



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 083 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, April 28, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 28, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1100)
[English]

COMPETITION ACT

The House resumed from March 13 consideration of the motion that Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate basically what we talked about the last time this bill was before the House.

Bill C-454 amends the anti-cartel provision of the act, section 45. The proposed amendments would strike the word “unduly” from section 45 and raise the level of fines that would be imposed. Section 45 is one of the key provisions in the Competition Act.

As I understand it, removing the word “unduly” could expose criminal liability conduct currently regulated by provincial or federal laws. For example, it is not clear whether provincial authorization of certain price fixing arrangements, such as thorough marketing or supply management boards, would continue to shield such arrangements from criminal liability under section 45 if the amendments proposed in the bill were passed.

Given this, I would hope that my hon. colleagues will ensure that they take all points of view into consideration before deciding how to address the conduct that is targeted in this section.

Bill C-454 would also give the Commissioner of Competition the ability to launch inquiries, with formal investigative powers, into entire sectors of the economy. It would be useful to get more information as to what is contemplated here.

The commissioner already has the ability to conduct market studies as part of her role as an advocate for competitive markets, the recent study into generic drug pricing being one example. Is something more intended, such as using the information gathered in subsequent criminal proceedings? This will need to be clarified as soon as possible.

Bill C-454 would change the rules regarding pre-notification of mergers by lowering the threshold at which companies considering merging would have to notify the commissioner of their intentions. In this regard we should ask ourselves whether the costs imposed on businesses by lowering the threshold for merger notification outweigh any benefits of having the Competition Bureau examine smaller transactions.

There is a lengthy list of proposed amendments to the Competition Act. Given the importance of the issues involved with this bill, I look forward to the careful consideration that this House will give it.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-454, introduced by the member for Montcalm. I think it is a timely discussion for us to have in the House.

Bill C-454 is an act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. We will support the bill at this stage because we believe it is important that it should go to committee to be discussed.

Other members have spoken about some of the things that are contained in Bill C-454. I want to address some of those, but I also want to talk in general about why it is important that we as parliamentarians take our responsibility seriously when it comes to competition.

I filled up my car on the weekend in my home riding of Dartmouth and the price was \$1.32 a litre. That is pretty high and the big concern is not what it does to my pocketbook. As a member of Parliament I get paid well to do the job that I do. I have an awful lot of constituents who cannot afford gas at \$1.32 a litre. It may be in fact that the price of gas is going to continue to go up. That may be a simple fact of life.

I think Canadians have the right to expect that their government, their members of Parliament, takes seriously the fact that in a free market economy we nonetheless have a responsibility to make sure that competition is real and open, and that in fact it is a free market and not a closed market.

Private Members' Business

In a previous life I used to run a home heating oil company for the Irving family and I can recall, and I am actually probably younger than I look, but I can recall when the price of heating oil in Nova Scotia was 26.3¢ a litre, which was the posted price for home heating oil in Nova Scotia on or about 1986, just some 22 years ago. The price of heating oil in Nova Scotia now is I think somewhere around 90¢ a litre, so we have gone from 26.3¢ a litre to somewhere around 90¢ and on top of that of course the new government disbanded the EnerGuide for low income houses which has made it even more difficult for families to heat their homes.

If we look at the basics of life, home heating oil in a province like Nova Scotia, where most houses are heated by oil, is not a luxury. It is an absolute necessity of life that one has to heat one's home. At 26.3¢ a litre, even 22 years ago, it was a lot easier to do that than at almost 90¢ a litre today. I think that consumers have a right to ask, where is the protection and is it a fair price?

Consumers are concerned about many things. I think that certainly the bill could address some of those things because people are nervous. What the bill would do is ensure that there is proper scrutiny on what is supposed to be a competitive market and appropriate penalties when companies, large big companies, abuse their right on the open market and are unfair to consumers.

The bill is very similar to Bill C-19 that was brought in during the last Parliament and that was in response to a report released by the Standing Committee on Industry in 2002, entitled "A Plan to Modernize Canada's Competition Regime".

One of the things that I often talk to my constituents about, and I talk a lot in high schools about, is the work that Parliament does outside of question period and even outside of this chamber, and the fact that committees can do a lot of good work. The committee that I sit on now is the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We released a report recently that was very good. The committee was well chaired by the government member for Niagara West—Glanbrook and the work that was done was very positive.

This obviously was a report done in 2002 following up on the VanDuzer report, an independent study of the Competition Act, that was requested at that time by John Manley, who was the minister of industry, and a good one.

The committee worked hard on the report, consulting widely with stakeholders and provided a comprehensive report with a list of recommendations to bring Canada's competition laws up to date. Canada was one of the first industrial countries in the world to adopt a competition or anti-trust law.

● (1105)

Competition legislation is intended to prevent monopolies and price conspiracies that work against the interests of consumers. The Competition Act, Canada's competition legislation, is administered by the Competition Bureau, an independent federal agency.

The way companies and corporations do business has changed a lot in recent years because of new technologies, mainly in communications and transport. Of course, we have had the globalization of trade and a number of government and private

members' bills have been introduced to try to cope with these changes.

Bill C-454 is a bill that is similar to Bill C-19, introduced in the 38th Parliament, but some amendments have been added which I think reflect the work of the committee in 2002.

Bill C-454 would, among other things, do the following: authorize the Commissioner of Competition to inquire into an entire industry; create administrative monetary penalties, AMPs, for abuse of dominant position; increase administrative monetary penalties for deceptive marketing, which I think is something else that a lot of consumers are looking for some action on; and repeal provisions dealing specifically with the airline industry, which has been an intermittently scrutinized industry.

At the time that the study did its work, just after the coming together of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines, there were concerns about that. I think there are still concerns about the airline industry and while I am talking about this, I want to commend my colleague from Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, who is bringing forward a private member's bill for an airline passengers bill of rights, which also reflects issues that I hear in my constituency from people who have concerns.

Bill C-454 would repeal criminal provisions for price discrimination, predatory pricing, discriminatory promotional allowances and geographic price discrimination. It would authorize the court to make an order requiring a person who made a false or misleading representation to compensate persons affected by that and to issue an interim injunction to freeze assets. It would allow for these AMPs that would abuse their dominant position in the industry. Now there are criminal penalties, but we need to go beyond that to allow for these other direct penalties to be put in place.

When we talk about consumers and a free market, I think that in general, Canadians would support the fact that we have a free market and would say that it works, but it causes concern when we have price spikes, and it happens in gasoline and heating oil, it has happens in insurance, and it happens in many areas. We are hearing now, with the potential of a downturn in the economy, that food prices are going up, and of course we have the international issue of food scarcity and the hungriest people on this planet are once again those who are penalized the most by that.

All these sorts of issues are causing Canadians concern and to wonder how they are going to pay their bills, how they are going to fill their oil tanks, how they are going to fill their cars, how they are going to afford groceries, how they are going to afford shelter, what will happen if the economy continues to deteriorate, and what will happen if manufacturing jobs continue to go elsewhere.

Other industries such as forestry continue to suffer. An awful lot of consumers are very worried and I think they look to Parliament and to their representatives to say that we believe in a free market and we think that this is the best way to have it, but if we believe that competition works and if we believe in capitalism and that there is in fact a free market, then it has to be free. We cannot allow large companies to have a half free, half closed market which always benefits them. It is important that there be direct action that can be taken to protect consumers in that case.

Private Members' Business

This bill is complex and it is important that we give this to the committee. The industry committee in 2002 did a good job in having a look at this. That is what committees do well. They call witnesses, talk to consumers, talk to consumer groups, talk to business advocates, and talk to the people who are most affected to consider the work that needs to be done.

Stakeholders and other interested parties will have an opportunity to make recommendations or changes as this goes forward. I am pleased to stand here today and support in principle this bill, so that we can let the industry committee do further work.

• (1110)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to take part in today's debate on Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

In my remarks today, I would like to discuss some of the misconceptions surrounding Bill C-454 and the impact the bill would have on the issue of oil and gas prices.

Last night I had the opportunity to visit my grandmothers, my grandmother Wallace and my grandmother Gray, who are both in their nineties and have issues with gasoline prices. I appreciate their paying attention to the issues facing this government and the country today.

The Bloc has very clearly linked Bill C-454 to the issue of high oil and gasoline prices. Furthermore, the Bloc is saying to Canadians that if passed, Bill C-454 would be a solution. With respect, this is just not the case. There are no proposals currently in Bill C-454 that would impact the price of oil and gasoline in the way the Bloc claims that they would. To demonstrate my point, later in my remarks I will discuss one example of the difference between what the Bloc says the provisions of Bill C-454 would do and what the real impact would be.

Obviously, high gasoline prices have a significant impact on Canadians, both consumers and businesses alike. None of us wants to pay higher prices for gasoline, or for anything else for that matter. However, as parliamentarians we would be doing our constituents a disservice by suggesting to them that there is a quick and easy solution to this complex issue.

To clarify matters, it would be helpful to review the role and mandate of the Competition Bureau. The Competition Bureau is an independent law enforcement agency that contributes to the prosperity of Canadians by protecting and promoting competitive markets and enabling informed consumer choice. Headed by the Commissioner of Competition, the organization investigates anti-competitive practices and promotes compliance with the laws under its jurisdiction.

The commissioner is responsible for the administration and enforcement of the Competition Act. The act includes criminal provisions against price fixing and price maintenance and non-criminal or civil provisions dealing with mergers and abuse of a dominant position, among other issues.

The Competition Bureau actively follows wholesale and retail gasoline prices to determine whether they are consistent with market

forces. When it comes to the gasoline industry or any other industry or sector of the economy, the focus of the Competition Bureau is on whether there has been a violation of the Competition Act. Where there is sufficient evidence of a violation of the act, the bureau routinely investigates and takes appropriate enforcement action.

As I am certain hon. members are aware, the Competition Bureau has looked into the gasoline industry over the years and has conducted six major studies. In addition, bureau investigations have led to 13 criminal trials related to gasoline and heating oil prices. Eight of these trials have resulted in convictions.

When it comes to matters within its jurisdiction, the Competition Bureau has taken action. However, there are matters that are not within the bureau's jurisdiction. At times like these when prices are rising, the Competition Bureau often receives complaints from consumers about price gouging, that is, that people feel the price is way too high. While price increases are not easy for anyone, high prices and high profits in and of themselves do not constitute a violation of the Competition Act any more than low prices do.

In a market economy, businesses are generally free to set their own prices at whatever levels the market will bear. Just because prices go up does not mean that there has been a violation of the Competition Act or that someone should step in to regulate prices. Absent extraordinary circumstances, governments should not determine what is an appropriate price or profit margin.

High prices are often a concern to the bureau when they are the result of anti-competitive conduct contrary to the Competition Act, such as a conspiracy to increase prices.

• (1115)

As I indicated earlier, when the Competition Bureau finds evidence of violations of the Competition Act, it has taken the appropriate action.

I have noted that the Bloc has included a provision in Bill C-454 to deal with price gouging. The Bloc has indicated that this is needed to deal with the gasoline prices that are considered too high, regardless of the reason for their increase. The Bloc has said that there should be regulation on the oil and gasoline sector with respect to price and profit margins. The provision put forward in Bill C-454 would effectively mean that the federal government would be responsible for the regulation of gasoline prices.

It should be noted that the federal government has no jurisdiction over the direct regulation of retail gasoline prices except in the event of a national emergency. Only the provinces have the authority to regulate gasoline prices. Four provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, have opted to set maximum gasoline prices. There are three provinces, Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, that have opted for minimum gasoline prices.

Allowing market forces of supply and demand to determine prices leads to the optimal allocation of resources by giving appropriate signals to both producers and consumers. High prices are an indication of tight supply. They send a signal to producers to produce more and to consumers to consume less. Price regulation or other restrictions distort these signals leading to misallocation of resources, which ultimately harms consumers.

Private Members' Business

To compound this, the proposed provision to deal with price gouging set out in Bill C-454 is not limited to the gasoline industry. As I mentioned earlier, the Competition Act touches on virtually every sector of the Canadian economy. Therefore, the Bloc's proposal as it is currently drafted could result in the Competition Bureau being responsible for regulating prices for virtually everything Canadians buy, not just gasoline, but automobiles, food, televisions, furniture, clothes, dairy products, almost everything. I do not need to get into a long discussion about the impact such market regulation would have on supply management.

Is this what the Bloc wants, a federal agency determining what it thinks is an appropriate price for almost everything consumers purchase, and to punish those who charge more than that amount? I would appreciate any guidance the sponsor of Bill C-454 could provide on this matter, specifically how such an approach would be workable.

Essentially, every time there was a complaint, the Competition Bureau would have to determine whether the given price on any given day was the appropriate price and was not too high. How vast a bureaucracy would have to be created in order to monitor prices in all industries all the time?

While I believe all hon. members of this House want to see lower gasoline prices, I fail to see how the proposed provision to deal with gas price gouging would accomplish this. Rather, as I read it, this provision would create more problems than it would solve. At a minimum I imagine that the provinces would not be happy with our getting involved in their jurisdictions.

Time does not permit me to discuss the details of any other provisions of Bill C-454 which the Bloc claims would help deal with high gasoline prices but would actually do nothing of the sort. I would hope that the committee would ensure that there was a detailed and thorough review of Bill C-454.

As I stated at the outset of my remarks, we are all concerned with the impact of high gasoline prices on Canadians. However, gasoline prices are a result of a complex set of domestic and international factors. We must be very careful that any proposal put forward will actually do something to help deal with gasoline prices. As such, we must carefully scrutinize the provisions of Bill C-454. We would be failing to do our duty as Canadians if we did otherwise.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am asking the House to support the Bloc Québécois' Bill C-454, which seeks to dust off the Competition Act and enable the Competition Bureau to conduct real investigations into the oil industry under its own authority.

I said "once again" because we have to remember that the Bloc Québécois has already put forward two motions on this subject in the House. The first motion, which was put forward on June 1, 2006, called for the Competition Act to be strengthened. Unfortunately, the vote was 77 in favour and 204 against. The second time, on May 2, 2007, I myself put forward an amended motion based on the idea of setting up a petroleum monitoring agency, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in 2003.

That time, there were 159 votes in favour and 122 against. Let us hope that things will work out this time.

Around this time last year, skyrocketing gas prices were becoming a problem again. The Bloc Québécois had put forward a motion asking the government to give the Commissioner of Competition the power to investigate the real reasons the price of gas was going up and to create a petroleum monitoring agency, among other things. Substantial amendments to the Competition Act are critical now that a barrel of crude is selling for around \$130 U.S.

Many people in my riding and throughout Quebec have been writing to me and contacting me to communicate their concerns about the constantly rising price of gas, which has been as sudden as it has been inexplicable. People want their elected representatives to do something to protect them from these senseless price hikes. When people have to spend more on gas, their buying power decreases and they do not buy as many other goods, other goods that also cost more because of the cost of transportation, as we know all too well. Every time the price of gas goes up, everyone pays to make oil companies richer. Everyone gets poorer, including governments, which, as I should point out, consume vast quantities of petroleum products.

With summer fast approaching, the oil companies will not think twice about increasing gas prices, as they do every year. As soon as people decide to go on vacation, prices at the pumps start going through the roof. Consumers will once again be lining the pockets of the rich oil companies, while the government does absolutely nothing. This government is on the same side as the oil companies, so it protects their interests. Also, the Competition Act does not make it possible to conduct a full inquiry on the real reasons for the price increases.

Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, would make it possible to fix the problems with the current legislation.

In its current form, the Competition Act does not enable the Competition Bureau to launch its own inquiries. It acts when it receives a complaint or ministerial request. Furthermore, the Competition Bureau does not have the power to compel disclosure of documents or protect witnesses, when doing general reviews of the industry.

The Competition Bureau does have this power when it is conducting an inquiry. But as I said before, only a complaint or minister's request can give it that power.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to file a complaint of collusion. There needs to be evidence, and that evidence is very hard to gather. Bill C-454 would make it possible to protect witnesses and compel disclosure of documents. Since these are not currently possible, the oil industry has been able to avoid this provision of the current legislation.

I remind members that no minister has yet dared to request an inquiry on the oil industry and the constant, cyclic and periodic rises in gas prices. I do not think a minister from western Canada, in a Conservative government, which looks out for the interests of oil companies, would make such a request.

Private Members' Business

• (1125)

The Conservative government is hiding behind the Competition Act to justify its failure to act. They tell us nothing can be done, since the Competition Bureau concluded that there is no agreement among petroleum companies to fix prices. Obviously, the government can reach this conclusion, since, as I pointed out earlier, the Competition Bureau is incapable of gathering information, forcing the disclosure of documents or protecting witnesses.

Thus, the existing act does not protect citizens from a situation that allows oil companies to rake in billions of dollars in profits every year. They are a very small group of players, within an immense market, for a product on which our entire society is unfortunately dependent. The answer to this equation is clear: abuse is a real possibility and the government must act. It must stop protecting the interests of the rich petroleum companies and start protecting our citizens from the greediness of this multi-billion dollar industry.

Finally, oil and gas pose an environmental, economic and social threat. No one wins when the price of gas goes up to \$1.30 a litre, which is currently the reality in Trois-Rivières. No one except the petroleum companies.

Some people would have us believe, just as the government tried with its bill to reduce gas taxes, that governments are profiting from this situation. That is false. To a large degree, gas taxes are fixed taxes that do not fluctuate with the price. I must remind the House, as I was saying earlier, that governments and municipal administrations consume a lot of gas. They also pay the price.

We all lose, especially Quebec, which does not produce oil within its borders. Quebec chose clean energy: hydroelectricity. Every dollar spent on gasoline in Quebec is a complete loss. Every time the price of gas goes up, more money goes out of Quebec and into the pockets of the petroleum companies.

Bill C-454 would at least give the Competition Bureau the tools it needs to shed some light on the exact reasons for the sudden rise in the price of gasoline.

Our citizens, who are paying top prices for gasoline, must have answers, clear answers. That is why I urge the members of this House to vote in favour of this bill.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for this opportunity to join the debate on Bill C-454. I would also like to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for identifying some important concerns we share about the shortcomings of the Competition Act as it stands today.

The current act fails to defend consumers in a number of significant ways. My colleague is seeking to address those failures with the introduction of this bill. I too will be introducing a private member's bill in the following days on the subject of the Competition Act, because I believe there is a growing consensus here in the House of Commons that the act as we know it today has serious shortcomings.

I think most Canadians would agree that our free market economy is not in fact a free market. It is manipulated in many ways that are detrimental to the consumer and ordinary Canadians. The Competition Act and the Competition Bureau, which holds the tribunals when we believe there is no free competition, are supposed to be of some comfort to Canadians. They are supposed to assure us that somebody is watching out for our well-being and that we have somebody in our corner representing our views in increasingly complex industrial sectors.

Canadians have an instinctive gut feeling that they are getting hosed by some industry sectors. Perhaps the most pointed example is the daily reminder, irritant and frustration of the appalling and irrational price fixing associated with gas at the gas pumps. It is critically important that Canadians have a champion for their cause.

Competition tribunals have been struck about five or six times under the Competition Act to try to determine if there is price fixing in the gas and oil sector. They have been unable to do so every time. Canadians get optimistic and tell the government to go for it and defend them and make sure they are not being hosed, but the tribunals have failed. Canadians want comprehensive investigations done, but the limitations of the Competition Act are such that the tribunals, no matter how well meaning, have failed to satisfy their frustrations.

I note in the private member's bill put forward by my colleague in the Bloc Québécois, Bill C-454, that a comprehensive rewrite of the Competition Act would be done to hopefully give greater ability to the tribunals to give some satisfaction to Canadians.

I note that the bill would repeal all the provisions dealing specifically with the airline industry, another area in which there has been some frustration and irritation felt by users.

Bill C-454 proposes to eliminate the criminal provisions and replace them with new ones dealing with predatory pricing and geographic price discrimination. This is a regional frustration in a country as vast as Canada. We do not really know sometimes if shipping and handling is being used as an excuse to jack up prices or to fix prices, et cetera.

Another irritant that brings this to the top of mind for a lot of Canadians is the price of cars in regard to those in the United States. Even though our dollar is now at parity with the American dollar, and was even higher for a period of time, the price of cars has not dropped in any corresponding way.

This seems to be right across the board with all car dealerships. None of them reacted to the reality that the Canadian dollar actually purchased more. There was no justification for a price differential of \$5,000, \$6,000 or even \$7,000 for a Chevy sold in Detroit and a Chevy sold in Windsor. It is this kind of thing from which we want our watchdogs to protect us and to defend our best interests in the most aggressive way possible.

Private Members' Business

The amendment that I will be introducing in my private member's bill would I think complement my Bloc colleague's bill. I believe it should be up to Canadians to invoke an investigation by a competition tribunal. It should not be left solely to government. My bill would trigger an investigation by a tribunal if 100 or more Canadians were of the opinion that an arrangement or relationship in any sector might constitute an offence under the Competition Act.

• (1135)

I say it is complementary because I notice in my Bloc colleague's bill that the investigation would not necessarily be limited to an individual company. Part of the reason we have not had satisfaction from the competition tribunal investigations is that the tribunal's hands are tied in the sense that it depends so much on the question put to it. If we are accusing two oil companies of price-fixing, the investigation is very narrow in investigating those two companies.

It is almost impossible to prove collusion. I am not accusing anyone here, but if there were some kind of informal arrangement whereby one oil company phoned the other, fixed the price for that day and undermined the competition, how could we prove that beyond any doubt and then apply any kind of punitive measures?

We would like the competition tribunal investigative body to be able to expand the scope of its investigation to look at the sector as a whole, even to be proactive in its investigation, to follow the money, as it were. We would like it to go from the narrow complaint, which may have dealt with two individual companies, to looking in a more general sense at the sector as a whole and then to trying to put some reason and logic to the inexplicable fluctuation in oil and gas prices, and I do mean inexplicable. The best minds in the country have tried to figure this out. The conclusion that most Canadians come to is that we do get gouged and we do get screwed.

The Canadian government does not even track gas prices any more, never mind trying to regulate or to make sure that we are getting fair pricing, never mind fixed pricing. The only consultant in the country the government members ever go to is this M.J. Ervin guy, the self-professed authority, the self-professed expert, who is actually a consultant to the oil companies. It is a fox in a henhouse situation. He never seems to see anything wrong with anything the oil and gas companies do. That is his meal ticket. I am critical of that.

We would like to think that there is somebody in our corner to make sure we are getting fair pricing even if we fall short of the burden of proof, of proving absolutely that there was price-fixing between two companies. If there is no defensible reason for the price to be jacked up arbitrarily, that is predatory pricing, and that is the language my colleague from the Bloc uses in this bill, where he notes that evidence of "predatory pricing" is required. Predatory pricing means taking advantage of people.

I have an elderly aunt who wanted to have four rooms painted in her little 600 square foot house. The guy charged her \$10,000. We took it to court. Sure enough, the court ruled that the person had misrepresented the value of the service rendered. He painted the rooms, but he misrepresented the value. That is the kind of logic we would like extrapolated to industry sectors.

Canadians do not mind paying the real prices of things even if they are going up due to world forces or domestic forces, but they do not like being gouged. They like being able to trace and track how the pricing was arrived at so that they know the real value of the product they are buying. Nowhere is this more self-evident, I believe, than in oil and gas.

Let me give one more example in the minute I have left. When Colin Powell announced the invasion of Iraq, with the shock and awe campaign about to start, the price of gas went up 10¢ a litre within one hour. No one can tell me that was for gas the companies bought at a higher price. The market anticipated a problem with the flow of oil and gouged consumers an extra 10¢ in anticipation of problems that companies did not even know would happen.

That is the kind of thing we need protection from as consumers. That is why we are going to see a flurry of private members' bills coming forward along the lines of improving and enhancing the authority of the competition tribunals, underpinned by a new and reformed Competition Act. I support this bill. I wish my colleague well in its success.

• (1140)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the bill and to welcome all members back after a long, hard, working week in the ridings. I enjoyed the opportunity to spend the week in St. Catharines and I worked pretty hard on making a couple of announcements with respect to the environment.

Today I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act. I listened closely to my colleague about the positions with respect to the non-competition act, which is a pretty complicated bill. It has a number of aspects to it and I will address a couple of them in my remarks today.

First, Bill C-454 contains a provision that would allow consumers to seek restitution for harm they may have suffered as a result of deceptive marketing practices.

Second, the bill would alter the administrative monetary penalty, or the AMP. It is a scheme for deceptive marketing practices. This would be done by increasing the maximum amount of financial penalty that the Competition Tribunal may impose for deceptive marketing practices and by providing for an additional penalty to remove any profits for that activity.

I will begin with the issue of restitution.

Bill C-454 proposes to allow the Competition Tribunal to order a company that has promoted a product through false or misleading advertising to pay restitution to the consumers who purchased that product.

Private Members' Business

However, the Bloc bill actually gives very little guidance as to how this process would work. In fact, the only direction that the Bloc thought to provide was to instruct the Competition Tribunal to appoint an administrator to manage the restitution fund and process consumer claims. In fact, the proposed wording is extremely broad and vague and could actually cause more harm than good. The language in the bill says that the amount of the restitution is to be distributed “in any manner and on any terms that the court considers appropriate”.

The problem with the Bloc's “throw the ball in the air and maybe we'll get it into the net” approach is that it severely lacks the precision necessary for legislation that actually underpins Canadian business and international competitiveness. I would hope that, in the course of this debate and at committee stage, we will obtain more clarity as to how exactly this proposed restitution scheme would actually function.

For the moment, there are a number of questions that stand out for me.

For example, the issue of unclaimed funds needs to be addressed. There would almost certainly be unclaimed funds every time restitution would be ordered. Not every affected consumer would be aware of a judgment in his or her favour nor would every affected consumer be able to prove that he or she actually bought the product in question. Then there is a good chance that some consumers would simply not bother to pursue their claim, in part, if it is only for the small amount of, say, a few bucks. However, even a few dollars multiplied by thousands or tens of thousands of people, or perhaps more depending on the product, could quickly, as we see, become a great deal of money.

What will become of these funds if they are not claimed? Obviously, such money could not simply be returned to the offending business because that would actually counter what the bill is trying to accomplish. Hopefully, the Bloc has thought through its political rhetoric on this and will be able to answer this important question because I assume that everyone would want to fully understand the answers to these questions.

The second matter that I will address today concerns a provision within Bill C-454 that would allow for increased penalties for individuals and businesses engaging in deceptive marketing.

• (1145)

From a justice perspective, we on this side of the House are in full agreement. When there are serious crimes that require minimum sentencing, we will always be in support.

The current maximum penalty for individuals is \$50,000 for a first order and a maximum of \$100,000 for each subsequent order. Bill C-454 proposes to raise these amounts to a maximum of \$750,000 for the first order and a maximum of \$1 million for each subsequent order.

For corporations, the current penalty is a maximum of \$100,000 for the first violation and a maximum of \$200,000 for each subsequent order. The provisions contained in Bill C-454 would actually replace these amounts with a maximum of up to \$10 million for the first violation and a maximum of up to \$15 million for each subsequent order.

Bill C-454 also proposes to give the Competition Tribunal the ability to order a second penalty in addition to the one described above. This second penalty appears to be intended to take away profits generated by the deceptive marketing practices.

The nature of these provisions with two separate penalties raises a few questions. First, I would find it useful to get some explanation as to how and why it was decided to propose two types of administrative monetary penalties. What are the reasons for adding this extra layer? Why is a single penalty not adequate? It is not clear to me why they would both be needed.

It would also be very helpful to hear exactly how these two penalties relate to each other. For example, could the Competition Tribunal order the second penalty only after there had been an order for the first one? If the second penalty could be levied on its own, could the tribunal do this in all cases or only in some cases? Has the Bloc actually thought through these issues?

Finally, there is also the issue of how or even whether the restitution scheme I described earlier relates to these penalties. Is it the intention of this bill to have all these provisions apply at the same time? Again, there are a number of questions that do not seem to have any answers within the context of this very complicated bill.

There may be answers to these questions but the Bloc did not answer these essential questions within its legislation. Putting forward half-thought through policy for the sake of some weak political rhetoric is not the right way to go about this. It is my hope that we will get the answers to these very important questions as deliberations on Bill C-454 continue.

The Competition Act is a very complicated piece of legislation. Likewise, Bill C-454 is lengthy and complex. A number of substantive policy questions arising from this legislation, such as implementing “price gouging” or “price regulation”, are provincial matters. I find it interesting that the Bloc raises time after time the issues it faces from a provincial perspective and yet, within the context of this bill, actually surrenders some of that provincial responsibility.

These provisions could be potentially damaging to supply management and should make members wonder whether this is just political wrangling rather than sound legislation as is required for the amendments to the Competition Act.

I trust that during committee stage there will be a complete and thorough review of this bill and that the federalist parties will actually protect the jurisdiction of the provinces because it seems that in portions of this bill the Bloc is not prepared to defend provincial jurisdiction on portions.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Shefford has six or seven minutes. I will then have to interrupt him to give the hon. member for Montcalm his right of reply.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-454. This is not the first time such a bill has been tabled. If my colleague does not understand why this was necessary, he should take a look at the other similar bills that have been introduced.

They were introduced because gas prices have been going up year after year. Everyone, from consumers to those working in the transportation sector—including rail transportation—is affected by this explosion in gas prices. The explosion in gas prices has led to an increase in the price of consumer goods. When gas costs more, the consumer price index will surely rise as well.

This issue has an important impact. The government always has the same response. The member who spoke before me once again said that there was nothing to be done because the Competition Bureau had concluded that there was no agreement among the oil companies to fix prices, so therefore there was no problem.

However, the Competition Bureau has never conducted a formal inquiry into this issue. All it has done is study how the industry operates. When the Competition Bureau conducts a study, it has almost no power, because it does not have the power of inquiry. It can examine how the industry operates in general, but it cannot discipline the industry.

What factors are behind the increase in gas prices? There are four: the price of crude oil, the refining margin, taxes and the retail margin. What everyone in my riding and in every riding in Canada wants to know is why gas prices are going up so much. Why is gasoline so expensive? What has happened to cause another increase in gas prices?

Absolutely nothing has happened. The retailers' profit margin fluctuates between 3¢ and 6¢ a litre. It stays about the same from one year to the next. The retail margin is always the same. Things have to be done differently.

Looking at the four factors, we have to assume that the oil well operator has a profit margin on the price of crude oil.

In my opinion, companies make money from the refining margin. A company makes billions and billions of dollars from refining. The price of crude oil is fixed and even listed on the stock exchange, and it varies very little. Of course, the “blueprints” determine the price of supply and demand. The taxes are relatively unchanged. The GST is 5% and applies to the price of gas before the QST. The QST is 7.5% and applies to the price of gas after the GST. This is unchanged.

As I said earlier, the taxes are still the same, and retailers still have the same flexibility. Only the GST and QST increase with the price of gas, but they account for only a small portion of the price increase. The taxes are essentially fixed. They are not making gas prices go up; the oil companies are making gas prices go up.

During the 2004 election campaign, the Conservatives presented a bizarre plan to fight gas price increases. Their proposal did not target oil companies; they proposed to decrease gas taxes. We do not believe this to be a wise course of action. If taxes are lowered, the price charged by the industry may rise and absorb the difference. The state needs the taxes to fund expenditures, namely to reduce our

dependence on oil. The state does not make money when the price increases. It actually loses because it is a large consumer of gas.

With regard to refining, North American oil companies significantly streamlined refining operations in the 1990s.

As you are signalling that I only have one minute left, I will present the Bloc Québécois' three-pronged approach.

• (1155)

The first thing would be to discipline the industry. That is the goal of Bill C-454, which strengthens the Competition Act. We should set up a monitoring agency for the oil sector.

The second would be to have the industry make a contribution in light of the soaring cost of energy and oil company profits. The economy as a whole is suffering while the oil companies are profiting. The least we can do to limit the devastating effects is to ensure that they pay their fair share of taxes.

The third thing would be to decrease our dependence on oil. Quebec does not produce oil and every drop of this viscous liquid consumed by Quebecers impoverishes Quebec and contributes to global warming.

Therefore, Quebec is proposing to reduce dependence on oil.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Montcalm now has the right to reply.

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank the Gaudet-Pilon-Morin-Venne team and all the bowlers and enthusiasts who raised \$13,200 on Saturday night for Leucan for children with cancer. I wanted to publicly thank them.

This being National Volunteer Week, I would like to thank all the volunteers in my riding for the good work that they do.

We will soon proceed to a vote on Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Although we already have a Competition Act, it has some major flaws that need to be fixed in short order. I would like to show that it is necessary for the House of Commons to intervene in order to improve the current Competition Act and vote in favour of this bill.

Every time the price of gas skyrockets, the government invariably says the same thing, that its hands are tied because the Competition Bureau has found that there is no collusion between the oil companies to set the price of gas and therefore no problem. The Competition Bureau has never conducted a proper investigation into the matter because it has never had the power to do so.

The bureau does not discipline the oil industry and does not encourage the government to intervene either. The flaws in the current act prevent the Competition Bureau from doing any real work. The Competition Bureau cannot initiate an investigation of its own accord. What is more, the Competition Bureau cannot compel disclosure of documents or protect witnesses when it does a general industry study.

The Competition Bureau is therefore limited in what it can do. Furthermore, the price of oil products keeps going up and the refinery margins vary remarkably. The refinery margins are twice, even four times higher than can be reasonably expected. When the oil companies decide to make their profits soar, the Competition Bureau will still not be equipped to conduct a true investigation, unless the House of Commons passes Bill C-454.

I need not remind hon. members to what extent the oil companies are shamelessly taking advantage of this situation. They are posting record profits. The flaws in the current Competition Act are a constant source of discussion in parliamentary committee, where a reverse onus of proof is being recommended to address the agreements between competitors and determine whether there is a conspiracy.

Here is what Konrad W. von Finckenstein, the Commissioner of Competition, said during a meeting of the Standing Committee on Industry on May 5, 2003:

—while the bureau's mandate includes the very important role of being investigator and advocate for competition, the current legislation does not provide the bureau with the authority to conduct an industry study.

It seems to me that it would be preferable to have a study on the overall situation carried out by an independent body that would have authority, that would be able to summon witnesses and gather information. It should also have the power to protect confidential information that someone is not necessarily going to want to share, but which would be vital in order to reach a conclusion based on the real facts.

These statements prove that the existing Competition Act does not allow the Competition Bureau to conduct real investigations into industrial sectors. Bill C-454 will make it possible to implement a comprehensive strategy that will enable us to do something about the rising cost of petroleum products.

It is high time we fixed this problem and gave the Competition Bureau the power it needs to do a proper job.

Bill C-454 to amend the Competition Act is critical to undertaking real investigations into the oil industry. Passing this bill will give the Competition Bureau the vital powers it needs to fulfill its mandate. Both the government and the oil industry must be transparent.

The people of Quebec—and the people of Canada too, I imagine—think that the ruling government and the oil companies are in cahoots with each other. In light of the tax cuts and other benefits being given to oil companies, people have the right to wonder about this. In my opinion, Bill C-454 would meet the people's needs, and I hope that it will be passed.

• (1200)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 12:02 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Government Orders

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT, 1999

The House resumed from April 10 consideration of Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, as reported (with amendments) from the committee, as well as Motion No. 2.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to speak to Bill C-33. Members of the House had the opportunity to express their position at second reading. The committee then did an excellent job trying to improve this bill. Unfortunately, many of our amendments were rejected, both by government members and by the Liberals. This did not prevent us from pursuing our work, however. For instance, an NDP member introduced motions to improve Bill C-33, including the motion selected by the Chair that we are currently discussing in this House.

I would remind the House that Bill C-33 seeks to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and that the motion we are discussing here today was introduced by the hon. member for Western Arctic.

I would like to begin by saying that the Bloc Québécois supports this motion, whose purpose is to improve a clause added by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food by specifying that a thorough review of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production in Canada should include a review of the progress made in the preparation and implementation of regulations enacted by the governor in council.

In committee, during the clause-by-clause review of Bill C-33, I proposed an amendment with a similar purpose. That is why it was not so difficult for the Bloc Québécois to support the NDP member's motion. This addition will provide for a more complete evaluation of the consequences of biofuel production and the implementation of governing regulations.

Government Orders

As I was saying, I proposed amendments to broaden the scope of the regulations and to allow the committee to study the regulations. Unfortunately, these amendments were rejected by both the Conservatives and the Liberals. Nevertheless, I feel it is worthwhile looking at these amendments again to give citizens, who have not necessarily followed the committee's clause-by-clause review, an understanding of how useful these amendments could have been. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details. The purpose of these amendments was to improve Bill C-33, to tighten up the regulations and also to allow the committee to study the regulations, as we would like to do in many files.

The amendments sought to broaden the scope of the regulations. Bill C-33 will allow the government to blend biofuels with regular gas. I had proposed two amendments.

First, I wanted the government to be able to regulate the submission by persons who produce, sell or import fuel of information regarding the environmental effects of biofuels. This would have provided an additional safeguard with respect to the source of these biofuels and their method of production. More specifically, we believe that the submission of information about the environmental and energy record, the life cycle and the environmental and social consequences of fuels must be regulated. This is currently a shortcoming of Bill C-33. We wanted to remedy this shortcoming.

Second, the bill, in its present form, distinguishes biofuels according to a certain number of criteria such as the quantities of releases, feedstocks used, or the fuels' chemical properties. We believe that the government should be able to differentiate biofuels according to criteria with broader environmental scope, namely their environmental and energy record, the analysis of their life cycle, even their social and environmental repercussions. That was the intention of the second amendment tabled.

We also proposed other amendments, because Bill C-33 does not include any standards per se. All it does is authorize the government to make a certain number of regulations governing biofuels, including standards and their consequences.

These amendments were designed to enable the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to study the proposed regulations before they were adopted, for the simple reason that the oversight will come from the regulations and not the bill that is before Parliament, Bill C-33.

If the committee were able to study the proposed regulations, the committee members could keep abreast of technological advances in the field of renewable biofuels and also evaluate the appropriateness of the measures proposed by the government.

• (1205)

Although renewable fuels are one way of combating greenhouse gases and reducing our dependence on oil—the Bloc Québécois has presented a very detailed policy on reducing our dependence on oil—they are not all created equal. When studying the proposed regulations, the committee could look further at biofuels, their sources and their potential impacts. Environmental and energy impacts were mentioned earlier. These amendments were therefore similar in their approach.

I am still talking about them, because I feel that it is not too late to do the right thing. Unfortunately, however, these amendments were not accepted during the clause-by-clause review. I repeat, if they had been, Bill C-33 would have been improved. As I said in several committees, this is often the norm. It is being discussed more and more. There is a desire for committees to study the regulations arising from bills. As issues evolve, there would be more frequent opportunities to study the regulations and look at technological progress that has been made and how the regulations are being applied, in order to determine whether this is in keeping with the spirit of the bill. Unfortunately, Parliament does not yet do this routinely.

All that to say that it is logical for us to support the motion of my NDP colleague from Western Arctic. Bill C-33 will only be stronger if Parliament agrees to vote in favour of this motion. This bill addresses some of the Bloc Québécois' concerns. We want to reduce our dependence on oil. We also want the transportation sector to make an increased effort in cutting greenhouse gas emissions and we want the use of agricultural and wood residues to be developed.

It is common knowledge that the Bloc Québécois favours the use of cellulosic ethanol. In Quebec, two plants have been built quite recently in the Eastern Townships. They should be up and running by this summer. There is one in Westbury and another in the Bromptonville area of Sherbrooke. The Kruger company is also involved in opening this latest plant in order to develop wood residues.

The goal of the Government of Quebec is for fuels to consist of 5% ethanol by 2012. In Bromptonville, there is a new development in cellulosic ethanol. Apparently agricultural and wood residue is used, but construction wood that is no longer of any use and would get burned anyway could also be used more. Producing cellulosic ethanol from leftover construction wood could be a rather useful development.

The federal government has announced a regulation requiring 5% renewable content in gasoline by 2010. Regulations will also require an average of 2% renewable content in diesel and heating oil by 2012. In addition to cellulosic ethanol, which I spoke about earlier, it would be a good idea—and I will finish up with this topic—to develop and explore biodiesel.

In committee we heard from people from the CFER back home, in Victoriaville, who are using a vehicle that runs on french fry oil. Used vegetable oils are collected from 10 restaurants in Victoriaville, and are currently used to run a delivery vehicle for a local pharmacy. Yves Couture, the director of that training and recycling centre, came to speak to the committee about this vision for the future. People may say that it is only one vehicle, but when the government has the good sense to invest in these new technologies, I am convinced that we will be able to make major advances in the development of biodiesel.

Government Orders

The Fédération des producteurs de boeuf du Québec is in favour of Bill C-33, and is also calling on the government to focus on biodiesel. Now that there are new standards for removing specified risk materials, these people do not know what to do with residue and animal waste. They even have to pay to dispose of it. If it were sent to biodiesel plants, we could run our vehicles on materials that would probably have been sent to the landfill.

• (1210)

We must fully examine these possibilities. We will have the opportunity to discuss them as these technologies move forward.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found my hon. colleague's presentation to be thoughtful and it focused on what is happening on the ground.

I was pleased to hear about all the different initiatives that are going on in Quebec with respect to the use of biofuels. This is very positive, but it also poses the important question, how can we determine the winners and losers in the biofuel industry as we move forward?

What we are trying to do with the amendment is to give us some flexibility in the approach we take. We in this party do not think that there is trust and confidence in the government to put forward regulations that are going to apply in a very good fashion to all the different types of initiatives that are available under biofuels, or as I like to call them, bioenergy.

In my constituency in the far north we are rapidly transforming the fuel used to heat major institutional buildings to wood pellets. Right across northern Canada including northern Quebec many communities are strictly on diesel fuel or fuel oil for their buildings. Fuel oil is \$1.30 a litre. The wood pellets that are imported from Alberta are half that cost.

There is still much work to be done in this field to understand the nature of the incentives and programs, and the conditions we should be attaching to the biofuels industry. Does the member agree there is a need to have that oversight?

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Western Arctic for his question. I also want to congratulate him on introducing this motion.

As the saying goes, it is better to be safe than sorry. Consequently, when Bill C-33 was studied clause by clause in committee, we introduced the amendments I mentioned earlier. The member's colleague, the NDP agriculture critic, also introduced worthwhile amendments. Only one was adopted. There was a good reason the member decided to introduce a few motions in the House so that we can have a better idea of the approach the government wants to take.

We are talking about technologies that are often in their early days. For example, cellulosic ethanol techniques are just emerging now. Canada does not yet have the capacity to produce these biofuels commercially. That is why it is imperative that in committee, we be able to look quickly—not just every five years or so—at everything the government wants to do and also at all the environmental and

energy-related impacts of that decision. This is really very important. We also have to look at the social impacts, especially with the food crisis in the world today.

It is important that we be able to study all the regulations the government wants to make once this bill has been adopted, to make sure they are on the right track. Some countries are taking a step back, while others are seriously questioning the use of biofuels. However, when a country wants to reduce its dependence on oil, it has two choices: it can either do nothing and continue using oil or it can use biofuels. But it has to use them intelligently.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to speak today to contribute to the debate on government Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, to provide for the efficient regulation of fuels.

[*English*]

According to the government's own technical briefings on March 14, 2008, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have grown steadily since 1990. At Kyoto, Canada committed to a target of 6% below 1990 levels; however, Canadian emissions have grown steadily since 1990. Canada's annual greenhouse gas emissions are currently more than 25% higher than they were in 1990 and 32% higher than Canada's Kyoto protocol target. This growth is due in part to the continued expansion of Canada's production and export of oil and gas. Without immediate action, our emissions from all sectors could increase by another 24% to reach 940 megatons in 2020. This is terrible news.

As my colleague, the MP for Ottawa South, has said, for Canadians all of this has to be seen in the context of climate change policy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, told the government, all parliamentarians and all Canadians that we need to contain temperature increases to between 2° and 2.4° if possible. We will only be able to do that, it says, if we stabilize emissions within 15 years and cut them in half by 2050. The IPCC report also says that there are already many low cost options available to developed countries like Canada to reduce greenhouse gases, such as financial incentives, the excise fuel tax, deploying existing technologies, tradeable permits and voluntary programs.

The Conservative government since it came to power has cut the carbon credits and the renewable power investment programs which were the former Liberal government's initiatives.

Professor Mark Jaccard of the School of Resource and Environmental Management at Simon Fraser University said in an interview with *The Hill Times* last year that the Conservative government believed it could deliver a successful environmental plan based on improving air quality.

Government Orders

•(1220)

[*Translation*]

A number of the former Liberal government's climate change programs were cut. Then, public opinion polls finally made the Conservative government realize that this was not a fleeting movement, but that the public was truly concerned about climate change.

Professor Jaccard added that a number of public officials advised the Conservatives to reinstate the Liberals' regulations and reintroduce them with different names, which was a waste of time. He also pointed out that the Conservatives wanted to delay the release of the new programs because of their similarity to the Liberal programs.

[*English*]

My colleague from Ottawa South also reported that the failure of the government's plan has been well documented by the C.D. Howe Institute, the Deutsche Bank, the Pembina Institute and the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the Conservatives' own board, has told the government its plan is baseless and will not achieve the targets in any way. In fact, it appears not a single third party observer has put forward a shred of evidence to substantiate that the government's plan would work.

The developed countries are responsible for the pollution rate we have now in the world. By moving their industries to developing countries such as China and India, to name only two, they have damaged their environment and their agriculture and have helped increase global warming.

Today, studies show that the expansion of the production of ethanol is doing very little for the environment. On the contrary, ethanol use could add to greenhouse gas emissions, not reduce them.

[*Translation*]

My constituents in Laval—Les Îles, many of whom are from India, Pakistan, the Middle East and other countries, are very concerned about what is currently going on in their home countries.

The problem of global warming is the most urgent ecological problem of our generation, as the leader of the official opposition pointed out. That is why, together with my colleagues from the Liberal Party of Canada, I think the government's bill does not go far enough. It does not provide any real solution to the greenhouse gases problem.

According to a study by the OECD, Canada is behind other developed countries and is among the lowest-ranking OECD countries in terms of emissions per person for smog-causing gases, at 2%. Although Canada contributes just 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions, the quantity of those emissions per person is among the highest in the world, and that percentage keeps going up.

A number of studies show today that corn ethanol and other biofuels, such as soy or sugar cane, contribute to increasing greenhouse gases and therefore to global warming.

A study published in *Science* magazine concluded that the current use of prime farm land to expand biofuel crops will probably only exacerbate global warming because of deforestation and increased cash crops to the detriment of food crops. That is to say nothing of the economic pressure being put on farmers to produce more biofuels including wheat, soy, barley and sugar cane, which has a negative effect on the price of corn and wheat, and therefore on the living conditions of those involved.

We are already beginning to feel the negative effects. All we hear about in the media these days is the food crisis, which is a direct result of the massive cultivation of cereal crops and other food products for uses other than feeding populations. And this is only the beginning of a vicious circle.

According to recent studies, there are other solutions, particularly the use of renewable or green energy sources that do not use carbon.

As for transportation, we could follow the example of Europe, and particularly France, which is currently developing electric car prototypes.

As for household energy consumption, we can now use alternative energy sources, including wind, solar or photovoltaic energy, that is, converting solar radiation directly into electricity, as some countries in northern and western Europe are doing, as well as hydroelectric energy.

We can also use new, environmentally friendly materials in the construction of houses, which is already being done in Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and even in certain developing countries. Some African countries, for instance, are using solar and wind energy. These environmentally friendly materials are designed to conserve energy in houses, thereby reducing the waste and over-consumption of energy.

My colleagues and I firmly believe that the most effective solution combines two attitudes: first, consuming less energy; and second, developing and producing more renewable energy.

•(1225)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her presentation. She brought up some very interesting points, many of which I agree with.

[*English*]

Although I am in agreement with the hon. member opposite on some points, I would like to point out some differences.

First, one of her last points was that we had to get our waste of energy under control, and I agree with her on that. However, she also mentioned that there was a crisis in food prices. There is definitely a marked increase in food prices around the world, but we have to be careful not to blame the food prices on biofuels. For example, food prices have increased by roughly 7% over the last three years. During the same period, oil has jumped by 70%. Therefore, if there were ever a case for finding replacements for oil, this would certainly be it.

Canadian families continue to enjoy some of the best food at the most reasonable prices anywhere around the world.

Government Orders

She mentioned that emissions had grown since 1990. As we know, during that period her government, the former Liberal government, was in power for 13 of those years. One of the members who sought the leadership of the Liberal Party mentioned that the Liberals did not get it done. Perhaps she could speak to that.

She states that we are behind the U.S. when it comes to biofuels. We are and that is because the former government did not get it done during the last 13 years. Therefore, could she comment on that?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for the compliment.

We are not talking about a problem that touches only Canada. We are talking about a problem that touches not only the hemisphere but the whole earth. What has happened to people elsewhere will happen to us.

I talked about the rise in food prices. I am not a specialist in chemicals or in the environment. However, I read the newspapers and I listen to the media. The media has said for the last two weeks that it is important for us to look at the alternatives. I am not saying we have the right answers. Far from it. My colleague from Quebec mentioned a while ago that we had to do more research and in different avenues.

For my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, yes, the Liberals were in power for 13 years and we looked at several answers. He may recall that the leader of our party was, at the time, minister of the environment. He was in charge of putting together an agreement, the Kyoto agreement, which took place in Montreal.

However, the Conservative government has been in government for two years now. Therefore, the Conservatives cannot always throw back the argument about what happened before. We are asking the Conservative government to govern and get something done.

•(1230)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, quite specifically, the amendment we are debating right now is an oversight amendment, which would give us more control over the process of the development of the biofuels approach in Canada, the bioenergy approach. Why will her party not support the amendment? It will give us the time to deal with the issues as they come up and ensure that the government acts correctly?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles has 30 seconds to respond.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I cannot respond to that in 30 seconds. It is very complicated.

If I may, I would like to answer my colleague at some other time. However, I would like to say this about the oversight function.

[*English*]

One has to be very careful. The government has oversight functions that look after it, but it is so secret that the oversight does not work in any case.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this debate is primarily about the NDP's two motions

concerning Bill C-33. The NDP's first motion is two-pronged. Part (a) seeks to correct part of the English wording. Part (b) of the first motion seeks to give the governor in council the authority to regulate the amount of greenhouse gas emissions allowed in the production of biofuels, to prohibit the use of GMOs in grains used in biofuel production and to restrict the use of arable land for production of biofuel crops.

Part (b) could render the entire motion out of order, first, because it broadens the scope of the initial bill, and second, because we are at the report stage.

With respect to the latter consideration, we are against Motion No. 1, should it prove to be in order, because management of a province's agricultural land is under Quebec's jurisdiction.

The NDP's second motion seeks to improve a clause added by the committee, which states that "a thorough analysis of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production in Canada" should include a review of the progress made in the preparation and implementation of the regulations enacted by the governor in council.

If the second motion is in order, we should support it, especially since the Bloc Québécois put forward a motion with a similar purpose in committee. This amendment will lead to a more complete assessment of the impact of biofuel production and the regulations that govern it.

Bill C-33 addresses some of the concerns of the Bloc Québécois, which is urging that we free ourselves from our dependence on oil, that the transportation sector make an effort to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and that we promote the use of forestry and agricultural waste.

With regard to biofuel substitutes for oil, the most interesting avenue at present is the production of ethanol from cellulose. This process, still in the experimental stage and deserving of more support for research, uses a plentiful and inexpensive raw material and, more importantly, would recycle vegetable matter that is currently unusable. It would also provide new markets for the forestry and agriculture industries.

The concept of using raw materials that can be produced more readily is gaining support.

Thus, research is being focused on the production of ethanol from non-food crops and materials rich in cellulose. The development of an efficient process for converting cellulose to ethanol could promote the use of raw materials such as agricultural waste and straw as well as forestry residues, primarily wood chips, and even fast-growing trees and grasses.

Still in the experimental stage, ethanol made from cellulosic materials such as agricultural and wood waste cannot yet compete with traditional products. However, it does represent a very interesting possibility.

Government Orders

Quebec can cut its oil dependency in half within 10 years. The Bloc Québécois estimates that this huge shift requires that six objectives be met: quickly help Hydro-Québec regain a margin of flexibility; continue encouraging individuals, businesses and industries to give up using oil; reduce fuel consumption in passenger transportation; stop the increase in consumption in goods transportation; reduce consumption of petroleum products as fuel; and make Quebec a centre for clean energy and clean transportation.

The goal is to increase residential efficiency by 18% and reduce consumption by 15% in 10 years. To find more energy, we need to start by looking at the energy we waste.

●(1235)

Using fairly simple methods to improve thermal efficiency, we can reduce the difference between older homes and newer homes by 65%, according to the federal Department of Natural Resources.

Our second proposal is to eliminate the use of fuel oil in homes, businesses and industry. The 10-year goal would be to reduce by half the number of homes that heat with fuel oil and to reduce by 45% the use of oil as a source of energy in industry.

We also recommend curbing fuel consumption for the intercity transport of goods. Unlike intercity transport, for which it is possible to develop alternatives to trucking, trucks will always be difficult to replace in an urban environment. However, in many cases, the vehicles used for this type of transport are unnecessarily large.

Furthermore, we must reduce the amount of fuel used to transport people. There are two paths to achieving our objectives. On one hand, we must come up with an efficient alternative to the use of personal cars in urban settings and, on the other hand, we must reduce the amount of fuel consumed by cars.

Another objective is to decrease the proportion of oil relative to all fuels. The Bloc Québécois recommends that current oil-based fuels have a 5% biofuel content.

Furthermore, we recommend that Quebec—a leader in some areas of transportation and clean energy—become a leading centre for transportation and clean energy.

By further consolidating our assets in such sectors as public transportation, hydroelectricity and wind power, as well as substantially increasing support for research and development in niches related to clean technologies, in which Quebec has competitive advantages, Quebec could have an enviable position in the post-petroleum era because it would be less vulnerable to oil crises and it could export leading edge technology.

Over the next 10 years, achieving these objectives would benefit Quebec in many ways. Quebecers could benefit from a 32.8% reduction in oil consumption in Quebec and a reduction of close to 50% in oil used for power generation in Quebec, which would drop from 38% to 20%. They would also benefit from a 21.5% reduction in Quebec's greenhouse gas emissions, and a savings of \$3.2 billion on the cost of importing oil into Quebec.

As my Bloc Québécois colleague was saying earlier, the bill does not go far enough. It is nonetheless a major step forward for the people of Quebec and Canada.

●(1240)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise again on this particular issue. I put forward the amendments to this legislation and one amendment has been accepted. The amendment would provide more oversight to the process that my colleague on the agricultural committee put forward as an amendment. The amendment would provide a two year review and would enhance the bill by providing more review over the actual regulations as put forward by the government. As I have pointed out before, that is a very significant thing.

Some great work has been done in Quebec. The REAP institution, located in Quebec City, demonstrated at committee that even the move toward cellulosic ethanol would really not be cost effective or as potentially greenhouse gas useful by simply converting cellulosic material, whether it be wood or waste from agricultural processes, to thermal energy. Thermal energy can be used in homes and commercial businesses to replace other fossil fuel products, and in the case of Quebec, for instance, replacing liquefied natural gas, a product we are now looking at importing from Russia or Qatar.

My colleague said her party is supporting the bill, but you really are not. You are supporting a bill that would enable the government to do exactly what it wants with the regulations right now. It would enable the government to reward whoever it wants, with Canadian tax dollars, to go ahead with biofuels rather than having some conditions attached which would give the real winners in the biofuel industry the leg up they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like the hon. member for Western Arctic to resist the temptation to use the second person and make a greater effort at using the third person.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has the floor.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, to answer my colleague opposite, currently everything to do with cellulosic ethanol is still in the embryonic stages of research. The Bloc Québécois and I believe that this is the avenue we should be taking. We must invest in research and development in order for this avenue to become cost-effective in the near future. What is more, as I concluded in my speech earlier, I would say that the bill does not go far enough to satisfy the Bloc Québécois. Nonetheless, it is a major step forward and that is why my colleagues and I will support it.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things in which I am most interested, above and beyond the merits of the bill, is the development put forward by my colleague from Western Arctic that would force the government to allow the regulations to be scrutinized by the committee.

Government Orders

I raise this only because it is a rare and unusual thing, and I hope even a precedent setting thing. All too often Parliament debates the text of a bill, the legislation itself, and gives it great scrutiny, but then it is up to the government to put in place the regulations, which have very little or no oversight at all. Will the hon. member agree with me that this is a very positive development and a precedent that should be implemented or used in other pieces of legislation as well?

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska previously mentioned the possibility of going to committee and reviewing the way the House currently manages bills. I agree with the position he took in his speech this morning.

• (1245)

[English]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak once again to this bill. I just want to say that the amendment that we are proposing, that this bill goes to a special committee to ensure that any regulations or any rules that affect biofuels undergo careful scrutiny, is very important.

This would provide the precautionary approach. It is another safeguard. I did table an amendment in committee that was adopted, which basically stated that within six months after this bill comes into force and every two years after that, there would be a comprehensive review of environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production.

This amendment puts that kind of precautionary approach ahead of this taking place, and my amendment ensures that we really scrutinize the whole use of biofuels in Canada.

I do have a concern that the other amendments that I did propose in committee did not go through, and that is one of the reasons why we are here today debating this bill. I would just like to mention some of the amendments that were rejected.

Had they been accepted, this bill would have prohibited the use of genetically-modified grains, oilseeds or trees for biofuel production, except for those genetically-modified grains, oilseeds or trees that were used for biofuel production in Canada before 2008.

It would have prohibited the use of lands protected by federal legislation and other sensitive biodiverse lands for biofuel production. It would also have preserved the biodiversity of lands used in biofuel production and prohibited the importation of grains or oils for use in biofuel production.

Those were some of the amendments that I had proposed that were rejected. If we look today, we see that apparently Husky Oil, which has a plant in Lloydminster and Minnedosa, is thinking of relying entirely on corn for its ethanol production, thereby not really giving any benefit to the farmers in Manitoba, and opening up the possibility of using corn imported from the United States to fuel these two plants, completely bypassing the primary producer in Canada. I think this is wrong.

If we look at the chain reaction of what is happening, maybe it is oversimplified but this gives us an idea of what is happening in biofuel production in the world, we see that, for example, there is

more crop land being turned over to produce corn for biofuels in the United States, at the same time displacing land that has been used traditionally for soybean production, which then increases the acreage for soybean production, for example, in Brazil, which displaces cattle ranching, which then forces the ranchers to cut down the precious rainforest to have grazing land for cattle.

In all of this whole cycle, I cannot see a positive effect on greenhouse gas emissions. That is just one example of what is happening.

We are not opposed to biofuels in general because the concept can be a good one. For example, in my province of British Columbia, there is a company that is now in production utilizing waste from restaurants to produce biodiesel, which is certainly a way of using the oil that normally would be thrown out. So there are ways of harnessing the energy for positive purposes.

What this bill does without any amendments is it gives our Prime Minister and this government basically a blank cheque to implement their proposals for biofuels, which do not take into consideration the negative effects on the environment or the increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

What I would like to do is just focus on a couple of articles that have come across my desk in the last couple of days. One is from the *Malaysia Sun*, March 23, 2008, and it basically stated that the head of Nestlé, the world's biggest food and beverage company, has sent out a warning against biofuels. The chairman and chief executive of the company said that the growing use of crops such as wheat and corn to make biofuels was putting world food supply in jeopardy. He said that the current subsidies being handed out to biofuel makers were unacceptable while the price of maize, soya and wheat was being driven higher. He also said that land for cultivation and water sources were under threat.

• (1250)

An article in Friday's *Ottawa Citizen* stated:

It is increasingly difficult to mesh the happy talk about biofuel production in Canada with what is going on in the rest of the world.

The article goes on to state:

Now, food supply is a complex thing. But it's becoming clear biofuel production is playing a role in shrinking that supply.

While the biofuel industry is not the main reason for food prices going up, it is one of the contributing factors, which is all the more reason for us to look at the bill and look at the policy. As we present a policy for the future, we should be looking at the long range effects and not at the immediate short term gains that may or may not be there.

If we look at what has been happening in the United States, we see that something like 58 proposed ethanol plants are on hold now because the Americans are questioning where the industry is leading them. I think we have a golden opportunity in Canada to do this right and if we look at the amendment, and if it is accepted, that will be a positive step in that direction.

Government Orders

Numerous statements have been made by civil societies and others that are questioning the whole direction of biofuel production. I would like to quote from a joint statement by the Tamil Nadu Environment Council and Equations, India, which states:

Demand for water is growing along with the economy. Agrofuel plantations will only increase competition for water, and ultimately impact food resources.

We seek a ban on any scale of monocultures and plantations for the sake of agrofuel production.

That is from an organization in India which emphasizes, from what it says, that maybe we are not going in the right direction.

Another headline from a November 2007 article reads, “An African Call for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Developments”. The article states:

We, the undersigned members of African civil society organisations, as well as organisations from other parts of the world, do urgently call for a moratorium on new agrofuel developments on our continent. We need to protect our food security, forests, water, land rights, farmers and indigenous peoples from the aggressive march of agrofuel developments, which are devouring our land and resources at an unbelievable scale and speed.

We should be looking at that statement as a warning that if we proceed down the road, which our neighbours to the south have in utilizing corn, for example, in the production of ethanol, we can see the tremendous impact that it has on our resources, the environment and on water in particular.

It is not only articles written by civil societies. Scientists and science institutes are questioning this from the scientific point of view. For example, Mr. Robert Watson, scientific advisor to DEFRA and former chair of the IPCC in the United Kingdom, states:

It would obviously be totally insane if we had a policy to try and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions through the use of biofuels that’s actually leading to an increase in the greenhouse gases from biofuels.

Research shows that when we take into account all of the input costs and the transportation, there is actually an increase in greenhouse gases from biofuel production.

I would like to close by quoting from the recommendations of REAP Canada. It is a study called, “Analyzing BioFuel Options: Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Efficiency and Costs”.

The organization made the following recommendations to our committee about Bill C-33:

This bill should be withdrawn for 3 reasons:

1. It won’t appreciably reduce GHG emissions.
2. It is not a “Made in Canada” solution.
3. The legislation does not demonstrate fiscal responsibility.

This is a scientific institute that has studied the whole question of biofuels and it is saying that we should look at this from a precautionary point of view.

I would hope that my colleagues in the House will support—

● (1255)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the NDP raised a number of issues around Bill C-33.

On the weekend, we met with some embassy people from Africa. When we were speaking to them about food prices, we found that in Canada we need to be concerned about how we relate agriculture to food prices. By February 3, Canadians have paid for all of their food. It would appear to me that one of the sustaining factors that keeps us alive has been paid for by February 3. I would suggest that in Canada we have a cheap food policy.

I want to reiterate that Canada is the second largest contributor to food aid in the world. Canada plays its part because we recognize how crucial and significant it is to support and help supply foreign aid to those who are more vulnerable than us. I believe I read, and I may be corrected, that if Canada were to provide its resources to biofuels, we would still use 95% of our crop land for the production of food.

We have had projections of 20% by 2020 and 60% to 70% by 2050. No other government has done that because no other government has taken the initiative. I am wondering how much the member feels we are contributing to the price of food through our agriculture in Canada. Does he believe we should look at new technologies for biofuels so it is not all about agriculture products?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe we should be looking at other technologies in the area of biofuels, which is why I and my party are saying that we are not against the concept of biofuels. We are questioning the way in which Bill C-33 would implement biofuel production in Canada.

With regard to Canada and the production of food, although we do contribute to food aid in the world, someone recently implored Canada to do more. I believe it was a man who said that Canada was actually not contributing enough, that the current government was not taking the initiative internationally to work with various NGOs and other countries to alleviate the suffering that is being caused by a lack of food.

It has been quite some time since we have reached the goal that was set years ago of 0.7% for international aid. Maybe now, with a food crisis in the world, this is a chance for all parties to really help with the scarcity of food in this world.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think anyone can underestimate the food crisis. Our dollar has gone up considerably over the last number of years and that has sheltered Canadians a bit, but with the high cost of everything we have in this country, our consumer price index, for instance, keeps out energy and food costs so that Canadians do not even get the message about what is happening in this country.

● (1300)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I did not quite get the question that my colleague was going to ask but I believe it had something to do with the cost of food.

It is true that food prices are rising in the world. Biofuels are one reason for this but not the main reason. There are obviously other reasons. I believe if a biofuel policy were looked at—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I must resume debate at this point.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Government Orders

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to join the debate on Bill C-33 dealing with biofuels. I have been following this with great interest as it winds its way through the House of Commons. I want to compliment my colleagues from British Columbia Southern Interior and Western Arctic for providing great guidance to our caucus on the subject of biofuels.

I should note that the NDP government in my home province of Manitoba is advancing biofuels a great deal in its greenhouse gas strategies.

I should begin my remarks by saying that the NDP is not opposed to the idea of shifting from fossil fuels to biofuels in a controlled environment with the caveat that we investigate the real benefit and the real gain and that we go into this with our eyes open.

My colleague from B.C. Southern Interior tried to move an amendment at the committee to state the basic principles associated with this bill so that the country would know what it is we seek to achieve and thereby, right in the bill, we would have a yardstick by which we could measure success or failure. In other words, if we are going in with our eyes open, we want to know that the objective of the bill is to ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions and shift from fossil fuels to renewable fuels.

I will speak briefly to that because I want to speak about the amendment and the subamendment primarily, which are being debated here today. We note that the biomass debate being criticized by those involved in food security is largely looking at the renewable fuels, ethanol made from grains, et cetera. We really need to couch this whole debate in the notion that there are other non-food agricultural residues where we could draw biofuels from, such as wheat straw and forest biomass. Even sugar cane grown elsewhere is less of a risk to the food security issue than some of the ideas of using corn, grain and things that could otherwise be used for food.

Having said that we are not against the idea of biofuels and we want to be able to support this bill, we also want amendments made so that Canadians can feel confident that we are going in the right direction. I am very proud of the amendment by my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior who succeeded in getting a bi-annual review of the legislation. I believe he introduced it as subclause (8). It reads:

Within one year after this subsection comes into force and every two years thereafter, a comprehensive review of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production in Canada should be undertaken....

I am surprised the legislation did not have that obligatory mandatory review. I am relieved now that it does.

However, my colleague from Western Arctic has taken it further today, which is what we are really debating today. We have now qualified this review with a subamendment. This is quite revolutionary. I am actually very proud of my colleague from Western Arctic. I hope what he is doing here today passes and sets a precedent for all other subsequent legislation. What he has done today is introduce language that says not only should the environment and economic aspects of biofuel production be reviewed on a semi-annual or bi-annual basis but we should also review the progress made in the preparation and implementation of the regulations referred to in subsection (140).

It is revolutionary because it sets a very virtuous precedent in that we agonize over the legislation. We debate it in full at all stages and at the committee stage we hear witnesses and then, when the bill passes, we hand it back over to the government and the government sets all the regulations. This is where the devil is in the details.

●(1305)

My colleague suggests that the standing committee should also have a go at the regulations. Let me walk members through how important these regulations are going to be in the biofuel legislation that we are talking about here.

The regulations, which normally the government sets without any consultation from elected members of Parliament, are going to be dealing with things like the adverse effects of the use of the fuel on the environment, human life or human health, and on the combustion technology or the emission control equipment of vehicles, et cetera. These are critical aspects and speak to the very heart of this bill. The regulations will be made unilaterally and arbitrarily by the government unless my colleague's amendment succeeds today.

I can safely say that the NDP will be supporting this bill if this amendment goes through. We will then have some comfort that the regulations will not take us all off guard; that we will not blindly vote for this bill and then be unpleasantly surprised by the regulations.

Regulations that also will come up in the context of this bill will relate to the quantities of releases, production capacity, technology or techniques used, and feed stocks used. In the case of workings or undertakings, they will relate to the date of commencement of their operation, et cetera, and the substance or the fuel source, the commercial designation and the physical and chemical properties of the fuels.

These are the thousands and thousands of details that will come into force and effect with the regulations, but by that time it will be out of our hands. We are elected representatives charged with the responsibility of testing the veracity and integrity of pieces of legislation, but we get no opportunity to deal with the regulations. I know of no other example whereby the regulations actually come before a committee to go through the same sort of oversight and testing.

That is why today my colleague has brought forward the most common sense amendment we could possibly imagine. I hope his constituents back home and the voters of Canada acknowledge this. He is saying that if the devil is in the details and the substance of the bill is in the regulations, why then do we not look at the regulations?

The rest is academic, frankly, because the real implementation, the real nuts and bolts, the real meat and potatoes, is in the regulations, and the scrutiny of regulations is something that is rarely done in this place. There is a committee called the scrutiny of regulations committee. I do not know if it has ever been convened. I think I was put on it one time just to humour me or to keep me out of trouble or something, but it is one of those committees that nobody ever does anything on, and this amendment would provide for actually analyzing the implementation regulations associated with what could be a very important bill.

Government Orders

I have noticed the interest in this amendment. I understand that there have been some fairly sympathetic comments in the speeches made about the notion. We should stay relevant and stay on topic. We are not really engaged in a broad, sweeping debate about the merits of the bill. It has passed second reading. It has passed the committee stage. We are now at the third reading report stage of the bill, with an amendment at the report stage.

The amendment is in order because it deals with another amendment. This could not possibly have been done at committee because the amendment that passed at committee is what is being amended now. This is the technical detail that allows us to dwell on this today.

Some of these regulations that may come forward will be dealing with the blending of fuels. This is one of the controversial things: the source and the origin of the fuel product. Whether it comes from grain or corn that would otherwise be used in food products is what is creating the controversy and the apprehension among the people concerned with global food security.

In actual fact, in Canada and the United States an awful lot of corn that is produced does not go to food directly. It is used to make Coca-Cola. Corn is grown in abundance throughout North America for the corn syrup, really, for the sugar content. A lot also goes to animal feed, but certainly some does come into the food chain for our grocery store shelves.

● (1310)

I am running short of time, but let me say that part of the problem is that we should not be encouraging an industry that will be counterproductive. Some of the authorities on this subject caution us that if we go in that direction we will not be achieving what we set out to achieve.

In the first place, we should have passed the amendment by my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior, which said that we should clearly state the principles in the bill. Sadly, that failed. However, with the amendment that did pass, with a review within one year and then reviews every two years thereafter, at least now we will be able to monitor and track the progress of this bill and nip it in the bud if in fact it is being counterproductive.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that good presentation on the nature of our concerns. Our concerns lie with the enabling nature of this bill on this very important topic. We tried very diligently in the agriculture committee to put forward conditions that should be attached to the kinds of directions we are to take. If we are trying to do something to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country, then the bill should make that part of the solution.

This particular work on biofuels was also part of Bill C-30. Within the larger bill there were opportunities to set the conditions within the industry for the direction that we are taking. This bill, without Bill C-30, has none of that. This is a piece of work that was stripped bare and rammed through the committee against the good advice of many people who support the biofuel industry, and now we are ramming it through Parliament and we do not have a chance to take a look at the meat, the regulations.

I can support this bill if we have the opportunity to make sure that we do a good job for Canadians. I would ask my colleague to give me some of the reasons why the Liberals and the Conservatives might not want to support this simple effort to make sure that we do the right thing here.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question put forward by my colleague from Western Arctic. For years, I have tried to figure out what motivates the Liberals and the Bloc. Reason and logic do not usually drive them. They are usually motivated by some other factors that I do not pretend to understand.

Let me simply say that it would be crazy “if we had a policy to try and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions through the use of biofuels that’s actually leading to an increase in greenhouse gases”. That would be the kind of thing that would be so counterproductive and counterintuitive that if, after two years, we decided that was the direction we were going in, the review hopefully would reveal it. That was a quote from Professor Robert Watson, the chief scientific adviser to the World Bank.

Another speaker on this subject, Vandana Shiva, the director of the India-based Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, said, “If...more and more land [is] diverted for industrial biofuels to keep cars running, we have two years before a food catastrophe breaks out worldwide”.

We are seeing riots in the streets. If what we are doing is contributing to an international food security crisis, then in the review that my colleague fought for and won in this bill, I am proud to say, it hopefully would be brought to our attention at that time and we could again nip it in the bud.

What I am particularly pleased about, though, is that, should this amendment today pass, in the review process of this bill we now would be analyzing the regulations with the same scrutiny and oversight with which we analyze the original bill. To me, that is revolutionary. That is a breakthrough.

If we do that on this bill, I think we will have set a precedent that will serve Parliament well for the rest of its life and also will serve all parliaments to come. They might not build a statue of my colleague on the grounds of the Parliament Buildings for this, but surely he will be remembered in the annals of parliamentary history as the guy who made a breakthrough in the way that we do things in the best interests of the people who voted us here.

● (1315)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to join in the discussion today of Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, regarding biofuels.

As we have been hearing, this is very important legislation. The amendment before us today is also very important, as it relates to how we do the business of the people of Canada in this place.

Government Orders

The intent of Bill C-33 is to enable the government to regulate renewable content and fossil fuels and proceed with plans to mandate a 5% renewable content in gasoline by 2010 and a 2% average renewable content in diesel and heating oil by 2012. This is something that we have supported in this corner of the House, although we supported it with reservations in the hope that we might see some important changes made when it was before the committee.

My colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior and my colleague from Western Arctic have worked hard to see improvements made to the legislation before it came back to the House. Unfortunately, that work was only partially successful. That is the reason we have this amendment before us today.

I should say that in committee there was some success, in that my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior managed to ensure that a parliamentary review would be undertaken every two years on the environmental and economic impacts resulting from the biofuel industry. That was a very significant addition to the legislation.

It is certainly something that needed to be there, especially given the changing scene regarding biofuels and the concerns that are being raised more intensely with every passing day, it seems, about the effect of this industry and these fuels on our planet and on food production in particular. Achieving that review at committee as an amendment to the legislation was a very important contribution to the debate around Bill C-33 and will have an important and lasting effect should this legislation ultimately pass.

The other problem, however, is that the other amendments introduced by the NDP and my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior did not get through the committee. They were very significant as well, in that they would have ensured that Canadian farmers benefited from any federal investment in the biofuel industry by the prohibiting of imported grains and oils for the production of biofuels. These amendments would have made sure that what is used in the biofuel industry is produced here in Canada.

The other part of the amendments that unfortunately was lost at committee called for the protection of the natural biodiversity of the environment from contamination by genetically modified trees and seeds. We have seen over and over again the concern about genetically modified foods being grown in Canada. There is a particular concern about the use of genetically modified seed and the effect that will have on agriculture in Canada. Given the interest in producing for biofuels, we wanted to make sure that there was some limitation on genetically modified seed and trees being used. Unfortunately, that did not make it through the committee either.

Finally, my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior tried to ensure that prohibiting the exploitation of sensitive biodiverse regions for growing crops for biofuel production was part of the legislation. That seems to be a very reasonable addition. It is something we should be concerned about when we are going down this road of biofuels, but sadly that did not make it through either.

The final and most blatant statement, I think, and the most important statement of all, was that food production should come first, before production for biofuels. We wanted to see that enshrined

in the legislation as a principle as well. That did not make it through the committee process.

These are all very serious issues that were raised by the NDP in the debate at committee and ours were all very reasonable and appropriate amendments to bring forward. I am sad that they did not get the support of the other parties to get them included in the legislation we are debating here today.

That being said, we are putting forward another amendment today at this stage of the debate. That amendment would ensure the scrutiny of the regulations related to the bill that are brought forward and would make sure that the appropriate committee of the House has that opportunity specifically to look at the regulations. We heard earlier from my colleague from Winnipeg that often the devil is in the details. When it comes to legislation, the details are often in the regulations.

• (1320)

That is why we believe it is important to pass this amendment. As well as having oversight of the overall environmental and economic impact of heading down the biofuels road, we want to make sure that we look specifically at the regulations that are brought forward by the government relating to this bill. That is extremely important. Often we do not pay the kind of attention that we should. Given the very serious concerns related to biofuels, it is important that we do that.

Without that kind of scrutiny, and given that this is broad enabling legislation, we worry that we are handing the government another blank cheque. The Conservative government seems to be very interested in those kinds of blank cheques. It seems to be very interested in promulgating legislation, guidelines and regulations that are big enough to drive a Mack truck through. We have seen this over and over again.

We saw this with Bill C-10. That bill was essentially about closing income tax loopholes, but also included a guideline around the film and video tax credit dealing essentially with the censorship of film and video production in Canada. It is a very broad guideline that gives the minister and the government very broad powers with respect to deciding, based on apparently their own personal tastes, what should or should not be funded when it comes to film and video production in Canada. We in this corner of the House and many people in the arts community and the film and video production community in Canada are concerned about that and are extremely upset about it. It is another example of putting a very broad guideline or regulation into a piece of legislation that would give the government broad powers to make decisions without being clear and transparent.

Government Orders

We have also seen this with respect to Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill. The bill includes similar broad powers for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration when it comes to dealing with immigration applications from people wishing to come to Canada. It gives the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the power to choose to ignore immigration applications. This is very inappropriate. The NDP has fought long and hard for an immigration system that is transparent, that is guided by clear regulations and clear policy. To give this kind of broad arbitrary power to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who can ignore immigration applications based on unknown decisions to us, such as personal preference or biases of the current government, seems unreasonable.

We see Bill C-33 as very broad legislation. It would essentially give the government a blank cheque to develop regulations around the biofuels industry. The NDP is very concerned about that. It should be more closely delineated. There should certainly be, at least as a bare minimum, more opportunity for scrutiny of the overall direction of the legislation and the impact it would have, as well as direct scrutiny of the regulations that are brought forward relating to it. That is what our amendment deals with today.

The whole question of biofuels is part of what some people are calling the perfect storm. In an article Gwynne Dyer wrote about the coming food catastrophe, he sees it as a piece of the perfect storm, related to population increase, related to the demand for food which is growing faster than the population, and to the changes in diet in countries like China and India where there is a growing middle class. It is related to global warming. Some countries are seeing changes in climate that affect their ability to grow food. Again there is the whole question of biofuels and whether they supposedly reduce carbon dioxide emissions, but because of the change in food growing patterns that they are evoking around the world, they actually may strongly increase carbon dioxide emissions. Biofuels may not be a solution to the problem, but in fact may make it worse.

• (1325)

Gwynne Dyer certainly sees all of these things coming together as the perfect storm. He quoted Professor Robert Watson, a former adviser to the World Bank, who said, "It would obviously be totally insane if we had a policy to try and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the use of biofuels that is actually leading to an increase in greenhouse gases".

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague's discussion. This is a very serious issue. As much as we are talking about the need to have a biofuels plan for Canada, we also have to place it in the international context in which we are living right now. We are facing a global food crisis and Canada certainly appears to be absent from this debate on the international stage. Canada does not appear to be showing any leadership because the government is apparently not interested in it.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what he thinks the implications are if leading countries like Canada are not stepping up to the plate at this time in terms of the global food crisis. What is it going to mean for further global instability, especially as the food riots we are starting to see in a number of countries begin to escalate?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is correct that we are seeing some very serious and troubling developments around the world. The food riots we have seen are certainly one example of it. There are the rising costs of grains and rice, for instance, around the world. I read one report that in Thailand farmers are actually sleeping in their fields to protect their rice crops from people going into the fields to steal them because rice is becoming so valuable. These are changes that are very disturbing.

I have seen the chain reaction that the drive to biofuels causes. It is an American example. U.S. farmers are selling one-fifth of their corn to ethanol production. That means that U.S. soybean farmers are switching to corn because they can make better money doing it. The Brazilian soybean farmers, in reaction to that, are expanding into cattle pastures to expand their production. The Brazilian cattlemen are being displaced further into the Amazon basin, leading to more rainforest being chopped down. All of these developments contribute to the development of greenhouse gas emissions. The chain is pretty direct and far extending. It extends around the world. The policy changes we make here have an effect all the way around the world because of this kind of chain reaction.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot of talk by the opposition about the price of food and whether or not we should be turning food into fuel.

Farmers in my riding, and I am sure a lot of agriculture producers in British Columbia where the member is from, have been struggling in recent years to make a living and finally, they are making some money on their crops to survive.

It has already been pointed out numerous times today that less than 5% of agriculture production is being used to produce fuel, which I think we would all agree is pretty minuscule. I am sure the member knows that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has recently authorized the removal of kernel visual distinguishability, KVD. This move by the minister will allow varieties of wheat, which I am sure will lead to other crops, to basically increase their yields in a huge way.

I would like to know if the member supports the initiative taken by this government that will allow farmers to increase their crop yields and therefore, profitability.

• (1330)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, in this corner of the House we have always been concerned about the income of farmers and agricultural producers across Canada. Sometimes we wonder if that commitment is shared by other parties in this House.

One of the key things we tried to do in committee was to make an amendment to the legislation that would protect Canadian farmers by ensuring that if there was going to be production of biofuels, it had to be done in Canada. There would be protection so that corn or wheat could not be imported into Canada to be used in Canadian plants that were producing biofuels. That was a measure that was intended to protect Canadian farmers. Unfortunately, other parties in this House turned it down.

Government Orders

It seems like a very reasonable amendment, one that tries to protect the place of Canadian farmers in this industry as it goes ahead. It is something which we feel very strongly about. Given the fact that the amendment was turned down, it really makes us question what the intentions are of the government and the other parties when it comes to this legislation.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the amendment that our party is trying to make on a very serious bill. It is important for a number of reasons. When we are talking about this amendment, which is about allowing a scrutiny of the government's actions and being able to examine the impacts of the increase in biofuel production, it is really important for us to look at how we came to this point.

When discussions were first made about biofuels, there was a general air of excitement. There certainly was in farm communities. I represent a farming district. There was the hope that we could find a new market, that we could actually start to bring fields into production. We have many fields that are fallow in our area, and it would be great if we had new markets for our domestic agriculture. There was certainly that component in terms of the agricultural rural perspective.

There was also very much a sense of our party's growing concern about global warming. The government party does not seem to share that concern. The government seems to think it is a direct threat on the expansion of the tar sands project. Most other people in the world would agree that global warming is a serious issue and needs to be addressed, and the best way to address it is actually by diverting us from the oil economy as opposed to simply throwing more subsidies into the Athabasca tar sands project and the political backers of the Conservative Party.

We looked at the issue of green fuels as certainly a way that most people were willing to examine, to support to help foster a new economy to get the biofuels industry off the ground. We are, however, seeing many, many disturbing implications from the success of the biofuels industry, and it certainly is a reason for us to pause and reflect and to examine. It is also incumbent upon us as legislators to make sure that there is ongoing reflection and examination of how this industry is going to continue to develop.

We need those checks and balances. If the New Democratic Party were asked if we should give a blank cheque to the Conservative government to carry on without scrutiny, we would certainly say no. It is not that we are opposed to the further development of biofuels, but we certainly do not trust the government without accountability, without clear checks and balances, without someone leaning over its shoulder to make sure that it is continuing to play by the rules, because we know that the government certainly has had a few problems in playing by the rules recently.

This is where the amendment would come in. The amendment is not to oppose the future development of biofuels, but to say we need some reflection. That would be a perfectly reasonable position.

A couple of serious impacts are beginning to take place in terms of the whole development of biofuels. In our domestic agricultural community, we are certainly seeing some up sides, in terms of increased payouts that are being paid to grain, of course, but there are major implications for our hog sector, for our cattle sector, for

anyone looking for feed. There is the international implication and what this means in terms of the global food supply. I am going to focus mainly on that. There is also the question of whether or not this is, as an article in *TIME* magazine said, basically an energy myth that there is something clean in biofuels as it is presently being pursued. The article actually refers to it as the clean energy scam. We have to be very clear about why we are putting hundreds of millions of dollars into developing an industry that may not actually be helping us environmentally at all and in fact may be hurting us. I would like to speak in terms of those three priorities.

On the first priority, I am seeing in my region a growing concern about the price of feed and inputs. If I ask any of the farmers what they would attribute that to, they will say simply ethanol production. It is very clear. There is clearly the impact and the effect is right there.

Last year our hog producers were paying maybe \$90 to \$100 for a ton of barley. Now they are paying \$140 and it could go up to \$200. We are in a situation where 10% of the hog capacity in this country is about to be culled. In fact, even worse, part of the culling program will lead to sterilized empty farms for three years. Anybody who accepts the payout will not be able to hold any hogs for three years. That is a very serious hit to the regional and rural economies of Canada. It is a very serious threat to farm based families that are losing their farms.

● (1335)

Cattle producers tell us they get the same price for cull cattle now as they did in 1986, but in 1986 they were able to fill their diesel tank on the farm and buy feed. What they would get for a cull animal now would not even begin to pay for feed. They are very concerned about the growing cost of feed. With the push to get ethanol based products and corn and other agricultural products, we see the impact on our primary producers, especially anyone who has animal livestock. That is why we need to have ongoing scrutiny to see the implications and effects of this.

When we look at this internationally, the picture becomes much starker. We are seeing international food riots. We hear talk about a growing crisis that will affect perhaps the entire economy of the world. People will go hungry because they cannot afford to pay for basis staples. When we look at any of the economists who speak on this, one of the clear factors they always continue to indicate the fact of increasing production and spending money for fuels rather than to feed people.

This is a very serious issue. It is so serious that it is bringing together traditionally conflicting views. For example, Jeffrey Sachs has accused Canada of ignoring its position as a potential world leader on this issue. I do not know if there has been a time that Jeffrey Sachs and I have ever agreed on an issue, but in terms of this issue, we do.

Where is Canada's leadership? Right now people around the world are going hungry. There are food riots under way. We are in a situation where we are seeing growing instability and we hear nothing in the House, nothing from the government, nothing from Canada as a former international leader on addressing this.

Government Orders

What are the problems? We are talking about global warming. We are talking about the continual move to take food out of food production and move it into fuels. When we do the math, again, we see the bloated North American and European economy living off the sufferings of the third world. *TIME* magazine pointed out that if we took one SUV and filled it with corn-based ethanol, the amount of corn that went into filling that one tank of gas would feed one person for an entire year. It is clearly a question of efficiency, the fact that we have taken so much valuable food land and moved it out. We see the stripping of the Amazon basin now to move into soybean production for fuel economy.

The government wants us to give it a blank cheque, wants us to allow it to continue to expand the biofuels economy and give subsidies to a biofuel plant in this riding and a subsidy to another riding, which ridings are predominantly on the government side—

An hon. member: They would never do something like that, would they?

Mr. Charlie Angus: This is like the biofuels equivalent of in and out, except it is into government ridings. We see the Conservatives throw cheques around. They stand and say that we should let them do it without any scrutiny, that they should not bring this to the Canadian people and that the people should trust the government. We are in an international food crisis and the government is missing—

Mr. Mike Wallace: Come on, Charlie.

• (1340)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member only has 50 seconds left in his speech. If members want to ask some questions or make some comments, if they could just hold off for about 50 seconds, they can do so then.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your appearance to ask members to remember that this is the decorum of Parliament and to rise up and work with the New Democratic Party on something that is very simple, which is the need for scrutiny of the government's often shameless record. If the government had submitted to a bit of scrutiny before, it might not be in the trouble it is now.

We are looking to help the Conservatives. We are looking to keep them from getting themselves in further trouble. However, at the end of the day, we have to go back to the fact that this is a very serious issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Hopefully we can have a little more decorum for the question and comment portion. The hon. member's time has expired for his speech, so I will entertain questions and comments.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for reducing what was a fairly complicated debate down to its core, down to its visceral roots.

I have a quote that I would like him to take note of and comment on. This is by a woman named Vandana Shiva, the director of the

Indian-based Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resources. The quote is:

If...more and more land (is) diverted for industrial biofuels to keep cars running, we have two years before a food catastrophe breaks out worldwide...It'll be 20 years before climate catastrophe breaks out, but the false solutions to climate change are creating catastrophes that will be much more rapid than the climate change itself.

If we are triggering a non-virtuous cycle here, is it not that much more critical that we review it on a regular basis so we can nip it in the bud, if in fact we are contributing to the problem instead of the solution?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that statement speaks to the importance of what we are trying to discuss here, and that is the need for scrutiny in terms of where this biofuel plan for Canada goes. The question has to be raised at this point.

We all began at a point of believing that the biofuel so-called solution would help us to deal with global warming and would help us bring new farmland into production. However, the evidence overwhelmingly now suggests that something else much darker and unanticipated has happened. There are numerous signs that we are moving toward a global food catastrophe. This is a very serious issue. We are talking also about the fact that many of the great promises of clean carbon are about as reliable as the whole promise of clean coal, which is not clean at all.

The impacts on global warming and on the third world in terms of a food crisis have to be addressed, yet we have a government that says it does not want to have further scrutiny down the road. It wants to have a blank cheque. It wants to continue to push the biofuels economy, just like it has pushed the Athabasca tar sands. The government believes that a certain segment of this society is worth looking after, pampering and ensuring that every one of their little needs are met. Meanwhile the rest of society is being cut loose, shipped down the river along with the working families, the working poor, our first nations. Now people internationally are looking to Canada for leadership in terms of this global food crisis and they are hearing nothing but radio silence from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this debate back a little to the procedure that we have followed so far in the House with the bill. The billions of dollars that the government would spend on this was portrayed as an environmental concern directly related to greenhouse gas emissions, but the bill went to the agricultural committee. It only had that scrutiny.

The scrutiny it had was with the interest groups that were most likely to benefit monetarily from the process that was to be put in place. What the bill needs is the scrutiny of those who are concerned about the environment.

When we have a bill in front of us that could allow corn ethanol imported from the United States with a higher greenhouse gas emission characteristic than if we left the doggone gas in the vehicle, does the government not think this is important enough to have a debate about in the House of Commons?

Government Orders

● (1345)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, again, as my hon. colleague says, this is a very practical suggestion we have made, to allow this proposal to be scrutinized as it goes forward, but the government is not interested in that.

The government purports to say it is a friend of farmers. We could ask the farmers in southern Ontario what they think about the heavily subsidized corn and grain from the U.S. getting dumped in Canadian markets again and again, upsetting any kind of international standard for food and basic grains.

Why not work with us to ensure that our primary producers will not be overly impacted? Further, why not ensure that at the end of the day, if a biofuels economy happens, that it meets what it was meant to meet, which is to address greenhouse gases, and that it is not simply a make-work project for certain ridings to get large biofuels plants, which rely on subsidized corn that is dumped in from the U.S.?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the government brought the biofuels bill to committee, it received very little to no scrutiny whatsoever. I believe motions were brought forward that the debate should be limited, if at all. For a bill that will impact Canadian farmers and Canadian food prices and now with the increasingly a global concern on what has happened with commodity shares and prices around the world, there is an important element and a lack of transparency in what the government is attempting to do.

We have to understand, and it is fundamental, the government is choosing to use policy and taxpayer dollars to push a certain solution from its perspective. Any solution proposed to the complicated issue of climate change, we all know, needs to be given some thorough scrutiny. It needs to be addressed, analyzed and understood for what it is or is not.

With the bill, the government is essentially asking for a blank cheque from Parliament and Canadians to go forward and spend money on biofuels, be it corn, ethanol or others, without the scrutiny of Parliament and without the scrutiny of the Canadian people. There are many issues to choose from on which Canadians have lost faith with the government, but if any issue represents it best, it is the issue of the environment.

When we ask Canadians do they trust the Conservative Party, the Prime Minister and his so-called Minister of the Environment to deal with the environmental challenges we face, the overall answer is no. Whether it was specific climate change legislation that did little or nothing to affect the tar sands in northern Alberta or whether it was announcements like we heard this weekend, which get at only a small fraction of the problem and the government pretends it has solved the whole thing, Canadians are right and justified in feeling skeptical about the proposals that come forward from the government. It has a track record. In two and a half years, we have had little to no legislation to deal with the environment. I am my party's environment critic and I know. We have waited for legislation to come forward. We have waited and pushed initiatives with the government. We have said that this issue is too important to lay at the feet of the political spin doctors. This has to be dealt with by

Parliament in a conscientious and sincere way. Instead, we have seen this thing being used as a ping-pong ball, back and forth.

I can remember the environment minister saying that all he had to do was be a bit better than the former environment minister, now leader of the Liberal Party, or to perhaps inoculate the debate politically. These are not exactly high aspirations for a government when dealing with one of the most important issues to Canadians. All considerations are political. All considerations are partisan. This has to stop. We have to find ways that Parliament can work together, and the NDP has proposed, on several occasions and on several different issues, ways to do that.

The process was used for the bill is important. Clearly, it is identified as climate change legislation. It is identified as a potential solution to the debate, and biofuels have a role in the debate on climate change. Biofuels are evolving and changing as we speak. The information we are learning about them and the global awareness of the issue is increasing. I believe Canadians are onside and want to encourage governments to join with them in partnership, to join with them to find these solutions.

Let us look at the way the government has handled the bill. First, it takes an environment bill and moves it over to the agriculture committee, similar to its immigration bill that was shuffled to the finance committee. At some point, people have to ask what exactly is the government trying to hide when it does not use the obvious and logical choice for sending these bills to the places that matter, where the groups that are involved, the advocates and the members of Parliament who are most familiar with the issue can deal with it instead of this shell game that goes on back and forth.

The connection between using certain food products in fuel is one that needs to be debated and discussed. That is obvious. The analysis has to be done. We need to have a full and proper understanding of what it means. In that connection, it is important for us to establish what the actual assessment is by government, what the effect will be on our economy and what the effect will be on the producers who raise food for our tables, on both sides, not just the grain producers but, on the other side of the equation, those who purchase grain to raise livestock.

When we ask the government to do simple greenhouse gas assessments, if this is supposed to be some sort of panacea or big part solution, we will spend a lot of money on this.

● (1350)

The government is proposing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on this, billions in fact. That is no small thing. That is money collected from hard-working Canadians and given to the government in some form of trust, although it is a trust that is being eroded, to get to the solutions that are necessary.

Government Orders

One would think that a government, a party like the Conservatives that pretended to run on accountability and transparency, particularly when it comes to tax dollars, would welcome the open invitation from New Democrats to have a fiscal analysis, to have a greenhouse gas analysis of what their bill actually proposes.

Instead, the government has said absolutely not. It will not analyze this thing on environmental terms, on financial terms, or on the impact to the market. It will throw this in and see what happens later. That just seems irresponsible at a fundamental level.

Take this in comparison to the bill that we finally got out of the environment committee, a climate change bill proposed by the leader of the New Democrats, which was filibustered for six weeks by the government: day in and day out, hour after hour of talking out the clock just to avoid the bill having a free and fair democratic vote.

At the end of the day, the piece in the bill the Conservatives filibustered, which is interesting, the piece they delayed, was the piece on transparency and accountability. It was a clause written into the bill to say that the government must come forward to Canadians, present its plans in an open and transparent way, and also be held accountable for any of the actions in spending that it did over the previous five years, going back on a forward looking plan.

This is something that has been lacking, whether it was Liberal administrations or this Conservative one. Canadians are lacking and losing faith in their government's ability to deal with the environment. They simply want us to find the solutions, use common sense and not pick political favourites on our path to those solutions but to use what every Canadian household does when spending a dollar. It is one choice or another. Do we get the kids a new soccer ball or do we put more money on the mortgage? Do we buy a little bit more expensive food or do we use something else? Those are assessments Canadians make every day. It is a natural thing. Every business makes those assessments, understanding the risk versus the benefit.

Yet, an enormous expenditure of Canadian tax dollars on this issue is changing week by week. This issue, eight, nine, ten months ago, was in a very different place as we have seen the market start to respond to the huge subsidies, particularly coming from the U.S., but also being modified in Europe. It is becoming one of the contributing factors to what is happening on the global food shortage.

Clearly, with strong condemnation from leaders and advocates of the international community for the government, one would think that it would welcome the opportunity that the New Democrats are offering, which is to say: "Give this a better look". Maybe, when the bill was drafted, there were different circumstances. Maybe markets were responding in a different way.

However, let us get this right because if we get it wrong, if we continue to get it wrong, if the Conservatives and Liberals continue to vote for things that do not pan out in the end, Canadians are throwing up their hands in a more consistent basis and saying, "Maybe there is not a role for government in this", and that is a true shame.

Industry has said to us time and again, even the oil and gas sector, the highest polluting sector of the country, "Just give us the fair and competent rules by which we can live by, address and to which we

can adapt", as opposed to this wavering target, this moving target of an ambition.

At one point the Conservatives talked about ambitious targets that meant nothing. They have to realize that at the end of the day, there are so many millions and millions at play. I see the environment minister encouraging me to send this to the environment committee. I think that is a wonderful idea. I would encourage him to join me in this. After six weeks of his filibustering of a real climate change piece of legislation, one would think that he would not come into the House with the hubris to say that New Democrats are doing anything but advocating for real and serious environmental change.

When it comes to the end of the game, the minister will be remembered as somebody who either did something or delayed and played games. It is coming to the end of the day when Canadians are counting on the government and Parliament and will be asking, "Did we do the right thing? Are we getting the right thing done?"

We must use our collective intelligence to promote solutions in which we can be confident. The amendment speaks to that. It should be encouraged by all parties. The bill should be given further consideration and understanding to know its true implications.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We have time for one question or comment before statements by members. The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say to the member from British Columbia who just spoke, thank goodness the bill is out of committee. I know the Conservative members were frustrated that it could not come out sooner.

I wonder if he would respond to the interesting suggestion levied by the Leader of the Opposition just yesterday. Apparently, gas taxes are not high enough for the Leader of the Opposition. He wants to raise gas taxes. Would the NDP member respond to that new Liberal proposal?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it is with some reluctance that I would even attempt to understand the Liberal position when it comes to the environment.

I do not claim to understand the strategy or base tactics that are used when approaching this issue. I think it has been a problematic issue but that is not what I am here for. I am not here to point out the faults of the Liberals. I am sure my hon. colleague, the minister, can do that well enough on his own. Sometimes Liberals do that well enough on their own, as well.

Statements by Members

My job is to promote the solutions in which we believe, solutions that we have verified with Canadians using the best research and intelligence that we can. We do not believe in slamming forward ideas not taking account of the shifting debate that goes on with something as sensitive as this issue and that the biofuels issue is part of the solution.

The government's prescription for this, to send it through a purely agricultural lens and not take a look at it through the environmental lens and not assess the greenhouse gas impacts of what is going on, we believe is irresponsible governance. We think there is an opportunity here to do the right thing, for Parliament to work together and find a solution with which all four corners can agree.

That is what Canadians expect of us. I believe it is what Canadians expect of us and I believe it is what Canadians hope from us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will move on to statements by members. The hon. member will have three minutes remaining after question period to conclude the questions and comments portion of his speech.

We will now move to statements by members, the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really sad that the debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-484, has been so focused lately on misrepresentation of the facts. This is a totally pro-choice bill in the true meaning of that phrase. It explicitly does not apply to elective abortion. It applies to a woman who wants to have a baby.

There is a serious gap in the law that allows a criminal to violently take that choice and the child she wants away from her, against her will, without her consent, and with violence.

People who support this bill understand the difference between a woman who goes to a doctor or clinic and says, "I'm pregnant and I don't want to be. Please help me", and the woman who is lying on the floor while being attacked with a fist, boot, knife, sword or gun, who is crying, screaming and pleading for her life, and the life of the unborn child that she wants.

Detractors of Bill C-484 can stand with the assailant if they wish, but I am standing with and for the woman and the child that she wants.

* * *

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the National Day of Mourning, a day held annually on April 28 to commemorate the workers whose lives have been lost or who have been injured in the workplace.

In Canada, some 786 employees die from work-related incidents each year, an average of 2 deaths every day.

From 1993 to 2006, 11,002 people lost their lives due to workplace incidents. Another 900,000 per year are injured or become ill. That is why making workplaces safer is, or should be, a daily effort.

On this National Day of Mourning, we ought to take the time to remember the dead, injured and ill. I therefore call upon the government to make a serious commitment to improve health and safety in the workplace in order to remedy this serious situation.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the National Day of Mourning, officially recognized by the federal government in 1991 and observed in 70 other countries. April 28 was chosen as an opportunity for employees and employers to honour those who have been killed, injured or suffer illness as a result of their work, and to recommit to improving workplace health and safety.

There are still on average two deaths per day due to a workplace accident. From 1993 to 2006, over 11,000 people lost their lives in accidents, and each year another 900,000 people are injured at work.

Events will be held throughout the day in honour of this National Day of Mourning. Workers are invited to light candles, and to wear black armbands and ribbons. The members of the Bloc Québécois will do everything they can to help improve health and safety for workers.

* * *

[*English*]

BRITISH COLUMBIA SOUTHERN INTERIOR COMMUNITIES

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are many people in my riding who are making a difference in their communities.

First of all, I would like to congratulate Mayor John Dooley and his council for hosting a successful local government conference in Nelson. Thanks also to the mayor for his tireless efforts on behalf of quality child care in my province.

In Osoyoos, I had the honour of attending a gala fundraising dinner sponsored by the Osoyoos Arts Council and I wish it all the best in its future endeavours. In Princeton, I co-sponsored a viewing of the film *Tableland* on local food security. Thanks to Ann Hughes and others, over 100 subscribers will soon be able to pick up locally grown fruit and vegetables once a month. I would also like to thank all from Kaslo and Oliver who came by our drop-in sessions and to Cindy and others for a tasty lunch in Ainsworth.

Statements by Members

Let me close by paying tribute to Nancy Anderson of New Denver, who recently passed away. Nancy was a well respected naturalist, who devoted her life to the environment and the preservation of the cultural heritage in her community. Thanks you Nancy for making our world a better place to live in.

* * *

BEEF INDUSTRY

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of the House the work of All County Feed and Grain Ltd. Co-owners Darryl Williams and Mark Kuglin are running a campaign to encourage people to buy beef raised by local farmers. I am proud of the fact that Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound is the second largest cattle producing riding in Canada and I fully support this campaign.

The truth is that whether it be tomatoes, apples or beef, food that comes from around the corner is healthy, safe and better tasting than the alternative. There are opportunities here for both businesses and individuals. The menus of the best restaurants now use locally grown meat and vegetables. Hopefully, hamburger stands at Sauble Beach, restaurants in Owen Sound, and bed and breakfasts in Tobermory will all proudly advertise locally grown beef and produce on their menus.

Eat local campaigns provide excellent rewards for health and well-being and they also provide a boost to our local economies. Canadian farmers provide the greatest quality food in the world. I stand up for our farmers. I encourage everyone to do the same.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to meet with a group of black veterans here in Ottawa. They were participating in interviews about their experiences as soldiers as part of the oral history project. The project's goal is to inform Canadians and young people that black people have also served honourably as part of Canada's armed forces.

[*English*]

Interviews occurred all over the country, including Montreal where black veterans Archie Greaves, Anthony Gilbert, Jean Maurice, Calvin Marshall, Roy Heron, Ken Jacobs, K. Robert Jones and Lloyd Husbands participated.

These stories need to be documented as they are missing chapters from Canadian history and when they die, we lose a library of experience and inspiration.

It was an honour to meet with these distinguished Canadian veterans and I wish their project much success.

* * *

• (1405)

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to attention that today is the National Day of

Mourning. It is on this day each year that we remember workers who have been killed, injured or suffer illness as a result of their duties at work.

Today, our thoughts and prayers go out to the families, friends and colleagues of the victims. No words can ease their pain. The best way we can honour the victims is by striving to create safer and healthier workplaces by striving to prevent accidents and injuries from happening.

I ask all hon. members to take the time to remember the workers who have lost their lives or have been injured on the job. Let us honour them by putting forth our best efforts to foster safer and healthier workplaces through continued education, awareness and cooperation. Let us prevent these needless tragedies from happening again.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE MERCURIADES

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since 1981, the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec has been holding the Mercuriades, a competition that recognizes and honours the success of Quebec-based businesses.

I am proud to congratulate two businesses based in Upton, a small municipality in my riding: the Théâtre de la Dame de Cœur and its president, Claude Marchesseault, and Richard Blackburn and René Charbonneau, who took first prize in the "Contribution to regional economic development" category.

I would also like to congratulate the winners of the "Coup de cœur" prize, Christian Champigny and Claudine Poirier, the owners of Ferme Champy, a business known for its production of organic sunflower oil. These prizes highlight the vitality of business people in Upton.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRATION

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Beauséjour recently announced that he and the Liberal Party of Canada believe that the registration of all firearms is essential to public safety.

[*English*]

Furthermore, he stated that rural communities like the ones he represents need to acknowledge the issues of a "few larger urban centres" over those of his own. Apparently he is not interested in what New Brunswickers really think.

[*Translation*]

He seems to care more about defending the interests of these "larger urban centres" than addressing the concerns of the people of his province.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

The Auditor General reported that the registry wasted taxpayer money and contained unreliable data. The Liberals continuously neglected proper gun control and instead spent \$1 billion on a failed, unnecessary registration system.

Our government will keep its promise to eliminate the flawed firearms registry. We believe in targeting criminals, not law-abiding hunters, recreational shooters or farmers who proudly support our economy and our communities.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the National Day of Mourning for persons killed or injured in the workplace.

Last year in Ontario, 378 workers died and over 333,000 claimed compensation for work related injuries.

To mark this occasion, the Canadian flag is being flown at half-mast on the Peace Tower in Ottawa and on all Government of Canada buildings across Canada.

It is a shame that the secretly commissioned report by the Conservative government would abolish the half-masting of the flag on this special day. The half-masting of the national flag is an honour and expresses a collective sense of sorrow shared by all Canadians.

We all need a reminder to work harder to prevent these deaths and injuries and keep our workers safe. There is no greater symbol of this than the half-masting of our flag.

The National Day of Mourning for persons killed or injured in the workplace deserves this recognition.

* * *

*[Translation]***TAXATION**

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the deadline for filing their income tax returns just a few days away, many Canadians will notice that not only are they paying less income tax this year, but they will also receive an additional rebate for last year's fiscal year.

Last weekend, seniors in my riding told me that they had personally benefited from both pension income splitting and the age credit increase, which are making life more affordable for those on a fixed income.

When it comes to helping Canadians, the choice is clear. The Liberals have no policy, no leadership and no plan for Canada. They have nothing but their ready-made indignation and their intent to raise taxes. As for the Bloc members, by voting against the budget and its tax cuts, they effectively voted against seniors in Quebec. Fortunately, they will always be in opposition.

The Conservative government is achieving real results that families can count on.

● (1410)

*[English]***NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING**

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this day, April 28, the National Day of Mourning, New Democrats honour our sisters and brothers who have lost their lives or suffered injury and illness in the workplace.

Shamefully, Canada has one of the highest fatality rates of any OECD country. Between 1996 and 2006, close to 9,000 workers died from workplace accidents and illness. Hundreds of thousands more suffered work related injuries and health problems.

Despite the urgent need for safer workplaces, governments are weakening health and safety rules and enforcement.

The Conservative Government is also expanding the temporary foreign worker program, leaving temporary workers vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe working conditions. We are already seeing preventable deaths and injuries because of the poor working conditions faced by these workers.

Workers' rights are human rights. In honour of the lives lost and the families affected, the NDP commits today to renew its fight for safe and healthy working conditions for all workers. We call on government and employers to do the same.

* * *

*[Translation]***PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF CANADA**

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute to the Public Service Commission of Canada, which is celebrating its centenary this year.

In 1908, Parliament amended the Civil Service Act and created the first permanent civil service commission.

The amended act laid the groundwork for a professional, non-partisan public service that has made a huge contribution to our democratic system. Over the years, the non-partisan recommendations of seasoned public servants have helped shape government policies and programs.

Currently, Canada's public service is considered one of the best in the world. Our public servants regularly answer questions from other countries that want to learn more about our system. The PSC has provided South Africa and Ukraine as well as countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with help on issues related to public service governance and staffing.

I want to thank the PSC for the important contribution it has made to the public service, and I hope it will enjoy as much success in the next hundred years.

Oral Questions

I would like to mention that from April 29 to May 2, Library and Archives Canada will host a special exhibition highlighting many—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

* * *

THE ARTIS GALA

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 23rd Artis Gala was held yesterday. The gala's opening number paid tribute to 60 years of television with songs interpreted by Gilles Vigneault, Robert Charlebois, Diane Dufresne, Éric Lapointe and Garou.

For the second year, the gala was held at the Monument-National and emceed by François Morency. It was broadcast live by TVA.

For this gala the winners are chosen by the public. The winners included Guylaine Tremblay, female role in a Quebec soap opera, and Charles Lafortune and Julie Snyder, who tied for game show host. Guylaine Tremblay and Charles Lafortune were chosen personalities of the year.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I proudly salute the winners, who exemplify Quebec talent. We salute in particular the support for French television by the public, which voted in great numbers.

Once again, congratulations.

* * *

TOMB OF PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU DEFACED

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Trudeau family mausoleum in the cemetery in Saint-Rémi, a community in the Montérégie area, was vandalized. This act targeted not just one Canadian family, but the entire Canadian family.

Defacing the tomb of a public person or a private citizen is a barbaric act.

[*English*]

When persons have served their country as prime minister, their record of public service is entitled to respect and, at their death, they are entitled to a tranquil and dignified repose.

It is worth reiterating these truths in this House lest some vandal think we do not care. We do care.

I am sure all members of this House will join me in extending to the Trudeau family our feelings of solidarity, affection and respect.

* * *

•(1415)

TAXATION

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know the Liberal leader has not met a tax he did not like, such as his policy to raise the GST. Now the Liberal leader has another idea. He says that the solution to high gas prices is even higher taxes on gas and electricity for Canadian families and businesses.

This weekend the Liberal leader said that he was “very seriously” considering a carbon tax.

This follows support and openness to a carbon tax by the Liberal members from Toronto Centre, Halton, Ottawa South and Don Valley West, as well as the Liberals' star candidate, Elizabeth May.

A year ago, the Liberal opposition was firmly opposed to a carbon tax. Then, over the course of the past year, the Liberals have flipped and flopped on the issue from against it, to for it, to their latest position, which is that they will very seriously consider it.

In uncertain economic times, we need to strengthen the economy and not impose \$50 billion of taxes on working families.

This government understands that Canadians, especially low and middle income Canadians, do not need another tax imposed on them. It is too bad the Liberals just do not understand Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, the same day the Prime Minister delivered a rosy speech on the state of the economy, the Governor of the Bank of Canada said what we Liberals have been saying for months and months: that the Canadian economy is in trouble and the Ontario economy is sagging.

When will the Prime Minister wake up and smell the coffee?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the leader of the Liberal Party has woken up to the economy, because it is something that we have been focused on for some time. In fact, last fall, we brought in a sweeping package of economic stimuli, including reductions in the GST, reductions in personal income tax, and other benefits for families, providing the stimulus for our economy because we saw bad times coming.

In the time since then, his strongest stand on the economic stimulus package we put forward was to stay sitting when it came time for a vote.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the government inherited from the Liberal government the strongest economy of the G-8. It was a country with balanced budgets and money in the bank—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It was a country with the longest era of surpluses in Canadian history and yet in two years the Conservatives destroyed the fiscal framework. They spent the cupboard bare and put us on the edge of a deficit. Was this their plan all along so they can cut government services?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the measures we have taken have been designed to ensure that Canada has a strong economy, a balanced budget and a sound fiscal order and that it results in the creation of jobs for Canadians, something we have been doing all along.

I know that the Liberal Party has a different philosophy. The Liberals like big surpluses because they like high taxes. Perhaps that is why the Liberal leader spent last week promoting his plan for Canada's economy: a massive increase in gasoline taxes. That is how he thinks he could help Canada's economy. Canadian families think very differently about that.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that when we had a surplus and a strong economy, we cut taxes by \$100 billion, the biggest tax cut ever in Canadian history.

While the Prime Minister was in Laval delivering his rosy speech about the economy, Golden Brand was closing its doors: 540 jobs were lost in Montreal. In the Quebec City region, Crocs and AGC closed their doors: 1,000 jobs were lost. In the Eastern Townships, Beaulieu Canada closed its Wickham mill: 69 jobs were lost.

Why is the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party leader talked about taxes. He had a chance to vote to reduce taxes for Canadians, to reduce the GST. However, he was against it then and he is against it now.

He wants to increase the GST by 1% for social housing, by 1% to cut corporate taxes, by 1% for the Canada Child Tax Benefit, and by 1% for other things, and so on. The Liberal leader wants to increase the GST by a lot.

• (1420)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two years ago, the government inherited the strongest economy in the G-8 and now the Conservative government has Canada teetering on the edge of a deficit.

That could be called incompetent, but it might be deliberate. The Prime Minister's mentor, Tom Flanagan, has talked openly about "tightening the screws" on the federal government. Is this the plan: to permanently weaken the federal government of Canada? Is this the government's secret agenda?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to disappoint the member opposite, but there is no secret. We have had the strongest economy in the G-7. We have reduced public debt. We are running a surplus. We have balanced budgets. As I say, after more than two years of Conservative government, Canada is the envy of the G-7, with the strongest economic fundamentals in the G-7.

Why is this important? It is important because it puts us in a position where we can weather the storm better than any other country in the G-7. This is important for Canadians going forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when this government came to power, it inherited a \$12 billion surplus. Despite that, it eliminated the court challenges program, made cuts to status of women, killed the national child care program, and killed the Kelowna accord.

Now that the government is on the verge of a deficit, which programs do the Conservatives intend to cut?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that members opposite like big spending. They like big taxes. We reduced the GST by 2 percentage points and they talk about raising the GST. We reduced personal income taxes and now they are talking about raising gasoline taxes for Canadians.

As a matter of fact, they are talking about spending another \$62 billion. All this means is higher taxes for Canadians, with more spending and bigger government. Canadians know better, and that party opposite voted against every measure to reduce taxes for Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, documents made public last week would seem to indicate that this government, which boasted of being squeaky clean, falsified and, in some cases, even forged invoices for advertising during the most recent election campaign. Ms. Dixon, a representative of Retail Media, an advertising agency the Conservative Party did business with, says that the invoices attributed to her firm are forged or were falsified.

Does the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities deny Ms. Dixon's allegations? Can he confirm, from his seat, that these invoices are not forged or were not falsified in any way?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservative candidates spent Conservative money on Conservative advertising. That is completely legal. All parties do it. That is why we are taking legal action against Elections Canada. One day, before Elections Canada had to face questions about that lawsuit, Elections Canada officials interrupted the proceedings with that visit with a Liberal camera. We find that extremely strange.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is giving us the same sort of answers the Liberals did when we asked them about the sponsorship scandal. Yet high-ranking Conservative Party officials are involved.

Oral Questions

I therefore ask the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities whether he can confirm, from his seat, that his party did not forge or falsify advertising invoices during the most recent election campaign.

• (1425)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents in question that the member refers to are merely bundled invoices, which were separated and sent out to the ridings that were asked to pay for them. The GST was added. That is the only change that was made in the documents.

Today I will be tabling in the House of Commons a judgment that was made by the then chief electoral officer, wherein he indicated that advertisements considered local are done so not based on their content but based on their tag line. We had the tag line right. We followed the rules. We did it right.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government can say it obeyed the law all it wants, that it is merely a matter of different interpretations, but nothing could be less certain. In an email from December 8, 2005, an advertising director with the Conservative Party of Canada Fund states that the party will most likely exceed the limit and that doubts had already been raised concerning the legality of transferring spending to the ridings.

Is that not sufficient proof that the Conservatives knew from the beginning that their scheme violated the law, as alleged by Elections Canada?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 1997 document tabled by the then chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, he indicates that the law determines an advertisement to be local based on the tag line and not on the content. In fact, he says that the content is left only within the confines of charter rights of freedom of expression.

So we have legal backing from the former chief electoral officer. He may have changed his mind since then, and so may have Elections Canada, but that is not the fault of the Conservative Party.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only did the Conservatives know it was dubious, but they also tried to cover it up. Thus, when a Retail Media employee raised some doubts of his own regarding the transfers to Conservative Party candidates and requested permission to confirm it with Elections Canada, he was told to wait, because the party might not want to discuss it with Elections Canada.

Is that not the reaction one might expect from someone who knows full well that he has something to hide?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just described the rules as they were explained by Elections Canada. It is now clear that the Conservative candidates spent Conservative Party funds for

Conservative Party advertising. It is completely legal, and all the parties do it. That is why we are taking Elections Canada to court.

One day, before being questioned on this, Elections Canada decided to interrupt the proceedings and visit our office with Liberal Party cameras. I imagine the Bloc Québécois also finds this very, very strange.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are fed up with scandals. On one hand, as everyone knows, they punished the Liberal Party for the sponsorship scandal and the fraud committed.

On the other hand, they are now stuck with the Conservative Party, a party that scoffs at election laws. It is so serious that the RCMP had to raid their offices last week.

Why does the Prime Minister insist on blaming everyone else, when he is clearly responsible?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, in his 1997 election report, the then chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, indicated that national advertising spending restrictions in section 48 of the act did not apply to ads that had tag lines from local campaigns: “Since the time purchased was...used to run a national advertisement with a local tag line, this rendered the prohibition in section 48 somewhat ineffectual”. The then CEO of Elections Canada made it clear that the tag line, not the content, determines the nature of the ad expense.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is well known for being his own top strategist. Of course, instead of spending time strategizing on how to deal with higher gas prices or higher food prices, whether it is here or abroad, what he is strategizing on is how to get around election laws. That is not what Canadians want to see.

When did he authorize this scheme and when will he return the tainted rebate money? How does he explain that after multiple scandals and ethical breaches he has now become in government what he used to fight against as leader of the opposition?

• (1430)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member was asking when the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada came up with this scheme. This was in a 1997 report on the election that occurred on June 3 of that year. He was writing about whether or not advertisements should be expensed locally or nationally. He says, “The content of the advertisements accepted was subject only to the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Charter”.

The fact that the advertisements run by local candidates for the Conservative Party had national content has no regard, because in fact we have freedom of expression in this country.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Prime Minister promised to increase Canada's development assistance to 0.7% of the GDP, another broken promise.

In two years the government has done absolutely nothing, yet we now have a world food crisis. The world is asking for Canada's help and the government has spent the cupboard bare. Why has the Conservative government deliberately destroyed Canada's financial ability to help the world's hungry?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that a member of the official opposition would be asking a question about food aid and commitments. In fact, the former Liberal government signed the food aid convention and in the first year after signing that convention, it failed to meet the commitment by over 113,000 tonnes. In the last six years of the former Liberal government being in office, it failed to meet Canada's commitment to international food four times.

[Translation]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is untrue. The Liberals doubled the amount of assistance, and at the same time, set aside \$3 billion for contingencies. However, because of the Conservatives, Canada is on the brink of a deficit. The government must help those in need. They must make a choice: help those in need or eliminate something else.

What exactly will they choose?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government indicated it will double its international assistance, and we are on track. We committed to doubling our aid to Africa, and we will meet that commitment this year. I have attended international conferences where Canada has been commended for actually delivering on the commitments that it makes. Unlike the previous government that made large promises and commitments and never fulfilled them, this government makes meaningful commitments and ensures they are fulfilled.

* * *

FINANCE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last election the Prime Minister promised a minimum \$3 billion cushion against deficits. The finance minister broke that promise by budgeting so close to the line that many are now forecasting a deficit. It is a page straight from former premier Mike Harris, and we all know how that play ended: massive hidden deficits and service cuts that endangered the health of Ontarians. Is that now the finance minister's plan for Canada?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sometimes I wonder why the member opposite is so negative about Canada and Canadians, but then I remember what the Liberals did when they were in government, on the backs of the provinces. On health care, on education, on social services, the Liberals dramatically cut transfers to the provinces, thereby hurting Canadians from coast to coast to coast. That was the Liberal government in Canada in the 1990s.

•(1435)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are only negative toward the Conservative government because, unlike that finance minister, my Canada includes Ontario.

Oral Questions

Here is a 2001 headline from *The Globe and Mail*, "Tory cuts contributed to Walkerton tragedy". That minister helped to fire 37 water inspectors from the Ontario government's payroll.

Today, in the face of a possible deficit, are the Conservatives plotting another common sense tragedy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite actually cared about Ontario, he would speak to the Liberal Premier of Ontario and ask him where his economic stimulus is for the manufacturing heartland of Ontario. But he does not say that. He is not in favour of tax reductions. He thinks one helps businesses grow by taxing them more. He thinks one helps consumer confidence by increasing the GST; after all, he is the president of the raise the GST club.

* * *

[Translation]

TQS

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages is responsible for broadcasting and therefore must ensure that the regions receive a variety of quality information, just like larger centres.

Will the minister acknowledge that a general interest television network such as TQS must have a newsroom and a news service if it wants to deliver appropriately on such a mandate in larger centres as well as in the regions?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the member is referring to the announcement last week that TQS is cutting jobs. We share the sadness of the 270 employees affected by that restructuring.

I want to remind the member that TQS has chosen Remstar as the potential buyer and that all this has been approved by the court. Remstar will have to appear before the CRTC. I have written to the chairman of the CRTC to ask him to keep me informed about how he plans to proceed.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the minister said, the announcement of potential closures of newsrooms across Quebec by the new owner of TQS represents a threat to the diversity of information. The minister is remaining silent, indicating that this is just a business transaction.

Will she take steps to protect the diversity of the news media throughout Quebec, or will she remain unmoved and simply stand on the sidelines with her arms folded?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I totally disagree with the member. On the very afternoon the job cuts were announced, I met with unionized workers at TQS—something her colleague from Quebec City did not do until two days later.

Oral Questions

I have written to the chairman of the CRTC. I have made sure I will be kept informed of the process that is put in place. The CRTC will do its job. Interested groups can make submissions until May 15. Hearings will be held in Montreal and Quebec City on June 2.

* * *

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly of Quebec, women's groups and the Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec are speaking out against Bill C-484. More than 25,000 people have signed the petition on the specialists' web site calling for the rejection of this bill that could reopen the debate on the recriminalization of abortion.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages prevail upon her colleagues and convince them not to vote for such a bill?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a private member's bill that deals with unsolicited violence against women. That being said, it is up to each individual member to decide how he or she wants to vote on that particular bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages emphasizes that she voted against Bill C-484.

She should tell us today the real reasons why she voted against this bill. She should tell us what fears led her to oppose the bill.

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I indicated that there is a private member's bill and that each individual member can decide how he or she wants to vote on it.

What I would be interested in knowing is whether they are going to give us a hand on changing the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Are they going to become born again crime fighters for a change and give us a hand with some of our fighting crime legislation? That is what I would like to know.

* * *

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to documents contained in the warrant application used to raid the Conservative Party headquarters, the Prime Minister's Quebec lieutenant, the Minister of Transport, his deputy chief of staff, Patrick Muttart, and Michael Donison, the senior adviser to the government House leader, appear to have been involved in setting up the in and out scam.

Since charges could be pending, will the Prime Minister do the responsible thing and ask these people to step aside until the election commissioner's investigation is finished?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will quote prominent

author Andrew Coyne, who stated on April 23 in *Maclean's* magazine:

...the Liberals transferred \$1.7 million from the party to the ridings, which in turn purchased \$1.3 million in goods and services from the party, without provoking Election Canada's wrath.

I have a very concrete example. Right here in the city of Ottawa, five Liberal candidates pooled their fundraising funds, invoices were given to the national party and all ads were purchased from the centre. Why does he not ask his Ottawa MP to resign while the investigation goes on?

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was working at his leader's office, Mr. Donison sent him an e-mail dealing with problems with their scams. It was even decided that ads should be bought in a riding in which no Conservative candidate was running. Obviously, that is contrary to the Elections Act.

Who among those around the Prime Minister is not currently under investigation? Could any of these individuals step in and take over from those who are too busy protecting their reputations?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had candidates in every riding in Canada because we are a national party. There was, however, an instance involving Liberal candidates right here, in Ottawa, as I said. Not to mention the fact that the Liberal Party transferred money directly to the Liberal candidate in Ottawa Centre to fund this Liberal in-and-out scam. I wonder if the member will stand up now and demand that the member for Ottawa—Vanier, who got involved, step aside until his name is cleared.

[English]

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a clearly established pattern with the minority Conservative government that all the power is centralized in the Prime Minister's Office.

I ask the Prime Minister, will he throw away his book of dirty tricks, allow the procedure and House affairs committee to meet without government members filibustering as they have for the past seven months, and allow us to hear witnesses on this scandal of the ad scheme of in and out? What is the government trying to hide from Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Conservative Party, and its members on that committee, is the only party that has not voted against hearings on this very subject. In fact, we put forward amendments to have hearings on the subject, but to include all the parties so that we could examine the \$1.7 million that the Liberal Party transferred to ridings and the \$1.3 million that those ridings then purchased back from the central party.

What do the Liberals have to hide? What is buried in that \$1.3 million worth of secrets that they do not want to come out in the committee?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary will not be able to hide the truth. The election overspending scandal that is engulfing the Conservative government involved, according to Elections Canada, improper advertising by 67 Conservative candidates across the country. Money flowed in and out, advertising flowed back and forth, all apparently to circumvent the law.

To clarify the scheme, if the parliamentary secretary is so confident, will the government simply table here and now copies of all the actual ads and all the details of where and when they ran and who paid for them in these 67 ridings?

• (1445)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservative candidates paid for Conservative ads with Conservative money, to answer his question.

We have very interesting news about the Liberal candidate in Central Nova. Elizabeth May has put forward a fundraising scheme in which she says that people can donate through the Green Party of Canada. In small print it says, “The donation will go to the Green Party of Canada, who in turn will transfer the money to Central Nova. The tax receipt will be issued by the Green Party of Canada”.

Is that why the Liberals do not want to have hearings into their own financial practices at the committee?

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that police who use dogs to find drugs in high schools or public places must be able to justify prior suspicion of a crime in order to use evidence seized. With the amount of drugs in high schools increasing in recent years, parents want to know that every effort is being taken to keep drugs out of our schools.

Can the Minister of Justice comment on how this latest Supreme Court of Canada decision will affect keeping kids safe from drugs?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will examine this decision to determine the best ways to protect children. I note that there was a significant minority decision as well. We want to ensure that police have all the tools they need to protect children and if that requires new initiatives from this government, Canadians know that they can count on us.

* * *

[Translation]

TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages informed this House that Remstar's offer had been approved by the court. Is the minister aware that, at the hearing on the future of TQS, the controller, who is appointed by the court, said that the buyers, namely Remstar, had no intention of asking for substantial changes to the licence? We now know that this is false. Indeed, the massive layoff of journalists and the death of the news

services are in blatant contradiction with the formal commitments made by TQS, when it applied for its licence.

Rather than merely sympathize with these people, will the minister finally do something?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will definitely do more than the member who just put the question. I have already written a letter to the CRTC chair, who will keep me informed of the process that is going to be put in place. All interested parties have until May 15 to express their views to us, and the hearings will take place on June 2.

Again, I remind the hon. member that this is a private transaction. Remstar must present its offer to creditors.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, so this is just a private transaction. We are talking about culture, language and information, but we are told this is merely a small private affair. That is shameful.

The Liberals said the same thing before CKAC shut down its newsroom. The Liberals did nothing at the time, and the Conservatives are not doing anything now. Yet, 270 people are going to lose their jobs, while Quebec and its regions will lose a major voice.

Instead of writing letters and saying that this is a private transaction, will the minister wake up and realize that she is the one responsible, and will she finally take action?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is in fact suggesting that the CRTC does not have the requisite qualifications or authority to hold hearings. I think we should let the CRTC complete its process, and we should also let creditors make a decision on Remstar's business plan.

* * *

[English]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Joe Goudie, the Conservative candidate in Labrador in 2006, was told to take part in the Tory in and out financing scheme.

In an affidavit for Elections Canada, his campaign manager said, “If I was a victim of one of those email scams, I wouldn't feel any more duped...”

Mr. Goudie is so angry at being trapped in this scheme by the Conservative Party that he is planning to leave the party altogether.

Advisers to both the House leader and the Prime Minister ran this scheme.

Will the Conservative Party stop badmouthing its former candidates who are only being honest, and instead, fire the scam artists?

Oral Questions

• (1450)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight some of the practices of the hon. member for Wascana.

During the last election, Liberal candidates in the region of Regina engaged in regional media buys and he was part of that scheme. At around the same time, according to the affidavit I have in my hands, money was transferred from the national party. However, guess what? There was no contact between those local campaigns and the advertising firms that carried the placement of his ad lines. Very strange. They did not break any laws. Their only crime is hypocrisy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Liberato Martelli, the 2006 Conservative candidate in the riding of Bourassa has also criticized the in and out scandal.

Mr. Martelli directly implicated the Prime Minister in this scandal, saying, “The [Prime Minister] knows what is happening. He micro-manages. He knows everything that is going on around him.”

Will the Prime Minister publicly renounce his little in and out scheme, or will he and his organizers deliberately break the law again?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. It is completely legal; all the parties do it. That is why we are taking Elections Canada to court.

One day before Elections Canada was asked about its actions, it visited our office with Liberal cameras. That is very strange, and we are prepared to defend our actions during the election.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in order to run away from the scandal, the Conservative Party will not only attack Elections Canada but now it is contradicting its own candidates and volunteers.

Cynthia Downey, the former Conservative candidate for Random—Burin—St. George's, said:

We thought that the federal party was actually going to do something to help us...
But then we found out that we were not to spend that money, but to return it.

The Minister for Democratic Reform now claims this money was spent for the local campaign.

I challenge the parliamentary secretary to stand in the House and call Cynthia Downey a liar.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back in a 1997 report on that year's election, the then chief electoral officer said that advertising was considered local based on its tag line not its content.

I challenge the member to call the former CEO of Elections Canada a liar.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative candidate in Compton-Stanstead, Gary Caldwell,

confirmed that the Prime Minister and his team cheated during the last election. Mr. Caldwell said that the money was supposed to be spent on local advertising, but that did not happen. He advised the Prime Minister to accept Elections Canada's decision, as he has.

Does the Prime Minister plan on taking his candidate's advice, or does he plan on ordering Conservative organizers in the ridings to do the same thing again next time around?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the *Globe and Mail* dated April 25, 2008, stated:

Look at any party's filings and the flows are recorded for all to see. [The Liberal leader's] 2006 campaign filing shows money moving in and out on the same day. Various New Democrats' filings reveal that in their more centralist structure, more money flows up than down, but they too mix national and local spending freely.

It happens all the time. It comes right from the *Globe and Mail*. It is a fact. The other parties just need to accept that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BILL 101 AND THE CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-482 calls for Bill 101 to apply to the 240,000 workers in Quebec governed by the Canada Labour Code. If recognizing Quebec as a nation means anything, then its culture and language have to be protected.

Can the Minister of Labour and member for Jonquière—Alma tell us what his policy is for Quebec: French as the language of work or bilingualism?

• (1455)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 18 years of being in Ottawa, the Bloc Québécois is still trying to find ways to stir up trouble here in this House. Do you know how many complaints there have been about language of work in my department? We had five complaints over the past year. Do you know how many had to do with Quebec's official language? There were 2,005.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the minister that what he just said does not apply.

As far as this bill is concerned, a note drafted by the Privy Council to the Prime Minister had been more or less blacked out, according to *La Presse*. We know that the Prime Minister is obsessed with his desire to control everything and that he maintains a culture of secrecy for government business.

Why was this information censored? Does it reveal government secrets? Could the government please show some transparency and submit the note in full?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as far as language is concerned, the federal government is required to provide services in both languages according to the needs of the public. I would like to remind the hon. member that a member of the other party in Quebec City, the Parti Québécois, wants the federal government to interfere in a provincial jurisdiction by applying Bill 101 across Canada. And yet, this representative of headquarters in Quebec City, the PQ member Daniel Turp, is calling on his constituents to contact him in the language of their choice, even English.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier, the Minister of International Cooperation boasted about the Conservatives' meaningful commitments.

Here is one we know about. Financial—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra has the floor.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, financial considerations were offered to Chuck Cadman to influence a critical vote.

The Prime Minister's own words are published in a book for sale right across the country. The Prime Minister has shamefully evaded answering questions on this issue time and again.

On the tape, he talked about financial considerations Chuck might use due to an election. What were they?

In the absence of an answer, how does the Prime Minister expect Canadians to trust him?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question started off so much better than it ended. In any event, she asked how people can trust the Prime Minister.

I have a quote from the website of the member for Vancouver Quadra under the heading "My Vision for Quadra". It reads:

Quadra residents deserve solutions to the problems that affect our community's safety. My goal is to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness in Vancouver.

How is asking a question about an offer that did not take place three years ago standing up for the people of Vancouver Quadra?

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to learn that the Liberal's platform committee co-chair, the member for Kings—Hants, suggested last week that the Liberal Party opposes developing biofuels.

The Liberals are turning their backs on Canadian farmers and the biofuel industry. Two canola crushing plants have been developed in

my constituency and the resulting oil could be used to produce diesel fuel.

Biofuels will help provide the boost our farmers need.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food reassure Canadians that despite the Liberals' latest flip-flop, the government still supports Canadian farmers and the biofuel industry?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing. One day the Liberals are calling for double our mandate on ethanol in gasoline and the next day the member for Kings—Hants says that the Liberals are against biofuels altogether.

On this side we take a principled approach. Ninety-five per cent of our crop land continues to supply the world with nutritious food, which means that only 5% is dedicated to ethanol. At the same time, we are investing \$500 million in technologies that will use waste products to develop next generation biofuels.

We are getting the job done.

* * *

● (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is spring again and once more we are seeing emergency planes having to be used to take people from the flood plain at Kashechewan and Fort Albany.

The people of Kashechewan had a signed agreement with the Government of Canada to relocate them. The government ripped up that agreement and it also walked away on two studies that it commissioned that said that the families had to be moved off the flood plain.

What is it now, four emergencies in three years? Would the minister tell the Canadian people how many floods and evacuations it will take before the government finally moves these families to safe ground?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the weekend, I was in contact with the chiefs from Kashechewan, Fort Albany and Attawapiskat. All of them and their communities are doing yeoman service to protect the people in those communities, as is the Minister of National Defence who has made aircraft available for the evacuations.

I want to thank all of those communities for their efforts and the receiving communities that have looked after these people who have been taken out.

We are continuing to follow through on the memorandum of understanding signed with the chief and council at Kashechewan last year to ensure, as they requested, they stay in the community. We are working on the dikes to make it safe in the years to come.

Privilege

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the minister is misinforming the House. The people did not say that they were going to stay in the community. They were told by the government.

What the James Bay Cree are being left with are underfunded schools, third world infrastructure and no coherent plan for flood plains. We now have Kashechewan and Fort Albany under evacuation and Attawapiskat has moved to stage one evacuation.

The minister cancelled the emergency evacuation centre in Attawapiskat last December because he did not want to fund the school that was going to be built.

Why does the minister continue to roll the dice with the families of the James Bay coast?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. We have been working closely with first nations in the development of these evacuation plans. I talked with each of the chiefs this weekend, as well as with emergency workers from Ontario. The evacuation has gone well. Lessons were learned from the past of course and we have incorporated those into the new evacuation plans.

The important thing is that we are keeping people safe. We are working with the communities as we put forward a comprehensive plan based on the memorandum of understanding signed by chief and council about what we could do in that community. We are proceeding with that plan and will continue to do so in the future.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Justice Harry S. LaForme, Chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period, in response to a question, the member for Nepean—Carleton made an offhand and disagreeable insinuation that was unworthy of Parliament, suggesting that I had done something contrary to the Canada Elections Act.

I have been a member of this House for 13 years and I have always tried and done my best, in my remarks, behaviour and actions, to respect the law, of course, but also to respect Parliament. All my reports to Elections Canada are in order; they have been produced in accordance with the law, and all my expenditures scrupulously submitted for authorization and verification.

When I was first elected in 1995, and then in 1997, 2000, 2004 and 2006—and hopefully again in 2008 or 2009—I have never asked the Liberal Party of Canada for money and never received any from the Liberal Party of Canada. Any media expenditure was for local and regional advertising. To insinuate otherwise is an attack on the truth and my reputation as well as that of my official agent and everyone who has contributed to my campaign.

No wonder that even his Conservative colleagues in the Senate reject his remarks, as lacking politeness and accuracy. His own colleagues in the Senate are criticizing him for his inappropriate remarks in this House. That says a lot.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will take this question of privilege under consideration and urge the member for Nepean—Carleton to stop making untrue statements, withdraw his remarks and apologize.

• (1505)

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have before me a sworn affidavit from which I will read about the facts of the case to which the member refers. It refers to Ottawa area regional media buys of Liberal candidates, of which he was one, in the last election.

Election Canada records indicate as follows with respect to regional media buys of Ottawa area Liberal candidates in the last election:

The documents contained in [our exhibits] appear to indicate that there were RMBs [regional media buys] involving at least the following Ottawa-area Liberal candidates in the 2006 Election:

- a. [the member for Vanier]
- b. Lee Farnworth
- c. Michael Gaffney
- d. Richard Mahoney
- e. Elizabeth Metcalfe

Notably, documentation for the Mahoney campaign referred to the Astral media buy as “the Party’s regional media buy”, requested by Don Moors—LPC.

In the federal political context, the Liberal Party of Canada, normally indicated through LPC, is referred to in these documents. It goes on to state:

Other emails to and from Mr. Moors relating to the regional media buy transactions in the records of the Mahoney campaign and other campaigns identify Mr. Moors as being at Temple Scott Associates, a national public relations firm.

The invoicing for this grouped media—

• (1510)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Show us the difference. He’s misleading the House.

An hon. member: He will table the documents.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I will be tabling these documents, Mr. Speaker, much to the dismay of those members. It goes on to state:

The invoice numbers from each of these broadcasters to all the candidates are the same, indicating that it was a pooled or common buy. One of the email addresses appearing several times in the chain of email correspondence concerning the RMBs is “LPCO”.

As noted, applicants for counsel, that is lawyers for the Conservative Party, provided with the original email apparently containing a set of audio files of the Liberal Party in this region. This was in turn provided to the Conservative Party. The icons did not work so we could not listen. It is interesting they did not actually provide the ad itself to Elections Canada. The link in the email with which they provided it did not work.

However, what we do find, and this is the interesting part so far, is that they pooled their resources to run a single ad, all those ads being the same, all the invoices being the same for those ads. The only thing that changed on them were the tag lines, so there was nothing one would need from riding to riding.

Documents included in this exhibit indicate that Richard Mahoney's campaign was paid a significant transfer from the Liberal Party on or about the same day that his campaign paid for a share of these regional media buys. This is set out further in the Liberal in and out transfer section of our document, which I could read at length, but I am not sure you would be interested, Mr. Speaker.

What we have are Liberal candidates running the same ad through the same invoice and at the same time they were doing this, the national Liberal Party was transferring funds in to one of those ridings, Ottawa Centre, with the explicit purpose of financing those ads. That is precisely the same kind of in and out transaction that the member and his party have condemned time and time again.

The member for Ottawa—Vanier has not broken any laws. His only crime is hypocrisy.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, very briefly, on the same question of privilege, the member for Nepean—Carleton refers to a sworn affidavit. Might he tell the House if that is the same sworn affidavit by Geoff Donald, which the Federal Court prothonotary, on February 27, refused to admit in its civil case because it was determined to be irrelevant?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, he has not challenged any of the accuracy of my remarks, but I will answer his question directly. This affidavit is entirely relevant in your court, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question, the member for Nepean—Carleton accused me of using a Conservative scheme, whereby money from the national party is sent to local ridings which then send it back to the national party.

I have stated in this House that I never asked for nor received any money from the national party, be it in 1995, 1997, 2000, 2004 or 2006. Will the member for Nepean—Carleton state otherwise, or will he apologize?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there was any suggestion made at any point that he had done that. What was difficult was the suggestions that there had been a misleading of the House and misstatements. He simply indicated that the hon. member had participated in a regional ad buy that involved transfers, if not to him, to other candidates in that ad buy from the central party that went back and that the invoice involved had exactly the same characteristics as the invoices of our

party, of which those members complain. This is the nature of the difficulty of this.

We can stand up to every question the Liberals have asked on this issue since it arose and make the exact same questions of privilege they are attempting to make now. That is the difficulty in this matter, that there are different treatments for different parties, yet when their behaviour is exposed, there is furious indignation. This is the double standard that has characterized this entire issue from the start and this is the double standard which caused us to take Elections Canada to court.

There is no question of privilege here. He asked the question. He wanted a response. He asked for more details. He got them. He has not disputed a single fact in that affidavit.

The Speaker: The Chair will look at the material. I assume this affidavit is going to be made available either by tabling or sent to the Clerk, so I will have a chance to look at it. I will examine the answer that was given to the question that was asked and the material and determine whether there is a prima facie question of privilege here.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED REMARKS ATTRIBUTED TO MEMBER FOR KINGS—HANTS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to clarify something. In the House today it was alleged that I spoke out against biofuels. In fact, I sourced the article from which the citation was presented. In fact, the article did not have a direct quote. It did say, however, that the hon. member for Kings—Hants said, “There is a lot of enthusiasm for biofuel but he doesn't see it as being environmentally beneficial... except for cellulosic ethanol...and it's having an inflationary effect on food prices. It could lead to offshoring of food production, not in the best interest of the farming community”.

To say that I was speaking against biofuels would require a truly bio-fool.

The Speaker: I am not sure that is a point of order, but we will move on.

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord is also rising on a point of order.

● (1515)

[Translation]

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I went to the trouble of going to the table to indicate that I wanted to be the first to raise a point of order.

I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, who is presently listening in the lobby, to enter the Chamber as he is directly involved because of an answer he gave in oral question period.

He offered to table a document from Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Chief Electoral Officer at the time, regarding an opinion on election expenses prior to the June 1997 election.

Routine Proceedings

Therefore, I request the unanimous consent of this House to have the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board table, in this House, a document from Jean-Pierre Kingsley, as he offered to do in his reply.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was actually awaiting an opportunity to table the same document, under tabling of documents. It is an official government document. It is the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 36th general election, which has been tabled in this House previously, but there is an extract. It was addressing broadcast rules and blackout rules in particular, because there was a court decision that resulted in a distinction between the blackout rules applying to national advertising and local advertising.

What he said in it was that as a result of the Somerville decision, candidates and all others were able to advertise on June 1 and 2. The criteria applied to determine whether specific advertisements were to be accepted for broadcast were the identity of the sponsor and that of the body or person invoiced. The content of the advertisement accepted was subject only to freedom of expression guaranteed by the charter.

As a result, a number of individual candidates purchased time on the day before polling and on the actual day of the election. Since the time purchased was often used to run a national advertisement with the local tag line, this rendered the prohibition, that is the blackout line in section 48, ineffectual.

Here he made it quite clear that the only thing that applied was the tag line to determine whether or not it was national or local in content. It is an interpretation on which our party has relied, and all parties have relied ever since. I have it in French and English, and I am happy to table that extract.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we will be happy to see that document tabled in the House. But I think it bears repeating at this point that the advertising practices of the Conservative Party in the last election have been reviewed by the Chief Electoral Officer, both Mr. Kingsley and Mr. Mayrand, and the Chief Electoral Officer, past and present, has determined that the flaw rests with the Conservative Party, the Conservative Party alone, and no other party in this House.

The Speaker: I do not think that that is a point of order. It sounds like a matter of debate.

Is the government House leader rising on this point or some other?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I am rising on this point, Mr. Speaker, and I would not like to go into debate. I will point out that the document I tabled with the opinion included says that the determining factor of whether an advertisement is national or local is not in the content but in the tag line, the argument of the Conservative Party. That is a report signed by the Chief Electoral—

The Speaker: I think the points have been made. We are going to move on.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 32(2) of the House of Commons, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, three treaties entitled: an agreement between the Government of Canada and the government of the Republic of Chile to amend the free trade agreement between the Government of Canada and the government of the Republic of Chile; an agreement for scientific and technological cooperation between the Government of Canada and the Government of the People's Republic of China; and an agreement for scientific and technological cooperation between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Republic of India.

* * *

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 11 petitions.

* * *

● (1520)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: the 12th report on Chapter 4, military health care, National Defence, of the October 2007, report of the Auditor General of Canada, and further, the 13th report on chapter 4, managing the Coast Guard fleet and marine navigational services, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, of the February 2007 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following two travel motions. I move:

That, in relation to its study on the status of the free trade agreements and ongoing negotiations between Canada, Colombia and Panama, 12 members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Bogota, Colombia, and Panama City, Panama in May 2008, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, second, I move:

That, in order to attend the Conference of the Canadian Council of the Public Accounts Committees, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be authorized to travel to Whitehorse, Yukon, from September 7 to 10, 2008, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to again present an income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a large number of constituents in my riding of Mississauga South. The petitioners want to remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$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 admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions as shown at the finance committee hearings; 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.

[Translation]

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to present a petition concerning student loans. Hundreds of petitioners are calling on the minister to review Canada's student loan system and create a federal, need-based grant system by rolling in the budget of poorly targeted federal post-secondary education programs and the millennium scholarship foundation.

They are also calling on him to reduce the interest rate on loans, create a federal student loan ombudsperson, provide better relief during repayment of student loans and extend the time allowed before repayment, which is currently only six months.

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition filled out by people in my constituency. This petition holds to the point of the recent serious criminal charges and actions of fraud against Canadian citizens by the Liberal Party of Canada.

Routine Proceedings

With the recent arrest of Mr. Corbeil, these petitioners request that the Parliament of Canada continue to investigate the location and possible allocation of the \$40 million of taxpayers' money which mysteriously vanished under the Liberal Party, many of whom are still in this House today, during the sponsorship scandal.

TIBET

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by a number of my constituents from the riding of Yukon. With the upcoming Olympics in China, this petition points out that the Chinese government has not lived up to promises it made to secure the Olympic games. As a result of this failure, the people of Tibet continue to endure the loss of human rights and live under a cruel regime.

The petition calls on the Prime Minister to openly and freely confront China's tyrannical opposition to human and civil rights. It calls on the Government of Canada to take a stronger position and stand in support of Tibet and to encourage the government of China to enter into talks with the Dalai Lama to bring about an end to the oppression in Tibet.

● (1525)

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions today on behalf of residents in my riding. The first draws the attention of the House to serious concerns with respect to assaults against pregnant women and the protection of their unborn children. They call upon Parliament to enact legislation which would recognize the unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition draws the attention of the House to the trafficking of women and children across international boundaries. The petitioners request the government to continue to do its work to combat trafficking of persons worldwide.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from citizens in the Nelson area in my riding against the war in Afghanistan. The petition says that the U.S.-led combat mission in Afghanistan is now over six years old, longer than World War II, and sadly there is more instability and violence in Afghanistan than in 2001.

The petition also says that NATO forces continue to back a government dominated by warlords and drug lords and in 2007, NATO bombs killed over 6,500 people in Afghanistan, the highest death total since the war began.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners say that a clear majority of Canadians now oppose Canada's mission in Afghanistan: 61% are against plans to extend the mission past February 2009. They call on the Government of Canada to stand with the majority of Canadians and say "no" to extending the mission in Afghanistan.

* * *

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, Question No. 219 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 219—**Mr. Bill Casey:**

With respect to the use of Canada's Victoria Class submarines: (a) did the HMCS *Corner Brook* stop for critical repairs at a United States Navy (USN) facility located along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States in 2008 and, if so, (i) what was the USN facility, (ii) what specific repairs or upgrades, besides the repair to battery ventilation fans, were carried out on this specific submarine; (b) how many tons per day of diesel fuel is consumed by HMCS *Corner Brook* and other Victoria-class submarines at normal cruising speeds; (c) what is the cost to the Canadian Navy, per ton or per litre, for diesel fuel for Victoria-class submarines; and (d) what is the total fuel capacity of a Victoria-class submarine, in tons or litres?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a) HMCS *Corner Brook* conducted one non-scheduled visit and one scheduled visit to United States Navy facilities as part of a multi-month deployment for exercises and operational employment that began in February 2008. No critical repairs were conducted, but rather routine repairs and maintenance took place during these periods. Critical repairs are conducted for issues that affect the submarine's immediate capability to execute a mission.

(i) The non-scheduled stop occurred on Feb. 17/08 at United States Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia. The planned visit to United States Naval Station Mayport, Florida, began Feb. 22/08 in company with HMC Ships *Iroquois*, *St Johns*, *Ville de Quebec* and *Preserver*.

(ii) No upgrades were made during either visit. One urgent operational repair, forward submerged signal ejector blow down drain selector valve, was conducted in Norfolk. This repair was not defined as critical since the defect did not affect the submarine's immediate capability to execute the mission. 12 other repairs of a more routine nature were conducted while in Mayport. In addition to the replacement of #1 main battery ventilation fan, this routine work included the replacement and/or repairs to propulsion, auxiliary and ancillary equipment such as: auxiliary motor control units, gauges and control switches, high pressure/low pressure lines, as well as casing components. Such work is routine during port visits.

It is in the nature of naval operations for defects to accumulate, both in surface ships and submarines, through normal wear and tear, and weather effects, while operating at sea for extended periods. While at sea, on board repair capabilities and technical expertise, as well as integrated redundancies for the key systems, allow vessels to maintain their operational capabilities until reaching the next scheduled port of call where maintenance work can then be

completed, as occurred for *Corner Brook* and the other ships of the task group while in Mayport.

In response to b) The number of tons per day of diesel fuel consumed by HMCS *Corner Brook* and other Victoria-class submarines pertains to submarine capability, and is therefore classified. The standard of measure used for fuel within the navy is in cubic metres: 1000 litres per cubic metre. The amount of fuel consumed varies with the speed of advance. Typically there are two figures used to describe submarine fuel consumption, one for transiting, and one for patrolling on station. The term "patrolling on station" refers to that stage of operations where the submarine has reached an assigned patrol area and conducts operations as tasked. In the case of diesel submarines such as those of the Victoria-class, this usually implies operating submerged using the electric propulsion mode at slow speed for extended periods of time, thereby greatly reducing the fuel being consumed.

In response to c) Submarines burn the same type of fuel as used in Canadian Navy surface ships. The average cost of fuel for HMCS *Corner Brook* has been \$790.00 per cubic metre in 2007, with the current cost at \$940.00 per cubic metre as of 12 Mar 2008.

In response to d) As with the question regarding rates of consumption, this information pertains to capability and is therefore classified. In particular, when these two items, consumption and capacity, are brought together, the true operational range, time to arrive on station, and endurance can be accurately estimated, and is therefore considered sensitive information.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 217 and 220 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: The questions enumerated by the hon. parliamentary secretary have been answered. Is it agreed that Questions Nos. 217 and 220 be made orders for returns?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

[Text]

Question No. 217—**Mr. Yvon Godin:**

With regard to the National Defence Official Languages Program Transformation Model: (a) who exactly must be bilingual under the Model; (b) do all National Defence members have the right to receive orders from their superiors in English or French and what is the rationale for this; (c) has National Defence ever required all its members to be bilingual; (d) is the Model consistent with the Official Languages Act and on what criteria is this answer based; (e) does the Model run counter to all the efforts made in the past to comply with the Official Languages Act; (f) what method is used, and by what means, to ensure that working groups within units can provide services in both official languages when necessary; (g) how will the adoption of a “functional” approach ensure that National Defence complies with the Official Languages Act more fully than in the past; (h) which recommendations by the former Commissioner of Official Languages were not included in the Model and why; (i) where are the English, French and bilingual units located; (j) can a unilingual member serve as superior to someone who does not understand the member’s language; (k) will the Model increase the isolation and lack of understanding between the linguistic groups, in addition to aggravating tensions between Anglophones and Francophones, and have these aspects been considered; (l) what evaluation criteria and processes are used to designate a unit bilingual, Anglophone or Francophone; (m) will only bilingual and Francophone units receive services in French; (n) will the Model provide greater opportunities for advancement and equality for Francophones and why; (o) will the Model affect the number of positions for English and French teachers, program designers, curriculum developers for English and French courses and technical and administrative staff and, if so, how; (p) who will be required to reach the CBC level; (q) how will priority be given for language courses and what is the rationale for this; and (r) can the December 2006 Canadian Forces’ Linguistic Designation of Units, Positions and Functions project be consulted and what was the rationale behind it?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 220—**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:**

Concerning grants and contributions from Canada Economic Development for the Regions of Quebec (CED-Q) to non-profit organizations (NPO) for each of the fiscal years since 2003: (a) what NPOs have received grants and contributions from CED-Q; (b) what is the amount of these grants and contributions; and (c) what is the description or nature of the NPO projects supported by CED-Q?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

FORESTRY

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Vancouver Centre. I would be pleased to hear her on this matter now.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to request that an emergency debate take place beginning at 6:30 p.m. tonight, pursuant to Standing Order 52, regarding the mountain pine beetle infestation in British Columbia’s forests.

The pine beetle has decimated hectares of British Columbia’s pine forests and moved to Alberta. With the fire season around the corner, it is urgent that we debate the human safety risks in communities, as well as the economic and environmental devastation caused by this crisis.

The Speaker: I have considered the matter raised by the hon. member for Vancouver Centre at this time.

There is no doubt in my mind that the pine beetle infestation in the forests in British Columbia is a serious matter. I note that a take note debate was held on this matter in 2004, so it is not a new problem. It is an old problem. Accordingly, I have concerns that it may not meet the demands of the Standing Orders in respect of an emergency and, accordingly, I am going to refuse the request that she has made for an emergency debate at this time.

I think it is one of those things that certainly would be of interest, but I am not sure that it constitutes an emergency given the ongoing nature of the problem, which is the worry.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1530)

[Translation]

CANADA CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY ACT

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC) moved that Bill C-52, An Act respecting the safety of consumer products, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it was a little more than two years ago that Canadians elected a government that had clearly set out its priorities and that began to fulfill its commitments. Not only did we make good on our promises, but we also took measures to tackle new issues that require a quick response.

The safety of consumer products is a prime example of our commitment to act in order to get results. This is why I am pleased to launch the debate at second reading on Bill C-52, an Act respecting the safety of consumer products.

Put simply, the Government of Canada cares about consumer safety and acts accordingly.

[English]

The bill we are now debating follows through on our Speech from the Throne commitment to “introduce measures on food and product safety to ensure that families have confidence in the quality and safety of what they buy”.

This bill is a key component of Canada’s new food and consumer safety action plan which the Prime Minister announced on December 17, a plan that budget 2008 supports with \$113 million over two years. Our plan’s objective is simple: to modernize and strengthen Canada’s safety system for food, consumer products and health products. Let me take a few moments to remind fellow members about the circumstances leading to our action plan and this proposed legislation.

Government Orders

The fact is that the vast majority of suppliers that make, import, distribute and sell consumer products to Canadians take safety seriously. Those businesses value their reputations. They appreciate how important those reputations are to their success. However, problems can and do arise, perhaps even more in a time when so many different companies in different countries may be involved in creating and distributing a single product before it reaches a store shelf.

For example, we saw problems last year with reports of children's toys with high levels of lead. As minister, I can tell this House that when we heard reports of threats to consumer safety, our government responded with all the tools at our disposal within the existing regulatory framework, but even so, I could see that our processes had not kept up with the market.

The Hazardous Products Act has not been thoroughly reviewed by this chamber in 40 years. As a result, consumer product safety in Canada has been based on a legislative framework that takes a one size fits all approach to regulation. Often the federal government can do little more than react to problems. Even something as important as product recalls have been up to individual companies.

[*Translation*]

The time has come to use a new approach. The time has come to use the approach advocated in the food and consumer safety action plan. In fact, this is the approach that the government intends to use under the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act.

[*English*]

In addition to the legislative changes we are seeking through this bill, we have already started taking action to better protect consumers. For example, our new children's products and food safety website enables Canadians to search online for recalled food and children's products.

Bill C-52 seeks to provide even more tools. Let me take a few moments to describe the legislation.

This proposed act would replace part I of the existing Hazardous Products Act. It reflects our new approach, updated for the globalized economy, based on three priorities: first, active prevention, to stop as many problems as possible before they occur; next, targeted oversight, so the government can keep a closer watch over products that pose a higher risk to health and safety; and finally, rapid response, so we can take action more quickly and effectively on problems that do occur.

In terms of active prevention, the new legislation seeks to establish a regulatory framework that would enable our government to offer better safety information to consumers. It seeks to encourage industries to build and improve safety throughout their supply chains. It seeks to encourage problem prevention.

The proposed legislation includes a key step forward for prevention. It would prohibit the manufacture, importation, advertisement and sale of consumer products that are a danger to human health and safety. This commitment to prevention is strengthened even more by the stronger compliance, promotion and enforcement activities found within this bill.

This bill proposes stiffer fines of up to \$5 million for serious contraventions, and would leave the ceiling open to a court's discretion when the supplier is found to have acted wilfully or recklessly.

To encourage compliance, this bill seeks to give inspectors the option to use administrative monetary penalties as a less expensive, more efficient alternative to criminal prosecution.

In terms of targeted oversight, we need a much more focused approach and a much more informed approach. Accordingly, Bill C-52 would enable the Government of Canada to require suppliers that produce consumer products to conduct safety tests and to provide the results of those tests to us to verify compliance. This data would enable inspectors to focus on products that could pose the greatest risk to consumers.

In terms of ensuring a rapid response, Bill C-52 would allow the government to take faster action than ever before to protect the public when a problem occurs.

As I mentioned earlier today, there is limited government authority currently to pull unsafe consumer products from store shelves, but largely, it is up to the suppliers. In practice they normally respond quickly because that is the right thing to do, of course, for their consumers and for the good of their brands, but there is no guarantee of that in the law. Under this proposed legislation we would gain that authority. If we have access to much better information and records for the businesses involved, our product safety inspectors would be able to respond more rapidly when the need arises.

This bill would require industries to keep records so that they and federal inspectors can trace consumer products from manufacturer to importer to wholesaler to retailer so action could be taken quickly and effectively when needed. This would be a major step forward and one that is seriously needed in an era of complex global supply chains.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

These three elements of our new approach—preventing problems, targeting higher risks and taking immediate action when a problem occurs—confirm that the Government of Canada cares about protecting consumers and acts accordingly.

Does the existing safety net for Canada's consumer products work? The numbers show that it does, but Bill C-52 seeks to ensure that the system works even more effectively.

[*English*]

I hope that all parties in this House will stand in support of consumer product safety. I expect that they will agree with me when I say that the vast majority of industry takes consumer safety very seriously. It is only a small percentage which act irresponsibly and whom we will go after, allowing law-abiding Canadian businesses to compete on a more level playing field.

Government Orders

I believe that all members should join with me in supporting Bill C-52, proposed legislation for updating a safety system so that it becomes second to none in the world, because Canadian consumers and Canadian businesses want and deserve nothing less.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the health minister for bringing this subject before the House.

[*English*]

There are a lot of questions to be asked about the bill. I look forward to seeing the bill at committee. We will be supporting sending the bill to committee so that we can look at the details. We generally agree on the principles.

I would take this opportunity to ask the minister, while he is available, to answer questions on two elements of the bill.

First is the introduction of the power to effect a recall. As the minister mentioned in his opening remarks, currently it is being done on a voluntary basis and with quite good effect. Industries have recalled their products quite willingly.

My concern is that if we go to a power to recall, over time will it become an obligation on the inspectors to recall? To protect the people of Canada from potential lawsuits in the future, rather than negotiating a recall or action with the private sector as is done currently, will they find themselves in an obligation to recall situation? Has the minister considered this or had discussions about it?

Second is the staffing requirement. The way the bill is structured, it will require collaboration from border security agencies, Health Canada inspectors, as well as CFIA inspectors. Of these three groups, the one with the least ability currently would be Health Canada, which has the lowest number of inspectors, and the bill puts a lot of responsibility on Health Canada. How will the staffing shortfall be handled? Has he given this serious consideration?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to discussing the particularities of the bill in committee as well so that parliamentarians can have an opportunity to get into the guts of some very important legislation.

In terms of the obligation to recall, I would expect that if there is a concern about health and safety, the first obligation is to work with the industry, as is done today, to effect a recall. We want to have the power to recall if those discussions break down. If for some reason that we cannot ponder in this place because it would be so counterintuitive and diabolical, the manufacturer or the distributor refused to take into account the evidence of health and safety risks, then the Government of Canada would have an ability to recall. It is only in those cases that I believe the legislation would kick in in its new form.

In terms of staffing requirements, the hon. member is quite correct. There is a need for more inspectors as well as the higher fines. Upon the legislation becoming law, we would be staffing up in that respect.

I would mention to the hon. member and to the chamber that this bill is budgeted for in budget 2008. There is indeed over \$500 million over the next five years budgeted to enact this law, should it pass the chamber.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc has been asking for legislation like Bill C-52 for a long time. We are very happy and will support it. We will also work hard on it in committee.

Since we are fortunate enough to have the minister here introducing his legislation, I would like to ask him why it says that the minister may, under the stated conditions, exempt anyone from the requirement to keep records or traceability information in Canada when he deems it pointless or inconvenient. I would like the minister to tell us what the circumstances are under which he will do this.

The minister should also tell us whether he is prepared to increase the number of inspectors. Legislation like this can only be enforced if there are more inspectors. What are the minister's plans in this regard?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his questions.

I would like to tell the House that it is important for this bill to be studied in committee.

In reply to my colleague's questions, it is possible under certain circumstances that our government already has in its possession documents or other information to answer these questions. Depending on the circumstances, there could be a requirement to obtain other documents. There may be another way, though, of protecting the documents. I am open to a discussion.

In regard to the Health Canada officials responsible for protecting the documents, as I told my colleague, it could be other officials.

I expect that as soon as the bill is passed by Parliament, we will draw up an action plan to hire other employees in the future.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, further to my colleague's remarks, we certainly are looking forward to this bill and to seeing it go to committee where it can be discussed in detail. It is certainly a positive step forward.

I look at the two bills, Bill C-52, which we are dealing with here today, and Bill C-51, as intertwined. A lot of the concerns we hear on the agricultural side of the equation are about the definition of "product of Canada" and the requirement for truth in labelling in terms of food and so on. One can buy product of Canada olives, but we do not grow too many olives in this country. I think that shows the fallacy of the current definitions.

Government Orders

In the intertwining of the two bills and the requirement for Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which falls under Agriculture Canada, to work together and be properly resourced, is the financial ability going to be there to resource both sides of the component? Also, looking at the two bills together, are we going to get to truth in labelling so that when Canadians buy a product they can be sure that the definition applies to the products they are buying?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, the member raises some very good points. I can say a couple of things about them.

First of all, obviously Bill C-51 also will be debated in this chamber. I would have liked to do so tomorrow, but we have an opposition day tomorrow. We defer to our friends in the opposition, but the hon. member can expect debate on that bill at some time in the near future.

I share the hon. member's concern about resources. I can assure the hon. member that this is budgeted for in budget 2008, with more inspectors and more assistance for CFIA. I think it is important that we also move forward on the product of Canada issues. My friend, the Minister of Agriculture, is taking the lead on that file, but I am encouraging him, as the member is, to move forward. He will indeed move forward.

I agree with the hon. member. Certainly in my riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka we do not grow olives. It must be the same in Malpeque. Perhaps in Pelee Island there is an opportunity to do so, but that might be the only place in Canada where it is the case.

In all seriousness, these issues do have to be addressed. It is certainly our intention to do so.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. I think it is an important bill. It is a welcome action from the Government of Canada. As an opposition party, we look forward to playing our role within Parliament to improve this bill: to ask the proper questions and to hear from Canadians who may have concerns. They may or may not be supportive and may wish to suggest amendments that can be brought to the committee or to the House to ensure that this bill achieves what it attempts to do, which is to protect Canadians.

I am sure the minister will recognize, as will every member in the House, that it is easy enough to protect Canadians. We can make every commercial activity in this country so restrictive that nobody will ever get hurt, but ensuring the protection of Canadians while permitting trade and business to happen, and allowing farmers, producers and manufacturers to do their work, requires a balancing act. As we look at the implementation of this bill, we are going to have to look at whether we can achieve both of those things and make sure that in the future they continue to happen properly and that we do not go too far one way down the slippery slope.

There is a case in my riding right now with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency risking the ongoing success of a long term employer because of an issue of product safety. It is an issue of perceived product safety and how we deal with it. In this case, it has been shown that the product is quite safe, while we cannot give the same level of assurance to the products we buy off the shelf that compete with it. That creates great concern. I look forward to examining how we will do it.

As the member for Malpeque has brought out, we are dealing with two bills. I do not think we can look at these two bills in isolation. That is probably one of the reasons why the government brought forward Bills C-51 and C-52 at the same time. While in the House today we are dealing with Bill C-52, I am looking forward to dealing with Bill C-51.

Bill C-51 has been in the discussion stage for a long time. It has been in the consultation stage and there has been work with industry to bring it forward, but it is a lot less so for Bill C-52, which seems to involve more knee-jerk reactions because of problems that arose, especially in the fall. When we do things quickly or on that basis, there is always risk. As a Parliament and a committee, we are going to have to ensure that we study this properly and make the necessary modifications so that it achieves what it wants to do, which is to protect Canadians.

The principle of the bill, as I suggested, would be difficult to argue with. I think everybody would agree with it. If I were to term it in any one way, it would be to say that it makes people become responsible for their actions and puts some serious financial penalties on people who do not. If people are trying to profit from legitimate activity, they have some responsibility for that. The first responsibility would be the safety of their consumers and customers, as well as their workers and anybody who comes in contact with their products. I think everyone would agree with that principle.

We have to be careful, because here we are talking about the importer, manufacturer, retailer, distributor or whatever person possible being inspected by Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or the Canada Border Services Agency at any time. In my mind, under this law they would all bear the same responsibility.

What we are telling them is that they have to keep a registry and have knowledge of the chain of supply. That is easy enough to do as a distributor who brings into the country a number of products and distributes them. It is easy enough to do as a manufacturer bringing in the inputs, doing some manufacturing changes, transformation, alteration, repackaging and whatnot and putting them out on the market. Then it is easy enough.

• (1550)

It gets a bit more difficult for a retailer who is not part of a large chain. An independent or a smaller operation may have similar products that it buys from a few places. When it is selling from its business it might be difficult to know exactly where each and every product was sold. It might not be able to track them.

I am looking forward to seeing what is meant by this and how this tracking would be applied. Are we creating a system that would be very expensive to operate, so expensive that small entrepreneurs will be forced out of the market, especially at the smaller retail level, those that we would typically call “mom and pop” operations?

We have seen it in the feed store industry already. Out of our concern for BSE and our requirements to label and track all the feeds and all the inputs into those feeds, we have come to those sorts of problems.

Government Orders

If we do not do this correctly, we could bring that type of a problem into where it is not warranted. I will agree that where we have risks to human health, we have to take the appropriate action. If it means that under certain conditions certain individuals or businesses should not be in possession of certain products, then that would be understandable. However, we can very easily throw the baby out with the bathwater if we do not do it properly and if we do not have the proper safeguards.

I have a bit of concern with one of the areas. I had the opportunity to raise it with the minister. I agree with the principle, and I think we all should, that there should be a power to order a recall. I think we understand that. However, if we look at the situation where we are now, we do effect those recalls by negotiations and by discussions. I have not been advised of any situation where the current practices have not worked and where an unsafe product has remained on the market because a distributor, a manufacturer or a retailer refused to remove it from the market. I do not know of any situation like that in Canada. However, it could happen, so the power to recall makes sense.

Sometimes if we give a minister or a department the power to do something, over time it evolves into an obligation to do things, because people test it in the courts or suggest that if that operation had not been done and the minister had effected his power to recall in such and such a case, then we would not have had this operation. Then what happens is that the next time there is a case that looks remotely similar, the minister's inspectors, to protect the Canadian public, as they should, effect or force a recall. That is the risk.

I am not saying that this is what would happen in this instance or in this case, but I would want to be sure that our first actions at all times are negotiations, that they are on the lines of where they are going now, where the inspectors of Health Canada or CFIA are working with the importer or the manufacturer on the Canadian side to see if there is a way to do it without effecting a recall. What happens is that quite often we are able to resolve the situation without human risk, without risk and without bankrupting Canadian corporations. If we effect or force a recall, we could create undue market fears, loss of shelf space for companies and those types of activities, which could become very dangerous. Those are things we absolutely want to avoid.

Let us remember also that we do not have the same sort of power over the people our Canadian manufacturers, distributors, entrepreneurs or importers are competing against, because the regimes in the domestic markets of our competitors might not be the same. I think we have to remember that.

We also have to look at the way it would be administered. Would we be doing this in a way that maximizes the use of the current bureaucracy? Or would we have to replicate everything else and therefore make it more complicated? Are we going to have an importer working with multiple departments to do the same process? Would we have some coordination?

•(1555)

When the finance committee looked at counterfeit products coming into the country, we saw that the Canada Border Services Agency was unable to inspect these products because it was understaffed. There is no way it can do an active inspection so it

needs some sort of system that triggers a look at certain imports, stocks or lots. If we expand the requirements without creating a coordinated administration of it, we run the risk of having an overly bureaucratic process.

We have said over and over again that we want smart regulations in this country, that we want to streamline red tape and administration processes. This is an excellent opportunity to do it from the onset as we are establishing a new program.

On the question of the penalties being higher, I do not think anybody would argue with that. I think it is a good idea but what people question is whether this has any effect because the penalties are never applied. As there are never charges under the current system, would it be meaningful to increase the penalties? I would suggest that it would be but we need to look at why they are not applied now and whether there are other ways, other than the court process, that we can use.

I was very pleased to see that in the bill the administrative sanction route is being considered where the minister and his inspectors would be able to apply monetary and administrative sanctions on the importer or manufacturer outside the court process a lot faster and more efficiently. I think that is a good idea.

The other thing is the use of injunctions rather than having to charge an entrepreneur, that an injunction can be applied for in court to cease an import, the distribution or certain manufacturing processes or procedures. I think it is a lot better way to go than having to charge and having a long, drawn out court battle that is unsure in all cases and certainly would lead, not necessarily to the protection of an individual's well-being, but certainly would have a negative impact on our capacity to compete.

The question on the effect on competitiveness is important. In that respect, I would like to see the bill dealt with not only by the Standing Committee on Health but also by the industry committee. I have a feeling that at the health committee we will be able to accommodate the people who want to give us that perspective.

How do we implement these principles and not reduce the competitiveness of Canadian business? I think that is what we should be seeking. Our first responsibility is the protection of human health and we cannot for any reason abdicate on that responsibility but we must look to do it in a way that protects our competitiveness in our domestic market, as well as in our exports. I am looking forward at the committee to be able to do these things.

I am pleased that the bill has been brought forward for debate and I believe our party will be supporting the bill going to committee. I look forward to having these discussions at committee, seeing the specifics of the bill, seeing how the implementation will happen and having the opportunity to present amendments at the committee or in the House. I hope officials of the Government of Canada will be prepared to indicate to the committee the order and types of regulations that are called for and what they would look.

Government Orders

We do take a bit of a leap of faith in the House of Commons as members of Parliament when we give powers to the minister or to the government to enact regulations to affect the intent of a bill that is passed by the House because we do not see those regulations again. They are done, in most cases, by order in council and, in very few cases, are they ever brought before Parliament again, either directly or through one of these committees. I think it would be quite useful if government officials could give us an indication or an idea of the type of regulations that will be required in this case.

I look forward to having a more fulsome discussion of the matter at committee.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the health critic for the Bloc Québécois, I am very interested in this bill on consumer product safety. The act has not been revised since 1969. The Bloc has been asking the government for a bill to clean up the old legislation, which is no longer adequate for today's needs. There were gaps that needed to be filled and requirements that needed tightening and we needed to ban the manufacture, promotion and marketing of products that are a health hazard and sometimes even fatal to people who come into contact with them. There is currently no requirement for manufacturers to test their products. With this bill, the onus will be on them to prove that their products are safe.

The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly raised the issue of consumer safety over the last few years. Canadian standards cannot be different from those in other countries, for example, when unusual amounts of lead are found in certain products. There is good reason, therefore, to wonder about the effectiveness of the current legislation. Many products have been recalled over the last few months. There was the toothpaste from South Africa containing substances that were a danger to human health and the Fisher-Price products containing materials that were dangerous and toxic to children. Mattel, the American toy manufacturer, also recalled several million toys made in China in this case. There was too much lead in some toys that many children have, such as Barbie dolls or GeoTrax toys. Fortunately, all these products have been recalled because they were dangerous to children.

The Auditor General looked into this back in 2006. She pointed out all the problems with Health Canada and its ability to control dangerous products. She said that the managers of the product safety program were unable to fulfil their mandate because they lacked the tools. They did not have enough human resources. The resources they had were not used very well and the legislation was not very effective at protecting Canadians. The government has known about all this ever since 2006.

The bill is certainly a step in the right direction, but as my colleague, the Liberal health critic, said, we still do not know anything about the regulations. It is the regulations that will show how the bill will be fleshed out and implemented.

There are five measures in the bill to reverse the burden of proof when it comes to safety. The first concerns consumer product safety. The second extends the powers of the inspectors. The third gives the minister a new power to recall products. Fourth, the penalties will be quite onerous, and fifth, products will have to be traceable.

Let us take a look at what the first measure about burden of proof means. Currently, no constraints are imposed on manufacturers. They do not have to prove that their products are not dangerous and do not pose a threat to consumer safety. Bill C-52 would reverse the burden of proof and impose it on manufacturers. Even today, Health Canada itself must conduct tests to prove that a product is dangerous and poses a threat to consumer safety. Bill C-52 proposes forcing manufacturers and importers of consumer products to test the safety of their products regularly, and, most importantly, to disclose the test results. The bill would also require businesses to declare all measures taken or illnesses caused because of their products. This puts the onus on manufacturers and importers, because it forces them to prove that their products are safe, which is what the Bloc Québécois has been calling for since last September.

• (1605)

The second measure has to do with increasing inspectors' powers. As the Auditor General stated in a report, in order to ensure that this bill is implemented and effective, inspectors on the ground will have more powers when Bill C-52 comes into force.

For that to happen, consumer products will have to be subject to recall, relabelling or a licensing amendment. These inspectors will be the means to enforce this bill's most important provisions. As we will see later on, we are concerned about adding to duties and responsibilities, and we have a lot of questions about this.

The third measure is the minister's new recall power. Until now, health authorities did not have the power to recall consumer products found to be dangerous. Recalls were issued on a voluntary basis by manufacturers and importers themselves. Bill C-52 would give the minister the power to recall any products that are defective or endanger consumer safety. It is high time Health Canada took this kind of action. We will have to see whether the minister's discretionary power turns out to be effective or not. For the time being, we do not know how that power will be managed.

The fourth measure is intended to provide for real, deterrent penalties. Manufacturers could have been fined \$5,000. For a manufacturer that imports or sells a lot of products, that figure was laughable and trivial. Now, the offence could lead to a fine up to \$5 million, and the offender could be liable to imprisonment for two years.

Deterrents in the United States and the European Union are said to be much tougher. In the European Union, fines can be as high as 5% of the company's annual revenue. The United States imposes fines that go as high as several million dollars. It is therefore plain that this will be one measure that could be effective in dealing with a company that failed to comply with hazardous products regulations and standards.

Government Orders

On the question of products being traceable, it is important to know where the product was made and the route it travelled before it arrived here. There will have to be safety reports regarding all supply sources and all components of a particular product. This system has all the features of a traceability system. We shall see what happens when the regulations are made. For the moment, we cannot see how this entire traceability process will be regulated.

This measure seems to us to be fine for now. However, the bill will be studied in committee where we can ask questions and hear from the industry and from organizations that work to ensure the quality and safety of the products that consumers buy.

The alarm was sounded by the Auditor General in 2006: there were not enough inspectors to enforce all of the regulations. There were 40 inspectors in Canada, 10 of whom were in Quebec. That is a very small number for this very big job. Because this bill will expand their responsibilities, the Minister is not yet in a position to tell us how many inspectors he will need, to ensure that the task to be assigned to them by this bill can be properly carried out. He is therefore not in a position to tell us what kind of support they will be given, how their responsibilities will be increased or the human resources that will be required to meet this need.

This was one of the criticisms levelled by the Auditor General in respect of all of the responsibilities assigned to officials.

•(1610)

It is therefore important that resources be increased, and that proper training be provided for these officials, who will see their duties grow. We are well aware that training was not adequate. For example, some of them did not even have training to do food inspection in agriculture. These were people who worked in plants, but who had no specific training to do the job right when it came to the quality of certain foods.

Will there be sufficient funds? Here again, no one has an answer. There was \$113 million allocated for enforcing the law in the next two years, for new proceedings, but not for hiring and training new inspectors. So we have a lot of questions to ask the Minister and his officials when this bill is discussed in committee.

As I said, the bill appears worthwhile at this stage, in terms of the broad principles and the desire to have safer products. The public has been very concerned for some time now about the high number of recalls and about products that have affected public health.

We need to act quickly, but is the government prepared to make regulations to tell us how this legislation is going to operate? Will there be adequate funding? The Minister could not give us a satisfactory answer today. We hope that in committee someone will be able to tell us how this money will be allocated. Will it be allocated to training? How much money will be allocated, given the number of inspectors?

There are also two new structures. How much will they cost? Do we not expect most of the money to be allocated to them? We hope it will not be allocated solely to administration, and that it will also be spent to provide proper support for the officers who will be responsible for overseeing the food safety evaluation process.

We know that the government has been making mistakes for two years.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: They are shaking their heads, but it has been making mistakes. I will provide a specific example for the Minister who is shaking his head on the other side of the House. At the end of November he brought out a personal analysis kit for consumers, so consumers themselves could make sure that consumer products are harmless. Really! We opposed that measure. The government was shifting responsibility to consumers. Every consumer had a testing kit and responsibility now lay with the consumer. Imagine! The government made a mistake, and because of that we can see that it was not very realistic to think that consumers could be their own product safety watchdogs. Shifting responsibility to consumers like this was a mistake, it was kind of out in left field.

Then, in December, he brought out his Food and Consumer Safety Action Plan. There again, we asked questions to find out what human resources were going to be needed. If so, we wanted to know what kind of training these new inspectors were going to receive. We have to admit that introducing Bill C-52 seems a little bolder, but we will have to see what comes of the regulations.

I would also like to raise another aspect of the question that has not been addressed in relation to this bill. I have introduced a private member's bill dealing with expiry dates for food products. There are no expiry dates on some consumer products now available. In other countries, like France, there is an expiry date on all products. I hope the Minister will be listening when he comes to the committee. I would like him to make this amendment to the Food and Drugs Act, so that the expiry date for all consumer products can be read on a label or could be added to the nutritional content label.

•(1615)

I would like this information to be available to consumers so they can make the most informed choices possible about the products they buy.

Bloc members will be voting in favour of this bill on second reading for the reasons I mentioned earlier. The purpose of this bill is to reassure consumers and make changes to the process for evaluating dangerous and harmful consumer products.

We cannot speak today about the way these five measures will be covered by regulations but we hope that the minister will be able to table the regulations. We cannot simply indulge in wishful thinking and give the minister carte blanche. We have questions to ask him.

Earlier, we wanted to know how the problem of the number of inspectors would be resolved and what kind of training they would receive. In addition, we wanted to know how the minister's discretionary power would be used to carry out a recall and how, in certain cases, the minister might decide not to recall a product for various reasons. How will the minister decide whether a product is dangerous? What will the limits be for recalling one product rather than another? On that score, we still have questions for the minister and we hope that he will make his intentions clear in committee and that his officials will enlighten us about the regulations.

Government Orders

As I said previously, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of approving this bill on second reading. However, this is an issue we will watch closely in the coming months as the bill progresses toward third reading.

We still have questions that need to be answered before we give final approval to this bill. We also want to hear from the various consumer rights groups, as well as from the business community. At the same time, we must keep our guard up. We realize that we are no longer in a market where we know who has produced a product, especially with all the imported products coming in from all over the world. We know that in some countries the standards are not as safe or as easy to identify.

So, we must not close our eyes but rather try to balance the danger from a product against the viability of a company. Earlier, a member of the Liberal Party said that companies must not suffer either. However, the owners of companies all have a duty to ensure that the food and products they provide to the public are safe. We cannot put aside the primary objective, which is to reassure the public. Above all, products for children must be safe. We must also eliminate the dangerous elements of some products.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Kitchener Centre, The Economy; the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Transparency in Afghanistan.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in this first debate on Bill C-52, which is long overdue, long awaited legislation dealing with protecting consumers from dangerous toxic products. I say long overdue because this matter has been before the House on a repeated basis, year after year, for as long as I have been in this place, which is some 13 years, and I am sure long before that.

On the one hand, we welcome the Conservatives' move to bring forward legislation that on the surface appears to be concrete, proactive and significant. I say on the surface because as we start to pore through this very detailed legislation, many questions come to mind. We will be carefully scrutinizing the legislation to ensure that all this tough talk about standing up and protecting consumers and getting tough with the industry is going to matter and is going to mean something.

To this point it is hard to fathom that a Conservative government is prepared to stand up to the big toy manufacturers in our country and to the big producers around the world, which are actively bringing their goods into our country as quickly and as expeditiously as possible. It is hard to imagine that the Conservative government is prepared to stand up to this industry and say that Canadians come first, that the safety of people comes first.

However, I will give Conservatives the benefit of the doubt. My colleagues and I will be very interested in seeing how the bill measures up to the tough talk. When I say tough talk, I point out that

the government is very good at using the language the health protection movement has been advancing for many years and for which the Canadian Health Coalition has called and for which the New Democratic Party has called for many years. They talk about strengthening and modernizing Canada's safety system. It certainly sounds good on the surface. If there is anything behind those words, it will make a big difference to Canadians who have waited a long time for something to finally happen at the federal level of government around safety of consumer products.

We went through this for so long with the Liberals. It is impossible to recount how many attempts we made to try to move the Liberals, when they were in the government, to the point where they would take some action. Year after year we presented private members' bills. We raised serious incidents, yet we could not bring the Liberals to practise what they preached, which was supposedly believing in the do no harm principle, the precautionary principle, the belief that products on this market should be safe beyond a reasonable doubt, that people, especially young children, should not be exposed to dangerous toxins and that we had to be very careful about testing products and ensuring industry was responsible.

Canadians, after all these years, are getting a little tired of all the talk and no action. When I was first elected in 1999, we heard then about the dangerous toys on the market. We heard about lead or cadmium being in many children's products. We tried to get the government to move. It would not, so we brought forward private members' legislation.

I want to refer to March 10, 1999 when I introduced Bill C-482, an act to amend the Hazardous Products Act. This was very specifically to deal with the fact that toys for young children and babies contained phthalates. There was substantive scientific evidence to show that exposure to phthalates was very dangerous to the health and well-being of children.

● (1625)

Since then, other colleagues have pursued legislation. My colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley has introduced similar legislation dealing with exposure to phthalates and other dangerous substances. My colleague from Ottawa Centre has been raising the issue of bisphenol A, just as I and others in the House have done. Repeatedly over the years we have tried to get government, Liberal or Conservative, to act in the face of this dangerous exposure to our children and young people and adults in our society today.

We have something of a possibility today. We have a sign of legislation that could in fact do the job. Listening to the dialogue between the Liberals and the Conservatives, I get the feeling that I am at some sort of board of directors meeting where people are weighing the question of how far we should go to protect consumers without disturbing the profit margins of these companies. It seems like we are talking about bottom lines in terms of corporate survival and corporate health and profit margins as opposed to human health and safety.

Government Orders

Let us not forget that today is a special day for all of Canada. This is a day of mourning for workers in this country who have been injured or have died on the job. When we are talking about exposure to toxic substances, whether it is in terms of workers who are producing the products or consumers who are buying and being exposed to these products, we have to take action in a substantive concrete way. We can no longer simply afford to say nice words and pleasantries around this issue. It is time to actually make a real difference.

We need more than legislative change. We need more than what the Conservatives have brought forward today, even if it is a flawed piece of legislation. We need a cultural change. We need a philosophical change. We need an understanding from government that all processes have to be in place to protect Canadians from dangerous products and toxic toys.

The Conservatives say that they really believe in law enforcement. We hear it all the time. We hear it in terms of crime on our streets and neighbourhood safety. We hear a lot of tough talk. Do we ever hear that kind of tough talk when it comes to producers of toys and consumer products? I do not think we have. The minister will try to say that in this bill the government is getting tough, that there are going to be big fines, that the government will have the power to recall and it is going to send a strong message.

If we look closely at this legislation, we will realize that it is very open-ended and without obligation. There is no requirement on the part of the government to be tough. It says it may be tough, it may recall products, it may fine corporations, it may take action, but there is absolutely nothing explicit in this legislation that says when a toxic product gets on to our shelves and consumers are exposed to that product, the government must and will take firm action. There is nothing that explicit, nothing that definitive in this legislation.

The Conservatives have generated so little trust among Canadians on every front, especially when it comes to the health and well-being of Canadians, especially when it comes to health protection in the face of dangerous drugs, toys, food, exposure to all kinds of toxic chemicals in our environment today. The government has not taken the kind of action that would warrant Canadians believing that it is prepared to go all out, to be tough when it comes to the health and well-being of Canadians.

We have to devote today to talking about the importance of being tough, the importance of doing what we say we are going to do. We have to devote today to the importance of standing up for workers who are killed or injured on the job, and the importance of standing up for Canadians who are exposed to dangerous products and who suffer serious consequences as a result, something that lasts a lifetime. All the talk in the world around recall and tough regulations will not fix the problem, unless we are prepared to make sure that the products coming into this country are as safe as possible.

Unless we apply the do no harm principle, we are no further ahead. If we simply say we are going to continue this buyer beware model that the Liberals started and the Conservatives seem so endeared about, wrap it up with a few little bells and whistles around recall and around big fines, it will not matter, because the products will stay on the market, the danger will be done, and it will be too late.

● (1630)

Sure, it is great to get tough after the fact, but what does that do for the Canadian who is exposed? What does it do for the little baby whose health is ruined for life? What does it do for a whole population whose quality of life has been jeopardized because of this attitude of buyer beware, survival of the fittest, let the market forces prevail when it comes to health and consumer products? That is the challenge we face today.

Our job today is not like the Liberals want to do, to simply give a blanket statement of approval to the Conservatives and say, "Yes, this is good, let us get it to committee. We support it but we just want to fine tune it". The onus on us today is to really question and dig deep around what it means and what impact it will have.

What good is this legislation if the government does not put in place the resources that are required at the borders to make sure that potentially toxic products do not enter this country? What guarantees do we have from the government that it is so serious about this issue it will put in place the kind of inspection labour force that will do the job?

There was a bit of money in the last budget. By all accounts, if we put it all together and look at the requirements for Bill C-52 in terms of toys and consumer products, and Bill C-51 in terms of food and drugs, the money the government is promising to expend in this area is probably a drop in the bucket when we look at the requirements and the kind of framework that the government has presented to Canadians.

In fact, if the government is that serious about a proactive piece of legislation, then it has to have resources in the field. It has to have inspectors at the border. It has to have the determination to actually test and label and be absolutely rigorous in this field if it is to make any difference.

It is hard to mesh the tough talk from the Conservatives with their wide open, easy as it goes talk around trade. Many of the problems we are facing today have to do with governments that have failed to understand the importance of putting in place fair trade practices. Our borders have been opened up to all kinds of products about which we know very little or have done little in terms of testing and scientific research. It is time, as so many have already said, to take that seriously.

Government Orders

Let us look at the number of products over the last three or four years that have appeared on the market, but which should have been recalled. Since 2005 there have been 34 products that contained a lead risk, 26 products that were a risk in terms of choking, 5 products that led to head injuries, 5 that led to risk of laceration, 3 that could have meant internal damage from magnets, 3 that put people at risk of being burned, 3 that put people at risk in terms of entrapment, 2 that put people in danger in terms of puncture or impalement risk, 2 that could have caused strangulation, 2 that led to bacteria risk, and 1 a toxic chemical risk. That is an incredibly long list of products that we know about, where there has been some documentation, where consumers raised concerns and where government was forced to react.

How in the world is the government prepared to actually get a handle on this area and apply this bill to make a real difference? Is it going to put a ban on any product that consumers identify as dangerous, which has been backed up by scientific evidence? Do we have a government that is prepared to get that tough? Will it ban a product?

• (1635)

Let us look at the example of bisphenol A. That plastic has been around for a long time. We have been talking about it in the House for many months. There are 150 peer reviewed studies on bisphenol A which talk about the dangerous complications for people's health and well-being, about hormonal imbalance and problems in terms of young kids. There are all kinds of scientific studies showing that that plastic is toxic and dangerous to people's health and well-being. Was there a ban on the products right off the bat? No. What we got last week was a statement from the Minister of Health that the government might ban it, but it was going to give it 60 more days of study. The minister went on to tell parents that the government was going to ban baby bottles made out of bisphenol A but parents should not worry, they should not pull the products off their kitchen shelves, they should just avoid putting boiling water in them.

Is that a proactive approach that guarantees people's safety first? Is that health protection, or is it simply another variation of buyer beware? Consumers have to check out these products and do their own tests. They have to go down to the hardware store and get the tests that tell them whether there is lead in a product. They have to go to a lab to have products tested for other toxic chemicals. They have to take it upon themselves because the government is all talk and no action. Is that what it is all about, or is the bill really going to make a difference?

As I said at the outset, I am willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the government and I look forward to a very serious study of this bill at committee, but I can say that there are some serious problems with the bill as we look at it today. One is the question of the power to ban when products are presented as dangerous. What in the bill will require the government to take very quick, prompt action to ensure that the bad experience of one person does not have to mean a horrible experience for a whole lot of other people?

What in this bill will actually ensure that toy producers, manufacturers of products overseas are being watched closely and required to live up to certain standards? We will never under the present government have the kind of inspection requirements that are

needed at the borders to make sure that every product is safe. What is the government doing to indicate to producers overseas that there are certain standards that must be met, or are we simply following a country like China that says it is up to the country receiving the products to make those determinations? How in the world can we continue to operate on that basis?

We have raised many questions over the last few months about the importation of toys in particular, because for young kids and babies, exposure to these toxics is that much more serious at the early stages of life when compared to adults who can tolerate a greater risk.

We have to be very careful if we are serious about preserving and protecting the health and well-being of Canadians. We have actually said in the House that we cannot simply stand back and act tough when big companies like Mattel suddenly decide that government means nothing when it comes to health protection. We are talking about companies that make huge profits. It is up to us and the government of the day to actually stand up and make a difference.

My time is coming to an end in this first round of the debate. I want to conclude by saying that there are many parts of the bill that cause questions and concerns. We will be proposing amendments. We will be looking for some positive response from the government to those amendments. We will be looking forward to working with the Conservatives to make this bill live up to its name of being very tough legislation when it comes to the health and well-being of Canadians, one that is firmly grounded in the do no harm principle as opposed to the buyer beware risk management model. I look forward to the ongoing debate and discussion.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to say that we really appreciate all the points raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North. We fully agree that a lot of work will have to be done in committee on this legislation. However, I would like to put a question to the hon. member.

It seems to me that she referred primarily to imported products. How does she envision the committee's work as it relates to made-in-Canada products? I am thinking of products such as cosmetics, that are made here. It may take a long time before these products are found to be harmful or totally harmless to the health of those who use them.

Does the hon. member think that the legislation should include some provision to ensure that products are absolutely safe, before they are put on the market?

• (1645)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc member for his very relevant question. The principle that I want to apply to products made outside Canada is the same as the one I want for products made here in Canada, and that is the do no harm principle.

Government Orders

[English]

The do no harm principle is fundamental. Whether the product is made overseas or here in Canada, it is absolutely imperative that we test, study and supervise the production of products to ensure they meet the highest standards possible and that the minute there is a problem in terms of a toxic reaction, a carcinogen present in a product, there is an immediate action, whether it is banning the product or clear warnings to consumers, but much more than simply providing some websites for consumers and talk that we are going to fine people if they do not live up to certain standards.

We want to see the do no harm principle applied every step of the way here in Canada and overseas.

I want to add one thing. If we in this House put more time into thinking about revitalizing our manufacturing sector and putting these products here in Canada under the overall framework that our Parliament provides in terms of manufactured goods and products, we would be a lot further ahead in terms of the health and safety of Canadians and the jobs and growth for our economy.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe we as legislators have a duty to not just believe in the principle of do no harm but to actually enact whatever legislations are necessary to that principle and to make it a reality.

Bill C-52, which is the Canada consumer product safety act, is something I believe all of us in this House should support. It is about protecting our citizens before these toxins get into people's hands.

I believe there is a willingness on the part of the government to introduce the legislation, which is laudable and supported. However, does my hon. colleague believe there is a willingness on the part of the government to commit the necessary resources to make this a reality? That is also equally important. If we are to be clear about our intent, we need to ensure that the resources are in place.

The member made some very articulate remarks about her concerns specifically around the issue of the principle of do no harm and ensuring that our citizens are protected and that we have laws that, as we say every day in our prayers, are just laws but also protect the citizens and health of our country.

Does my hon. colleague feel that the government would provide the necessary resources to implement this legislation?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by questioning the member when he states that this bill is, by virtue of the paper it is written on or the words in it, do no harm.

What I am saying today is that we are not sure this is a do no harm approach. It talks tough and has the appearance of following the precautionary principle but I think it has many flaws and weaknesses, one of which is the question of resources. All the tough talk in the world without actual inspection resources will make it meaningless, which is one area of concern. I do not believe that what the government announced in the budget will be sufficient for the task at hand, both in terms of the consumer product legislation and in terms of food and drugs.

I want to mention a couple of other concerns. There is concern around the fact that this bill only allows us to react to problems, as opposed to being proactive and doing something in a concrete way

ahead of the exposure. The use of counterfeited approval labels, also primarily associated with offshore products, has not been dealt with in this bill. In fact, the United Steelworkers has suggested that we have an explicit ban on products containing toxic substances, enforced through a pre-entry testing system and financed through a service fee applied at the border. That is an option that we should look at that is not part of this bill.

The bill is wide open in terms of discretion. Much of it is based on the fact that the minister and the government may intervene or may act. There is no explicit requirement for the government to act. The government is not required to inform consumers of safety issues that have been identified, and that certainly needs to be tightened up through amendments.

We have a lot of work to do on this bill before it actually meets the standards and expectations of Canadians.

• (1650)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess the question that average Canadians are asking themselves anytime a story hits the news about toxic toys or toxic products is the fact that we have system set up whereby our factories are shut down in Canada, factories that have good paying jobs and have for years provided these corporations with excellent profits. They have good safety standards and yet these same companies move overseas and set up under jobber firms where we have all kinds of toxic products. We do not know what is in them. The products are then re-imported back to Canada where they pose a threat to our own citizens and we are supposed to, after the fact, run across and put up band-aids.

Since it has been a deliberate strategy by the corporate sector to move to sweat shop, third world conditions where there are no standards, should we not hold them accountable? I am saying that we should hold them accountable for the damage they do to ensure that any time any of these products come into our country that the giant companies that have been allowing these shenanigans to take place will actually be held accountable.

We have workers in this country, standards in this country and we can produce these products in this country. It is just this perpetual race to the bottom that this government and the former government have been allowing.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has identified the nub of the issue and a central theme throughout all of this health protection talk by the government, a government that fails to address the issue of globalization and deregulation in the face of trade deals that know no parameters, that puts aside the questions of human health and safety in the interests of creating a level playing field for corporate entities around the world and without regard for the environment, human health and job protections.

Government Orders

The best way to summarize that is to repeat what my colleague, the member for Parkdale—High Park, said in the House recently. He said that years of poorly drafted trade deals have caused a rush to deregulation. It now threatens Canada's economy and the safety of Canadians. We have exported good, family supporting manufacturing jobs and imported products that put our families at risk. The long term solution is joining contemporary debate in the Americas and asking why trade deals are so imbalanced and why they do not protect workers, our health or the environment that we share.

In that context, some of the critiques of this bill to date coming from the labour movement suggest that we need to get much tougher when it comes to—

• (1655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will need to move on with resuming debate. The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-52, the Canada consumer product safety act.

I was here earlier and I listened closely to the minister's remarks. He did go to some considerable length to make it sound like the government was taking strong action where maybe previous governments had not taken the kind of action necessary. I do think it is important that I set the record straight in that regard. It was several times that we recognized in the previous government that greater consumer protection was necessary and that there needed to be new authorities implemented in terms of the protection for consumers and consumer products and, in particular, in the area of food.

In the previous Parliament, there was the introduction of Bill C-27 which would have moved forward in a lot of those areas, taking strong measures, especially in the area of labelling, of bringing up to date quite a number of bills that required modernization and giving greater authorities for CFIA and other agencies to deal with imported product, hoaxes and threats of putting foreign products into food or threatening that on the grocery store shelves. It was really the Conservative opposition of the day that prevented that from happening.

I am glad the Conservatives have now seen the light and are bringing forward a bill that we very much believe is a step in the right direction.

I agree with many colleagues who have previously spoken that this does need to go to committee. We need to look at the details to ensure there is nothing in the fine print that we should be concerned about. As a party we will be moving this forward to committee. We see it at this stage as a step in the right direction. It is an issue that exploded after, basically, the lead scare on toys from one nation that exports those products to Canada.

In reality, we have to look at both bills. We are here to speak to Bill C-52, but we have to look at both Bills C-51 and C-52 because they are intertwined and both have to move forward to committee.

As I indicated, we are committed as a party to improving the safety and health of Canadians. We believe this debate should occur at committee. We believe it is important to strengthen the regulatory process to ensure that Canadians have access to the safest consumer

products that can be made available and to ensure that the products are labelled properly so that consumers do in fact know what they are buying.

As I indicated, we also think it is necessary for these bills to have a proper review and also necessary to ensure that witnesses on both sides of the question, people with the technical and the legislative expertise, be invited to committee to go through the bill in detail.

Currently a lot of the information about consumer products is done on a voluntary basis. I think we know that this is just not as adequate as it should be.

This new bill, then, will prohibit the sale, import, manufacture, packaging, labelling and advertising of consumer products that may pose a risk to consumers. While voluntary recalls will continue to happen, inspectors named under the act or by the minister will now be able to order the recall of a consumer product.

In the past, I have expressed in the House some concerns about the way some of the ministers in the government use their authority. I have just a note of caution. These authorities are there for a purpose, not for an ideological agenda. They are there to protect consumers and to ensure that consumers have the safest products available. They are not there for purposes other than that. I want to point that out at the beginning.

On the area of labelling, we read about it in the press almost daily now, and it relates mainly to food products. With the intertwining of the bills, I think it is important to mention this. I did have the opportunity in December and January, with a colleague, to meet consumers and the farm community on the whole issue of our regulatory system in Canada as it applies to, yes, consumer products, but certainly and mainly to food products that are on grocery store shelves.

One area that Canadian farmers are really concerned about is that a double standard applies to them. They face a tougher regulatory regime than do their competitors, yet their competitors' products end up on Canadian grocery store shelves in competition to those of our farmers, who face that tougher regulatory regime.

Canadian farmers face double standards from their own government regulations by taking on costs to meet high food safety and environmental standards only to watch imports that do not meet the same standards price them out of the supermarkets. There are a lot of examples in that regard.

We have to ensure that with this bill coming in, and with tougher regulations and more inspections, Canadians who are meeting these standards are not disadvantaged. We cannot allow that to happen. I will use a couple of examples that I know well from the agricultural arena.

• (1700)

For the health of Canadians, Canada has established rules to eliminate feeds using specified risk materials from cattle in order to eradicate BSE, yet the United States has not imposed those same rules, and Canadians continue to import and consume those beef products from the United States. We cannot allow that situation to continue.

Government Orders

Gencor, a plant in western Ontario, closed about five or six weeks ago. It was killing 700 older cows a week. The reason it closed was that its cost regime for removing specified risk materials put it at a disadvantage with U.S. plants. It went out of business, with the loss of 120 jobs and a processing plant for Canadian product.

With these new regulations on consumer protection and under Bill C-51 on food protection and labelling, et cetera, we have to ensure that at the end of the day our industry is not put at a disadvantage. We have to be on a level playing field with the United States.

As well in the farm sector, although this bill does not specifically relate to the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, the bill does relate to Health Canada. It has authority over the PMRA, which is responsible for pesticides in this country. Some pesticides are banned in Canada because they are deemed unsafe for the health of farm workers applying the product, yet Canada allows imports using these pesticides because they meet Canadian food residue limits.

Here is what we have. We do not allow the use of this pesticide or herbicide because it may have an impact on workers. Therefore, even though it may be a cheaper product, a producer is not allowed to use it in this country because of its impact, as I say, on workers. Yet we will allow the product produced with that herbicide and by foreign workers onto our grocery store shelves, and again our farmers are not competitive.

I make this point. As Canadians consume these imported products, Canada is no longer protecting the safety of farm workers. We are simply exporting the problem to foreign workers in exchange for cheaper foods and undermining the potential of Canadian farmers. It is another example of how Canadians are disadvantaged. They are important measures, yes, and they are measures that need to be taken in terms of workers. We should not be exporting—we can, I guess, but we should not be—our moral responsibility to other countries and disadvantaging our own in the process.

What I am saying is that Canada cannot have it both ways. Imported products that do not meet or do not even have to meet Canada's domestic production standards undermine Canada's high domestic standards for food safety. Canadian farmers are not only competing in a regulatory system that impedes them in the international markets, but they are operating in a regulatory environment that gives their international competitors the advantage in domestic markets.

I have to make that point, because with these new bills and these new regulatory authorities, with greater authority for the minister, all of which are important, we have to ensure consumer product safety but we also have to ensure that Canadian producers and, indeed, Canadian importers are not disadvantaged as a result.

The last point I would make is one that we have heard a lot about recently. In fact, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food is holding hearings in this area. The Prime Minister, along with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture, mentioned this issue when they announced the introduction of these bills. It is the whole issue of product of Canada labelling.

• (1705)

I raised this question earlier with the Minister of Health. The fact of the matter is that one can buy product of Canada olives in Canada.

One can buy product of Canada grapefruit juice. One can buy product of Canada orange juice. I do not know of anywhere in this country where we grow olives. I do not know of too many grapefruits or oranges being grown in Canada, so why would such a package on a grocery store shelf read “product of Canada” when those products are being sold here?

The fact is that the definition is wrong. When Canadian consumers go to the grocery store shelf, they should feel confident that what they are buying is indeed a product of Canada. Under the current definition, that is not the case. The current definition is that 51% of the total package costs occurred in Canada. It really has nothing to do with what is in the package.

That has to change. As the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, we are looking at it. It has to change and relate to the product that is in the package itself, because I firmly believe that if Canadians are given the choice, they will veer toward buying the product that is indeed produced by Canadians, knowing the kind of regulatory and environmental regime we are under and knowing that it is supporting other Canadians in their economic activities.

Certainly I want to emphasize to the minister and to the government as a whole the absolute urgency of dealing with product of Canada labelling. It is a very serious matter. It has to be dealt with in a comprehensive way.

There has been some suggestion that we could go to voluntary labelling as well and that may be a possibility. The bottom line is that Canadians need a strong regime to define what indeed is a product of Canada and what is not.

We do see Bill C-51 and Bill C-52 as important in that they modernize our regulatory regime for consumer products in Canada. The government has to go further than what is currently stated in these bills. We must get a definition of product of Canada. The bottom line is that there has to be truth in labelling. That is what consumers want and it does not matter whether it is a widget, a computer, an apple, an orange or a piece of steak. People want absolute certainty that there is truth in the labelling on what they are buying. There has to be a regulatory and enforcement regime around that to make it stick.

Our party is committed to improving the safety and health of Canadians. We have attempted to do that in the past. As I mentioned earlier, there was some opposition from members in the Conservative government. We support measures which strengthen the regulatory process to ensure that Canadians do have access to the safest consumer products.

We look forward to reviewing the details in the legislation at committee to ensure that it is as accountable, transparent and effective as possible for Canadians. We do see this as a step forward. We look forward to the discussions in committee, some of the technical briefings, and some of the witnesses who will come forward with information that will be useful to all of us in the House to ensure that at the end of the day this is the best legislation possible for the interests of Canadians and for Canada as a whole.

Government Orders

● (1710)

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the member will be supporting the legislation.

One of the statements he made has me quite concerned and it deals with the issue of labelling. While I support product safety and assurance that we meet all safety standards, the issue that is devastating for western Canadian hog producers is country of origin labelling. As we in western Canada see it, that is basically a non-tariff barrier for our products going into the United States. I hear from hog producers in my riding and across western Canada that this is devastating.

I hope that the member's comments are not to be interpreted as support for the kind of country of origin labelling that the Americans are utilizing in order to keep Canadian products out of the United States. If we insist on similar types of country of origin labelling, what would that do in terms of the argument that we are making that the Americans are imposing a non-tariff trade barrier?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister raised the question. Country of origin labelling, COOL, in the United States is indeed a very serious matter, and no, I am not proposing anything similar in any shape or form.

What I am saying is that labelling that is currently on food products in this country that states it is a product of Canada when it is not should not be labelled as such. The definition has to be changed, so that consumers know. If the minister is in a store and, as I said, picked up a bottle of olives and it said product of Canada on it, then it would be his assumption in his head that it is indeed a product of Canada. It is not. It means that 51% of the cost of that packaging, labour, et cetera, went into the process to get that product in the bottle and on the grocery store shelf. That is misleading and we cannot allow that to occur.

I do want to point out and say that I agree with the minister that the country of origin Labelling in the United States is, I believe, certainly a non-tariff barrier. Many of us from all parties on the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group have been to the United States. I know most of the ministers have been arguing with the American administration and indeed with Congress and Senate members that this is a non-tariff barrier.

I would hope that the government challenges it under NAFTA or under the free trade agreement, either one, as such, because it is creating a barrier for our products going down there. Sadly, in the minister's province, and I have talked to Manitoba hog producers several times over the last six weeks, they are seeing their market for weaner pigs dry up. Good contractual arrangements have been broken because American producers who buy weaners from Canada are worried that the product cannot be stated as grown in the United States or as a product of the United States under this new legislation. As a result, they have broken those contracts, violated contracts, and have a legislative policy that, I think, is a non-tariff barrier.

For those producers in Manitoba, they now have thousands of small pigs that they have no facilities to feed them in and they have no feed to feed them. What is going to happen to these producers? It is a financial difficulty and, I think, a legal difficulty. The Americans have to be challenged on it.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Malpeque for his speech. We sit together on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The hon. member mentioned the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Like me, he meets the representatives of the agency quite regularly in committee.

I was wondering about something—and I would like the opinion of the hon. member for Malpeque, who was once the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. In Bill C-52 specifically—and Bill C-51 as well—it is a matter of having more power for inspections. When representatives of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency come to committee—and the hon. member for Malpeque can certainly confirm this—we always ask them whether they have the means to conduct enough inspections.

The hon. member spoke of the reciprocity problems the beef producers were experiencing in terms of specified risk material. There was also talk of the problems related to the pesticides and insecticides used on imported fruit and vegetables. Those products are banned here. However, we end up with fruit and vegetables from countries where those products are still being used. I have always felt that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency does not have enough inspectors or resources to do its work properly.

Does the hon. member see any improvement to that problem in this bill? Having greater power of inspection is one thing, but we probably need to provide more inspectors and more money to the agency for it to do its work properly.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. We do meet with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency many times at committee. The minister earlier, in response to my similar question, said there are resources in the budget to cover added personnel for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

That is a positive thing if the added personnel are there to be able to do the job adequately. But as my colleague notes, it is not just a matter of having more personnel to do the inspections, it is a matter of the extra cost burden that Canadian farmers have in order to pay some of the cost recovery fees for these inspectors that our fellow farmers in the United States do not have. They cover their costs for food, health and safety for their farm community. We put a cost recovery fee on Canadian farmers that puts them at an unfair disadvantage.

Government Orders

We tabled an all party committee report in December and we asked the government, in terms of the beef and hog crisis, to take on some of these costs and to take them on seriously. It failed to respond in that regard. I would put on the record that we believe we need to re-align Canada's regulatory inspection fees and cost recovery rates such as those applied to border measures, to traceability, to food inspections, but to be competitive and on a par with our major trading partners, including the United States.

We also need to work with the CFIA and other industry groups to improve approvals for new medications, et cetera. We cannot have a higher cost regime in Canada than elsewhere for our primary producers because they put on grocery store shelves the best food that can be found in the world. They should not have to pay a burden of cost that is different from other competing farmers in other countries in order to do that.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-52, An Act respecting the safety of consumer products. My colleague from the Bloc Québécois who is our critic for health issues made a speech earlier today. She confirmed that the Bloc Québécois approved the principle of the bill since the Bloc had already asked the government to make its safety rules concerning dangerous products more stringent to prohibit the fabrication, promotion and marketing of any product that present an unacceptable risk to health. I will come back to that.

Unfortunately, we know that some people succeed in selling toys, food and other products containing dangerous substances. They end up in Canadian markets, on our grocery shelves, and in our children's hands. That should not happen in 2008. One can understand that a few, rare cases may happen, but it seems that the problem has now reached alarming proportions.

The Bloc also called on the government to require manufacturers to inspect their products and show they do not pose a danger to consumers. This burden of proof did not exist—and still does not exist, because the bill has not yet been passed—but it is change we called for some time ago.

I should point out that consumer groups reacted fairly positively to the announcement of this bill, but remain cautious. We always say that no government should be given a blank cheque, especially not this one. We do not know what is going on behind the scenes, and it is always disturbing when we do not know all the ins and outs of a bill. One thing is certain: we can give the government the benefit of the doubt for the time being. Consumers remain cautious, as I said, just as we do.

That is why we will refer this bill to the committee, so that we can hear testimony and examine everything this bill encompasses, just like the related bill, Bill C-51. We will look at the regulations to see how serious the government is in its approach.

Geneviève Reid of the consumer group Option consommateurs stated that it is a step in the right direction, provided there are resources to back it up, the regulations are solid and there is good communication with the public. She was quoted in *La Presse* on

April 9, 2008, after the government announced that it was going to introduce these bills.

As for the obligation for companies to declare any major incident involving one of their products, Ms. Reid says that there will also need to be an incident register where consumers can report incidents. It makes a difference if there is such a mechanism for consumers who have bought items containing dangerous substances or foods unfit for human consumption that have made those consumers ill. People need an easily accessible way to let the government know that there was a problem with a product.

Clearly, this information will not necessarily be released immediately. The necessary checks will be made to determine whether this product did in fact pose a problem. If consumers are involved in the process, the result could be even more information about certain incidents that might happen.

I do not question the relevancy of the bill. With all those recalls in recent months and years, whether they involve toys or food, there is reason to be concerned. It was time the government did something about this issue.

Earlier, I had a discussion with the hon. member for Malpeque, because we both sit on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. We are very concerned about food recalls. These recalls always target food that comes from other countries. This was the case with spinach, cantaloupe, carrot juice, pear juice, and pork that came from abroad and contained melamine.

It was not intended for human consumption, at least I hope, but animal feed was contaminated. As regards this specific issue, there is still a void in the legislation. No one is responsible for ensuring that we feed safe food to our pets.

• (1725)

The result is that some pets have died. And we know how people are attached to their animals. Personally, I have always lived with a cat. I have always had a cat since I was born. I still have a female cat that is almost 15 years old now. I feed her well and she weighs 17 pounds. She is a little overweight.

All this to say that pet owners expressed their concerns when that happened. I would like the government to take note of it, so that we can fill this void in the legislation when we have the opportunity to examine these things in committee, whether it is through this bill, or another one.

Food safety has been seriously challenged in recent years. In a few moments, I will share some numbers with those who are listening. As I was saying earlier, during questions and comments, whenever officials from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency appear before the committee, we always ask them questions about food inspection, not only once it is in Canada, but also at the border, and even abroad.

Government Orders

Earlier, the reciprocity in standards was mentioned. That is important. Some pesticides, insecticides and other chemicals used in producing the fruits and vegetables we eat are forbidden for use in Canada. In some cases, it is a good thing. There are too many products that have been used without their safety being truly established. Measures are being taken to make sure that some products are used under surveillance and some products are prohibited.

Unfortunately, some products come from China, India and even the United States. I do not want to single out only developing countries. The United States also made the political and social choice to authorize the use of some pesticides and some chemical products. That is their decision.

In Canada, we do not allow these products. Unfortunately, foods grown in those countries can get through all testing and end up in our stores. That is an issue we raise every time the Canadian Food Inspection Agency appears before us. We are told that the issue is under scrutiny and that the products sold here are up to our standards and that inspections are done.

However, we know that there is a lack of inspectors. The hon. member for Malpeque was right when he said earlier that every time there are talks about increasing the number of inspections and inspectors and raising the budget the agency has to do the job, we must not make the farm producers pay for it. It is the government's responsibility to make sure that all food and other products entering Canada are safe.

We too often see that foods produced using pesticides that are forbidden in Canada can find their way into our grocery stores.

Earlier, I spoke about the lack of inspectors. I wonder if Bill C-51 solves this problem. They say they want to increase the number of inspectors or improve the chances of having an inspection. However, upon reading the bill, I have serious doubts about the government's willingness to actually conduct more inspections.

Knowing that we import goods from China, India or even the United States—they come from all over—and the source of a product, why do the inspectors not go there to see what is happening? In terms of the environment, you do not need to watch TV for long or read about what is happening to know that in China, for example, environmental standards are quite lax. Personally, I would not even drink the water used to grow these products, these fruits and vegetables. Some concerns expressed by consumers are certainly understandable. We could do an on-site check of what is used to grow crops. It would be an advantage to have more inspectors to do that.

• (1730)

Therefore, it is not the relevance of the bill that concerns me, but the lack of resources allocated to the front lines. It is one thing to increase fines for guilty parties, but the priority should be given to inspections and reciprocity of health standards. We spoke about reciprocity earlier. It goes without saying that our beef producers, for example, have to deal with unfair competition. We know that, in the United States, beef producers are not required to dispose of specified risk materials, as are our beef producers, who presently absorb the costs. That is a serious problem.

Earlier today we debated Bill C-33 on biofuels. We think there may be an interesting opportunity for biodiesel, but nothing is officially in place yet. It is not yet possible for our producers to make money with specified risk materials. Right now these represent an additional expense for them. Consequently there is unfair competition from American producers. We need to examine reciprocity.

I also wonder about the Conservatives' lack of judgment with respect to the safety of toys and foods.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Oh, oh!

Mr. André Bellavance: The Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec reacted and that is understandable. I will explain to him why I said there was a lack of judgment. The government has known since 2006 that the act did not adequately protect Canadians. When the new government took power in 2006—it was brand new for almost two years—it knew from the Auditor General's report that the act was lax. We have had all of these recalls and all of these products have entered the country under this act. All the government did was react. It took a long time. As for calling it a lack of judgment, the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec can take a look at his dictionary, but he cannot deny what I am saying.

The Auditor General pointed out that Health Canada was short on inspectors. How can the Conservative government justify its lax attitude since 2006, when this is a matter of health and safety for Canadians, and particularly for children, when we are talking about contaminated toys? This government likes to use its announcements as a marketing tool, targeting very specific audiences.

We saw the Prime Minister visiting the Salvation Army surrounded by gifts during the holidays to say that the government would now be focusing on toys. For more than a year, the Auditor General had been sounding the alarm. It makes for a good photo op, but perhaps the government should stop bragging about solving the problem, when it took far too long to do so. Clearly the problem is still not solved, but a step has been made in the right direction. The fact that it took so long was one of the problems. The Prime Minister announced that he intended to amend the legislation in September 2007. Why did he wait so long? That question remains unanswered. And because of this, consumers now feel much more insecure.

Bill C-52 was tabled one and a half years after the Auditor General's warning in November 2006. The report notes:

8.21 Product safety program managers considered many of their regulatory activities to be insufficient to meet their regulatory responsibilities. We found these opinions were confirmed in an internal study of the program's resource needs, documents relating to resource allocation, and in interviews conducted as part of our audit.

Government Orders

The report also notes:

8.22 The product safety program has requested additional funding, but it received very little funds for special initiatives in 2005–06 to address the shortfalls presented above. Program managers indicated that their inability to carry out these responsibilities could have consequences for the health and safety of Canadians and Quebecers, of course, [the member's emphasis] such as exposure by consumers to non-compliant hazardous products. There is also a risk of liability to the Crown.

Thus, it took the government over a year to announce even its intention to do something, and a year and a half to introduce the bill we are discussing here today in the House.

• (1735)

How can the government justify this laxity? It was probably too worried about its four or five priorities with a quick election in mind. Everyone knows what the government did. As the Bloc Québécois agriculture critic, I can say that agriculture was not one of its priorities. It set a few priorities and really laid the groundwork for a very quick election, and when there was no election, it did not know what to do and no longer had any priorities. I do not understand why this was not a priority. I mentioned agriculture earlier, but there are many others. That was obviously one of them. Public health and safety should be one of this government's priorities, just as they should be a priority for Parliament as a whole.

And it is not as if there were no warnings. I was talking to the Minister of Labour earlier about a lack of judgment. It goes without saying that the government needed to take action when so many toys were recalled. Why the government did not act more quickly is totally beyond me. There were recalls by Fisher-Price and Mattel. In August 2007, Mattel recalled 18.6 million toys made in China. Members certainly remember that saga. The most deplorable thing in this case was that, in order to maintain a good relationship with its Chinese supplier, Mattel apologized to that company for the prejudice this may have caused. Had I been in Mattel's shoes, I would have apologized to the consumers who ended up buying toys contaminated with lead paint. There was too much lead in the paint used on these toys.

What do children do with these toys? They handle them and put them in their mouths. When that happens, it can obviously become a problem if the paint used on the toy contained a dangerous substance. There is no problem with a child putting a toy in his or her mouth if that toy is safe. However, a danger was discovered and I think Mattel should have shown more compassion toward its customers by apologizing to them. I can certainly say that if it turns out that diseases are linked to the use of these toys, the company will not only have to apologize, it will also have to pay. So, as I was saying, the most frequent problem is the presence of too much lead in the paint.

Although I have criticized the fact that the government took a lot of time before introducing this bill in the House of Commons and although the Bloc Québécois had to make repeated requests before the government finally took action, Bill C-52 is a step in the right direction. We will see what the government's intentions are in committee.

One of the positive points that I wish to emphasize is the obligation to document the product's history. The traceability of the product, if you will. In Quebec, Agri-Traçabilité Québec allows us to

track our meat from the farm to the table. Thanks to that agency, Quebec is far more advanced than the rest of Canada. We should follow Quebec's example in these things, because it is important for the safety of consumers. I spoke earlier of the pork products imported from abroad in which melamine was found. Thanks to Agri-Traçabilité Québec, that would not happen in Quebec.

Previously, the hon. member for Malpeque spoke of country of origin labelling. Some products we can find on the shelves that are marked "Product of Canada" are not made in Canada at all, like olives. He spoke of grapefruit juice and we could also mention orange juice. There are many similar products. There are even some pickles, which could have originated in Canada, but the only Canadian parts are the jar, the lid and the vinegar; the pickles themselves come from India. We should not be able to put a "Product of Canada" label on such products.

I would like to end on some positive points. The manufacturer or importer will have to inform the government of any incident that should arise, in Canada or elsewhere. As I mentioned previously, inspectors will have greater powers to intervene. We will also need to adequately fund those measures and ensure we have the necessary staff to carry out the inspections properly.

• (1740)

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska and I appreciated his speech. My question is very simple. He painted a complete picture. I understand why he talked more specifically about inspection needs. It was really necessary to talk about contaminated food not only for dogs, but also for other animals, and about the issue of toys that do not even come close to meeting our standards.

My question is entirely related to agriculture and to the fact that we have here, in Quebec particularly and in the rest of Canada, very strict standards as far as production is concerned. In Quebec, we have mechanisms, including traceability and others, to ensure that the food that appears on our plates and goes into our bodies will be totally safe.

My question is very simple. Why are the Government of Canada and the parliamentarians in this House not imposing standards as binding, as strict and as safe for our people? For imported foods and ingredients to be used in food products, why do not we require at the source the same quality and the same standards that we apply here? Obviously, there would be quality controls and inspections. Why do we accept less than what we demand here, at the price it costs here? We would have a good quality, absolutely safe food basket at a reasonable price.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her excellent question. I would send it right across the aisle because it is the same thing we have been asking this government and even the previous one. When I arrived here in the House of Commons, the Liberals were in power and we were already asking these kinds of questions.

Government Orders

To answer the hon. member's question more specifically, I think that consumers are entitled to know exactly where the products they buy come from and how they were produced. There is a lack of information here. The reason is very simple. It is for purely commercial reasons. The government allows this because it wants to continue trading with other countries.

The idea has never been to forbid trade with other countries, unless their products are unhealthy. There are some foods that cannot be sourced anywhere else. Bananas, oranges, grapefruit and olives just do not grow around here. Some products will always have to come from abroad.

The great problem, as we have long known, is in the area of reciprocity and what we demand of our own products but not of those that land on our shelves from abroad. I have never been able to understand why we do not have the same requirements for these products, other than the big bucks involved.

We are told that these requirements exist. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will come and say that products cannot enter the country if they fail to meet the safety standards. However, we regularly find products right beside our own good stuff that consumers might be tempted to buy because things are put on them to make them last longer and make the fruit and vegetables look better.

I can say, though, that increasingly consumers are not necessarily looking at the colour and beauty of a product, one that has been waxed or produced with pesticides. They are looking more and more for what seems most natural and comes from somewhere close by. At some point, we will have to give our own farmers the space they deserve. When products are not up to scratch, they will have to be stopped at the border. They simply cannot enter. That is what we should do.

● (1745)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to what my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska said about the lack of judgment of the Conservatives. With all the other examples that we already have, I think that it reveals that they are not interested in an issue if there is not enough marketing, if people are not talking about the issue and if it is not on the front page.

That is more and more obvious in this case. And we have proof of it: back in her 2006 report, the Auditor General sounded the alarm. There were also other events after that. We did wait for a long time. Finally, that lack of judgment has turned into irresponsibility and incompetence. Examples of that are unfortunately numerous. I would like the hon. member to come back to this topic. We are under the impression that the Conservative government is more likely to act when the issue is purely a question of marketing.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question. I believe he just put his finger on the problem. Let us give credit to this government. It is a master of communications. When the Prime Minister announced the reduction of the GST, he was in a car dealer's showroom standing beside a \$40,000 minivan, with a big label showing a one percentage point reduction of the GST. This is just a series of photo-ops—excuse me for using the English term in French but I do not know any other

one. The government makes big announcements, but does very little. In this case, as I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister ended up at the Salvation Army, with gifts all around him, saying that children ought to have toys which are not dangerous for them. We are in favour of that. However, when he made that announcement, surrounded by gifts, a full year had already gone by since the Auditor General had sounded the alarm. I wonder why the government took so long to act.

I would also like to remind my colleague of the recalls which occurred. The government cannot pretend it did not know. In all, there were 32 recalls in 2006, and 90 in 2007. To this day, in 2008, there have been 37 recalls. Obviously, in the case of one single recall, millions of toys can be involved. And I am just talking about toys. I read this in the *Protégez-vous* magazine, which aims at protecting Quebec consumers. The recalls include millions of toys—21 million toys—most of them made in China, that have been recalled since last August. If this is not enough for the government to act, I wonder what it will take. In my opinion, making announcements in places where good photographs can be taken is just not serious. What is needed is legislation which will really protect people. The government must make this a priority and stop showing off.

● (1750)

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that I rise to speak to Bill C-52. For at least a year and a half, the Bloc Québécois has asked the minister to reinforce its hazardous products safety requirements in order to ban the production, promotion and marketing of any product that could present an unacceptable danger to health.

We are not only talking about health, or about situations where people get sick all of a sudden; we are also talking about long term effects, and that is what is pernicious. The legislation should be able to find a way to trace poisoning cases back on a long-term basis. I would even go as far as to say that the legislation should be able to trace back mental health problems that people could have developed after contact with certain products. This information is not always easy to find. This is why we would like to improve this bill because some of its provisions seem somewhat simplistic.

Obviously, we realize that this bill comes along after the legislation the Americans just passed. When the United States passes a law, Canada finally decides to legislate on the matter.

The government has known since 2006, since the Auditor General's report, that the legislation did not properly protect the public. This is not something new, and my colleague pointed that out earlier. I am emphasizing this because they would have us believe that they just realized that the public needs to be protected. The Bloc Québécois has been calling for this for a long time now.

Government Orders

We would also like Ottawa to give manufacturers the burden of inspecting products and demonstrating that they will not compromise consumer health and safety. I am talking about imported products, because the discussion with the hon. member for Malpeque earlier was very interesting. He was saying that Canadians are not asked to do inspections or pay for them because they would no longer be competitive.

However, when it comes to products imported from Asian countries—China and India in particular—producers of those products, and not the government, should have to prove that their product is acceptable. I am all for the government paying for the inspectors, but it should not have to pay for the tests to protect the public.

We know that some products are entering the Canadian market. These are products we have not had the privilege of consuming before because they came from abroad. I am thinking of commercial and residential paints in particular. Apparently, there is a whole movement by companies who are getting ready to import paint. Certain paint can be very harmful to one's health. Here in Canada, we have taken very important measures with respect to VOCs, volatile organic compounds, and also with respect to all the products that bind paints.

Naturally this makes paint more expensive. Therefore, if we produce paint here that respects our standards, foreign paint also has to respect our standards.

Will we protect people from this paint before it ends up our shelves, or will we do so once the paint has ended up on our shelves and people have proof that this paint is dangerous?

In my opinion, Bill C-52 should be clear enough on the fact that the imported products must be proven to be suitable and compliant with our health standards.

These health standards are not always very high in Canada. I am thinking in particular of lead and radiation coming from radioactive materials. Our standards, which are not very high, are not even being met. As was said earlier, standards are high in agriculture, but for other products, they are not. Therefore, we should review the quality of our standards.

● (1755)

I would stress that what I want to know is if we should let the products come in and then, determine whether they are acceptable or not, or if we should stop them from entering the country.

In Japan, a very well organized country, inspectors are sent to the point of origin of the product. If the product does not meet the Japanese standards, it does not leave the port and is not even taken aboard the ship. It is very important to understand that it is much easier to have inspectors applying our standards in foreign countries than to let the goods come in and then make sure they are properly inspected. Yet, presently this is how inspections are carried out: we let meat, vegetables and fruits come in.

I used to know someone at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Sometimes, it is difficult to inspect a large quantity of vegetables or meat once it has arrived, because these products are

distributed very quickly across Canada, even before inspectors have time to see them.

It would be much easier to use a system similar to the Japanese one, that is to inspect, approve and seal the products, and then let them enter the country. This method would ensure that the products arriving in Canada meet the standards. If we fail to do this, there is a much greater risk that unacceptable products could be distributed across the country.

So, it is important that we improve this bill. It is also important that we preserve the spirit of the law at its highest degree of effectiveness. This means that we should not simply think about having more inspectors to implement the legislation. The implementation of the act is just one step in the process. Afterwards, we must have more inspectors to preserve the legislation's high degree of effectiveness. Sending inspectors abroad, at the departure point of the products, could significantly help maintain the high effectiveness of Bill C-52, which is currently before us.

There is a similar problem with pesticides. It was mentioned earlier. My riding produces a lot of apples, but it is not the only one. It is also the case for the ridings of other NDP members. Currently, the United States is sending us a lot of its apples, because its producers use organic pesticides that are accepted by Canada, as long as they are mentioned on the apples, and these pesticides are cheaper than the ones that we use here. However, the pesticides used in the United States and accepted once they are mentioned on the apples are not approved here in Canada as pesticides that can be used by apple growers.

So, we should not think that Bill C-52 alone will ensure a very high degree of safety and competitiveness. It is absolutely necessary that our producers be on a level playing field with producers abroad who export their products here. So, this issue will have to be examined very carefully. The legislation will have to make a distinction between imported and local products.

A cosmetic—cosmetics are indeed included in the bill—made in Canada must be inspected before it is put on the shelves. However, we cannot wait until production is completed. On the other hand, if that product comes from abroad, production will be completed. That is why I am insisting that we must absolutely inspect products on the premises, before they are shipped.

Bill C-52 includes safety requirements for dangerous products. It almost prohibits manufacturing some of them. I talked about importing, but there is also the selling, advertising, labelling and packaging of consumer products. Of course this impacts on labelling costs, which will be very significant, but we will know whether the product is imported, or manufactured here.

Government Orders

● (1800)

The 51% we were talking about earlier may no longer apply. Apparently, the packaging for Van Houtte coffees—not that I am naming names—constitutes 51%. It says “Made in Canada”, but it is coffee. As far as I know, Canada does not produce coffee, but because packaging represents 51% of the price of the coffee, it says “Made in Canada”. If people can put “Made in Canada” on products that are mostly made elsewhere, we will never be able to implement Bill C-52 because its priority is ensuring that imported products comply with Canadian standards. There is some work to be done on this bill. I am sure that the members who are going to be working on this in committee will come up with a special label to identify imported products and Canadian-made products more clearly.

Naturally, nobody believes that recalls are the solution. As I was saying earlier, it has to happen before the products even get here. The system has been too lenient. When toys were found to be dangerous, they were recalled. But they had already made it to the market. People had bought them and taken them home. Bill C-52 simply has to make it impossible for such items or materials to be distributed.

I would like to revisit my paint example. It will be difficult to determine whether four litres of paint—which is still known as a gallon—is imported or not, especially if the packaging is made here and is a well-known brand. Right now, Sico, a Quebec-based company, has to comply with American standards on volatile organic compounds before its products leave Quebec. I think that Bill C-52 should demand exactly the same thing of products being imported here.

We are talking about consumer products, particularly things as unusual and varied as cribs, tents and carpets. They are currently allowed to enter with no standards in place. There are no standards for tents. Does everyone know that there are no standards for tents, apart from flammability? Someone could suffocate in a tent. A tent could fall on top of you. They pose all sorts of dangers, but we are not protected by legislation. When it comes to products of this nature, all standards should be stricter and show greater concern for users.

The same is true for carpets. There are very few standards concerning carpets. Manufacturers are allowed to use nearly any chemical to prevent dust from settling or to preserve the colour. These are some of the products people breathe in unawares, when they are sitting at home, watching television. People can gradually develop illnesses that are hard to diagnose but that result from products made from just about anything, because of this laxity.

I am using carpets as an example, but I could also be talking about certain kinds of flooring that are currently being imported, such as plastic flooring. One rule of thumb nearly always holds true: when a product has a strong odour, it is toxic to some extent. Pick up the plastic flooring that is imported and sold in stores. If it was subjected to rigorous tests, it would be refused because it is toxic.

Thus, this would cover a wide range of products. Consider, for example, batteries used in toys or flashlights. We received some in Canada that exploded.

● (1805)

Such a battery exploding can burn the eyes of a child with the chemical products it contains and greatly affect not only the physical health but also the mental health of that child.

In fact, adults would react the same way. Recently, people bought imported rifles—always from the same country—and at the first, fourth or fifth shot, the rifles blew up. One can imagine the trauma for a person not used to handling firearms.

This bill is therefore very broad in scope and must be based on standards which will have to be stricter than the present ones.

The bill also deals with protection against the radiation coming from clinical or consumer products, such as X-rays or laser beams. As incredible as it may seem, cheap watches are still imported with dials emitting dangerous radioactivity. Even some cars from Asia have luminous dials which emit radiation harmful to human health. They can cause cancer. It can be particularly damaging for taxi drivers whose car is equipped with such a dial, since they are always exposed to it.

This is harmful and it will be difficult to control. A little test upon entry into the country will not suffice. People will have to perform many more tests. Our standards will have to apply to everything produced outside of the country and they will often have to be made stricter.

We are not the first to adopt such legislation. Earlier I spoke about Japan, a country that is more advanced than ours in terms of domestic standards for all goods purchased from other countries.

As I mentioned before, the United States has just adopted regulations, in cooperation with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, that respond to the serious problems caused by these products. It is a veritable plague given that the U.S. imports 80%—if not more—of its toys, as does Canada. Dangerous toys are becoming a plague. On Radio-Canada, I heard some people talking about whether it was possible to find toys made in Canada. The woman answered no, that she had none in her store even though she carries a large selection of toys.

Europe is also addressing this issue. It will be important for the committee to look at what is being done in Japan. It is easier to see what is happening in the United States because we are much closer. However, what about Europe? The EU has proposed making standards more stringent and lowering allowable limits for other substances such as lead and mercury. It has prohibited about forty allergenic perfumes, perfumes not made of natural essences. We permit higher levels of lead and mercury in our products than Europe does. Europe has taken a stand and we should follow suit soon.

I would like the precautionary principle to apply to Bill C-52 and to truly serve as our guide to improving it. At the same time, we should examine our standards, which are sometimes lacking. We absolutely have to do this if we wish to protect all our citizens. Neo-liberal globalization is a new phenomenon that we did not have to reckon with previously.

Government Orders

We are proud to participate in this bill and we hope to be truly able to provide more money and more locations for inspectors to do a good job.

• (1810)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is not very complicated. With our good judgment and our sense of responsibility, we in the Bloc Québécois have had occasion to chastise the Conservative government about this issue.

I want to go back to the question I asked my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska earlier, and I am sure my colleague touched on it briefly as well. Since August 2007, nearly a year ago, there have been numerous product recalls. The Auditor General sounded the alarm on this issue in 2006. Now it is nearly May 2008.

This is like a breach of contract, and confidence in the current Conservative government is eroding more and more. We could look at other events and issues on which the “new government”—as the Conservatives referred to themselves for quite some time, a little too often for my taste—has not kept its word.

I would like my colleague to comment on the fact that it took action by the Auditor General and repeated recalls for the government to come up with a bill. At the same time, we are wondering whether there will be enough inspectors to do the work and what regulations will be associated with the bill. Many questions have yet to be answered.

I am certain that my colleague is capable of mentioning it, but it is important to say that people in our party and other parties will act responsibly and pay close attention to this bill. They will examine this bill very thoroughly in committee. Voting for this bill does not mean automatic kudos for the Conservatives for introducing this bill, because they should have introduced it much earlier.

My colleague is certainly able to speak about this government's lack of judgment and its irresponsibility in waiting until numerous products had been recalled and had made the headlines before it finally took action.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his remarks and for his very pertinent question.

Clearly, we do not share the same ideology. Members of the Bloc have an ideology that prompts us to think and work for the people in our ridings, not necessarily for the people who organize society, who make money, who engage in free trade with other countries. We are closer to the workers and labourers, and therefore, to consumers.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Conservative Party's ideology means that it is in no hurry to introduce this kind of bill because it could hurt private enterprise, which may want certain privileges. The bill calls for traceability and documentation, but the minister may choose not to ask for these things if it is not in the companies' interest.

There seems to be a huge abyss between our two ways of thinking. We have before us a bill that we think is very important and should have been introduced a long time ago. But the government thinks that this bill, whose goal is to protect the average consumer, is not as important as a bill to protect the weightier interests of the

people who are maintaining the neo-liberal capitalist status quo in this country.

We have to wonder if the Conservatives are doing everything they can to drag this bill out. They should have introduced it a year and a half ago. There would have been enough time to have it passed before an election. Now they might try to drag it out until after the election, which could happen who knows when, but possibly a while from now. It takes some time for a bill to be passed, and when it is introduced late in the game like this one, obviously there is a good chance it will never be passed.

• (1815)

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Speaker, this is in the same vein as what my colleague was saying. During question period today, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages spoke about how the market ruled. Why would the market rule? What should rule is justice, a sense of responsibility and the possibility of straightening out a situation that is wrong or that has become intolerable.

There are many examples of the problems we have had with products. I remember very well. Last week, I was in my riding, and once again we had to sound the alarm. People had to demonstrate in the street. They do not do this for fun. The cod fishers who were asking for a shrimp quota were forced to take to the streets to demonstrate in order to get it. Why did this not happen three weeks earlier, so we could have avoided the stress and the demonstration?

The Conservatives seem to be fond of the wait and see approach, where they let things go and let the markets rule. They wait for problems to come up, or rather they wait for problems to make the front page. When a problem makes the front page, they will do something. Otherwise, they do not.

I wonder if my colleague agrees that there are many examples that lead us to believe there are ideological differences.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine sees the situation quite clearly. Ideology is what separates us from the Conservatives. A bill like this one is a bill that was introduced because of international markets and because almost anything goes. Trying to be on equal trade footing has brought us to our knees. We are prepared to sacrifice everything and do anything for trade.

Commercially speaking, it does not matter to us where our products come from. If we lose jobs it is not so bad. Trade with a capital “T” as big as this House is controlled by the market. That is what is happening. At some point, when we have compromised too much, we end up poisoning our citizens. That is what we are seeing. We are poisoning our children, our people and we are creating the possibility of long-term illnesses.

Government Orders

We used to talk about workplace illness. Now we talk about consumer illness. Because we have allowed the markets to spiral out of control, we are now dealing with consumer illnesses.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sadly, there is only a few minutes left for me to point out the concerns I have with Bill C-52. I will cut to the chase and build on the comments of my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, who pointed out, quite rightly, that the root of our problem today can be found in the laissez-faire capitalism associated with free trade, which has led to further and further deregulation and, in fact, a reluctance for governments to regulate in the sense that it would have and should have to protect citizens of our country.

I note the Hazardous Products Act was put in effect in 1968 and has been virtually unchanged since then. That was a period of time when we made things in Canada. We were not worried about the import situation quite as much. We could control, modulate and regulate the input into the products. When it had the stamp "made in Canada" on it, we could assume it was probably fairly safe.

We have yielded that control now. The globalization of capital has made that irrelevant. In fact, we are condemned when we raise these issues. We are told that we are trying to put up non-tariff barriers to trade whenever we say that we should at least harmonize our standards, so the expectations are that we are not being poisoned by our trading partners.

However, my colleague is right. We are poisoning another generation of children in our zeal, in our enthusiasm to close down the last manufacturing plant in Canada and export every last job. We are in such a hurry to do this that we are not even being careful enough to ensure it does not have health consequences to the point where we are pickling the innards of our kids with some toxic super-chemicals that they are being bombarded with in this post-war era.

The petrochemical industry has gone nuts in our country and in the world in the post-war years. Mark my words, in the very near future one in two Canadians will die of cancer. It never used to be that way. Fifty per cent of all the people will die of cancer when my kids are my age. That is absurd. That means we have done something terribly wrong.

If anybody watched Wendy Mesley's show on television, the very sensitive investigative journalism done about her personal struggle with breast cancer and the questions that were not asked about what happened when we ingested chemical A and chemical B and it turned into chemical C inside our internal organs, those are the questions that are not being asked. We are being far too casual.

The one thing we are being extraordinarily casual about is the biggest industrial killer the world has ever known, which is asbestos. Canada not only allows the import of asbestos, it is the world's second largest exporter of the world's greatest industrial killer. Asbestos kills more people than all other industrial toxins combined, but yet in Canada not only exports it with great and wanton abandon, it heavily subsidizes the production and export of asbestos.

We can be critical of allowing toys coming in from China with asbestos and lead in them. When I said that there were toys with asbestos coming in to Canada, the Minister of Health stood and said

that I was exaggerating, that the government would never tolerate it. A few short weeks later we found toys with asbestos in them, 5% tremolite asbestos in the CSI fingerprint game, which was such a popular seller last Christmas.

We are so cavalier about asbestos, we are not only mining it, producing it, selling it, exporting it, we are importing it as well. I believe the government is afraid to condemn the use of asbestos because it does not want to offend the province of Quebec, from where asbestos comes, the last remaining asbestos mine in the country.

The asbestos mines that I worked in are all closed. They were closed by natural market forces. Nobody will buy this toxin any more unless, for some magic reason, it is the benign asbestos that they mine in that province when all of a sudden it is subsidized and its export is promoted.

We send Canadian Department of Justice lawyers around the country like globe-trotting propagandists for the asbestos industry to find new markets and new places to pollute with Canadian asbestos.

● (1820)

We are just as guilty of that but we are not taking the steps to protect our own people from the import of toxins because, unlike Europe and the United States, Canada does not even have the power to issue a mandatory recall of a product. The United States can. In California and in a number of states they clearly take their hazardous materials more seriously. In a properly functioning public health protection system, when a problem comes to light about a product on the market there should be an obligation on the part of the government to inform consumers and remove it from the market. However, under this new law, the government may do this but there is nothing to require it to do this. It is still optional. The word "may" is used throughout.

● (1825)

Bill C-52 is inadequate on a number of levels, one of which I was just illustrating. I believe it should require the government to take positive action when it comes to light that a product on the market is harmful.

In the current context of the bill, if the government is made aware of a toxic chemical in a children's toy there would be no legal requirement for it to even make people aware of it. In the case of the asbestos in the CSI fingerprint toy, it was denying it. It would not even suggest that asbestos was bad for us. I made the government aware of it but there was no attempt by the government to recall the toy. We had a press conference downstairs in the 130-S room. To this day, the government has done nothing about it because for it to say that the asbestos in that children's toy is bad, it would need to admit that the asbestos it is subsidizing and exporting around the world is bad for people. It would be caught and hoisted on its own petard, as it were.

Adjournment Proceedings

There is no legal requirement in the bill for the government to make people aware of a bad product and I think that is wrong. I suppose there would be political consequences if we exposed the government, which I did in the CSI thing, but it is hard because, as we know, after the fact accountability relies on the government getting caught.

Similarly, the minister would have the power to order companies to conduct studies to ensure that a product is safe but nothing in the proposed law would ensure that products are regularly tested for toxicity. This is the subject of another bill, Bill C-225, in my name, a pesticide bill where we believe there should be a reverse onus on the companies that want to sell pesticides, herbicides and fungicides and that it should not really be up to us, or even the Government of Canada, to prove beyond a doubt that the product is absolutely safe. It should be the company that must prove the chemical is safe before it is sold. There is no such obligation now. The company can sell anything and only if someone does all the testing and determines it is unsafe will the company be curtailed in the sale of products.

That is completely arse backwards. That is clearly the lobbyists and the petrochemical industry. The pesticide producers have done a very effective job in tying the government around their little finger. This reverse onus notion would put the burden of proof on the manufacturers that the products they are selling are safe and the precautionary principle should surely apply, especially when we are dealing with children and pregnant women who are that much more susceptible and vulnerable to chemical contamination. The cell walls of a developing child, as the cells are multiplying, are so thin that they are like little sponges for these chemical pesticides.

We cannot put a tonne of pesticides on our lawns and let our children go out to roll in the grass and not expect them to be affected and affected permanently.

We also believe and are calling for the nationwide ban on the cosmetic, non-essential, non-agricultural use of pesticides. The provinces of Ontario and Quebec have now done it but that is only in the absence of leadership and direction from the federal government that should have done it without having to wait for other jurisdictions to do its regulatory job for it.

I want to simply say that there are a number of independent agencies in civil society that are critical of the bill. I seem to have misplaced my press release from the United Steelworkers of America but it is certainly one that has had a campaign on toxic imports partly because of the job issue. I would be happy to continue this at a later time.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we return to the study of Bill C-52, there will be 10 minutes remaining for the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I asked a question about the economy in the House back in February and the Conservative government did then what it continues to do, and that is to manufacture misleading communications on a vast range of issues.

This winter we saw the Minister of Industry attempt to rewrite the history of deficits in Canada with both false and bizarre comments on the various components of the Liberal plan for Canada.

The Conservatives released a 67 page document that disingenuously claims that the Liberal spending priorities would drive Canada into deficit. The Conservative interpretation of the Liberal spending priorities is quite simply totally wrong.

By way of an example, the Conservatives describe the cost of the Liberal demand for corporate tax reductions as simply unknown. This is despite the fact that they themselves included this measure in their fall economic and fiscal update. It causes one to question.

Further, the Conservatives grossly overestimate the cost of the 30/50 plan to reduce poverty in Canada, claiming that the entire plan would be paid for in the first year, and not over the five year period as we have committed to.

The Conservative document also double counts the Liberal commitment to invest \$1 billion in manufacturing jobs in technologies, claiming that we would both create an advance manufacturing prosperity fund and match the Ontario government's manufacturing fund.

We have been worried for some time about the capacity of the Conservative government to be trusted to provide valid financial analysis.

The Conservative government inherited a strong economy two short years ago. After 13 years of Liberal leadership, Canada was in a robust fiscal situation, the envy of the G-7 countries. What has the government done? It has squandered Canada's economic good fortune in two short years with spending priorities that are determined by short term political gain without any consideration for Canada's long term economic stability.

After two years of Conservative government, manufacturing sales have plummeted to a three year low and Canada's trade surplus has shrunk to its lowest levels in nearly a decade. Conservatives are losing credibility on important files like the environment, homelessness, immigration and foreign affairs, all of this at a very alarming rate, but their lack of initiative and vision on the economic file is alarming to say the least.

It would seem that this recent campaign of lies is designed to discredit the stellar economic and fiscal record of the Liberal Party.

Adjournment Proceedings

If I may take a moment to boast, the previous Liberal government delivered the longest string of budgetary surpluses since Confederation. Moreover, Liberal leader Stéphane Dion has repeatedly made it clear—

• (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. The hon. member is a privy councillor and experienced in this House, and knows not to name other members of the House by their own name.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just checking to see if you were listening.

Our Liberal leader made it clear that a new Liberal government will keep Canada's books balanced. This contrasts sharply to the record of the current Conservative finance minister, who was part of the common sense revolution in my province of Ontario that left a \$5 billion deficit.

The finance minister has a devastating record which includes broken promises on income trusts and a damaging flip-flop on interest deductibility.

With the downturn in the economy, Canadians are looking to the federal government for leadership and economic vision, but what do they find? They find a Conservative government that has completely been preoccupied with fabricating and misrepresenting Liberal priorities. This continued lack of economic stewardship is irresponsible and damaging to Canada's economy.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the face of global economic uncertainty, Canadians can be confident that their federal government is engaged in prudent fiscal management, and taking aggressive and pre-emptive measures to help Canada succeed.

For instance, we have provided nearly \$200 billion in long term, permanent tax relief to stimulate and bolster the economy, including lowering business tax rates to the lowest among major industrialized economies, cutting personal income taxes, and reducing the GST by two per cent.

This year alone, there has been \$21 billion in tax relief. That is roughly 1.4% of Canada's economy. It has entered and is entering our economy this year in a timely and permanent economic jolt.

We are making the largest federal public infrastructure investment since World War II through our \$33 billion building Canada fund.

We have also introduced a \$1 billion community development trust to assist communities and workers affected by economic instability, build a better future through job training, create opportunities for workers, economic development to create new jobs, and infrastructure development to stimulate economic diversification.

Indeed, the member's home province of Ontario has been very appreciative of our trust. Ontario's Liberal premier has called it "good for the people of Ontario" and said that the Prime Minister has "done something which we've been asking of him".

In its recent budget, the provincial government in Ontario outlined how it will utilize its portion of the \$1 billion trust, including

initiatives to help unemployed workers transition to new careers and well-paid jobs in the growing areas of the economy.

Collectively, these measures have been praised by a wide range of organizations, including the IMF, whose recent "World Economic Outlook" singled out Canada's action to date, remarking:

A package of tax cuts has provided a timely fiscal stimulus...the government's structural policy agenda should help increase competitiveness and productivity growth to underpin longer-term prospects.

Similarly, the University of Toronto's Institute for Policy Analysis heralded our Conservative government's measures to strengthen Canada's economy, stating:

Helping offset the [global economic] weakness...will be the "fortuitous" injection of stimulus from the tax cuts....

A *Calgary Herald* editorial praised the government's efforts to support the Canadian economy, pointing out that:

—the fall economic update [will] strengthen consumer demand, notably the 1% GST reduction, and...announced a billion-dollar fund to assist one-industry communities...for once a government seems to have been ahead of the curve.

We remain confident in our fiscal outlook.

We will continue our record of running balanced budgets.

Even the Liberal finance critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, has acknowledged that Canada will continue to remain in a surplus position, remarking that "if history is any guide...over time, surpluses will turn out to be larger than they currently are".

• (1840)

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate these chances to have adjournment proceedings. I wish that we would have more back and forth debate in this House because I think it is what Canadians would like.

However, what Canadians also deserve is honesty from this government and all members of Parliament. It is interesting to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about my province of Ontario when it is his government's finance minister who went out and told the world that people should not invest in Ontario because it was not a good place to invest and who took on my premier and my province when we all recognize that for years Ontario has been the economic engine of Canada.

I would also point out to my hon. friend that governing is about making decisions and balancing priorities. The government decided it would give two one-point GST reductions. The first one cost the coffers \$5 billion, the second around \$7 billion. Thirteen billion dollars went toward paying down the debt when it could have been invested in Canadians.

There are no more shock absorbers in our fiscal outlook. We said at the time when the budget came forward that we were one SARS crisis away from deficit. We are now a heartbeat away from deficit.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I might suggest that it does take a certain kind of politician to view giving back to Canadians their hard-earned money as anything but positive. We are proud to be ending the former Liberal government's practice of significant overtaxation, which resulted in huge surpluses.

Instead, while maintaining a sensible fiscal cushion, we are delivering historic tax relief that will leave more money in the pockets of Canadians. We are reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in nearly 50 years, lowering the overall tax burden by nearly \$200 billion and, unlike the Liberal opposition, we will not engage in billions and billions of dollars in reckless spending that would throw Canada back into deficit.

The Liberals' financial commitments made since the 2006 federal election alone would immediately push Canada back into deficit, racking up over \$60 billion in new debt. Obviously, the Liberal Party has embraced deficit spending and a tax and spend approach, one very similar to that of the member for—

• (1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

TRANSPARENCY IN AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this evening I would like to go back to the question I asked on March 3 about respecting the specific conditions and obligations in the motion that was passed concerning the Canadian armed forces mission in Afghanistan.

We explained our stance on a motion that required the Conservative government to orient the armed forces' mission toward overall reconstruction of the Afghan state and to withdraw from going after the Taliban after 2009. As we know, the purpose will be to establish legal, security and economic institutions in a country ravaged by war for over 40 years.

That motion also called on the government to coordinate with the departments and agencies involved in reconstruction in the province of Kandahar. We still do not know how the cabinet committee on Afghanistan will carry out that mandate on the ground.

The wording of the motion committed the government to greater transparency and accountability toward citizens and Parliament with respect to the three parts of the mission. As planned, the government created a special committee of the House, but up to now, we have been hearing anything but good news.

We learned from General Hillier that NATO had known since 2006 that we needed at least 1,000 more soldiers to secure the province of Kandahar. This information was not originally taken into account, because members were not informed during the debates held recently. This probably meant that the Taliban was able to carry

out more attacks on the troops in that region. It is probably one thing that limited Canada's chances for success.

Another 1,000 soldiers will fight alongside us, and we learned that they will be Americans. So there will be 1,000 more soldiers. However, based on what we know about them, will they respect the spirit of the motion adopted by the House of Commons? Do they even know about it? Will they adapt their strategies to take into account their Canadian comrades in arms and the role given to them by Parliament?

Will the Canada-U.S. forces work on rebuilding and on securing roads and villages to enable Afghans to live in peace, or will they continue their hunt for the Taliban?

We also learned that the cost of the mission had been hidden from Canadians and their representatives. The military budget for Afghanistan went from \$402 million in 2005-06 to \$803 million in 2006-07. In 2007-08, the cost of the mission will surpass \$1 billion.

Even though the government had this information, it waited for the motion to be voted on before giving it to us. So much for the transparency and accountability referred to in the motion.

Only later did we learn that the cost of the mission was increasing and that the Canadian government was hiding this fact from us. Everyone will agree that this was nonetheless an important factor to consider in an honest vote on the motion, like the one my colleagues and I took part in in this House.

In the end, our unbelievable Minister of Foreign Affairs ruined months of work by calling for the resignation of a governor, interfering in something that diplomats were handling perfectly well and thereby seriously damaging our diplomatic credibility.

I am beginning to think that the extraordinary work of the soldiers, aid workers and government officials is being undermined by the federal government's incompetence and I must ask, once again, in concrete terms, what difference will we make in Afghanistan?

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for raising this question.

In Afghanistan we strive to strike a balance between three pillars of engagement which are security, development and good governance. That is because security, development, and good governance are fundamentally dependent on each other in Afghanistan. This principle is embodied in the Afghanistan Compact, a five year road map for progress launched in 2006. The compact sets out benchmarks in each of these areas and timelines for meeting them. The Afghanistan Compact guides our engagement in Afghanistan.

When the motion was presented in this House, it was agreed to by the majority. Of course, the Bloc and the NDP voted against it. Nevertheless, it was passed with a majority vote. It was not a government motion. It was about the Canadian engagement in Afghanistan. I would like to correct the member and tell her that this was a Canadian position.

Adjournment Proceedings

When the Prime Minister appointed the non-partisan panel which came up with the recommendation for 1,000 soldiers and everything, we acted and we had a debate in this House. It is hard for me to understand why the member was not part of the debate when we discussed all of this.

Nevertheless, the government is fulfilling what the motion stated. A cabinet committee has already been set up. A parliamentary committee has also been set up which is made up of opposition members, myself, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. We will be working to ensure the essence of what was passed in this House, which is what Canadians want.

I want to re-emphasize the point that although we are committed to Afghanistan, we are committed to informing Canadians and having a debate in this House and telling Canadians what the mission is accomplishing and what is happening in Afghanistan.

I would like to assure the hon. member that this government is completely committed to an open and transparent system to ensure we fulfill our requirement which is the Afghanistan Compact.

As far as the 1,000 troops are concerned, this mission is UN mandated under NATO. We are a member of NATO. The American forces are a member of NATO. The French are a member of NATO as are the British. More than 60 countries are engaged in Afghanistan either through military, security, development or other aspects.

We know that Canadians take great pride with the international community in the effort of our brave diplomats, soldiers and development workers in Afghanistan. They are proud that Canada is making a difference in the lives of millions of Afghans.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, when I ask a question during an adjournment debate, I always do so in a non-partisan manner. I do not need to be lectured by any parliamentary secretary. I have studied this file. I took part in the debate and I remember it quite well. It was almost 11 p.m. on the last night and I voted in favour of this non-partisan motion. I would appreciate not being lectured in this House. I do not lecture others either.

The motion has been debated. I agree that it is non-partisan, but the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to

the Minister of International Cooperation will nonetheless acknowledge that this is a governmental obligation. It is not up to Parliament to run the UN-NATO mission in Afghanistan. That is the government's responsibility.

Why was the government not transparent before the motion was adopted? Why did it not tell us that it knew since 2006 that 1,000 more soldiers were needed? Why did it not give us the right budget figures? Why was it not transparent? Why was it not truly accountable? That is what we were promised in the motion.

I seriously question the way I was informed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I regret that I must interrupt the hon. member.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation now has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, nobody is giving anybody a lecture. She is a member of Parliament and she has the right to ask any questions and the government will put forward a position.

In her question she said that she needed transparency. I am telling her that this government is committed to transparency. That is what we have actually done. That is what we have done in the past and that is what we intend to do in the future. I was just outlining what this government has done to achieve the transparency that Canadians want. I can assure the member that we will continue to do that.

She has every right to ask questions in Parliament about what the government is doing whenever she desires. I know she is an independent member of Parliament so sometimes she is not on committee so she may have missed that. I can assure her that she is more than welcome to ask any questions on transparency in reference to our mission in Afghanistan.

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 6:51 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, April 28, 2008

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Competition Act

Bill C-454. Second reading	5133
Mr. Van Kesteren	5133
Mr. Savage	5133
Mr. Wallace	5135
Ms. Brunelle	5136
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	5137
Mr. Dykstra	5138
Mr. Vincent	5140
Mr. Gaudet	5140
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	5141

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999

Bill C-33. Report stage	5141
Mr. Bellavance	5141
Mr. Bevington	5143
Ms. Folco	5143
Mr. Lauzon	5144
Mr. Bevington	5145
Mrs. Thi Lac	5145
Mr. Bevington	5146
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	5146
Mr. Atamanenko	5147
Mr. Shipley	5148
Mr. Bevington	5148
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	5149
Mr. Bevington	5150
Mr. Siksay	5150
Mr. Angus	5152
Mr. Miller	5152
Mr. Angus	5153
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	5154
Mr. Bevington	5154
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	5155
Mr. Baird	5156

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Unborn Victims of Crime Act

Mr. Epp	5157
---------------	------

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Pacetti	5157
-------------------	------

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Vincent	5157
-------------------	------

British Columbia Southern Interior Communities

Mr. Atamanenko	5157
----------------------	------

Beef Industry

Mr. Miller	5158
------------------	------

Oral History Project

Mrs. Jennings	5158
---------------------	------

National Day of Mourning

Mrs. Davidson	5158
---------------------	------

The Mercuriades

Mrs. Thi Lac	5158
--------------------	------

Firearms Registration

Mr. Allen	5158
-----------------	------

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Telegdi	5159
-------------------	------

Taxation

Mr. Petit	5159
-----------------	------

National Day of Mourning

Ms. Davies	5159
------------------	------

Public Service Commission of Canada

Mr. Proulx	5159
------------------	------

The Artis Gala

Mr. Bachand	5160
-------------------	------

Tomb of Pierre Elliott Trudeau Defaced

Mr. Ignatieff	5160
---------------------	------

Taxation

Mr. Sweet	5160
-----------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Economy

Mr. Dion	5160
Mr. Van Loan	5160
Mr. Dion	5160
Mr. Van Loan	5161
Mr. Dion	5161
Mr. Van Loan	5161
Mr. Ignatieff	5161
Mr. Flaherty	5161
Mr. Ignatieff	5161
Mr. Flaherty	5161

Elections Canada

Mr. Duceppe	5161
Mr. Poilievre	5161
Mr. Duceppe	5161
Mr. Poilievre	5162
Mr. Guimond	5162
Mr. Poilievre	5162
Mr. Guimond	5162
Mr. Poilievre	5162
Mr. Layton	5162
Mr. Poilievre	5162
Mr. Layton	5162
Mr. Poilievre	5162

International Aid			
Ms. Hall Findlay	5162		
Ms. Oda	5163		
Ms. Hall Findlay	5163		
Ms. Oda	5163		
Finance			
Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	5163		
Mr. Flaherty	5163		
Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	5163		
Mr. Flaherty	5163		
TQS			
Mrs. Mourani	5163		
Ms. Verner	5163		
Mrs. Mourani	5163		
Ms. Verner	5163		
Unborn Victims of Crime Act			
Ms. Deschamps	5164		
Mr. Nicholson	5164		
Ms. Deschamps	5164		
Mr. Nicholson	5164		
Elections Canada			
Mr. LeBlanc	5164		
Mr. Poilievre	5164		
Mr. LeBlanc	5164		
Mr. Poilievre	5164		
Mrs. Redman	5164		
Mr. Poilievre	5164		
Mr. Goodale	5165		
Mr. Poilievre	5165		
Justice			
Mr. Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	5165		
Mr. Nicholson	5165		
Television Industry			
Mr. Mulcair	5165		
Ms. Verner	5165		
Mr. Mulcair	5165		
Ms. Verner	5165		
Elections Canada			
Mr. Russell	5165		
Mr. Poilievre	5166		
Mr. Rodriguez	5166		
Mr. Poilievre	5166		
Mr. Simms	5166		
Mr. Poilievre	5166		
Mr. Scarpaleggia	5166		
Mr. Poilievre	5166		
Bill 101 and the Canada Labour Code			
Mr. Laforest	5166		
Mr. Blackburn	5166		
Mr. Laforest	5166		
Mr. Blackburn	5167		
Ethics			
Ms. Murray	5167		
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	5167		
Agriculture			
Mr. Breitzkreuz	5167		
Mr. Ritz	5167		
Aboriginal Affairs			
Mr. Angus	5167		
Mr. Strahl	5167		
Mr. Angus	5168		
Mr. Strahl	5168		
Presence in Gallery			
The Speaker	5168		
Privilege			
Oral Questions			
Mr. Bélanger	5168		
Mr. Poilievre	5168		
Mr. LeBlanc	5169		
Mr. Van Loan	5169		
Points of Order			
Alleged remarks attributed to Member for Kings—Hants			
Mr. Brison	5169		
Oral Questions			
Mr. Guimond	5169		
Mr. Van Loan	5170		
Mr. Goodale	5170		
ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
International Treaties			
Mr. Keddy	5170		
Government Response to Petitions			
Mr. Lukiwski	5170		
Committees of the House			
Public Accounts			
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	5170		
International Trade			
Mr. Hill	5170		
Motion	5170		
(Motion agreed to)	5171		
Public Accounts			
Mr. Hill	5171		
Motion	5171		
(Motion agreed to)	5171		
Petitions			
Income Trusts			
Mr. Szabo	5171		
Student Loans			
Mr. Godin	5171		
Sponsorship Program			
Mr. Goodyear	5171		
Tibet			
Mr. Bagnell	5171		
Unborn Victims of Crime			
Mr. Allen	5171		
Human Trafficking			
Mr. Allen	5171		

Afghanistan	
Mr. Atamanenko	5171
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	5172
Questions Passed as Orders for Returns	
Mr. Lukiwski	5172
Request for Emergency Debate	
Forestry	
Ms. Fry	5173
The Speaker	5173

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Consumer Product Safety Act	
Mr. Clement	5173
Bill C-52. Second reading	5173
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	5175
Mr. Ouellet	5175
Mr. Easter	5175
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	5176
Ms. Gagnon	5178
Ms. Wasylcia-Leis	5180
Mr. Ouellet	5182

Mr. Silva	5183
Mr. Angus	5183
Mr. Easter	5184
Mr. Toews	5186
Mr. Bellavance	5186
Mr. Bellavance	5187
Ms. Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	5189
Mr. Blais	5190
Mr. Ouellet	5190
Mr. Blais	5193
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	5194

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

The Economy	
Mrs. Redman	5195
Mr. Menzies	5196
Transparency in Afghanistan	
Ms. Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	5197
Mr. Obhrai	5197

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En case de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :**
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

**Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: (613) 941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: (613) 954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@pwgsc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

**On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires ou la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : (613) 941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : (613) 954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**