircraft to go from one place to another will be able to do it in complete and total security.

This is another way that the government takes its job seriously and ensures that terrorist threats that exist will not impede our travel.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this program is going to cost us \$3 million per year. The no-fly list will catch many innocent Canadians and ruin business and recreational travel plans. Worst yet, it is the victims' responsibility to get their names off the list. It will take at least six months, if they ever can do it.

Oral Questions

This so-called safeguard will not protect ordinary Canadians, despite what we hear from the minister. If the government will not scrap the no-fly list, will it at least set up an ombudsman's office with the authority to have access to all the files and the power to immediately get names off that list that should not be on it?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is there is a recourse for an individual who happens to find himself or herself on that list. The hon. member knows that. He has hopefully read the regulations that govern this passenger protect program. There is a recourse there.

We have consulted with the civil liberty groups in the country. We have obtained the advice of the Information Commissioner. We have done our job and this list is there to protect Canadians.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Members of the European Union are putting a squeeze on Canadian fishermen through an illegal ban on seal products. In a flagrant violation of international trade law, Belgium has now banned Canadian seal products on the basis of domestic public concern.

Action must be taken by the government before other EU members consider enacting similar bans due to a perceived lack of consequences.

Will the minister and his colleagues formerly commit to launching WTO actions against EU members that are illegally banning Canadian seal products?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is actually a pretty good one.

First, let me ensure that everyone knows the EU itself has not banned or will not ban seal products. It has admitted that the seal hunt is conservationist. Second, it is looking now at the humaneness of the hunt, and we hope to be able to prove that also.

Individual member states, some of them including Belgium, have banned seal and seal products. This is a serious precedent. We cannot put up with it and we will take action.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, building good trade relations with countries around the globe is vital for Canada to maintain its place in the world and to make us a more prosperous nation.

Earlier this month the Minister of International Trade concluded free trade negotiations with the European Free Trade Association countries, the first free trade agreement in six years.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation say whether our

government is engaged in trade talks with emerging economies like India?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to strengthening our relationship with India, and we have delivered. On Saturday, the Minister of International Trade announced that Canada has concluded a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement with India, a key step toward increasing trade and investment flows.

This FIPA and the recent free trade agreement with the EFTA countries send a clear and unambiguous signal that after 13 years of Liberal neglect Canada is back in business.

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[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, twice now, when it comes to local telephone services, the Minister of Industry has shown that he does not care about people in rural areas.

First, he denied that his government was leaving the door open to rate increases. Then his parliamentary secretary downplayed the importance of the CRTC's decision and invited people to appeal it, which is a process that does not actually apply in this case.

Back home, communities are getting organized. They will form a coalition and will demand that the government back down from its stance and protect rural people once again.

Will the minister listen to the people, hear their message and take action?

● (1505)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are putting consumers first. The CRTC has decided that it wants to update its price cap framework. I remind the member that this government will see that the CRTC will continue to regulate in areas where there is little competition.

Because the decision by the CRTC can be appealed within 90 days, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Diane Whalen, Minister of Government Services for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[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 24 petitions.

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PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 16 of the Director of Public Prosecutions Act, I am pleased to present to you for tabling, in both official languages, two copies of the first annual report of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on National Defence in relation to the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

It has been a year and a month since the Standing Committee on National Defence passed a motion, mandating itself to examine various aspects of the mission of Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Since then, committee members have heard dozens of witnesses and travelled to Canadian Forces' bases in Canada and Afghanistan. The courage, resolve and dedication of our Canadian Forces has been a source of inspiration for the defence committee.

The past, present and future sacrifices of the Canadian Forces personnel and the families they support, or the families that support them, have likewise afforded a profound gravity to this report.

I sincerely hope this report will assist Parliament and the government in their ongoing support for our men and women serving in Afghanistan.

The report is dedicated to the 58 Canadian men and women, who at the time of this report's adoption, have died in Afghanistan serving our country.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study on Afghanistan, eight members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Kabul, Afghanistan, in the fall of 2007, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Will the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Routine Proceedings

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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OFFICERS OF PARLIAMENT

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been discussions among all parties and I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, on Monday, June 18, if a recorded division is requested on the motions to ratify the appointment, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1(2), of the Ethics Commissioner and/or the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, the recorded division(s) shall be deferred to 6:30 p.m. today, Monday, June 18.

● (1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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PUBLIC INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved:

That, in accordance with subsection 39(1) of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, chapter 46 of the Statutes of Canada, 2005, this House approve the appointment of Christiane Ouimet as Public Integrity Commissioner.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That, in accordance with subsection 81(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act, Chapter P-1 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, this House approve the appointment of Mary Elizabeth Dawson as Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

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.

Routine Proceedings

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:

[English]

The Speaker: In accordance with the order adopted earlier this day, the division on this motion is deferred until 6:30 p.m. later this day.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development presented on Monday, February 12, 2007, be concurred in.

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development looked at post-secondary education for first nations and submitted a report. We now have the government response to that report. It is an opportunity for us to talk about not only the importance of post-secondary education, but also some of the broader issues facing first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

I will not go through all of the recommendations in the report, but essentially the report focuses on a couple of key areas. One area is around information. Some of the recommendations in the report of the standing committee dealt with the fact that information is absolutely essential to ensure that first nations have access to best practices and information that would enhance the availability of education. There really is inadequate information around the statistics on access, how many students do not get on the waiting lists, how many students complete their education, or what their employability is. There is a huge gap in information and data gathering.

The other two areas where there were substantial recommendations from the standing committee were around post-secondary funding and access for first nations, in other words, student and band funding, and funding for post-secondary educational institutes.

On student funding, one of the recommendations centred around the fact that there really is inadequate funding in terms of tuition, living costs, support to families and the different scenarios that students face in this day and age. I am going to be talking a bit more about that. The first nations post-secondary educational institutions have very limited access to funding. Much of that money has to be sought through their own devices.

I must admit that the government response was very disappointing. The response obscures information. It does not directly deal with some of the issues. It was a non-response in many cases. Some of the language that was used in the report is obscure in that at times, it talks about aboriginal peoples, and at times it talks about first nations, Métis and Inuit. That language continues to cross over. This obscures the reality in many communities about who is getting

access, and how many people and how much money. When it comes to things like completion rates, it further obscures the data.

The committee heard from many people across the country. We heard concerns consistently from coast to coast to coast about how first nations post-secondary education is handled in this country. I want to add something on top of this, a very recent decision that is going to further compound the difficulty.

The B.C. Supreme Court in the Sharon McIvor case ruled that a section of the Indian Act is discriminatory against women. The Sharon McIvor case has gone on for 18 years. Many women and men across the country are hoping the government will not appeal this very important decision, particularly a government that continues to claim it is functioning from a place of human rights. If the current government sees fit not to appeal the case, the government will be facing an additional funding crunch when it comes to things like post-secondary education, housing and all of the other things that are under continuous funding constraints on reserve. Up to a third more students could be eligible for post-secondary education if this decision is not appealed. The very difficult situation that is facing many people on reserve now would only get worse.

I want to talk a little about the social context. We cannot talk about education without looking at the social context.

• (1515)

We have talked about these numbers in the House of Commons before, but they are worth repeating. One in four first nations children lives in poverty compared to one in six Canadian children. One-third of first nations households with children are overcrowded. More than half of first nations children face health issues because of obesity. High school completion among first nations youth is half the Canadian rate. At the current rate it will take 28 years for first nations to catch up to the non-aboriginal population.

When we talk about poverty, one of the arguments that is frequently made is that one way to close the poverty gap is to look at economic development and education. If that is the case, then we need to invest money in that area.

Another argument that is often made is about the myth that exists. The Assembly of First Nations published a paper, "The \$9 billion myth exposed". There is a myth that first nations on reserve have all the access they want to education, that money is no object. Of course, we know that is absolutely not true.

The other number that is bandied about is that each individual on reserve gets \$16,000, plus or minus. The Assembly of First Nations looked at some of these numbers and published the paper, "Fiscal Imbalance: The Truth About Spending on First Nations". In talking about per capita spending, it said:

Per capita spending on First Nations is half the amount for average Canadians (between \$7,000-\$8,000 compared to \$15,000-\$16,000). Spending on First Nations through core federal programs is capped annually at rates lower than inflation and population growth.

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That is an important point to raise because the notion that there is unlimited access is just not fair and not true.

In many first nations communities the reality is that their responsible governments, their chiefs and council are often faced with the very difficult decisions around whether to spend money on education when people are going without adequate housing, or whether to spend money on education when people do not have access to clean drinking water. That continuing pressure on band councils exists.

The 2% cap in federal funding has been in place since 1996 and applies across reserves for all funding, except health. Health is at a 3% cap.

When we look at the long history of recommendations around providing access to post-secondary education, report after report after report has talked about the importance of post-secondary education and funding it adequately. In the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, volume 3, "Gathering Strength", chapter 5 on education, paragraph 3.5.20 says:

The government of Canada recognize and fulfil its obligation to treaty nations by supporting a full range of education services, including post-secondary education, for members of treaty nations where a promise of education appears in treaty texts, related documents or oral histories of the parties involved.

In paragraph 3.5.19 it states:

Federal, provincial and territorial governments collaborate with Aboriginal governments and organizations to facilitate integrated delivery of adult literacy, basic education, academic upgrading and job training under the control of Aboriginal people—

It talks about delegating responsibility and supporting the adaptation of programs, and so on. The final point in the RCAP report is under paragraph 3.5.21, which states:

The federal government continue to support the costs of post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit post-secondary students and make additional resources available

- (a) to mitigate the impact of increased costs as post-secondary institutions shift to a new policy environment in post-secondary education; and
- (b) to meet the anticipated higher level of demand for post-secondary education services.

As far back as 10 years ago that very comprehensive report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had some very strong, clear recommendations that talked about the need to adequately fund and support post-secondary education.

In November 1996 the then Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, in a report on education dealing primarily with elementary and secondary education, made a recommendation on a national aboriginal education institute. It talked about the fact that the mandate could include a resource centre for curriculum gathering and development, evaluation of education and labour training programs, analysis and reporting on innovations and best practices, and a collection of data on academic performance.

• (1520)

This is a report from over 10 years ago. Some of the recommendations in this report are the very same recommendations that the current standing committee was making. In 10 years there has been no action.

In addition, the April 2000 Auditor General's report focused on elementary and secondary education. In her observations and recommendations in paragraph 4.23, she said:

—education for First Nations has been studied for over 20 years. This includes at least 22 studies between 1991 and 1999 in one departmental region—

That is one departmental region. There has been study after study after study and still we continue to see that gap in post-secondary education availability and accessibility. In the Auditor General's report of November 2004, we begin to see a pattern. We do a lot of talking. We do a lot of reports. We do a lot of responses to reports. Where is the action? In her 2004 report the Auditor General in paragraph 5.91 talked about the fact that Parliament is not receiving a complete picture. She said:

It does not compare the post-secondary achievement of First Nations people, living on or off reserves, with that of the Canadian population as a whole; nor does it explain to what extent the program contributes to the educational achievement of First Nations.

This speaks directly to one of the recommendations in the report, that there is insufficient information to talk about the results around the money that is being spent. First nations are calling for that support. They need help on reserve and off reserve in order to gather adequate data.

In the same report, in paragraph 5.92, the Auditor General said:

Unaudited departmental information also indicates that the annual number of students being funded has actually been declining in recent years, from a high of about 27,000 in 1998-99 to about 25,000 in 2002-03. However, the Department does not explain this trend.

In paragraph 5.93 it states:

We noted that about 27 percent of the First Nations population...between 15 and 44 years of age hold a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree compared with 46 percent of the Canadian population within the same age group. We believe that Parliament should be informed about the gap, the potential causes, and the way that the program helps to address it.

It sounds like there is more need for information.

An audit was prepared by the Developmental Audit and Evaluation Branch, assisted by Hanson/Macleod Institute. This is an evaluation of the post-secondary education program from June 2005. This is an audit on the department's own work. It looked at both post-secondary education and the Indian studies support program. In talking about the funding formula, it states:

The formula covered the costs of tuition, books and an itemized list of living expenses. Since 1997, block funding envelopes have been capped with annual increases allotted according to Treasury Board directives.

One of the things we have been talking about is that the funding is capped and is creating some serious problems. Later on in the audit report under "Findings: Rationale and Relevance" it talks about the importance. It says:

Post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit is intended to lead to enhanced economic self-reliance and stronger communities, people and economies, all of which are consistent with federal policies and priorities.

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That is an important item. In Canada we often hear about the looming skills shortages. We also hear about the population increase in first nations. First nations in this country currently have a higher birth rate. We are seeing in some places a significant growth in the youth population. Here is a ready population to help address the skills shortages, but that means access not only to post-secondary education, but to apprenticeship programs as well.

The report says that first nations and Inuit participation rates have not yet achieved the same level as other Canadians or even that of other aboriginals. Between 1986 and 1996 for example, although first nations participation rates followed the same upward trends of those of other aboriginal Canadian students, they remained roughly 10% and 14% lower than the other two groups throughout the decade.

• (1525)

Furthermore, program utilization rates amply demonstrate a strong level of pent-up demand among first nations and Inuit communities for additional resources in both PSSSP and the ISSP sub-programs. It is estimated that 3,575 students were deferred each year between 1999-2000 and 2001-02 and that, for instance, requests for ISSP funding outstripped available resources over the past years by factors of two to one in one region and by three or four to one between 1995 and 1997 in other regions.

This is the department's own information that continues to support that there is an absolute need to address some of the gaps. Later on in the same report it says:

Statistics show improved employment rates among First Nation and Inuit individuals with higher levels of education. Employment income also increases dramatically as a percentage of total income as educational attainment levels increase. Given that many student respondents said they would not have been able to improve their education level without the PSE program support, it was concluded that the program has achieved progress in enhancing individuals' economic self-reliance.

It does say in here that this is based on the best available evidence. We have heard from other places that the information available is inconsistent and often does not deal specifically with employability outcomes. Under "Cost-Effectiveness" it states:

It was found that the guidelines for a PSSSP student living allowances are 14 years out of date, that PSSSP students are, on average, receiving between \$500 and \$4,000 less per academic year than they are paying in living expenses; and that current per student allowances are below the national average established under the Canada Student Loan Program five years ago.

One of the comments in the report was the fact that students could go and get a student loan. That certainly is an option for some students, but for many students that is just not an option. First of all, they are often coming from areas of extreme poverty and there is something called "sticker shock". For many students, unless there is some support in recruiting and retention, they are actually even prohibited from getting into a university or college to begin with.

In fact, many of the universities cannot supply that information about which students are actually deterred from actually entering into a post-secondary education institution because of what they call sticker shock. As we know, tuition costs continue to go up across this country and many students, both first nations and non-first nations students, are simply not able to access affordable education in this country.

There was a cost-drivers report, again it is the department's own analysis, which said:

The PSE program is recognized as one of the more effective means of eliminating the gap in life chances between First Nations and Canadians, and is funded as a matter of social policy by the Canadian government.

Since the introduction of the 2% growth cap in 1996-97 the number of students has fallen by 9%...The decrease is attributed to post-secondary funding being reallocated to cover non-discretionary costs such as provincial school billings and the per student costs growing as a result of the cost-drivers below.

When it talks about the cost-drivers, it talks about some other impacts. There are an increasing number of secondary students graduating from high school which is of course putting demands on the funds that are available. There is a cohort of mature students who are finding that older students are now wanting to return to school and complete their education. Of course the budget is a huge constraint.

It talks about the amount of resources that are required in order to catch-up. This was part of the "resource ask" that the parliamentary standing committee put in its report. The catch-up said:

In order to return first nations post-secondary education participation to 1996-97 levels, ongoing annual funding of approximately \$24.8 million would be required.

This is actually based on a rate of \$11,390 per student which the report later on talks about the fact that it should actually be based on \$13,300 per student, which is a blended rate.

To increase first nations post-secondary education participation in accordance with population growth of the 18-34 age cohort would require a further \$22.6 million annually.

There are more numbers in that report, but I think the point is that the department's own information talks about a very serious gap.

• (1530)

One of the things that the government will say, and previous governments have said, is that post-secondary education is a matter of social policy; it is not a legislative requirement. The government has a responsibility, whether it wants to acknowledge it or not, and social policy or not. A need has been clearly identified through a number of reports, audits and evaluations. I would suggest that the parliamentary standing committee's report requesting a removal of that 2% cap is an important report.

In 2004, the Assembly of First Nations prepared a paper called "Background Paper on Lifelong Learning". That report talked about the fact that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada had not changed post-secondary education, PSE, policies and programs since 1988 or kept current with the increasing costs of higher education.

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Policy changes in 1988 resulted in a reduced number of students eligible for funding. Applicants being placed on waiting lists, limited access to PSE by offers or residence, outdated guidelines, amounts for student living costs, tuition fees and educational expenditures discouraged and stressed first nations people. Students experienced financial hardship and many had to drop out. Funding was subsidized through other social programs. Again, the litany continues.

I want to turn very briefly to the fact that post-secondary education institutions are left out of this mix. They are an important part of the picture. I hope that the government will take a serious look at the report prepared by the parliamentary Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and follow through on the recommendations that were made.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important motion and one that this House needs to act on very quickly. I would like to ask my hon. colleague this question. What does she think the positive impact of implementing these recommendations would be on the aboriginal community?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the input that the member has provided at committee around this important issue.

We in Canada have been cited internationally for our work around poverty on reserves. Whether it is the Conference Board of Canada or other think tanks, one of the elements that consistently comes up is the fact that we have to provide education if we want to raise people's standard of living.

The committee specifically dealt with post-secondary education, but was fully aware that the kindergarten to grade 12 system needs to be addressed. The department is supposed to put together some material on this. A report is coming, but we are still waiting for it.

In terms of post-secondary education, whether it is university, college, vocational, or technical apprenticeship, it will truly help raise people out of poverty. When we talk about things like capacity building, when we talk about things like self-government, or when we talk about things like economic development, education is key.

The recommendations that came from the standing committee are extremely important in terms of addressing the gap in first nations' ability to access education.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member and I want to congratulate her first for presenting this motion that will be debated in the next few minutes, here in this House, and also for the work she does in committee.

When the work of the committee began, at the start of the new session, we spent some time determining which issues the committee should address, which should take priority and which required exhaustive study.

Lord knows that when it comes to aboriginals, there are a number of issues, such as water, housing, health and so forth. We agreed that the key was post-secondary education, to ensure that whether

aboriginals lived on reserve or not, they could achieve independence and be able to work.

We made an initial observation and I am surprised the minister did not mention it in his response. It is all well and good for the government to say that it is allocating \$308 million in the 2006-07 budget to post-secondary education, but this is a one-time allocation. The Conservatives can suddenly decide to cut the budget, scrap the \$308 million and use it for something else.

Does the hon. member believe that we should urge the government to take another look at its findings and carry out the main recommendations, namely recommendations one and two, which are so very important?

Post-secondary education needs a stable budget. The survival of the first nations depends on it.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue is a hard-working colleague on the committee. The issue around funding of course was key to the report from the standing committee.

I talked about the context of the 2% cap that has been in place since 1996 and the growth in population.

The other issue is that there is not multi-year long term funding that has been committed year over year. The challenge that happens for people is that they are not able to do some of that long term planning and strategic thinking that needs to take place in terms of addressing the very real needs around post-secondary education.

Because it is social policy it is not legislative and therefore there could be a change in the funding levels. They could be decreased because it is a matter of social policy.

The committee recognized that fact and called for that long term stable funding to be in place. Therefore, I would absolutely support that kind of funding mechanism to be put in place and would encourage the government to actually take up the very good work that the standing committee did on these recommendations.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development I certainly learned a lot about the educational needs of our aboriginal students in that study.

One of the statements that was made during that study was that aboriginal students who complete secondary school are as likely to graduate from a post-secondary education as non-aboriginal students.

Would the member agree that we need to spend more time on initiatives to help primary and secondary students succeed? Because the member comes from British Columbia, perhaps she could focus on a recent agreement that was signed that would possibly be a model for other areas to implement in terms of increasing those opportunities for aboriginal students.

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• (1540)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfortunate that we end up in a discussion that talks about either/or. This really needs to be a discussion that talks about and/and. Absolutely, we need to take a look at kindergarten to grade 12. We need to take a look at supports, completion rates and culturally relative curriculum.

We need to continue to take a look at the fact that a number of post-secondary students simply do not have access. They simply cannot afford to get in. The bands cannot afford to send them. We need to take a look at the fact that we could really help address the economic disparities on reserves by ensuring that access to post-secondary education is there for first nations students who wish to take that up.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the honour of attending a graduation ceremony at the Friendship Centre in Victoria of aboriginal students and others who had completed a bridging program, since these were largely adults who had less schooling and found a way of coming back.

During the evening I spent a lot of time talking with many of them and I found out that they were saddled with huge debts. Does my colleague think that aboriginal people, adults and young people who want to go back to school, have the support they need?

The young people with whom I spoke that evening were interested in going up north to Alert Bay do a traditional trip as part of the completion of their program and to get a better understanding of their own culture.

Could the member talk a bit about what exists in terms of first nations post-secondary education, institutions and programs.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, as the post-secondary education critic, I know my colleague from Victoria comes up against the cost of tuition and the cost of student support all the time. It is compounded in first nations communities because many times we have older students who are returning to school and they need to deal with things like child care and additional transportation costs because they are often leaving remote communities.

In terms of the importance of a culturally relevant curriculum, which includes things like trips to Alert Bay, there simply is not the funding to develop that culturally relevant curriculum and there is not the funding around appropriate language material. In terms of support to first nations post-secondary education institutions, it was not until amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 that first nations people were actually even permitted to go to post-secondary institutions.

We also have this long and sad legacy of residential schools which has meant that many students have struggled in terms of leaving their communities to go away to educational institutions. The importance of first nations post-secondary educational institutions is extremely important in that kind of social context.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today on this important topic before the House. The member who has called this concurrence debate is a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and

Northern Development and is a passionate advocate for aboriginal people throughout Canada and, of course, students.

This was an important study that was the first that I took part in as a member of Parliament and, as such, was not only a study on education but was very much an education for me.

We received many submissions and it was an extensive study. We also, in my opinion, found important information about the process for which aboriginal students across Canada are learning.

If there is one thing that everyone can agree on, it is that the path for individuals to succeed, for communities to escape poverty, for societies to flourish and for economies to prosper lies through education, education and more education.

Despite heroic efforts by thousands of students, parents, teachers and educators and many green shoots of progress, we all must admit there has not been enough of that progress. Too few aboriginal children finish high school. Too many schools lack the labs and libraries or the access to extra support services that make a difference. They have little measurement, no real system and no education act, just schools, lots of funding, agreements and people trying to make it work by throwing money at a system that may not work in the short term but suffices for the here and now.

However, it will not last. We need deeper renovation. We must do better. It is essential for all students across Canada and especially aboriginal students. We cannot wait.

Thankfully, we have seen a process begin in British Columbia. First nations people have led the way by forging a unique three-way partnership with the two levels of government. This partnership marries old ideas of first nations people along with new models of clear accountability for results in interconnection to the provincial standards for students and teachers.

Parliament passed this law to support the partnership last December. It is something that all members of the House were very proud of. We are moving swiftly, not just to implement it in B.C., but to offer similar partnerships in other parts of the country.

We have also learned from successes in Nova Scotia and the James Bay coast of Quebec. We have forged solid working relationships with experts in provincial ministries and universities.

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We are still not sitting in a way that is urgent to press forward on these problems but we will in fact move forward and invest more than \$50 million in important new school projects and extend the SchoolNet program that supports these schools with the Internet connections that they need to become the schools that everyone expects in this modern age.

This fall we will be doing a lot more as well. We cannot let this story end with an improvement in high schools. We also know that it is crucial to build bridges from these secondary schools to the labour markets and how important these further skills can be, whether that means university, college or accreditation for trades.

That is why our budget presented in March made an investment of an extra \$105 million over the next five years. It is more than double the size of the aboriginal skills and partnership initiative which will fund skills training for thousands of aboriginal people.

That is why we sign partnership deals, bringing together first nations with private sector firms like EnCana and Siemens. We have renovated and extended for another five years the urban aboriginal strategy with a tighter focus on employment.

I have visited many communities throughout the north, including the community of Thompson. I know we have the member of Parliament from the Thompson area here today. I witnessed some of the work that was done with the aboriginal strategy in that fine city in which I was born and I can say that it has worked for the citizens of that community.

• (1545)

The one thing we learned in our study was that it is essential for post-secondary students to actually graduate. Perhaps the most important point that I personally learned as part of that study is that first nations students on reserve, in fact all aboriginal students throughout Canada, when graduating at the high school level are just as likely to proceed to post-secondary education and achieve success as other students in different demographics in Canada. This is an important fact that was learned by myself and other members of the committee during that important study.

As a government, we feel that we must focus much of our energy on improving the standards of secondary education throughout first nations communities. Unfortunately, there is a patchwork of systems in place that governs education. I know British Columbia has moved forward with an important initiative but many other provinces in Canada have yet to embrace these models. This is something that we as a government must do.

I want to highlight some of the other things we learned in the study since today we have been called upon to have this debate. One of the areas that I particularly focused on was the area of funding provided to first nations communities and how that funding is then further allocated. There is debate in relation to the amount, which is roughly \$300 million. Some have argued that there should be more and some have argued that this amount needs to be more efficiently utilized. Of course, I believe there could be new efficiencies brought about to improve the outcome of that \$300 million.

That is an area that I believe needs more work. There is really no general accountability on that \$300 million. In fact, it is invested directly into the bands' general operating funds. If there were a new

system that allowed for these communities to specifically allocate those funds to universities, I think new efficiencies could be found.

Of course, if an individual on reserve wanted to complain about the fact that there is not necessarily assurance in the way that \$300 million is spent, they currently cannot do so within the Canadian context but, thankfully, we are bringing an important bill before the House, Bill C-44. I know the member for Churchill is not interested in this topic.

Bill C-44 extends the Canadian Human Rights Act to first nations people on reserve and that is important.

Ms. Tina Keeper: That is not true.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: It is very important and that is true.

In 1977, the Canadian Human Rights Act exempted first nations people on reserve from being able to launch human rights complaints against other bodies, first nations or, of course, the Government of Canada. This is something that has been in place for a number of years and it needs to be changed. Thankfully, we have a bill before the House of Commons right now that would repeal this unfortunate exemption and allow for first nations people on reserve to lodge their complaints in areas that they feel they are being infringed upon.

I would like to wrap up by saying that this government is very committed to education for first nations people, not only post-secondary but also education at the secondary level.

• (1550)

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it really interesting that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would find it necessary in this speech to mention me, which maybe is complimentary.

Nonetheless, speaking about human rights, first nations' access to education and post-secondary education as being the fundamental premise, as we have heard, in terms of building a better standard of living is necessary for first nations as the disparity is so great.

Could the member expand upon the principles of the B.C. legislation model that he talked about because we have seen that type of model throughout Canada with first nations who have been very active in terms of having frameworks for first nations education? We have it in Manitoba. I think it would be very good for the parliamentary secretary to know that because that is his home province. If he could expand upon the principles of the B.C. education model that would be very helpful.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, prior to becoming a member of Parliament I came from the film industry and as such I am a great fan of all movie stars, so perhaps that is one of the reasons why I made my comments.

In relation to the member's question, I do have an interest in the B.C. model. I think it could work well for other jurisdictions, including Manitoba. Having spoken with individuals within the province and also with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, I know that there is an interest in this.

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I think one thing that is agreed on is that the current outcomes in secondary education in Manitoba in first nations communities are not satisfactory. This is one of the reasons why we need to move to a model that will look toward bringing about standards that allow first nation learners to enter into post-secondary education in a way similar to that of other students in other demographics.

I know that there is a lot of interest in first nations communities in being able to embrace some of the things that British Columbia has done with its important piece of legislation.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the parliamentary secretary. I still have many questions. The minister's response to the report, in which we invested many hours and days of work, and that was tabled here in this House, is inadequate, in my opinion.

The minister must understand—and I hope his parliamentary secretary will make him understand—that the money earmarked this year in the budget for post-secondary education, that is, \$308 million, is unfortunately not permanent. In addition, for any reason at all, the government could decide tomorrow that there is no longer any money and announce that it is cutting the \$308 million.

Why will the government not plan for this money from now on, in the form of an established program? Indeed, there is no program at this time. This amount is being paid at the discretion of the minister or the Treasury Board.

Once again, post-secondary education for first nations people is being jeopardized. I will give a quick example. We asked the minister to intervene to help establish a first nations university in Val-d'Or—the First Nations Pavilion—construction of which is scheduled to start immediately. We are calling on him to intervene to help us create day-to-day educational programs for first nations people. The answer is no, because there is no money, and any money we do have is going only for something else.

Why can we not budget this money, that is, \$308 million, every year? Thus, from one year to the next, we could be guaranteed this amount, which would no longer be subject to Treasury Board approval.

[*English*]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, of course the \$300 million that the member speaks about is in this budget, as it has been in previous budgets, and it will continue to be. Our budgets are approved by the House, budgets that his party has the ability to vote for, and it has done so.

I expect that this will continue all along, as our government has said. We will continue to say that post-secondary education is essential for first nation learners in order for them to achieve the degree of economic outcome that so many other citizens in Canada have.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member raised the issue of human rights, so I would like to ask him a question given the recent B.C. Supreme Court decision with respect to the Sharon McIvor case. In regard to its potential impact, given that this decision has the potential to

increase the number of people who could be eligible for funding in a number of areas, including post-secondary funding, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could give some indication to the House as to whether or not the government intends to appeal that decision.

If the government does not intend to appeal that decision, given the context that we already have around a 2% funding cap and around growth in the number of young people on reserve who are eligible for post-secondary education, I wonder if he could indicate what plans the government has for addressing the potential increase in the number of eligible students applying for post-secondary education.

• (1600)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my presentation, the amount of \$300 million is something that I believe can be more efficiently allocated. I think that efficiencies are the most important part of making this allocation work better for first nations people. I know that some of those recommendations are in the report and hopefully possibly will advance this outcome.

In relation to human rights violations that might be occurring in Canada, I think that as a government that is one of the reasons why we are bringing forward Bill C-44. We are not going to stop because there might be a flood of complaints. We do not think that is going to be the case, but that is no reason to put off such important efforts.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back again to the McIvor decision, which my colleague opposite raised. It is a very important decision. It is a decision that will have far-reaching implications for first nation communities and indeed for Canada.

It is important that the parliamentary secretary be able to elaborate on what kinds of efficiencies could take place in post-secondary funding. When we look at the potential for 200,000 more people to be recognized as having status, we do not know what the numbers will be in terms of those eligible for post-secondary education, but given the demographics of the community, we know it will be substantial. We need to know a little more about what idea the government has as it relates to efficiencies in education. What we are hearing about over and over again is lack of opportunity and lack of capital funding.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, of course the member opposite has spent some time at the aboriginal affairs committee with me on this very topic. I also have focused much of my interest on the fact that this dollar amount of some \$300 million does get invested into general revenue within the communities.

Occasionally it does not even make it to said communities, so this is where I think efficiencies can be brought about. When these dollars can be tied to specific spots, it will be a great improvement, so I hope that as time proceeds we can see a model like this in the future.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion presented by the member from the New Democratic Party. I sat with her on the aboriginal affairs committee for a period of time.

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I rise because this issue is very important to me. I probably would not be standing here today if not for the post-secondary program in my community. My wife and I were the first university graduates from our families and we were both the first in our families to graduate from grade 12. If not for the post-secondary program, I honestly and truly really would not be here. The quality of life that my children and my family enjoy today is key. The key to that quality of life has been the support I got from the post-secondary education program.

With both our families coming from poverty and being raised in northern isolated communities, we did not and could not afford the opportunity to attend post-secondary education. I feel that I serve my country and my people much better as a productive member of Canada by having secured an education and by contributing to what needs to be done to make our country even better.

This is what the post-secondary program has done for me, my wife and my kids. My two eldest children are now going to university as well. I know that they both are going to be a tremendous success and will continue to contribute to their community, their province and their country in the way that I hope I am doing in the role I am enjoying today as a member of Parliament in this great House of Commons.

When I look back at my situation and the situations back home, this is the aspiration of many first nations, Métis and Inuit youth in this country: to secure an education and to secure the support, because many of my people, whether they are first nations, Métis or Inuit, unfortunately find themselves in a situation where poverty is a daily reality. Education is the key to being able to rise from that poverty, as the parliamentary secretary spoke about and as my hon. colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan and many others have spoken about.

Having grown up in a community where poverty and such things are unfortunately the norm, we are starting to see a change. We are starting to see an emerging reality where there is a positive attitude, where people can see a light at the end of the tunnel. One of the biggest ways to support achieving that new pinnacle or that next level, moving out of poverty, is by securing that education.

I agree with the parliamentary secretary that the K to 12 system is key to this, but we cannot ignore post-secondary today, and I will speak a bit more to that as we move on.

For the most part, aboriginal people have existed on the margins of this great country. I will speak very briefly about three modern phases of aboriginal-state relations and I will put into context why post-secondary funding and institution support funding are key today.

From shortly after the world war ended until about 1969, aboriginal people were in their communities. Governments knew we were there, but there was never any response unless there was a crisis. Until a crisis occurred, the government response was usually ad hoc. There was no real resolution in the short, medium or long term. It was just an ad hoc crisis. That is the name of that phase. It was just an ad hoc crisis relationship between the aboriginal peoples of this country and the state.

Something changed in 1969. The spark that caused an upwelling within the aboriginal community was the issue we are talking about today: education. The white paper was introduced in 1969. One of the keys in that document, aside from language that our people did not like, was that in order for us to be contributing members of Canadian society, we needed to access post-secondary education, or our education system needed improvement.

● (1605)

That launched the next phase. Aboriginal people were tired of being marginalized. It was only in recent memory that they were able to hire lawyers and able to leave the reserves to shop or do anything. They needed a permit from the Indian agent. They all still remember not being able to vote until just recently. Coming out of that phase into the next phase, they challenged, stood up and wanted their rights recognized. The key issue that arose at that point was the Indian control of the Indian education document that came out in 1972.

From about 1970 until the early 1990s, it was very much a phase where aboriginal state relations were best characterized as confrontational. Aboriginal people used the courts to identify, protect and advance their rights. Unfortunately, blockades and other events occurred in Oka and Ipperwash where lives were lost. This was not a very positive time in that relationship phase from the early seventies to the mid-nineties.

However, out of that came some clarity. The Supreme Court, the Federal Court and the provincial courts said that enough was enough. They said that there were enough case law and decisions that the government and the first nations, Métis and Inuit people should use to guide the next stage of the relationship. They told all parties to take those tools and use them as a framework to establish a new relationship between Canada's aboriginal people and Canada.

With RCAP in 1993, we began to see a bit of a change in the relationship that began as an ad hoc crisis. It was “we know you're there but we really don't care if you're there” attitude. It was a phase where there was confrontation. The early nineties started with a more collaborative approach, in part fuelled by RCAP. We saw an increase in the devolution of programs to aboriginal communities. We saw over 100 self-government tables spring up across the country.

What we saw from the nineties to now was an emerging consensus that we were here to stay in this country and that we all needed to work together. We needed to build on the rights that were there. We needed to put them within the Canadian context so we could be Canadian together.

Having been a chief at the time that the Kelowna accord was negotiated, the Kelowna was the high-water mark in that relationship. The political accords signed between the first nations, the Métis and the Inuit were key documents which spelled out how the Government of Canada should proceed in its relationship with first nations, Métis and Inuit people to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as post-secondary education, housing, economic development, health and so on.

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Unfortunately, that high-water mark was erased. What concerns me today is that we are starting to see a relationship going back to the middle phase, a phase that nobody wants. Certainly the first nations, Métis and Inuit people do not want to go back to that more confrontational phase after they have invested blood, sweat and tears to get to the relationship where collaboration ruled the day.

The number one priority achieved with the Kelowna accord and the political accords was to break the back of poverty in aboriginal communities. That had to be the number one pressing issue we had to address. Having said that, I am concerned that we are moving backward after achieving so much.

That is characterizing a bit of where we are at. It helps to set a context. I want to speak about aboriginal people themselves. I do not know how many of us in this House understand that 50% of the aboriginal population is under the age of 18 for the most part, for sure under the age of 20. In communities in my riding, 50% are under the age of 18. That represents potential that cannot go wasted, a potential that, if we mobilize this young population properly, could help break the back of the poverty that I spoke about earlier. This is a population we cannot ignore.

● (1610)

Yes, \$305 million were talked about but I, respectfully, wholeheartedly disagreed with the parliamentary secretary's comment that the money could be spent in a better way. Sure, that could probably happen, but there is not enough there to meet the demand we have today. Any money can be spent in a more appropriate way but it is important to point out that what the parliamentary secretary and the government ignore is that government has not provided the infrastructure for proper data collection to occur.

We then have irrational numbers that people pick and choose and use against each other. The fact is that today we have the highest number of young people that we have ever seen in the history of the country who need support to go to post-secondary education because, unfortunately, many of them living in poverty. Start of story, end a story.

Therefore, we need that investment, they need that investment and Canada needs that investment today.

I am also concerned about some of the messaging coming from the government side that aboriginal people are to blame for the mess they are in. I think it is absolutely critical to understand that government policies, not necessarily just the Conservative government, but the past government, have forced aboriginal people, more particularly first nations people, to implement policies that discriminate against their own. Therefore, we have discrimination between on reserve and off reserve, between men and women, between children with disabilities and children without and between what status one was born with under the Indian Act membership code and what one was not born with.

It is those policies that have contributed to painting a real negative picture because people do not understand. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, which is what we have across the floor. It is that little knowledge about the realities that gets assembled to point the finger specifically at aboriginal people for the situation they find themselves in. That is what concerns me the most.

It must be understood that aboriginal people across the country are out there getting jobs. They are going to work in the morning. They are seeing their kids off to school, registering them, if they can, in minor hockey and minor sports, and they are paying their bills trying to do what Canadians do every day.

However, the future has them worried because the opportunities for success are extraordinarily narrower for aboriginal people than they are for the average Canadian because of the poverty they find themselves in.

What concerns me is that we see the media and many others profess that the sins of the aboriginal people are their own. However, they go too far when they say that. We have people who confuse the culture of poverty with the culture of the aboriginal people. The culture of poverty does not discriminate between the colour of our skin. Poverty wreaks havoc in one's life. Sometimes I get concerned with the messaging from all sectors of Canada that confuse the two and say, "It's your fault that you're in the situation that you're in".

The good news in the aboriginal community is that we are seeing some of the highest rates of graduation from grade 12 in the history of this country and some of the highest rates of graduation from post-secondary institutions in this country. We are seeing the highest rates of business development, new businesses, successful businesses being developed in aboriginal communities by aboriginal people in this country that we have never seen before. It is unprecedented.

There is good news out there and I would like all members of the House to take the time to find out about that good news because it is simply too easy to find out the bad. When we confuse the bad with the message of connecting cultural poverty with the culture of aboriginal people, we are doing a huge disservice to aboriginal people and to Canadians in general. There is good news out there and there is a tremendous and positive amount of things happening.

● (1615)

Where is Canada at? This country is going through an economic boom in many sectors but mostly in the resource sector. Economic activity in the resource sector typically occurs near aboriginal communities. That economic activity provides the opportunity for skilled jobs in many different areas. It provides an opportunity for business development. When we talk about this economic boom in the resource sector, trades, professional training, management training, all these things become available. Skilled labour is needed within the mines or in whatever the resource activity. There are joint venture partnerships in business, partnerships in general and sole ownership. Opportunities present themselves. We need to look at where we are today and line up the resources to capitalize on the youthful population.

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Canada is experiencing a labour shortage. Baby boomers are retiring at an alarming rate. Within the next five years I hear that up to 50% of teachers in the Canadian Teachers' Federation will be retired. We are seeing similar numbers in the nursing profession, doctors and in the trades. One just needs to look at the cost of building a house in Saskatoon now.

We have a tremendous opportunity before us and we have the circumstances lining up in the best possible way. The economic boom, the labour shortage and the healthy state of the country's fiscal capacity all line up to state very clearly that if we see investing in post-secondary education as an investment, we will see a huge payback to this country in the form of increased productivity and, at the end of the day, we would begin to break the back of poverty.

Investment in post-secondary training for our aboriginal youth is an investment in Canada, in the provinces and in rural Canada even more today as we stand here but, more important, it provides the opportunity to break the back of poverty.

I will now switch gears and talk about student funding. The parliamentary secretary mentioned some numbers a few minutes ago. A 2% cap on post-secondary funding was implemented in 1996 and it has prevented thousands of first nations students from attending post-secondary education just in that short few years. In 2007 and 2008, at least 2,858 students, first nations students in particular, will be denied access to post-secondary funding.

Since 2001, that is 13,000 students. Think about what 13,000 young people, working and contributing to Canada's productivity, would do for their families, their communities and Canada. Instead, unfortunately, many of them are still in their communities collecting social assistance because there are very few jobs. The cost of doing nothing is huge.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples said that by 2016, if we maintain the status quo, it will cost government 47% more. That is a drawdown on Canada's productivity. Instead, if we invested we would see an increase in Canada's productivity.

This response today is extremely disappointing. It fails first nations youth who aspire to pursue their dreams of post-secondary education by not investing in the youth to ensure their success. We are seeing the government off-loading some of its fiduciary responsibility to the provinces. First nations, Métis and Inuit institutions are extremely successful but they need investment.

● (1620)

The government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, "No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada", is a complete, wholehearted, huge disappointment. I could not express it in words, from the phone calls and the correspondence I get from across the country. People are very disappointed that it is abandoning our youth.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for outlining so clearly the importance of post-secondary education in the country. I appreciated the fact that he said how important it was we talk about the positive aspects currently happening in many communities. In fact, part of the recommenda-

tions the committee made was to put together some data so people in communities could take advantage of best practices.

In his speech the member touched on the allegations by the government that \$300 million-plus was plenty and what we really needed to do was look at efficiencies in communities. Could he expand on and give his observations, from his personal experience, on the very good students who simply do not have access, no matter how efficient a community is, under this funding cap? He mentioned something like 13,000 since 2001.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Speaker, I point out that the minister, in his report, stated that the government would rather be forward-looking than looking at the loss of these 13,000 kids who could have gone to school because the it wanted to maximize opportunities for all qualified learners.

The minister needs to understand that these are qualified learners. They have their applications in, and they are waiting. Thirteen thousands students were denied funding, and way more than that have applied. Thirteen thousand is only the number of students who have their forms in, through the various stages of approval, only to be turned down at the end of the day.

That is only back to 2001. If we were to go back to 1996, it would be at least double that, I suspect. As we move forward, my biggest concern is that baby boom, which is bulging its way up into that 15 to 24 age bracket. It is that bubble that is coming up and if we keep the 2% cap, I am very concerned. This is where we are headed. This is why the investment needs to occur now.

● (1625)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is something that interests me very much. It is really important to also look at our elementary education as well. Has the member examined the agreement British Columbia has put together? How does he see it happening? This would be an excellent opportunity for Saskatchewan to build.

As the member said, the population is growing. One of the fundamental things that is important for us as citizens of Saskatchewan is to ensure that our young people, our young aboriginals are well educated and have very good footing in fundamental education.

What problems does he see and can I help him to advance that interest or can he can help me? I would like to see us all get together to try to duplicate what has happened in British Columbia. Can he see this happening?

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Speaker, the government has to understand that the B.C. agreement fits a B.C. reality. The devolution of school control, or self-administration as I call it, in the prairie provinces happened almost 30 years ago. In the prairie provinces we have the primary level of education delivery. Joint parallel developments of secondary and third level services in Saskatchewan in particular and Manitoba far exceed where B.C. is at right now.

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In many respects, the prairie provinces are further ahead with their educational system development than British Columbia. That is why the British Columbia chiefs who were here said that the B.C. model would not work in the rest of the country because this is a specific B.C. solution.

I would be more than glad to meet with the member to talk about what we could do in the prairie provinces and in many other parts of the country to make the system stronger. We are seeing huge success levels coming out of the first nations system in the prairie provinces.

My former tribal council did an education indicator's report that showed 92% of the students from grade 12 graduated versus the provincial system which was in the 80% range. I get concerned that first nation systems are being held up as not as good as the provinces, and that is completely wrong and misinformed.

I want to pass one compliment on to the minister and her department. I understand some people met with some representatives from the department, who are being very proactive in the aboriginal human resource sector development area trying to get some positive, forward moving initiatives done. I would be happy to contribute there if I can.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always listen with interest to what my colleague, the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River has to say. He is in the unique situation of being the only former chief of a Canadian first nation in the Canadian House of Commons, and we should all take note and pay heed to what he says on these issues.

The former minister of Indian affairs under the Liberal regime identified education as his number one priority. He was very public and very open about that, saying it was the only way to go from poverty to middle class in one generation. I remember those speeches. However, during his tenure, the government took steps to start to tax the tuition and living out expenses of first nation students while they were going to school.

Given there is an appalling shortfall of funding and resources to send first nation students to university and given if they start paying tax on that money as earned income, they will have less to spend and the first nation will have to give them more to live on than even fewer people will go to school.

Could he explain the Liberal government's logic at that time to address the shortfall in funding for post-secondary education by slapping this tax on tuition and living out expenses? Is there any rationale for having done that?

• (1630)

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that the actual machinery of government operates separately from the executive in many cases. This is an example where the bureaucracy decided to undertake this path. Once the first nations, Métis and Inuit community across the country spoke with the previous Liberal government, measures were taken to begin to rescind and move away from that.

In fact, the member for Prince Albert successfully got the money that a Saskatchewan junior hockey league team received not to be taxed.

These are things that we have to work on as we move forward.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just came back from my riding. The Governor General visited a couple of schools. I happened to visit schools in Mishkeegogamang and Fort Hope. I saw the future of Canada in the eyes of first nation students who want to proceed with their education. They want to have a chance at post-secondary education to see what they can do.

My colleague mentioned a number of times the bubble, the massive amount of youth who are coming up. These young people want to be involved. They have seen what happens to students who have nowhere to go. They know they are left in their communities with no work or anything else. They have seen what they can get into when there is nothing to do. If there is no work, then there is no future for them. This bubble, this massive amount of youth, will serve Canada well.

My colleague mentioned poverty many times. It is abject poverty. Many members of the House would not believe the poverty on reserves. Would he talk about the poverty that these people face every day.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Speaker, I guess the best way for me to answer is to say that I watched a documentary about northern Ontario reserves. It probably was a reserve in the riding of my hon. colleague. The reporter asked a little girl, who was about 12 years old, if she had money what would she buy. The little girl said food. She did not say an iPod. She did not say a cellphone.

This is the situation in which many of these young people find themselves. This is why that bubble about which I speak is a huge, perhaps unfathomable to many members in the House. We must invest in that bubble because it will help Canada at the end of the day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to rise in this very important debate on post-secondary education for the first nations.

We in the Bloc Québécois have studied the main issues concerning the first nations of Quebec, Labrador and the rest of Canada of course. After a thorough analysis of the situation, we agreed that education was one of the most important issues facing the first nations. We discovered that there are a lot of studies dealing with primary and secondary school education. These aspects are quite well covered and well dealt with by the government, regardless of the party in power.

We were astonished, though, to discover the major shortcoming that exists in regard to post-secondary education. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and I realized that this major deficiency existed when we were helping to create a First Nations Pavilion in Val-d'Or, as we are still doing.

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The First Nations Pavilion in Val-d'Or is supposed to help educate the aboriginal leaders of tomorrow. It is a university building, therefore, that is supposed to be established and managed by the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. It is noteworthy that the president of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue is Ms. Édith Cloutier. The hon. members are probably not very familiar with her, but the people who live in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and are listening to me today know that Édith Cloutier is aboriginal and the director of the Native Friendship Centre in Val d'Or. On the strength of the university courses that she herself took, she is working now on setting up institutions to help her brothers and sisters in the aboriginal communities.

A First Nations Pavilion seemed to us to be very obvious and self-explanatory. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eyou and I were in favour and supported it before the committee to ensure that it was recommended. When we submitted this recommendation to the committee to get it adopted and brought forward, we were astounded to discover that the government is only obliged under the Indian Act to provide elementary and secondary school education to Indians. I use the words “Indian” and “Inuit” advisedly because the Indian Act is probably the most retrograde piece of legislation that exists under this government and in this country called Canada. This act must be changed because it keeps the first nations in a state of total poverty. Nothing in the Indian Act requires Canada, as the trustee of the native peoples, to provide them with a post-secondary education. Absolutely nothing.

My hon. colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eyou, who had worked so hard on establishing the First Nations Pavilion was absolutely thunderstruck, as was I, to discover that nothing in the budget or in the legislation required the government to help the first nations go beyond a secondary school education.

That is why we began our work, and it was the Bloc Québécois that was responsible for the adoption of the motion that this should be examined immediately once the committee was established. In considering the work to be done, we decided that our focus would be on post-secondary education, because we felt there had already been quite a few, not to say many studies into elementary and secondary education.

•(1635)

The government indicated in its response and the minister told us that by spring 2008, they would be implementing a new policy dealing with elementary and secondary education for first nations. It did not refer to the essential role of post-secondary education.

My colleague from the Liberal party, who spoke just before me, gave some examples and I will give some as well.

In my riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue, there are five Algonquin Anishnabe communities—whom I salute by the way—including several communities that have experienced unprecedented population growth.

The government has put nothing in place to train these young people who will be the leaders of tomorrow. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives are equally to blame. When it comes to post-secondary education, first nations have been left for too long to manage on their own.

Yes, there is a budget of \$308 million. The hon. parliamentary secretary said that this year's budget provides \$308 million for post-secondary education. I asked him a question and I did not receive an answer. Will the government promise to include recurring amounts—I emphasize recurring—for post-secondary education of aboriginal people? Do I have to spell it out for him to understand? If so, I will say it again slowly so that the translation is clear. Will the government include in its future budgets recurring amounts for post-secondary education of aboriginal people? There are none at present. There should be and there must be recurring amounts of money because the survival of the first nations depends on it.

I read the following statement somewhere. I do not know who said it but I will quote it: “Education is the beginning of freedom; education is the beginning of independence; education is the beginning of taking control”.

Let us imagine post-secondary education. I remember what we were told in our history courses. We, French Canadians, were not allowed to get ahead. It would be dangerous to give us too much schooling or we would recognize the way we were being treated and do something about it. That is exactly what is happening in terms of first nations. That is how the country is treating them. They must not get too much education or they will know too much and they will be able to take control of their lives.

If we train too many aboriginal lawyers, they will know their rights. They will be able to sue the federal government, which has kept them in the dark for too long. We must therefore be careful. We must not train too many. We must not train too many therapists. It would be better for white people to take care of that.

Do I need to provide an example? What about the schools where aboriginals were imprisoned? Young aboriginals were imprisoned to make them forget their knowledge, their language and their culture. I am referring to the residential schools.

That came to an end in 1975. I did say 1975. We are not talking about 1875, but 1975. That went on for almost 100 years. Had these peoples been informed in their language and their culture of what was going on in the residential schools, I do not believe that—and I will say it—they would have become as assimilated as they have. That is what happened. The first nations have the right to receive appropriate education.

•(1640)

That starts with post-secondary education, which is the door to the future. That is where doctors are trained. In committee, we met with many people and someone told us that you could not train enough first nations doctors because it takes too long and there was not enough money in the budget. It takes seven to ten years to train a doctor. They have a budget every year.

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This is how it works. If a student wants to become an engineer, lawyer, doctor or dentist, he or she must be on a list. Every year, the government awards bursaries, but the bursary must be given out by the band council. The council decides that it does not need a doctor, because the training takes too long. How are the doctors trained? There is not enough money and the first nations are left behind. According to the government, there are not enough aboriginal doctors. An appropriate investment must be made in order for the first nations to develop.

Let us return to the minister's reply. I did not say it, the minister did. This is what he said:

The Government believes that a concept of shared responsibility must apply in providing support for Aboriginal post secondary education and that this entails exploring the range of resources available from public, institutional, non profit and private sector sources.

What I just read means that they want to put the report on a shelf to collect as much dust as possible, and to never talk about it again.

I would like to thank my colleague from the NDP for bringing this issue up today in the House. On the contrary, we must talk about it, because post-secondary education for first nations people is very important. The minister went on to say, and it is worth listening to this:

Issues of funding for post-secondary education will be considered as part of the required review of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's education programs.

This means that nothing will happen at all.

It is not complicated. Will the government commit to recurrent funding in next year's budget, or will it not? I asked the minister that question and I am awaiting an answer. I am also waiting if the answer is no. This would mean that he did not understand anything, that he does not understand anything and that he does not want to understand anything. Education for first nations people is a priority. This is 2007. Post-secondary education is a priority. I agree that this must be done according to the rules. I do not think we should send the money just anywhere. I agree. This is taxpayers' money. We must give some thought to how we spend it. There must be some control.

I have another story. There are 648 first nations in Canada, and the federal government does not know whether each of these communities has an information system linked to the federal government. Something is not working here. This is why we are asking first nations to provide multiple reports. I will not name names in case I am wrong, but a first nation told us that to receive \$39,000 it had to produce nine reports for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Nine reports is a little excessive.

We are told that \$10 billion has been spent on the first nations and that this is too much. The problem is that the departments do not communicate with each other, as we have seen.

•(1645)

The representatives of the Departments of Justice, Health, Transport and Natural Resources do not talk to the representatives of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and vice versa. Everyone stays in their own corner, and then the point comes when it blows up.

I would like to read another excerpt from the minister's response. This is worth listening to:

To this end, the Department is working with interested parties including First Nations and Inuit representatives on a broad review of its education policies and programs in preparation for renewal of the Department's education programming authorities in March 2008.

If that is not a bureaucratic response, I do not know what is. The public who are listening to us surely cannot imagine anything worse than that.

The problem is that in that sentence the minister is replying only with regard to elementary and secondary education. Not a word is said about post-secondary education. My question to the minister is still the same: are we going to put a recurring item in future budgets that will be called "post-secondary education—\$308 million"?

I would like to address another subject. It is unacceptable in 2007 that we would be freezing the increase in the ceiling on first nations spending at 2% a year. When the aboriginal population is climbing by 3.4% a year and the first nations budget is rising by only 2%, something is going to happen. Something will rip, will crack, will break, will be destroyed, I do not quite know what, but we are going to have some very tough days ahead.

Think about it. What is going on in post-secondary education? There is not enough money to send aboriginal people to get training. We are being told that the private sector will have to do its part. I am choosing my words carefully. Education for the first nations is the responsibility of the federal government. If it wants to transfer money to the provincial governments and hand over its role, that is fine. I agree with that. As long as things stay they way they are, however, education for the aboriginal people is the responsibility of the federal government, which has a fiduciary duty, and the government must absolutely shoulder those responsibilities.

My colleague talked about the Kelowna accord. We had an opportunity to hear the former Prime Minister, and the Minister of Finance and Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs who were involved in 2005. They are still members of this House, but I have forgotten the names of their ridings, except for the former Prime Minister; we know that his is LaSalle—Emard. They all said in committee that \$280 million per year had been earmarked for education in the budget, in addition to money already budgeted. That would at least have been a start, to get things moving.

I do not want to take more time, but I want to remind this government of its duty. If we want the aboriginal people to develop, to take charge of their future, if we want the aboriginal nations to become self-governing and to be capable of planning their own development so it is not imposed on them by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, we absolutely have to invest large amounts of money, right now. That money has to be recurring in future budgets.

•(1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Before moving on to questions and comments, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, Regional Economic Development of Canada.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing or Special Order, the normal hour of daily adjournment today shall be 6:30 p.m. and when no member rises to speak today to Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act, or at 6:30 p.m., whichever comes first, the question on the motion relating to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-31 be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested, and the vote deferred to 6:30 p.m. today.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

[English]

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for outlining some very good points regarding the report of the standing committee on post-secondary education and the government response.

I wanted to touch on a brief issue. I know that in Quebec this is also a very important issue as it pertains to funding for first nations post-secondary educational institutions. Certainly this report and the government's response basically said it is a provincial responsibility.

Yet, we know the importance of first nations post-secondary educational institutions. We know that there are 64 currently in this country. Some of them are affiliated with other colleges and universities. One or two of them are stand alone. We know how important it is that the funding is in place so that the curriculum is culturally relevant, that it is within an important social context, and that it recognizes some of the challenges that the students have in terms of leaving their communities and the kind of isolation that they have from their own communities.

Could the member specifically talk about the shortcomings and the government's response to funding for first nations post-secondary educational institutions?

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I can almost say that the answer is

“nothing”. Almost. Currently, in Quebec, when a person from an aboriginal community wishes to pursue post-secondary studies, it is a problem. In a nutshell, this is how the system works in Quebec: we have primary and secondary education, and then something special that we call CEGEP, the college of general and professional instruction, and then university. However, once people complete their fifth year of secondary school, there is nothing to help them move on to CEGEP or university.

Not only is there no support, but people have to apply to the federal government for a scholarship. That means that all aboriginals from Abitibi-Témiscamingue and northern Quebec have to go outside, and that is why we are asking for an aboriginal campus or university centre to train the leaders of tomorrow in the region.

For now, nobody is giving us any answers, we keep getting their voicemail and nobody knows what is going on. It is clear that first nations need help overcoming this obstacle. They need leaders. The future of first nations depends on first nations people having role models when it comes to post-secondary education.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's statements about post-secondary education. I certainly applaud his efforts in bettering the lives of aboriginal people all across Canada.

One of the statements he made and previous speakers have made is in reference to the \$308 million that is available for post-secondary education. I think it is important to point out to the House that in addition to those funds, budget 2007 also more than doubles the funding for the aboriginal skills and employment partnership.

I think we all agree that there is more to education than simply college and university, and many people have found meaningful employment in some of these initiatives.

I point out just a few of them: the aboriginal mine works project; the people, land and opportunities project; the Northwest Territories oil and gas aboriginal skills and employment partnership development; and many others that I could list.

The member, near the beginning of his speech, mentioned something to the effect that the Indian Act was a retrograde piece of legislation. He went on to say that the Indian Act needed to be changed.

As a lawyer who probably has a much deeper knowledge of the act than I do, I was wondering if he would make any suggestion as to where the government would begin in replacing the Indian Act. What kind of process would he envision in that matter?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, you will have to cut me off, because I could talk on about how to replace the Indian Act for 30 or 45 minutes.

Routine Proceedings

One thing is crucial. The Indian Act could not possibly be replaced without consultation. I know this does not please my hon. colleague who asked me the question, but real consultation with first nations people is needed to see how they envision the abolition of that act. We cannot and must not impose any amendments to the Indian Act without first ensuring real consultation. That will take some time.

For this, first nations people must be educated. Major investments are needed in post-secondary education, including college and university, as well as at the post-graduate level.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, earlier we heard the parliamentary secretary talk about the fact that some of the opposition members were looking at the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and were not particularly supportive of it.

One of the statements that the parliamentary secretary made was the fact that a repeal of section 67 would actually improve educational opportunities on reserve. Yet we know about the 2% funding cap and the very serious issues that are facing first nations on reserve around funding that is available for things. Could the member comment on a simple repeal of section 67 and its impact on educational opportunities?

We know for example that the United Nations has issued a report that said a simple repeal of 67 without adequate remedy would actually not improve the human rights situations on reserve. Could the member comment on that in terms of the educational aspect?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I have much to say on this matter. It is true that Bill C-44, which we are currently studying in committee, contains only nine operative words. Those nine words, however, will have serious repercussions on first nations people. Once the Canadian Human Rights Act applies in a community, this means that, immediately, anywhere in Canada, legal action can be taken against a band council or against the department any time there is no water, no hospital nearby or if people are not receiving the same level of care as anywhere else in Canada.

Earlier, in my response to another colleague, I said that real consultation is absolutely essential. The government must go to first nations communities to hear how first nations people want to repeal this retrograde legislation. Everyone wants to repeal it. We must find the mechanisms to ensure that this is done in full respect of the wishes of first nations people.

[*English*]

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for this motion because it is very important that we speak to this issue.

I represent the Churchill riding where there are 33 first nations. I am a first nations person myself. I am Cree from Norway House Cree Nation, which is in the Churchill riding, and on my mother's side I am from the Treaty 9 area in a community called Muskrat Dam. As a first nations individual and member of Parliament

representing a riding which has a large first nations population, this is an issue which of course is very dear to my heart.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Nunavut.

I would like to begin this debate by speaking about the context. From my perspective and the perspective of people in my riding, the context is very important when we speak about first nations education.

Today we have heard the hon. member for Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River articulate very well the historical context and the culture of poverty. This is often mistaken for aboriginal culture and people have often utilized it to advance agendas which are not fair. Not only are they not fair, but they are not practical and do not respect the honour of the Crown nor the relationship that should be in place, a conciliatory relationship of respect and dignity between first nations and Canada.

I would like to elaborate on the culture of poverty somewhat because it is really important for Canadians to understand that it has been a matter of systematic and systemic policies and legislation in this country which have contributed to the culture of poverty.

I am a direct descendant of a signatory. My great grandfather was a chief who signed the addendum to Treaty 9. I received an email today from a person who is from my riding and a direct descendant of one of the chiefs who signed Treaty 5. It is part of our history. It is part of our oral history and the history of our communities and cultures. We are very politicized within our first nations history as well.

People have to understand that just as Canada has its written history, we have our own history as well. Within Canadian post-secondary institutions that history has been finally deemed, in the last 15 years, as valid. Although we as first nations people have respected it and know it is true, that shared history is very important. That is what is really important about first nations education and how we move forward.

The government's response to first nations education is very disappointing because, as we heard today, what is the cost of doing nothing? If we look at first nations history in terms of policy and legislation, it does not even have to come from within the first nations perspective in terms of our own oral history.

However, throughout history we have seen that there has been a systematic attempt to put barriers in place in lieu of the successes of first nations people in this country. It is that dynamic that I believe contributes to these types of responses today.

• (1705)

As I said, I am from Manitoba. It seems that the parliamentary secretary is not familiar with first nations education. He misrepresents the picture of first nations education in Manitoba. I am very proud to say that in 1971 our leadership wrote a book called "Wahbung: Our Tomorrows". It addressed first nations education. It became the basis for the education framework agreement which was signed in 1991.

Routine Proceedings

My Liberal colleague mentioned Saskatchewan. In Manitoba we too have had control of first nations education at the community level, and we are talking about K to 12. First nations education was understood to be a treaty right and it was understood in terms of the context of lifelong learning, which includes post-secondary. We have had that for over 30 years. In 1971 we articulated that in written form. It has been part of how we understand our lives. As we need to make transitions into different systems, we have done so with clarity.

The B.C. model, which is indeed a fantastic model for B.C., is not suitable for Manitoba. It is an absolute misrepresentation to say that Manitoba does not have that type of framework. We have had an education framework agreement. We have had a framework agreement at the self-government and education sectoral table. The government walked away from negotiations. It is appalling that there has been an absolute misrepresentation of what first nations people want, what first nations people have accomplished so far. It is negligent to insist upon that type of representation.

In Manitoba it is absolutely critical and not only for the sake of integrity, but also there is the cost of doing nothing. Each year in Manitoba we have to defer 1,000 students who are seeking to go to post-secondary institutions. We would have to have 2,000 students in post-secondary education to close the gap between the average Canadian in Manitoba and first nations in Manitoba. The member opposite mentioned vocational trades and the efforts the government has made on HRSD, but in Manitoba, we would need 2,300 additional spots for first nations students in vocational trades and colleges to close the gap.

In Manitoba we have an enormous population and the quickest growing population. It is absolutely critical that we start to address these issues in a way that will have a profound effect not only for first nations youth and for first nations communities, but for Canada.

The government in response to this report said:

—it is troubling that the percentage of Aboriginal youth that enter post secondary studies is significantly lower than that of non Aboriginal youth. This gap exists for a myriad of reasons, and a link must be drawn to other socio economic factors that affect some Aboriginal communities like poverty, housing issues, and unemployment—

I would argue that is quite common. The government went on to say:

The most serious problem creating this gap is that not enough Aboriginal youth are completing high school—

My problem with that statement is that socio-economic factors, such as poverty, housing and unemployment, are significant issues. We have to deal with them. We have to address these issues. The approach has to be holistic in terms of building a bright future. This is what first nations have wanted. This is what first nations in my riding have been saying for over 30 years. The cost of doing nothing is despair. It is inhumane.

•(1710)

I was in a community in my riding, Shamattawa, where a child had taken his own life. There is no reason on God's green earth that children in Canada should be faced with such despair. How we address this issue is that first nations education and post-secondary education has to meet the standards. We should look at post-

secondary education as being an answer to closing the gap for aboriginal people in Canada.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Churchill made a very eloquent presentation. I would like the member's opinion on a question that I raised before. We have seen that the funding for first nations post-secondary educational institutes, specifically ones run by first nations, is absent from the government's response. It basically says that post-secondary education funding is a provincial responsibility, yet we know there are very good institutes including the First Nations Technical Institute, FNTI, which is on life support because of inadequate funding.

I wonder if the member could comment on the importance of first nations control of first nations education and post-secondary institutes in this country.

•(1715)

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, it is a critical point when we talk about first nations education. First nations control over first nations education is essential.

I would like to speak about a number of different things but I want to talk about the issue of self-determination. People understand inherently that in our language we interpret self-determination as what makes us human. Self-determination in Canada has to be understood not within the context of becoming non-Indian, non-first nations or non-aboriginal. It has to be understood within the context of being aboriginal within Canada. Study after study, report after report, individual after individual, community after community have demonstrated that culturally appropriate teaching models, education models and institutes which are designed and run by first nations are critical to the success of first nations education.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 18 months ago the Government of Canada signed an agreement with the leadership of five first nations as well as 13 provincial and territorial governments. We refer to the agreement as the Kelowna accord. Without belabouring the Kelowna accord, we do know that there were large sums of money in the Kelowna accord to address education and a number of other issues that relate to poverty, such as housing, health and building capacity. It was very much a holistic endeavour, and as I said earlier, a high-water mark in the relationship between aboriginal leadership and non-aboriginal leadership in the country.

I have heard the member speak privately about what Kelowna meant to many people in her community. I wonder if she could tell the House today the importance of the Kelowna accord and the significance of its loss.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Churchill has one minute to do that.

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, purely in terms of numbers for post-secondary education alone the Kelowna accord meant a \$500 million investment over the next five years. I would like to address what the Kelowna accord meant to my riding which has a significant number of first nations and Métis nation communities. It was understood by all people and even non-English speaking grandmothers. People asked me about the Kelowna accord. They understood what the Kelowna accord meant. It meant hope.

I would argue that the current government has on its agenda an idea that we should remain in poverty. In dollar terms alone, welfare is more than 20 times as expensive as a university education. If people are just going to look at the bottom line in terms of dollars, that is a really good piece of information.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be speaking in the debate as well, because this is an issue that touches us completely in our communities. I want to thank all those who spoke very eloquently before me. I also want to thank the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for moving the motion.

I have to add my voice to the people who have expressed their disappointment in the response to the aboriginal affairs committee's sixth report, which is on the topic of education.

I find it quite ironic in looking at our history, especially the residential schools when we were being immersed in the education system against our will. The current Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development defended the injustice done by saying that the government at the time was just trying to educate the aboriginal people. Today we are trying to do everything we can to support education for our young people and even older people who want further education. We also want to take ownership of all support programs that lead to a success in education. It is ironic that the government is finding ways not to support us in our endeavours now that we want to get educated.

When we look at good practices and good programs that are already running today, there is little support for them. I know we have the money to support some of the programs that are operational today throughout the country but there never seems to be enough. It is important to break the welfare cycle. My colleague from Churchill mentioned the cost of welfare versus the cost of an education and the impacts.

I am sure we do not know all the numbers. We cannot put a dollar figure on all the problems that come with being on welfare and the dignity that is taken away from people. They wish to change their lives but sometimes the obstacles are just too big. I do not think we can put a dollar figure on that. It is quite difficult for us in the House and for most people to understand exactly what that means to the young people in our communities. We need to change that. We need to reverse the cycle.

I have good examples from my riding of Nunavut where education has meant the world of difference. A young girl whose mother has been on welfare all her life was able to get an education. She came back home to our community, got a job and now she can provide for her mother and her younger sister. She can encourage her younger sister to complete her high school education and go on to post-secondary education. She can be an example to her own family.

There are other very successful programs referred to in the report. We talk about Nunavut Sivuniksavut which is a bridging program. High school students in my riding of Nunavut can apply to this program. It is such a successful program here in Ottawa that many applicants are turned away. We are looking at different ways to offer the program, maybe through modules or in a different community so people can take the same program in their community, but there are just not the resources to do it.

The report also looked at how we can further fund good programs like that which have a very high success rate. We found that of the graduates, most were either working or pursuing further education. Very few were not working and for most it was by choice.

• (1720)

Another good program is the Nunavut youth abroad program, which has been changed to the northern youth abroad program because of its success. It used to be for just Nunavut students, but the Northwest Territories asked that its students be included because of the very successful way that students have been encouraged to enter the program.

It is a summer program, but again, very good numbers of kids have gone on to further their education because of their horizons being broadened by this program. There is a Canadian phase, when they work in different areas of the country, and then a phase in the next year when they go to Africa and help impoverished countries there.

Again, in regard to those students who have entered these programs, the numbers are very high for either furthering their education or being able to take great jobs in their communities, but unfortunately the Department of Foreign Affairs has decided not to fund this program, so we need to find other ways of supporting it. I think post-secondary education would be one of those areas. The funds for that could also fund programs like these.

I find it very disheartening to listen to the parliamentary secretary, not only in his speech today but also in committee, as he seems to discount a lot of the positive things that come from our committee, saying that we are at fault for where we are today and that we are not making better use of the funds that are going to our communities, whether they be for first nations communities, Métis or, in my case, Inuit communities. I find that very insensitive to the great work that I think our people have done as far as aboriginal people are concerned in trying to make life better for our own.

The Conservative government and the Conservative members of Parliament will never convince me or other aboriginal people that they know better than we do what is good for us or that they know how to improve our lives without our input. They are doing all their legislation and policy changes without any of the aboriginal peoples' input, but we remain very much an optimistic people. I have said this many times: we have to be an optimistic people.

Routine Proceedings

I recently attended a graduation in my home community of Arviat, where 14 students were receiving their Bachelor of Education degrees. They were all mature Inuit students who went back to pursue an education. Some were in their thirties and some even in their forties. They definitely would not have been able to do this without support, whether it was financial support or support from the community, elders or educational institutions.

This four year program was done as an outreach, meaning that it was done in our community. It was brought directly to Arviat so the students did not have to leave home. This, for me, has far-reaching impacts, because these people will be able to go back to their schools, whether that is elementary school, middle school or high school, and totally change the school just by being there.

We now will be able to have education take place in the language of the majority of students, which is Inuktitut in my community, and hopefully we will see higher numbers of high school graduates, because these students who are now teachers will be setting an example for our young people of what we can accomplish when we have the right determination and the right support to pursue these kinds of futures.

I want to close by saying that investment in the right places will produce positive results, but we need to be part of the process and involved in all the solutions. I strongly urge the Conservative government to make investments in the right places and work with the people instead of making these remarks that there is already all that money going to our communities and that if we just knew better how to handle the money we would be better off. I find that very patronizing and very insulting to the people who work so hard with so little to produce positive outcomes for their communities. I want to thank all the people who work in our communities to improve life for the people.

● (1725)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. I certainly like working with her on the aboriginal affairs committee. I know that she has a desire to see the lot of aboriginal people in Canada improved, as we all do.

However, I do take exception to some of the statements that she made to the effect that some of us do not want aboriginal people to become educated or to succeed. I need to say that one of the reasons that I requested to serve on the aboriginal affairs committee was from exactly that kind of motivation: to see the lives of aboriginal peoples improve. I would ask her not to imply in comments about being insensitive or something that simply because we approach the topic from a different perspective we do not have a concern equal to that of members opposite.

Our government has implemented a lot of key measures in the past year to improve the lives of aboriginal people. There has been \$308 million for post-secondary education and \$105 million for the aboriginal skills and employment partnerships. We have Bill C-44 and also the recent announcement that deals with specific land claims and a process to speed up that entire system.

I have two questions. Should the government fund 100% of post-secondary education for aboriginal students and other Canadians? If

it did, how much of a budget would it require to fund that kind of request?

● (1730)

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Mr. Speaker, I was referring mainly to a comment that came from the parliamentary secretary, so the member might want to have a chat with him if he feels that I am misrepresenting the comments of those members.

In answering his first question about whether I think the government should fund everything, those are the kinds of things that we could work out together. We have always said that we are not asking for a complete handout and that we want to be part of the solutions, the decision making, the policies and the legislative changes. We want to be part of the consultations that are going on about how to implement our land claims agreements.

First of all, I guess, we want to be able to implement the Kelowna accord because we have a private member's motion, and I do not think that we should have to resort to that in the first place to implement something that all people in Canada in the aboriginal communities worked for.

We just want to be part of the solution. We want to help make decisions on where those investments should go. As my other colleague said earlier, we want to be part of the productive society in Canada. We want to be able to do that.

I think it is really very sad when I hear comments in my communities about young people who call home from jail saying they are getting three meals a day and that is more than they ever would get at home. When we are sitting there and listening to that, we are thinking that there is something really wrong with this picture when someone is happy to be in jail so that he can eat three times a day versus living in poverty at home and having to wonder where the next meal is coming from.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halifax has one minute for both the question and the answer.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Wow, Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to do with that.

I appreciate the comments made by the member for Nunavut. She will know that recommendation two in the report has to do with the committee recommending that the 2% annual cap on spending increases for the department's post-secondary education program be eliminated immediately.

Could she comment on that very specific recommendation given what we know about the socio-economic circumstances of the vast majority of Canada's first nations people?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Nunavut has 30 seconds.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Mr. Speaker, when we look at the demographics for the aboriginal population in Canada, we see that ours is the fastest growing population in this country, yet the cap does not even come close to the numbers that we find when we talk about the increases in population. Another colleague of mine talked about a young population, with 50% of our population under 18 and the 2% cap—

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Victoria.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. As the NDP critic for post-secondary education, I am aware of many problems in Canada's post-secondary education system and also the solutions that many of us have proposed since this session began.

Tonight I would like to talk specifically about the problem facing Canada's first nations.

I should mention that in 10 minutes I will be sharing my time with the member for Halifax.

• (1735)

[*English*]

We know, for example, that 70% of jobs in Canada require post-secondary education. We know that among the general population, 30% of Canadian students say that financial considerations are crucial to them in their decisions not to acquire post-secondary education. I can only imagine what it is among first nations people.

As the speaker before me has said, first nations have the largest growing population in Canada, the largest number of young people in Canada and largest unemployment level in Canada. We know that completion of high school is very low and there are undoubtedly many historic and present social conditions that are the cause of it.

I was very disappointed in reading the response of the government to this report. In the letter the minister mentions doing more studies. It seems discouraging at this point from what we have heard from colleagues opposite and my colleague, whom I thank for raising this issue, which is such an essential debate in Canada. Responding to the problem and to the facts that we already have by proposing yet more studies is a very discouraging response indeed.

I have said that we know what some of the solutions are. In my riding a story was written up in the local newspaper of a woman who had a young child and was lucky enough to win the battle against illiteracy. She began with very low levels of literacy and decided she would not to pass on those same problems to her child. She approached Project Literacy Victoria to help her overcome some of the reading and writing problems she was facing. That was six years ago. She is now reading novels and looking forward to continuing her post-secondary education.

When I say we know what some of the solutions are and when I look at the response of the government earlier this year in cutting important programs for literacy, this is beyond understanding.

Project Literacy Victoria is one of the groups that has offered programs, which have helped hundreds and hundreds of people, aboriginal and white, to move on, take their lives back in their own hands and get further education. I know this does not address the issue of post-secondary education, but we talked about some of the causes around post-secondary education, and they begin with basic literacy programs. By cutting these programs, the Conservative

government has done a large disservice not only to aboriginal people but to the general population that faces these issues.

We know also that one of the recommendations is to remove the 2% funding cap. By itself, this 2% funding cap has prevented thousands of aboriginal people from moving on to post-secondary education. Yet the government responds by talking about more studies. It is as simple as removing this cap to allow many of the students who are now struggling to get through school to do so.

• (1740)

Recently I had the pleasure of attending a graduation of students who had completed a bridging program. They were aboriginal students who had left school for one reason or another and who had now completed a bridging program, allowing them to continue on to university.

Many of these students were facing huge debts. These programs have proven themselves to be very successful. I look at the first nations program, which is offered at Camosun College in Victoria, that offers services and programs for first nations, Métis, Inuit and native American students.

This program offers cultural support to students who are outside their community. It also offers academic support in programs such as family support workers, first nations home support or residential care attendant program or in health support as well. It also provides experience and dedicated first nations instructors.

Yet we know that since 1993, transfers for education to universities have been cut across Canada, not only programs through Indian and Northern Affairs but programs generally for post-secondary education. These cuts have affected the possibility of offering the kinds of programs that exist at Camosun College and that could exist in many other places.

For example, in 1997 only 6% of aboriginals in my province of British Columbia applied to university, compared to the non-aboriginal rate of 29%. Currently their university participation rate edged up to 9.1%. In contrast, the university participation rate among non-aboriginals rose to 34%. This speaks to a real gap in our system, that we are allowing our first nations to stay behind.

In the process of the employability study that we are presently doing, it has become clear that we cannot allow such a large segment of our population to simply fall by the wayside. We must take action.

It is past the time for studies. There are solutions. My colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, has proposed many of them specific to first nations and so have we in terms of the post-secondary education in general.

I urge the government to consider these, rather than spend more time with studies.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I spent some time on the health committee when we studied aboriginal health and wellness issues. It was an eye opener. It is something that every parliamentarian should have an opportunity to do, to fully appreciate that any problem we notice in society in general it is probably 10 times worse within the aboriginal communities in many respects.

The member touched on the cap. I was very interested in the recommendation of the 2% cap being eliminated. I do not quite understand how the parliamentary secretary reaches the conclusion that there is some mismanagement. How could a cap possibly deal with not only the growth in the population of the aboriginal communities, but also with the increased cost of providing those services and to the extent that any additional moneys required would be taken away from other programs because there is no colour coding of dollars? It is interpreted somehow very astonishingly that somehow this constitutes mismanagement. That concerns me.

Could the member say that maybe this is just another example of the failure of the government to understand, to consult, to educate and inform itself so it does not say silly things, such as “we are cutting literacy for adults because adults are already illiterate and they can't be helped?”

It is almost silliness. Does the member think that maybe there is a pattern of a failure of the government to do its work before it makes decisions?

• (1745)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I remember well one of the ministers of the Conservative government talking about adult literacy programs and about cutting the fat. We are all aware that there is a pattern in families. If we look at the cause of illiteracy in children, we often find parents who have really difficult issues.

Raising the issue of mismanagement was just simply out of order, when we consider the growth in the young population, the increased costs of administering the programs and the need for culturally appropriate post-secondary education. I talked about the excellent post-secondary program that exists in our area, which is managed very efficiently. Aboriginal students are graduating from that program.

Those are the kinds of programs that would turn things around if more funding was available.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a previous life, before coming here, I was a trustee for a school board. We saw the effect of the lack of action by our federal government over a long period of time. I am not going to point fingers at any party because this is not the kind of debate for that.

A few minutes ago I heard a discussion around how first nations would teach their own. Coming from the labour movement, I found worker to worker education worked well. Is this as successful in the aboriginal community?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleague raised this question. Throughout our study on employability, it became obvious that we could not leave segments of the population behind.

The social and economic costs are too high. It is time to pay attention to all of these.

First nations really appreciate the apprenticeship model. Without categorizing or profiling, it seems to respect their way of learning. Finding ways of both encouraging apprenticeships and ensuring completion of apprenticeships on reserves would really be a big first step toward solving the problem.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to have an opportunity to speak briefly in this debate on the motion introduced by my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I am very pleased for several reasons. First, it gives me a chance to say a word about the really excellent work she has been doing on behalf of my caucus and, I certainly know, on behalf of her own constituents, but also, I think, for any who follow her passion, devotion and intelligence for the work she does on behalf of aboriginal Canadians. She does it with incredible respect for the achievements of aboriginal Canadians, first nations and other aboriginal groups.

Second, I had the opportunity for a very short time after I stepped down as federal leader to be the post-secondary education critic for two years in this House. One of the things I enjoyed very much in that role was learning a great deal more about the challenges of first nations students in Canada in the context of post-secondary education. I say “enjoyed” in one sense, but in another sense I was horrified.

I will always recall that the then Liberal minister of aboriginal affairs, now the member for Fredericton, commented many times on how tragic it was, but true nevertheless, that there were so many more first nation students in jail than there were in post-secondary education institutions. That is one of the blights and one of the challenges that we face.

Hence, I am very glad to have had just a few hours this afternoon to immerse myself in the report that we are focusing on here, the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, entitled “No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post Secondary Education in Canada”. Because I feel like I need an update. I do not have a large number of aboriginal students in my riding who live in my riding or who come from my riding, although I am very privileged to have a good many students who are attending the post-secondary education institutions in my riding of Halifax.

I have come to have enormous respect for the challenges faced by Mi'kmaq students from my own province, but also those from other parts of Canada, the challenges that they have tackled and overcome given the fact that in so many instances they are really struggling financially while they try to give the kind of attention to their education that they want to give.

Routine Proceedings

I will go back as far as 1971-75, to when I taught at Dalhousie University and had an outstanding young woman student by the name of Joan Glode, who was from Nova Scotia from a Mi'kmaq community. I knew at the time that she was going places. Subsequently, at a surprisingly young age, she became head of Nova Scotia's Mi'kmaq Family and Children's Services, which is quite literally the self-government agency that administers family and children's services in the Mi'kmaq population in all of Nova Scotia. I know for a fact that she has provided leadership around the same evolution happening in other provinces.

Today I think of another very outstanding Mi'kmaq, not from my riding, and in fact not from my province but from New Brunswick, a woman by the name of Candy Palmetter, who graduated from Dalhousie Law School, from a program that is very much focused on giving additional support where needed to both the Mi'kmaq students and the Afro Nova Scotian students. Not only did this woman graduate from law school, but today she is a well known columnist and a well known radio commentator who has her own radio program. On the side, she calls herself a recovering lawyer and actually is a very popular comedian and moderator for various public events.

My point in mentioning a couple of those students is only to highlight the fact that we should be here celebrating the incredible success rate of first nations students who overcome the tremendous obstacles they face, and we should be recommitting ourselves even more determinedly to helping to remove barriers, which is why we have to speak out with some dismay, I think, at the government's response to the recommendations contained in this important report.

• (1750)

I do not know about anyone else, but I found the tone of the government's response to be quite patronizing. It was really a sort of lecture about the government being willing to help, but what are people looking for, a free ride? The tone of it is just insulting, it seems to me, and not worthy of a Canadian government responding to this challenge, which I think the vast majority of Canadians want the government to do.

Second, it seems to me that the government is just not very well informed. The government talks about the fact that students should be able to pay a significant portion of their own costs. That just shows profound ignorance of the fact that a great many Mi'kmaq students who are trying to put themselves through university are bearing financial responsibilities to help with younger brothers and sisters back home, who need the most basic kinds of supports because of the fact that there have not been serious commitments to the kinds of social and economic development programs that would put them in a much more favourable economic circumstance today.

I think the government responses are disappointing, and I think we very much should be recognizing a good deal of the leadership that comes from first nations people who have graduated from our post-secondary education institutions and who are giving tremendous leadership. One person who comes to mind is Phil Fontaine. I think we would all agree that he is an example of somebody from that very excellent set of policies and programs that were introduced in Manitoba. The member for Churchill, who spoke earlier, referred to this.

For over 30 years, Manitoba has really blazed a trail around improving access, with a particular program called the access program, which I think was introduced under the NDP government of Ed Schreyer and was carried on and enhanced under the NDP government of Howard Pawley. To this day, it probably is one of several reasons why Gary Doer for the third time finds himself premier of Manitoba yet again: because of a high level of satisfaction with a program that has been able to blaze some trails in spite of there not being the federal supports for those programs.

What is the result? In Manitoba, in the legislature and in the NDP caucus alone there are several first nations cabinet ministers, including Eric Robinson and Oscar Lathlin. George Hicks is not Cree but Inuit and has ended up as Speaker of the Manitoba legislature.

We need to redouble our efforts to get the government members to get behind these recommendations to understand, and they do seem a little more responsive to this than they used to be, how much the investment in providing this kind of support for aboriginal post-secondary education can literally transform first nations life opportunities.

I hope for more instead of this just being yet another report that the government feels is a sort of obligation, although it does have an obligation because it is required to respond. That is one of the good things about the rules of the House. When a committee works hard, hears a lot of witnesses and brings forward such a report, the government is required to respond. Here, I think, the government did so in a very inadequate way.

However, let us resolve today, on behalf of the first nations youth and children of this country, to work together to propel forward these recommendations, to remove the barriers in the thinking of government members that would allow them to respond so inadequately so far to this report. We now need them to respond in terms of resources and in terms of policy changes. I hope that is going to be the result of this successful report.

• (1755)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that during the course of today's debate so much emphasis has been given to the negatives that are involved in the aboriginal post-secondary education field.

During our committee hearings, we heard about all kinds of positive examples across the country where groups are doing great work in advancing this cause. I will quote from the report itself:

—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal post-secondary institutions and educators across the country have made and continue to make great strides in identifying and meeting post-secondary educational needs specific to Aboriginal learners.

The report goes on to point out the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program, which many of our members had the opportunity to visit.

Then, as it relates to the previous speaker's province, the Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia talks about how it “works to obtain commitments” from post-secondary institutions and how it has treated “post-secondary education as a top priority”. The report goes on to say it finances “every applicant”.

Routine Proceedings

I am just wondering, in light of these positive stories, if the previous speaker could outline what she thinks some initiatives could be in which we could partner with other agencies to see that whole area of post-secondary education advance.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, actually I want to leap to my feet and agree with the opening comment of the member. I do not very often agree with members who happen to be on the same side of the House but sit in the Conservative government caucus. I agree and I said it I think three times during my 10 minutes that we should celebrate the successes. We should underscore why the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education is so important to all our youth, but in particular first nations students who face more barriers than the vast majority of young people in this country. I used many examples to say so.

One of the things that I became aware of when I was the post-secondary education critic, and I do not think it has changed all that much in a couple of years, is that we do not really have an overall systematic approach to post-secondary education for aboriginal students.

I worked very closely with Richard Johnston in relation to the First Nations Technical Institute here in Ontario. What was clear is that institutions are forced to lurch from crisis to crisis. Even if funding is there for the students through their own resourcefulness, through other support, through some but inadequate government funding, despite the 2% cap, many institutions are in crisis. The funding has not been sufficient to ensure that those students get a good quality educational experience that is continuous and ongoing for future groups of students.

• (1800)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Halifax for her comments and her very deep understanding of the issues that are facing first nations and post-secondary institutions.

In my own riding, one of the campuses of Malaspina University-College, the Duncan campus, is actually on the Cowichan tribe's land. There is an innovative set of programs, including an elder in residence. Malaspina provides substantial numbers of supports to students. It is often lurching from funding crisis to funding crisis because of the lack of funding around programs like ISSP.

I wonder if the member could comment on the importance of culturally relevant programming and the importance in terms of supporting students in staying with their post-secondary education.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear that culturally relevant programming is very much a requirement. In that regard I want to take the remaining few seconds to cite the tremendously valuable film that was done in my own province about the history of the Mi'kmaq people, and the history of broken treaties and agreements with the Mi'kmaq people. It forms the context in which people in my province and in my region are trying to build new lives and break down barriers.

That kind of culturally relevant experience and understanding of the context have to be not just a starting point, but an ongoing part of the support system and part of the educational content, the curriculum material, for first nations students and for other students.

That is important so they understand the history and take up the responsibilities that come with that historical context.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Normally I would recognize the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for 20 minutes. However, this debate is limited to three hours and it will collapse at 12 minutes after six. Therefore, he has the floor for eight minutes.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity even for just a few minutes to add my thoughts to the debate today on the concurrence motion of the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on post-secondary education.

On behalf of the people of the riding that I represent, Winnipeg Centre, and on behalf of first nations across the province of Manitoba, my home province, let me say that I am very pleased that we are seized of this issue today in the House of Commons.

I am very pleased with the tone of at least the last few speakers in this debate, the note of optimism in their message to us today, and the recognition that there probably is no more significant thing we could do to elevate the social condition of first nations and aboriginal people in this country than to focus our energies on education. There seems to be a consensus building as this debate goes forward today.

Coming from the province of Manitoba I am proud that we have recognized this fact through three successive NDP governments in that province. It was the government of Ed Schreyer in 1977 that began the University of Manitoba's access program. One of the first graduates from that program is the current national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine. Another graduate is a former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Ovide Mercredi.

I think of my good friend and lawyer, Moses Okimaw, a chief of his reserve. About post-secondary education, Moses said to me once, "The biggest mistake they ever made in their lives was letting guys like me get a university education", because he has become one of the most effective and outspoken advocates for the social injustices that his people have faced in recent history.

While the tone has been positive, I have to focus on one wrong direction that Parliament was exposed to. In the previous government the former minister of Indian affairs, now the member for Fredericton, said time and time again the single most important thing he could do as the minister of Indian affairs was concentrate on post-secondary education.

He used the alarming analogy of pointing to the over-representation of aboriginal people in jail and the under-representation of aboriginal people in university and said his job was to reverse those statistics. That was powerful. He had me excited. I believed him.

Routine Proceedings

However, not six months later his government's response to this crisis of under-representation of aboriginal people in university was to put a tax on the tuitions and living expenses of aboriginal students when they were at university, a shot across the bow to try to introduce income tax, I suppose, to aboriginal people. The Liberals were trying to achieve some secondary objective by this ludicrous, counterproductive approach.

Can there be any doubt that if aboriginal students had to start paying taxes on the meagre living out allowance they get, they would have less money to spend, the reserve would have to give them more money to live on, and fewer students would end up going to university? It was ridiculous. We were shocked and flabbergasted.

I recognize the aboriginal native students associations of Algonquin College, Seneca College, Douglas College, and others across the country that gathered together and signed an 11,000 name petition that I had the honour of presenting in the House of Commons to point out the absurdity, the counterproductivity of taxing living out expenses of aboriginal people if in fact the government's intention was to have more aboriginal people going to university. It was appalling.

If we are to build civil society, and it is the paternalism of the Indian Act that has thwarted and undermined the development of civil society and aboriginal communities, but if we are to develop a middle class among first nations, there is no way to go from poverty to middle class except for education. It is the only vehicle within one generation to move from poverty to middle class.

If we are to build the administrative capacity that will lead to self-determination, and if that is in fact our objective and if we are honest about that, then we have to pay attention to putting more first nations, Métis and Inuit students through university.

• (1805)

An aboriginal leader sent me an email today about this very debate and he quoted another noted champion of social justice who said:

On some positions a coward has asked the question is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question is it right? And there come a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.

That email that was sent to me today quoted Martin Luther King talking about the struggle for social justice of the Black people in the United States and the civil rights movement.

The social conditions of aboriginal people in this country is the civil rights movement of Canada. The time for social justice for aboriginal people has come. In an era of seven, eight and nine surplus budgets in a row, if not now, then when? That is what first nations people are asking themselves. And as we approach the day of action on June 29, we have to ask ourselves, if not now, then when?

If for no other reason than enlightened self-interest, does it make any sense to leave a huge chunk of the population behind? Our party believes that society does not move forward unless we all move forward together.

There are specific things we can do to ensure that we elevate the standards of social conditions of first nations, Métis and Inuit people. The most obvious, the most agreed upon, and the most simple and

most directed straightforward thing we can do is to get rid of the 2% cap as per the recommendations of the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, so that funding is based on need with a special emphasis on dealing with the backlog of the 13,000 first nations students who qualify for school, but who are waiting because they have no money to go to school.

We have to jump start this campaign. We have to commit ourselves with a new vigour that this will be a challenge that we are ready to face or we face the consequences of a permanent underclass in our society. I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that it is morally and ethically reprehensible, but it is also counterproductive if we are to move forward as a great nation.

• (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The division on the motion stands deferred.

The House will now continue with the remaining business under routine proceedings.

* * *

PETITIONS

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition sent to me by students at the Laplume de Sorel-Tracy school.

The petitioners are against war, and particularly against sending soldiers to fight in Afghanistan. They claim that this causes Canada to lose billions of dollars and endangers the lives of the Canadians who are sent there. They also say that this contributes significantly to polluting our planet. They hope that the House of Commons will take another look at this issue and change its mind about the war.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition today on behalf of the citizens of Hull—Aylmer about visa requirements for citizens of the Republic of Poland.

•(1815)
[English]

The undersigned residents of Canada wish to draw to the attention of the House of Commons the fact that Poland, a member of the European Union and NATO, is using biometric passport technology, a secure passport identification system. Furthermore Canadian citizens no longer require visitor visas to visit Poland.

[Translation]

The petitioners are calling on the government to remove the visa requirement for visitors of Poland to Canada.

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions that I have the privilege to table.

The first petition is urging the federal government to provide funding for programs supporting women's issues for advocacy and research, and for organizations working to end violence, poverty and discrimination. The petitioners make the point that in an era of huge surpluses the government should be putting more money into such programs, not cutting from such programs, and that supporting women in this manner will also result in supporting children who are our future.

DRUGS AND PHARMACEUTICALS

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition with many signatures that I have the privilege to table today is one that is addressing the failed access to medicine regime that was put in place two and a half years ago, supposedly intended to allow drug companies in Canada to produce and export cheaper versions of brand name drugs to developing countries where people are suffering with HIV-AIDS. Yet not a single pill has flowed from that supposed Chrétien legacy bill.

Therefore, the petitioners are urging the government to reform that law and to review the obstacles in the legislation preventing the drugs going to those who most desperately need them in developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa

[Translation]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition on the broken promise on income trusts. This petition is presented on behalf of Bruce Benson from Calgary, Alberta.

Routine Proceedings

He recalls that the Prime Minister was bragging about his so-called commitment to accountability when he stated that there is no greater fraud than a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts but that he shamelessly broke his promise by imposing a punitive tax of 31.5%, which wiped out \$25 billion that more than two million Canadians, mainly seniors, worked so hard to save for their retirement.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise and to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

[English]

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition from literally thousands of Canadians from Newfoundland to B.C. to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, pointing out that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known.

Yet, Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. Canada still allows asbestos to be used in construction materials, textile products and even children's toys. Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

The petitioners are calling on Ottawa to ban asbestos in all its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and around the world, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

[Translation]

FREE TRADE WITH KOREA

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling petitions signed by hundreds of people who are opposed to the signing of a free trade agreement with Korea if an assessment of the real impact of such a plan is not made. Today, we know the position of the minister, namely that the plan will move forward and the agreement will be signed. Unfortunately, we do not know the content of the agreement and the petitioners are opposed to the signing of such an agreement if it will not benefit the economy.

[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of Mr. Grant Johnson of Brandon, Manitoba, who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud was a promise not kept.

Government Orders

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts and then he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out \$25 billion from the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners call upon the Conservative minority government to, first, admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

● (1820)

PET FOOD SAFETY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House today.

The first one is 18 pages and it contains the signatures of Torontonians who love their dogs and cats and are worried about the safety of pet food.

The petitioners were astounded to find out that the Canadian government plays no role in inspecting, monitoring or regulating pet food sold in Canada. They note that it is irresponsible of the federal government to wash its hands of ensuring pet food safety as half of all Canadians own pets.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government to regulate pet food.

CYCLING

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the next petition, which is close to 200 pages, comes from over 3,000 Canadians from cities coast to coast, like Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto and Halifax.

The petitioners want the federal government to legitimize cycling as the preferred means of transportation and to make it a part of the solution to climate change.

The 3,000 Canadians want the federal government to offer a tax credit to bicycle commuters similar to that offered to public transit users; set up a program similar to Britain's cycle to work initiative, that the employer purchase a bike and claim the tax back from the government and sell the bike to the employee at a tax free price; offer tax incentives to employers who set up bike lockers and showers for employees; and the removal of the GST from bikes and bike accessories.

Last weekend many parts of southern Ontario experienced smog days. The time for action is now.

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the petition I am presenting is as a result of recent events relating to friendly fire incidents in Afghanistan and, because of these unfortunate incidents, the integrity, professionalism and reputation of members of the Canadian Forces has been called into question.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister to take immediate action to ensure that members of our Canadian Forces be given the full respect they

deserve, are not treated as common criminals and that all efforts be made by the Canadian government to protect the reputation, livelihoods and mental health of these individuals when such incidents occur.

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a gentleman from Kelowna, British Columbia. Mr. Johnson remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud was a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts and then he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out about \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority government to, first, admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

* * *

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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1825)

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we were last discussing Bill C-31 there were six minutes left in debate for the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Unfortunately, there are only five minutes left in debate and he has the floor.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I last spoke to this issue, slightly more than three hours ago, I was talking about the five general categories of amendments that the Senate brought forward on Bill C-31. I dealt with the one amendment that we wish to oppose and we will be sending it back to the Senate for its consideration. That dealt with the timing of the coming into force provisions of the bingo cards.

The Senate had suggested a 10 month period of time be given to Elections Canada to develop these bingo cards for the use of all parties and candidates. We are suggesting that it should be done and could be done in six months.

There are two other general areas of amendments that the Senate had suggested. One deals with the use of birthdates on the election lists themselves. This was a hotly debated point of contention in committee. Members of the New Democratic Party and members of the Conservative Party opposed this but it was an amendment brought forward by a member from the Bloc Québécois, supported by the Liberals.

That amendment was to put not just the birth year but the birthdate, day and month, as well as the birth year on the election documents in an attempt to better determine whether or not someone purporting to be a voter actually was the voter. The thinking behind this amendment was simply to say that if someone came into a voting station saying that he was, for example, John Smith, age 51, but that he clearly looked 20 or 30 years old, the deputy returning officer and the scrutineers would be able to challenge the right of that voter to exercise his vote because they would be able to point to the fact that he was clearly not the age that was specified on the forms.

However, as well-intentioned as that might have been, there were some really serious concerns about privacy laws. Therefore, when it got to the Senate, members of the Senate, and I will name one in particular, Senator George Baker, a Liberal senator, said that they had to fix the mess because it was a travesty of privacy considerations. He blamed members of the government for bringing this amendment forward to the Senate and he stated quite unequivocally that they had to fix the mess.

I would like it to be put on the record, as several of my colleagues have already done, that it was not the Conservative Party in committee that recommended this change. It was the Bloc and Liberal members who recommended that birth years and birthdates be placed on election documents. It was one of those amendments that we quite vociferously opposed, as well as members of the New Democratic Party.

I think it is quite disingenuous for Senator Baker to start blaming the government for an amendment which we had no part in crafting. I think Senator Baker would be well advised to check with his own colleagues on that side of the House, for whom he seems to not have much respect since he does not really listen to any of their advice or instructions. However, he should check with members of his own party before he starts making claims and allegations dealing with amendments to this particular bill.

Finally, the last provision of the amendments brought forward by the Liberal senators deals with penalties for misuse of election documents or personal information. This is something we wholeheartedly agree with because, if anyone, whether it be a member of one political party or whether it be an election official, chose to give some of the confidential information contained in election documents to anyone outside of the election confines, they should be penalized and punished.

Originally, we had proposed in the bill that penalties of either one month in jail or a fine of \$3,000 or both would be a satisfactory and an appropriate punishment for people who misused personal information. The Senate examined this provision and came back with an even stronger provision stating that it should be one year or \$5,000 or both if anyone were caught misusing personal information during the election process.

We wholeheartedly agree with that amendment, as we agree with 10 other amendments. It is only the one, the time for coming into effect of the bingo cards, that we disagree with.

In conclusion, let me say that once again Bill C-31 deals with integrity of the voting process, something that all people in Canada should applaud. I hope this House tonight will approve that bill.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 6:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion relating to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-31 are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to 6:30 p.m. today.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to order made earlier today the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion concerning the appointment of Mary Elizabeth Dawson as Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Call in the members.

• (1855)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 207*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Anders
Bains
Barnes
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Benoit
Bezan

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Ambrose
Arthur
Baird
Beaumier
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blackburn

Government Orders

Blaikie
Boucher
Brisson
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Charlton
Chow
Clement
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Davies
Del Mastro
Dhaliwal
Dryden
Easter
Eyking
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Grewal
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Jaffer
Jennings
Kadis
Keeper
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Layton
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinty
McTeague
Merasty
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pacetti
Paradis
Pearson
Poilievre
Preston
Proulx
Ratansi
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Shiple
Silva
Skelton
Solberg
St. Amand
Stanton
Stoffer
Strahl
Szabo
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews
Trost
Valley
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Wasylycia-Leis

Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Chan
Chong
Christopherson
Comartin
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner
Davidson
Day
Dewar
Dion
Dykstra
Epp
Fitzpatrick
Godin
Goodyear
Graham
Guarnieri
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jean
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lee
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Manning
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mayer
McDonough
McGuire
Menzies
Miller
Minna
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Owen
Pallister
Patry
Petit
Prentice
Priddy
Rajotte
Regan
Richardson
Robillard
Russell
Savoie
Schellenberger
Sgro
Siksay
Simard
Smith
Sorenson
St. Denis
Steckle
Storseth
Sweet
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Tonks
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Volpe
Warkentin
Watson

Williams
Wrzesnewskyj
Wilson
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NAYS

Members

Asselin
Bigras
Bonsant
Brunelle
Crête
Deschamps
Gaudet
Kotto
Laframboise
Lemay
Lévesque
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ouellet
Plamondon
St-Hilaire
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Vincent— 32

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion concerning the Senate amendments to Bill C-31.

● (1905)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 208*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Anders
Bains
Barnes
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blackburn
Boucher
Brisson
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Chong
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Day
Dhaliwal
Dryden
Easter
Eyking
Gallant
Goodyear

Ablonezy
Alghabra
Ambrose
Arthur
Baird
Beaumier
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Chan
Clement
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Dykstra
Epp
Fitzpatrick
Goldring
Gourde

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Graham
Guarnieri
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jean
Kadis
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Khan
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Lauzon
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
Menzies
Miller
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Owen
Pallister
Patry
Petit
Prentice
Proulx
Ratansi
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Schellenberger
Sgro
Silva
Skelton
Solberg
St. Amand
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Temelkovski
Tilson
Tonks
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Volpe
Warkentin
Williams
Wrzesneski

Grewal
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Jaffier
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lee
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Manning
Mayes
McGuinty
McTeague
Merasty
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pacetti
Paradis
Pearson
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Regan
Richardson
Robillard
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Shipley
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Paquette
Priddy
Savoie
St-Hilaire
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Plamondon
Roy
Siksay
Stoffer

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I declare the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like today to remind the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec about the sad situation in the manufacturing sector in Canada and especially in Quebec.

Last March 23, I asked the minister why he did not get anything additional in the last budget. He promised that he would get something this year, but we see by the pitiful results that this was a promise he did not keep.

If a company is located in the minister's own region or Quebec City, chances are that it will get some financial help. Outside of Conservative ridings, though, there is no salvation. Many regions have been waiting for the hon. member to alight from his rented airplane with some good news, but in vain. He still does not know that there are other regions in Quebec that need financial help.

The manufacturing sector in Canada is going through a major crisis. Ontario and Quebec have been especially hard hit. Statistics show that the manufacturing sector has lost 200,000 jobs in Canada since 2002. How can the minister do nothing in view of all the factories that are closing? How can he sit there doing nothing while so many Canadians are losing their jobs?

In the course of the hearings of the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement du Québec in February 2007, the Association des Manufacturiers et exportateurs du Québec made a presentation. It explained why people should be concerned about our manufacturing and exporting companies. This is what it said:

This is the sector contributing the most to GDP (21%); it is responsible for 86% of our exports; it is also responsible for two-thirds of the private research and development that is done; it drives regional development; it has a major multiplier effect; it provides 575,000 direct jobs.

So what is the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec doing for a sector that is so vital to the Quebec economy? He is flying back and forth between his riding and Ottawa.

NAYS

Members

André
Bachand
Bigras
Blais
Bourgeois
Carrier
Chow
Comartin
Crowder
Davies
Deschamps
Gagnon
Godin
Julian
Laforest
Lavallée
Lemay
Lévesque
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
McDonough
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)

Asselin
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Blaikie
Bonsant
Brunelle
Charlton
Christopherson
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
DeBellefeuille
Dewar
Gaudet
Guimond
Kotto
Laframboise
Layton
Lessard
Malo
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Mathyssen
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ouellet

Adjournment Proceedings

The Canadian dollar is continuing its steep rise and at this rate will reach parity with the U.S. dollar. Without wanting to speculate on the repercussions of this situation, we know that manufacturing will suffer much of the negative effect.

Who will be directly impacted by this crisis? Once again, it will be the workers in our manufacturing industries.

More factories will close and there will be other bankruptcies. The manufacturing sector has had to face some huge challenges and needs more than a few tax-related promises. It has an urgent need for investment. In view of all the challenges facing the Quebec economy, how can the minister explain the total lack of new money in the last two budgets?

Are his six new programs not just smoke and mirrors to hide the fact that the Conservative government does not really believe in economic development? This is all the more evident in view of the fact that the government not only has not provided any new money but has even taken some away, as in the case of CANTex.

When will the minister finally respond to the companies' cry for financial assistance, especially for workers in the manufacturing sector in Quebec?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of my colleague, the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, allow me to respond in greater detail to the question raised recently by the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

The member expressed his concerns regarding the financial support provided to the regions of Quebec by the Economic Development Agency of Canada. As the hon. member knows, the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is a staunch defender of the regions. He has a well-known reputation for this.

Since becoming minister, he has put forward six new economic measures aimed specifically at helping the various regions of Quebec, and especially those that are struggling. Those measures include: the venture capital fund for business start-ups in the regions; the capital fund for business succession; the community economic diversification initiative—vitality; community economic facilities for the regions; partnering with enterprises for commercialization; and advisory committees.

Canada Economic Development's mission is focused on regional economic development and supporting businesses—our SMEs. The department assists Quebec SMEs directly by providing counselling services and financial assistance. It also encourages regional business communities and the organizations that support them. Other federal partners participate in this mission to varying degrees.

Had the member done his homework and taken the time to read our government's latest budget, he would have found, on page 200, that we plan to provide a total of \$105 million to seven centres of excellence that focus on priority areas of research and commercialization for Canada, including the National Optics Institute in Quebec City.

Examples of how our government has been helping the regions of Quebec abound. I could list a whole range of them, but that would only serve to emphasize how unfounded the member for Hull—Aylmer's allegations are. We are helping the regions in many different ways.

Since coming to power, our government has made a historic effort to revitalize infrastructure and improve quality of life in various Canadian communities.

The 2007 budget allocated unprecedented amounts of money in this area, and the regions of Quebec are among the first to benefit. We are talking about \$16 billion in new money for a total of \$33 billion over the next seven years.

Our government is determined to apply policies that will promote economic growth and new business opportunities in all regions of Quebec. Resolving the softwood lumber crisis is a concrete example of that.

That was also what motivated our government to create Advantage Canada, a strategic plan to improve our country's prosperity, which depends on the prosperity of our regions. It also motivated our Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada to launch new economic measures for the regions of Quebec.

I would conclude by saying that we are confident that the measures the minister has announced over the past few months and the changes to the department's financial assistance programs will make a real difference in the very near future.

• (1915)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, the minister does not have an answer or a realistic solution for Quebec manufacturers. He has no idea of the seriousness of the situation. More businesses will have to close their doors and more workers will find themselves without a job.

The Canadian dollar continues to climb. Why does the minister not realize the urgency of the situation? Do we have to spell it out for him?

He has not been able to secure new monies in the last two budgets and is not at all embarrassed about using the budgets of the Economic Development Agency of Canada as a cash cow for his riding and his region. Does he believe in economic development or simply in the re-election of his Conservative friends?

Canadians in the manufacturing sector work very hard to earn their wages and are proud workers. However, this minister's failure to take action is jeopardizing an even greater number of jobs on which Canadians and their families depend.

Can the minister explain his lack of haste and the fact that he still does not have new budgets to deal with this major crisis?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member either does not understand or is being disingenuous.

The minister has put in place six new measures to help the regions of Quebec, especially regions with weak economic growth.

These six measures are also designed to encourage companies to innovate, market their goods and services and improve their productivity.

These measures, along with the new programs that the Economic Development Agency of Canada put in place on April 1, are making a real difference.

If my distinguished opposition colleague made the effort to visit the regions of Quebec—something I suggest he do during the summer break, perhaps by hitting the barbecue circuit with his leader

Adjournment Proceedings

—many socio-economic players in the regions would readily corroborate what I am saying and praise my minister for his leadership.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:19 p.m.)

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