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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Halifax West.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ISRAEL

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the people of Israel on the 60th anniversary of the founding of their nation.

We are proud that at the United Nations in 1947 Canada was one of the 33 countries that voted in favour of the creation of the Jewish homeland. We are also proud of the friendship that has continued to grow between us. The signing of a free trade agreement between our nations in 1996 has brought us closer still.

Of course, while the nation of Israel is relatively young, the land of Israel, which I have seen personally, is a place of incredibly vibrant history and heritage going back millennia.

As we celebrate the birth and success of this important democracy, we also join in celebrating the rich spiritual inheritance that Israel has granted the believers of many faiths. Shalom.

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VETERANS

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member for Wascana's Fighting Ryans, the Fighting Shaws of Brockton, PEI, in the great riding of Egmont, have "got them beaten" in their contribution to Canada during the second world war.

No less than 10 out of 11 sons of Augustus and Louise Shaw served their country at that time. The recruitment officer rejected the 11th as it was thought that 10 from one family was quite enough.

In fact, there were also four daughters in that family. One, Mae Isabel, also enlisted and married an enlisted man.

Gordon Raymond, Garfield, Bayfield, William, John Avar, Wilfred, John Augustus, Holden Saunders, Perley Sumner, Kenneth Earl, Mae Isabel, Shaws all, and Lloyd Thompson served this country in war and deserve the gratitude of this House.

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[Translation]

WORLD AIDS ORPHANS DAY

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, May 7 of each year is set aside to acknowledge the courage of the thousands of orphans living with AIDS around the world. Since 2002, thousands of people have participated in World AIDS Orphans Day events in more than 20 countries.

Nearly 800 elected officials from more than 40 countries have signed the proclamation advocating the taking of immediate measures for the protection and global caretaking of AIDS orphans, while respecting the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Today, a diverse coalition of organizations, government officials and everyday citizens is standing up to make children a priority in the fight against AIDS.

This government must pledge to provide additional international funding to the development of programs and urgent measures to support these orphans.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, let me reassure those preoccupied about the situation: we will continue to demand from this government that it make a genuine effort for AIDS orphans.

* * *

[English]

MOTHER'S DAY

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge a group of people who do the most important job that people can do: our mothers. The requirements of being a mother may vary and every mom may approach the job differently, but each one deserves our thanks.

Mothers are our first and best teacher.

They work hard to put food on the table even if they have to work two jobs to do it.

Statements by Members

They volunteer in our schools, at our places of worship and in our community.

They love and care for us. Even if we sometimes require more care than they have the energy to give, they still love us and think we are perfect.

They give up things they need so that we can have sneakers, books and field trips.

Sometimes they do this job with help. Sometimes they do it all alone.

With Mother's Day coming up this Sunday, I ask all members of this House to show appreciation to all the mothers they know. It is still the hardest and most important job in the world.

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MS CARNATION CAMPAIGN

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud and honoured to rise today in support of the MS Carnation Campaign and to urge all Canadians to show their dedication to finding a cure by purchasing a carnation from May 8 to May 10.

Today, volunteers from the MS Society, MPs representing each political party and I have been pinning carnations on MPs to help raise awareness of MS and the MS Carnation Campaign.

It is well known that women are diagnosed with MS three times as often as men.

Many Canadians living with multiple sclerosis are mothers and many more adults and children are affected by this disease. That is why every year the MS Carnation Campaign takes place over Mother's Day weekend.

For 60 years, the MS Society of Canada has provided hope and help for people with MS across Canada: hope through their extensive national program and help through services that make life better today for people with MS and their families.

I ask everyone to please help consolidate these efforts and target their resources to help make every day better for people living with MS.

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• (1410)

CBC RADIO ORCHESTRA

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the many residents of Vancouver Quadra who have shared with me their frustration and dismay about the unfortunate termination of the CBC Radio Orchestra.

This orchestra is a national cultural treasure with a 70 year history of delivering the very best in classical music, both recorded and live. Although based in Vancouver, the CBC Radio Orchestra belongs to all and serves all Canadians.

Like the mandate of the CBC itself, the orchestra focuses on Canadian cultural content, including the many Canadian classical musicians who have played in the orchestra and the Canadian composers who have been showcased over the years.

The CBC urgently needs increased stable funding, as was recently recommended by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. If the government implements this recommendation, Canadians could continue to enjoy the benefits of a cherished and noble institution, the CBC Radio Orchestra.

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BILL SMITH

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to mark the passing of Mr. Bill Smith, who was born in Kingston, Ontario on May 2, 1943 and passed away on April 9 in his 65th year. He had nine brothers and sisters.

Mr. Smith started his career as a commercial painter before working with Defence Construction Canada as a civilian contracts inspector. In his 33 years there, he completed over \$200 million in capital projects.

That is not all. He was also a scout in the Ontario Hockey League and sent over 100 of his draft choices to the NHL.

His abundant community spirit was always on display in various areas, such as Pine River Days in Angus, in Essa Township, and he was instrumental in the campaign to save the Banting homestead. He worked tirelessly on numerous community initiatives. His leadership was inspirational.

Mr. Smith was a great personal friend of and adviser to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Not only was Bill Smith a great father and friend, he was a great Canadian. He will be sincerely missed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WEEK

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to highlight the 13th annual Emergency Preparedness Week. This week serves as a reminder of the importance of being prepared for emergencies or accidents. This year, the objective is for citizens to be able to cope on their own for at least the first 72 hours of an emergency.

In Quebec, civil security is a responsibility shared by citizens, municipalities, businesses and the government. On this occasion, I would like to pay tribute to the laudable and exemplary efforts of the firefighters, all members of police services, and the St. John Ambulance and Red Cross volunteers who help keep Châteauguay—Saint-Constant safe.

Our community is lucky to have such competent organizations to support and maintain its unique environment. Since it is Emergency Preparedness Week, let us take the time to honour the courage and determination of the members of these organizations and to thank each one of them for the work they do, which can often make a difference during the most difficult times.

Statements by Members

[English]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the bright young Canadians from coast to coast who are participating in the 2008 Canada-Wide Science Fair and 2008 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.

This fair, presented by Youth Science Foundation Canada, is taking place here in Ottawa from May 10 to 18. It is the largest youth science and technology event of its kind in Canada and brings together Canada's best young minds and the next generation of great scientists.

Our government is striving to develop a long term approach to science and technology through our S and T strategy. We have put in place the vision and the funding necessary to develop Canada's long term people and knowledge advantages.

By innovating and commercializing, researchers and scientists are driving Canada's health, environment and economy forward.

I express congratulations to the students, organizers and sponsors. I ask all parliamentarians to applaud these young scientists as they strive to be Canada's next great global innovators and knowledge creators.

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[Translation]

ISRAEL

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the state of Israel on its 60th anniversary and draw attention to the vitality essential for the building of a democratic, pluralistic state amidst relentless assaults and calls for its destruction and to an enduring legacy of scientific, academic, cultural and economic achievements.

Israel is not simply a homeland for the Jewish people—a place of refuge and protection. It is the homeland of the Jewish people. It is a vehicle for Jewish survival and self-determination, of the reconstitution of an ancient people in its ancestral homeland.

May I conclude with the age old prayer for peace: *Oseh Shalom Bimromov, Who Yaaseh Shalom, Alenu V'al Kol Israel, V'imeru, Amen.* May God who establishes peace on high, grant peace for us all, Amen.

May this 60th anniversary herald the end of terror and violence and a real, just, and lasting peace for all peoples in the Middle East.

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●(1415)

ROYAL CANADIAN MINT

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Royal Canadian Mint will officially unveil a \$2 coin celebrating the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City.

The event will take place tonight in Quebec City at Fan Fest, part of the 2008 World Hockey Championship, just before the game between France and Belarus.

The coin was designed by Geneviève Bertrand, a young jeweller born in Quebec City, and depicts the city's founding. The tribute to her birth city consists of a fleur-de-lys, a boat and lines representing water.

Along with this circulation coin, the Royal Canadian Mint is paying tribute to the history of Quebec City with a series of sterling silver collector's coins with an image of Samuel de Champlain.

I would like to congratulate Ms. Bertrand and thank the Royal Canadian Mint, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

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[English]

ISRAEL

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the world pauses to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of Israel. Significantly, this year we also mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the root of these two milestones lay the horrors of the second world war, the Holocaust, the incalculable human toll of war.

Tragically, 60 years later neither the founding of the state of Israel, nor the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has meant an end to suffering. The people of Israel have yet to live in security, and peace with their neighbours too often seems a distant dream. The Palestinian people remain without a homeland, deprived of basic human rights, unable to exercise political and religious freedoms and economic security.

On behalf of the NDP, I offer our warm congratulations to Israel and to express our firm commitment to fulfilling the dream of the Universal Declaration to a secure and peaceful Israel and Palestine, where the rights of all are fully respected. Shalom.

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WOMEN FOR AFRICAN GRANDMOTHERS

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize Beverly Britz and her fellow advocates who form an organization known as Women for African Grandmothers. These dedicated and determined women work tirelessly for the cause of Africa, improving the health of its population and alleviating the strain so often felt by the grandmothers on that continent.

Today is International Orphans Day and, as we speak, 13 million orphans are being raised by their grandmothers in Africa. The Women for African Grandmothers are an official opposition. It has called on governments of every stripe to increase targeted funding for pharmaceutical, agricultural and humanitarian assistance to a variety of African nations. In Toronto it organizes events to benefit the Stephen Lewis Foundation, an advocate on behalf of the delivery of affordable and effective drugs for the treatment of HIV-AIDS in Africa.

I know the members of the House will join me in applauding the work of Beverly Britz and the Women for African Grandmothers.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ISRAEL

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois would like to acknowledge the 60th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel. This anniversary gives us an opportunity to celebrate Israel's entry into the community of nations, its many cultural, economic and scientific achievements as a free, democratic society, and the special relationship between the governments of Canada and Israel.

This is also a time to reaffirm Canadians' unwavering support for Israel's right to live peacefully and safely within secure, recognized borders, for the peace efforts undertaken by the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and for the creation of a future democratic Palestinian state living peacefully and safely next to its Israeli neighbour within secure, recognized borders.

We were pleased with the results of the Annapolis conference, where the two parties agreed to renew peace talks. We encourage Israelis and Palestinians to pursue these negotiations in order to achieve lasting peace.

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[English]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are witnessing the amazing spectacle of cabinet ministers shirking their accountability and hiding behind the skirts of the parliamentary secretaries. Any time the government is in trouble, the parliamentary secretaries jump in front of the bullet.

The member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam in his PS role was forced to defend the Prime Minister on the Cadman affair. Every day he came up with inventive new ways to explain the tape, even if it meant sacrificing his own credibility.

Now it is the member for Nepean—Carleton, as parliamentary secretary for the Treasury Board. Every day in the House and on TV panels he loses a little more face on the Tory election expense scandal and a little more trust on his government's accountability, or lack thereof.

While ministers jet around holding photo ops, their poor parliamentary secretaries become the wearers of bad news. If the ministers do not want their cabinet jobs, perhaps they should stand aside.

At the very least, they should offer their underlings danger pay for serving so ineffectually as parliamentary secretaries.

* * *

● (1420)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I travel through my riding and meet with my constituents, one of the main things I hear about is taxes. No, not higher taxes like the Liberals are proposing, but lower taxes like our government is providing.

My constituents are confused about why the Liberals want a new, massive gas tax, when gas prices have already significantly increased over the past year. They do not want to pay more at the pumps.

They also do not understand why the Leader of the Opposition has proposed raising the GST back to 7% or higher. The Liberals had promised to get rid of the GST completely, but as Canadians know, they did not get the job done. Our government committed to reducing the GST by 2%, and we kept that promise.

Speaking of promises, the Liberals have made so many spending promises that they could actually put the country \$60 billion deeper in debt. That is not what our country and Canadians need in this time of economic uncertainty. What they need is a government with prudent fiscal discipline and strong economic leadership, and that is our Conservative government.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Why is the government refusing to ask for the return of a Canadian citizen and the only remaining westerner to be imprisoned by the U.S. military in Guantanamo Bay?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member refers to Omar Khadr. Mr. Khadr, as we all know, has been there for some years, since 2002. In fact, the government is following exactly the same policy established by his government in 2002.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, citizenship has to mean something. Since 2002, all the governments of western countries that had nationals being held at Guantanamo Bay have asked for and obtained the return of their citizens, after seeing that the American system, which they had given a chance, was unfair to their citizens. And that is the situation we are in with respect to Omar Khadr.

I ask him once again why he is refusing to ask for the return of Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Khadr has been held at Guantanamo Bay since 2002 and was therefore held for four years under the Liberal regime. Mr. Khadr is facing very serious charges. The government has received assurances from the United States, and Government of Canada representatives visit Mr. Khadr regularly.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a lot has happened since 2002. For example, last week, the court—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the freedom of a Canadian citizen is at stake. Last week, the court that will decide Mr. Khadr's fate stated that it would not take into account his status as a child soldier, even though it is recognized by international law.

By remaining silent, the Prime Minister is allowing the American army to violate the basic rights of a Canadian citizen. I ask him again to stand up and defend the rights of a Canadian citizen, as other heads of state have done.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, Mr. Khadr is facing very serious charges. He is now before the courts.

The only thing that has really changed is that, in 2006, the Canadian people changed their government. That is the only reason why the Liberal Party has changed its position.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to know that when they are in difficulty overseas, they will have a government that stands up for them.

Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen, is holed up in the embassy in the Sudan. He is unable to come home and clear his name. He cannot get a passport. He cannot get his name off the no fly list. He is caught in no man's land.

Will the government put him on a plane, fly him home and allow him to clear his name, or will it continue to pick and choose which Canadians get its support overseas?

• (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague must know, Mr. Abdelrazik is currently on the United Nations' list of suspected terrorists, because he is suspected of being affiliated with al Qaeda and the Taliban. He cannot travel to Canada because he is presently on that list.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain to the House why he is on that list? What evidence was used to justify putting him on the list? Otherwise, this infringes on the freedom of a Canadian citizen.

What will be done to bring Mr. Abdelrazik back so that he may resolve this situation?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer my colleague's question. This man is on the list of suspected terrorists. Why? Because he is suspected of being affiliated with al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban.

That being said, we continue to provide consular services to Mr. Abdelrazik and we will continue to do so.

* * *

400TH ANNIVERSARY OF QUEBEC CITY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, representative of Queen Elizabeth II, has gone to France on behalf of the Canadian government to inaugurate the festivities of the 400th anniversary of Quebec City. Madam Jean said she hopes France will “look

beyond Quebec”. I think France should look beyond Michaëlle Jean. She even said that her goal was to make Canada an authentic nation.

Does the Prime Minister realize that the 400th anniversary of Quebec City is a celebration of Quebec City and the Quebec nation, and not the Canadian nation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Governments of Canada and Quebec and Quebec City are working together so that we may all celebrate together the importance of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City.

The Governor General was referring to the importance of the relationship between Canada and France, just as the Bloc does by participating in the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are elected members. That is not the same as a monarchy, which is anti-democratic, archaic and folkloric. I do not imagine France would be represented by the Count of Paris. Monarchy is ridiculous.

That said, the Queen's representative even emphasized that the festivities surrounding the 400th anniversary of Quebec City are celebrating France and Canada.

Does the Prime Minister realize that we are talking about the 400th anniversary of Quebec City, the cradle of the Quebec nation? Are we not celebrating the Quebec nation, and not a ridiculous monarchy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after much hesitation, the leader of the Bloc voted in favour of recognizing the Quebec nation within a united Canada.

The leader of the Bloc is giving me an opportunity to say that 400 years ago, in Quebec City, our country was born in French. The founding of Quebec City is also the founding of Canada. The Governor General is today's successor to Samuel de Champlain, the first Governor of Canada. All Canadians are celebrating this very important event in our shared heritage.

• (1430)

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the federal government's Internet site for the 400th anniversary of Quebec City, the Prime Minister states, after the absurdities we have just heard, “—for the founding of Quebec City also marks the founding of the Canadian State.” Nothing is further from the truth. In 2008, we will not be celebrating the birth of Canada but the founding of Quebec City, the cradle of the Quebec nation.

Does the Prime Minister realize that the federal government's maladroitness attempt to use this occasion for his own political purposes is an insult to the Quebec nation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only ones trying to take advantage of an historic event, an extremely important event in the country's history, are the members of the Bloc Québécois who are attempting once again to rewrite Canadian history.

All of us in this House know that Quebec was the first city, founded 400 years ago, and that Quebec gave rise to Canada. That is what we are celebrating together.

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is rather curious that the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is rising to defend the Queen and the monarchy but that he is unable to rise to defend his own election expenses.

The visit of the “almost-queen” to France, just like the content of the government's Internet site, clearly shows the federal government's desire to usurp the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of Quebec City.

Why is the Conservative government, which recognized the Quebec nation, hijacking the 400th anniversary celebrations to do some Canadian nation building? That is a disgrace.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on two occasions, Quebecers solemnly voted on the country's future. Quebecers said yes to Canada. They said that they did not want or wish to remain all alone and isolated. The Bloc Québécois is an outdated political party. Here we see the permanent leader of a political party with no future in Canada.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the UN has announced that it would be looking into the government's failure to report Canada's CO₂ emissions. The UN had given the government one month's notice of the need to comply. There are severe consequences and penalties for failing to comply. Canada faces suspension from the carbon exchange. This would prevent Canada from taking advantage of golden opportunities to invest in sustainable development.

Is the government refusing to publish the data requested by the United Nations because it is opposed to the principle of a carbon exchange? Is that the reason?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the leader of the New Democratic Party is referring to the international registry under the Kyoto protocol. He knows that the previous government refused for over a decade to set up such a registry. This government has put someone in charge of this file, and we are working on setting up a registry.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have had many investigations of the government for ethical breaches but now we have the United Nations investigating Canada for breaches of the rules in registering greenhouse gas emissions.

Whether it is obstructing climate change bills here in the House or subsidizing its friends in the tar sands to the tune of billions of dollars, the fact is that the government is creating irreparable damage to the climate and for future generations.

Now, it is compromising our ability to participate in the climate exchange, the cap and trade system that is essential for fighting climate change.

Does the Prime Minister know no bounds when it comes to breaches of accountability?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Government of Canada is in the process of establishing the registry to which the leader of the NDP speaks. It has been in that process for some time. Nothing was done on it for the first 10 years. We have taken that responsibility and are moving forward.

The leader of the NDP also mentions subsidies to the oil sands. He should know that the government eliminated those in budget 2007 but, unfortunately, the NDP and the other opposition parties voted to keep them.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone born in Quebec City, I am proud that Quebec City is considered to be the cradle of francophones in North America, the cradle of Quebecers, French Canadians and all Canadians.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Even before Quebec City was founded by Champlain, there were aboriginal peoples there. The figures released yesterday by the Auditor General are a national disgrace. We had signed the Kelowna accord with all the provincial and territorial governments and the first nations.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, by destroying the Kelowna accord, he has made things worse?

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the former Indian affairs minister, Bob Nault, recently wrote in a national newspaper, “the Kelowna accord was not going to get the job done for first nations”.

He knew that and I think even the Liberals knew that. That is why we are taking precise, concrete measures to help. There was nothing in the Kelowna accord that addressed specific land claims, nothing about clean water programs and nothing about a joint federal-provincial agreement on child and family services.

We are taking concrete measures because aboriginals deserve more than a communiqué.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

It was a historic accord between the Government of Canada, the first nations and all the governments of the provinces and territories addressing a whole range of issues that would have made a great difference.

Will he admit that in killing the Kelowna accord he made things worse for aboriginal people?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do know what made it worse for aboriginal people. For example, in the Auditor General's report yesterday, she detailed that for 13 years the Liberals kept the same child and family service program in place that continued to take children away from aboriginal families and refused to change to a prevention model, which our government has started to do already by signing the agreement in Alberta.

Aboriginal people deserve better. They deserve a different system and they deserve a different government than they used to get from the Liberal Party of Canada.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year the Conservatives tarnished Canada's international reputation when, for the first time in Canadian history, they voted against a human rights document and refused to ratify the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Now they are working against a similar document at the Organization of American States.

The government is hiding behind legal wrangling and nitpicking.

What is the real reason that the Conservatives have refused to join the rest of the world in supporting the human rights of aboriginal peoples?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when that document came forward we identified some problems with it beforehand. Four countries voted against it, 11 countries abstained, 35 other countries did not show up for the vote and many other countries issued dissenting opinions on why the document was flawed and did not apply in their own country.

We believe we should take concrete measures within our own country. I wish that the members opposite would take the steps necessary to protect the human rights of aboriginal people on reserve. They have gutted the bill and have made it so that first nations are not covered properly. That needs to change.

[Translation]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for attempting to provide an answer. He referred to the example of the United States. I want to ask the minister: given all the other members of the international community, does he take the United States as a model?

•(1440)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what the member means but what I can say is that Canada does recognize aboriginal rights as entitled within our own Constitution.

When I met with ambassadors last week in New York, I went down the list of concrete measures that we were taking, including things that were never in the Kelowna accord: the Indian residential schools settlement and the truth and conciliation commission now headed by Justice LaForme.

We keep taking concrete measures on water, on education, on child and family services, on Indian residential schools and on a market housing initiative this week.

Aboriginals deserve concrete measures, not communiqués from the Liberals.

* * *

[Translation]

HERITAGE BUILDINGS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after the fire that destroyed the armoury in Quebec City, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages said that this building should not be left in a state of disrepair that would not be appropriate for the 400th anniversary celebrations. Yesterday in *Le Soleil*, that same minister said that no plans could move forward before the investigation is complete.

Is the minister saying that the site will not be restored for the start of the celebrations?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, this file is very important. The member must understand that this decision has not yet been made. A very strong team is working on this file. No decision can be made until the investigation is complete. It is a priority for this government. We have a minister, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is working on this situation. When the decision is made, we will inform the people of Quebec.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of National Defence give us a clear answer to a very simple question? Will the site be restored in time for the start of the celebrations in two months, yes or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker.

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MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada refused to meet on February 28, 2008, with six very important partners in the economic development of Montreal, including the Quebec federation of chambers of commerce and the Quebec Aerospace Association. The purpose of this meeting would have been to explain to the minister how important these organizations are to the development of companies in Quebec and Montreal.

How can the minister, who has decided to drain the lifeblood from Montreal International, push his arrogance and contempt so far as to refuse to meet the people who are most important to the economic development of Montreal?

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, a great many organizations and companies have attractive projects and want to do business with Canada Economic Development. However, if Canada Economic Development starts to pay the recurring operating expenses of a variety of organizations, its budget gets all tied up, especially as there are so many of them. We made a decision, therefore, to go with specific projects, and we think that an organization's legitimacy can be measured first and foremost by the fact that its stakeholders are willing to contribute to its operating expenses.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the minister soon tell the House that he is also going to cut off the economic and community development corporations that are essential if Montreal is to thrive, just as he cut off Montreal International? Is that the economic development strategy for Montreal that will be on offer? We are fed up with a minister who understands nothing and has nothing but contempt for Montreal's economy.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since we came to power, the Economic Development Agency of Canada has supported 256 projects in the greater Montreal area with investments totalling \$101 million, which have generated a grand total of \$327 million in investment and saved 4,700 jobs.

As I said, all the essential agencies that provide us with a transition plan will be given two years to learn to get by on their own. I think that everybody listening to us would find it very reasonable that they should be expected to operate on their own some day.

* * *

● (1445)

[English]

BURMA

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the tragic situation that is unfolding in Burma.

It is clear that the politics of the situation is keeping aid out. They are keeping aid workers out. They are keeping the international community out. We now know that there are over 20,000 people dead and there could be as many as 20,000 more missing.

I would like to ask the minister, could he please tell the House what political discussions has he had with his counterparts? What discussions has he had with the United Nations to make sure that in fact aid is getting to the people in need in Burma?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House that we are calling on the military junta to work in its people's best interest and open the doors to international aid, to the UN, to non-governmental organizations and to other countries. We are ready to help them. We are just waiting for an answer from them. If they open their doors to international aid, Canada will be there to help.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the minister did not answer my question. I asked the minister a very specific question. With whom in the UN, and with which of his international colleagues did the minister speak to ensure that we are working together as nations to persuade Burma to open its doors to humanitarian aid?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are discussing this matter directly with the UN. My colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation, is also in contact with her colleagues. Like all Canadians, we want aid to reach Burma, and we are in contact at the highest levels to ensure that it does. We urge the Burmese government to open its doors to international aid and to work in the best interest of its people. That is what we are doing.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): #Mr. Speaker, 10 new businesses, \$181 million in investments, 2,100 jobs created and preserved; that is what Pôle Québec Chaudière-Appalaches did in 2007. Those are tangible, measurable results.

But just as in the case of Montreal International, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has got out his axe and is cutting assistance to the Pôle economic development agency.

While businesses like Crocs and AGC are closing down, and job losses are piling up, the Minister slashes the budget.

How can he justify this stupid and baseless decision?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why was the budget envelope for Economic Development Canada almost entirely used up at the beginning of the year on a group of economic development organizations? Because the party that came before us did not realize that what it was doing was draining our budget envelope.

Pôle Québec Chaudière-Appalaches has submitted a transition plan and we have approved it. It will therefore have funding for the next two years and after that it will be operating under its own steam.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that after smacking Ontario down, he is now smacking down Quebec. Montreal International and Pôle Québec Chaudière-Appalaches have proved themselves, but the Minister still thinks it is a good idea to cut them off. With the challenges we are now facing, everyone is on the same page: municipalities, the provincial government, the business community—everyone—except the Conservatives.

Why is the Minister so set against people who work to create jobs? Why has he tied his own hands by cutting \$107 million from his own budget?

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, the Montreal Grand Prix recently approached my department for support. It wanted \$1.25 million to renovate facilities for the media and the Montreal Grand Prix. An economic development organization submitted the project to us, and we said yes. Why could we say yes? Because at Canada Economic Development we keep some room in our budgets so we can support one-time projects submitted by organizations that have a beginning, a middle and an end.

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[English]

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government takes the safety and security of Canadians very seriously. We have taken action to help protect Canadians against crime and dangerous criminals, against faulty products, and against pollution and harmful chemicals.

In her latest report the Auditor General commented on a number of people who may be in Canada illegally and on the process for monitoring their detention and removal.

Could the Minister of Public Safety update the House on the government's response to the Auditor General and how he plans on addressing her concerns?

● (1450)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do share the concerns about that number of people deemed inadmissible and whose whereabouts may be in question. That amount is an amount we largely inherited from the previous regime, but we do not take that as an excuse. We want to see improvements.

The Auditor General made a number of comments about improvements that the CBSA has made already in terms of removals. She also remarked, and I will quote her specifically, "The agency has increased the number of inadmissible individuals it removes from Canada, from about 8,700 in 2002-03, to about 12,600 in 2006-07". That is a 50% improvement. We want to do better.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is condemning the Conservatives' sorry record on first nations children in foster care.

Government officials are taking children from reserves into care eight times more often than other Canadian children. She called the government's funding formula outdated and inappropriate, and said it does not take into account how many kids need help or what services they need.

Why under the Conservative government's watch are kids on reserve getting shortchanged when it comes to child welfare?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the Auditor General's

report. We agree that the system that was in place, which we inherited from the Liberals, was a broken one. That is why we started to change it. We already have a tripartite agreement in Alberta that addresses the system itself which is designed under its current form, the one we inherited, to take kids from their homes and stick them in foster care as a form of child and family services.

We believe, as does the Auditor General, it is time to move to a prevention model and address the needs of the family to try to keep the family together so the kids do not have to leave home in the end.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the Conservative government that is continuing that legacy of doing damage to first nations children.

The Auditor General says it will cost 74% more to fully implement the Alberta model that the minister is so fond of. This is about resources, it is about children, and it is about being accountable.

Where is the timetable to implement this model program for the rest of the provinces? Where is the money to make sure this new model works better than the old one? When will the government fully fund child welfare services on reserve?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the member think we are spending too much money now in Alberta? I am not sure.

We approved in budget 2008, which she voted against of course, more money to extend the Alberta model across the country. We hope to do two or three more provinces this year alone. We are in negotiations with those provinces and with first nations. We actually believe it is important to work with first nations, their leadership, and their communities to make sure we design programs that work for first nations, not designed in Ottawa by a bunch of Liberals and Dippers.

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ETHICS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has five strikes against him. One, he has squandered a \$13 billion inheritance risking a return to deficit. Two, he has broken promises, including on income trusts and the Atlantic accord. Three, he has trashed Ontario's business climate. Four is the plethora of ethical clouds hanging over his head. Five is the dumbest possible tax cut with negative effects on productivity.

Are five strikes not enough to be out in the Conservative government?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should again be—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Markham—Unionville has asked a question and he wants to hear an answer. The Minister of the Environment has risen and has been recognized to speak.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should once again be ashamed of himself.

We on this side of the House thought a well-respected member like that member would come to this place and would apologize for the truly outrageous accusations he has levelled against the finance minister. He has levelled them in number four again. The reality is the minister has done more to support the developmentally disabled, children with Down syndrome and people who need a helping hand up. Attacking the minister, his family, his children, is outrageous.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no such attack.

However, I would point out that a new poll today says that 62% of Ontarians believe the government is hurting their economy.

Meanwhile, the finance minister will not even stand up to answer questions. Apparently that is what is called accountability under the Prime Minister. So today I am stuck with an environment minister who knows even less about economics than he knows about the environment, but I will give it a go.

What are the top four priorities in the Department of Finance's annual report? If he does not know that, what are they in the environment ministry's annual report?

• (1455)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only poll that matters is the one on election day.

The last time the people of Canada were asked did they want to reelect a crooked, corrupt Liberal government, 70% of Canadians voted against the Liberals and threw them out of office.

* * *

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about elections.

Yesterday on the in and out, the parliamentary secretary wondered what his party was accused of. Let me explain.

The Conservatives tried to hide \$1.3 million in national overspending on the books of local candidates. They forced local candidates to take part in the scheme where the local candidates had no control of the funds, never incurred the expenses, never knew what the ads were that were being bought, and then sought rebates; in short, election fraud.

Is the parliamentary secretary not embarrassed by having to answer for the ministers while they sit in silence with Elections Canada hot in pursuit—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board. Order, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an example of the Liberal in and out that we refer to as the double-double—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board has the floor. We will have some order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, our next example is the Liberal double-double.

On July 14, 2004 the Liberal Party made two transfers to Rick Limoges' local campaign for \$5,000 and \$4,000. The next day, Rick Limoges' local campaign made two transfers back to the Liberal party for \$5,000 and \$4,000.

Mr. Speaker, \$5,000 in, \$5,000 out; \$4000 in, \$4,000 out. In and out, that is the Liberals' game.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not just the Liberals who are making these accusations, it is also Elections Canada and former Conservative candidates.

No minister over there has the courage to speak up because they all benefited from this election fraud. The Ministers of Finance, Health and the Environment all benefited from this scheme.

Will the parliamentary secretary stop obfuscating, stop making excuses for them and confess that his party engaged in a major election fraud in the last election?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again and again I shared with the members across the way examples of in and out that they have engaged in. They become very defensive, but what they do not realize is they, like us, did nothing wrong. Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative ads. They got financial assistance from the national party to do so.

Elections Canada found out because we told them. Elections Canada singled us out, so we took it to court. One day before it was to face questioning, representatives barged into our office, breaking Elections Canada's own rules, and were followed soon behind by a Liberal camera. That is the story. That is the reality. The Liberal members really have to accept it.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada's funding agreement for the 14 ZIP committees and for Stratégies Saint-Laurent, which are working to protect the St. Lawrence River, expired on March 31, 2008. Since then, projects related to the St. Lawrence River action plan have been approved by Quebec's ministry of sustainable development, environment and parks. However, these projects cannot be launched because of the Conservatives' ideological stubbornness in continuing to underfund these community groups.

Will the Minister of the Environment commit to meeting with the 14 ZIP committees and with Stratégies Saint-Laurent in the next few days, to renegotiate and sign a fair agreement to fund the implementation of the St. Lawrence action plan until 2010?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada provides a whole series of supports to environmental projects and objectives right across the country. We think it is important not to do everything in-house but to work cooperatively with others to seek help in protecting the ecosystems and biological diversity of this country, and that is something we will continue to do.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are precisely talking about the ZIP committees for areas of prime concern. The minister's refusal to confirm funding for these groups directly affects tangible environmental initiatives. For example, the upper St. Lawrence and southern estuary ZIP committees had to fire over 50% of their staff, because the minister refuses to sign the funding agreement.

Will the Minister of the Environment commit today to signing this most important agreement, as the 14 ZIP committees and Stratégies Saint-Laurent are urging him to do?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we provide funding on an annual basis to groups that submit requests. There are obviously always more requests than there are funds. What this really does point out is that for 18 long years the Bloc Québécois has been in this place and has been able to exercise no power because it is on the opposition side of the House, not like 11 strong Conservative MPs who are working hard for Quebec and delivering the goods.

* * *

[Translation]

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's disaster assistance program does not cover wages lost by citizens, the repair or replacement of trailers, or the cost of food lost in a disaster. When Canadians need help, they should not have to worry about what the federal government can give them in terms of financial assistance.

Will the Conservatives change their position and pay back wages lost by disaster victims and emergency volunteers? Will they financially support the citizens to meet their basic needs, such as food, or will they abandon them?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a program to help the provinces when a disaster occurs. During discussions with my provincial colleagues, they told me they were satisfied with the program.

When disasters and other such problems arise, we are here to help. If there are some improvements that could be made to the program, we can explore them. However, one thing is important. We are here

Oral Questions

now for the disaster victims, since it is a very difficult time for the provinces when a disaster occurs.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recent events have led Canadians to question the safety of the products they use and buy. On April 8 the Minister of Health tabled the consumer product safety act, which would increase fines for those who import or produce an unsafe good and which would finally give the government the ability to force a recall of unsafe products.

Canadians watched the consumer product safety act move from first to second reading in only a few days and we are pleased to see it has been referred to committee for further study.

Would the Minister of Health update this House on its progress?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform this House of what I consider to be the height of irresponsibility by the opposition party.

Last night the official opposition tabled a motion at the health committee beginning a several week study on the supervised injection site in Vancouver, which means that all the important work that the committee has to do in regard to the consumer product safety act is put in abeyance.

What troubles me is that this is the same band of individuals who said that we do not need any more research. Now they are tying up a committee with weeks of more research. Our children, our mothers, our fathers, everybody needs better safety. The opposition is preventing it from happening.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, access to information documents show that the former heritage minister wracked up phenomenal bills on limousines, flights and hotels which she kept hidden from the public.

We have extravagant limousine rides to Conservative Party meetings, flights across the country for which there are no records, and double-billed hotels for the same nights in two different cities with no disclosure.

The rules are there for a reason, to ensure accountability and transparency in government. Average Canadians play by the rules. Why does she think she can break those rules with impunity?

Points of Order

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's expenses are done in accordance with Treasury Board rules. Public disclosures have been corrected where there have been problems. However, let me tell members this. The big difference between our government and the predecessor Liberal government is the approach of ministers toward their expenses.

Under the previous Liberal government, the public coffers were a piggy bank for a good time and a good meal. The government House leader's office, for example, in the last year of the Liberals spent 204% more than in the first year under the Conservatives. In the ministry of health, those ministers spent 289% more under the Liberals. The leader of the government in the Senate, under the Liberals—

• (1505)

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

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not accountability. That is entitlement.

In March 2006 we have a \$1,700 bill for two days of joyriding in a limousine. In August 2006, \$740 for a limo trip around Toronto with no disclosure. The next day, there is another \$861 to ride around Toronto with no disclosure. On November 2006, there is \$600 to ride around Vancouver with no disclosure, and on March 2007, a \$1,300 limo ride to a partisan Conservative Party meeting.

She has broken the trust of average Canadians. Will the government compel her to pay that money back to taxpayers?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's expenses are considerably lower than those of her Liberal predecessor.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Nonsense.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I hear the member for Wascana saying nonsense. Then he has to explain why, for example, the leader of the government in the Senate, under the Liberals, spent 3,711% more on expenses than under the Conservatives, and the minister of national revenue had expenses that were 368% higher under the Liberals.

Guess what? This is a government that takes care of taxpayers' dollars and treats them as if they were something that were valuable, not as if they were a free piggy bank to dip into, like the Liberals did.

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ELECTIONS CANADA

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has responsibility for the Canada Elections Act, yet he refuses to answer questions about the in and out scam. That is probably because he currently employs one of its key architects, Mike Donison.

Instead, every day we hear from junior over there because as senior Conservatives say, he is young so he will do what is asked of him—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I am not going to weigh the virtues or not of names, but I think members might refer to each other, as is

required in the House, by their titles. I am not sure who is referred to as junior, but in any event the question should be directed to a minister or parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I was finishing with the question anyway. He is young so he will do what is asked of him without too much questioning.

Why does the parliamentary secretary, every day, spew nonsense that the Federal Court has already ruled irrelevant?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank her for complimenting me on my youthful energy.

On July 14, 2004 the Liberal Party made two transfers to Rick Limoges' local campaign for \$4,000 and for \$5,000. The next day, Rick Limoges' local campaign made two transfers back to the Liberal Party for \$4,000 and \$5,000. That is \$4,000 in, \$4,000 out; \$5,000 in, \$5,000 out; in, out; in, out. Where is Elections Canada?

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AFGHANISTAN

The Speaker: Order, please. Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I invite hon. members to rise and observe a moment of silence in honour of the fallen Canadian soldier who recently died in Afghanistan.

[A moment of silence observed]

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• (1510)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Ms. Anne McGuire, M.P., Minister for Disabled People of the United Kingdom.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER**CONFLICT OF INTEREST CODE**

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you may remember, in November the member for Dufferin—Caledon raised a point of order in committee as to whether I could participate at committee in light of a potential lawsuit or threat of a lawsuit by Brian Mulroney. At committee, the chair decided that I could continue on and that there was no conflict, which I did.

Subsequently, the same member, the member for Dufferin—Caledon, asked the Ethics Commissioner to investigate as to whether there was a breach of the code on the question that there could be a pecuniary interest. The Ethics Commissioner has done so and I have been in discussion with her. The House will be receiving or may already have received her report.

I would like to thank the conflict of interest and Ethics Commissioner for her work on this file. This case dealt largely with issues that have never been dealt with and I am sure that all members will benefit from her efforts. I know that the commissioner found that I had acted in good faith in these matters and she did not recommend any sanctions.

I acknowledge the commissioner's findings and I will take all necessary steps, as soon as possible, to ensure that I am in full compliance with the rulings of the Conflict of Interest Code.

The commissioner found, which should be of interest to all members of the House, that there could be a pecuniary interest in a member if he is sued by anybody, not even another member but by anybody, because it could create a liability.

The commissioner evaluated the code as it currently stands and ruled, and I fully accept her ruling, that I could have an interest and should not have participated in that committee. I did participate in the committee because the ruling came after the committee and I was only served with the lawsuit well into this current fiscal year, a long time after the actions had been started by the member and before the Ethics Commissioner started her investigation.

The Ethics Commissioner pointed out that there was a risk that any member could be removed from their duty by some trivial lawsuits that could be brought by one member on the other. I would ask the House that the relevant committee review this ruling and accept it but look at whether there should be modifications to the rules of the House or to the code of conduct.

In closing, I want to assure everyone that the Liberal opposition will not allow frivolous lawsuits to stop it from vigorously holding the government to proper account.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have yet to see this report but I gather, from the way the member has referred to it, that he has been found guilty of a conflict of interest. Yes, I did raise the issue in committee and, yes, I did think it was improper. When a former prime minister of this country is suing him for \$1 million he has no right to participate in that committee.

I believe he was the lead with respect to the Liberals on that committee and he had no business asking questions or voting on motions. He had no business cross-examining the former prime minister in the committee. In fact, he tainted the whole proceeding of that committee, known as the Schreiber-Mulroney proceeding.

* * *

● (1515)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: Order, please. We are getting into a debate and, in my view, there is no point of order that has been raised by either hon. member.

Privilege

What I will do, pursuant to section 28 of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, is do my duty and present to the House the report of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner on an inquiry in relation to the hon. member for West Nova. The document is tabled and it is available for members to read. That is the end of that matter.

I gather that the hon. member for Peace River is rising on a point of order arising out of question period.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period today, the Liberal leader referred to a document that he referred to as the Kelowna accord and, as is customary in the House, when a member refers to a document, he or she should be able to produce that document.

What I am asking today is that the Liberal leader do what his predecessor never was able to do and that is provide for the House a signed copy of the Kelowna accord.

The Speaker: I think the hon. member for Peace River may want to check the rules because the rule he cited applies to ministers who quote from documents, not to other hon. members.

Therefore, I am afraid that he may be able to complain if ministers do not table documents but for another hon. member to refer to a document and not table it is quite in order. I am afraid that is the end of that.

[Translation]

We now have a question of privilege that I will hear right away. The member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

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PRIVILEGE

COMMENTS BY THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I will very briefly explain why I am raising a question of privilege concerning the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. Yesterday evening, during the adjournment debate, in response to something I had said, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development said, and I am quoting directly from Hansard:

It must have been frustrating for the member during her three years with the Bloc Québécois when she had to sit idly by while it was completely incapable of accomplishing a single goal on the seniors file.

The Conservative government and all its spokespeople routinely disparage the other parties in this House, and this is tolerated. However, it is unacceptable, in my opinion. I will let the parties decide whether or not to take action. However, when the parliamentary secretary directly disparages a member, namely me, in a mean and calculated manner, it is a personal and collective affront to the people I legitimately represent in this House.

Routine Proceedings

This sort of insidious and damaging remark, which reflects on a member's reputation and was made in this House, should not be tolerated. I therefore ask the parliamentary secretary to retract her comments.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the comments we just heard from the member could be better characterized as debate. It relates to the general issue of whether or not the Bloc Québécois, a party committed to only being in opposition, could ever actually change anything in Ottawa.

I think that properly falls into the area of debate and in no way is seen as a personal attack. It has to deal with political efficacy and whether or not we can actually pass legislation and do things by being always committed to being in opposition and committed to never being in government.

It is our view, of course, in that debate that we need to be serious about wanting to be a government in order to change things in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the response by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is totally unacceptable. The members from the Bloc Québécois were democratically elected by our constituents and that is a choice these people made based on their vision for the development of Quebec. If the hon. member thinks voting for the Bloc Québécois means being in eternal opposition, then he is wrong. When Quebec becomes a sovereign nation, that is when we will have real power and that is what we are working toward every day.

The Speaker: I will review the comments the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques is complaining about and, if necessary, I will report back to the House later.

The member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park now has the floor on a point of order.

* * *

• (1520)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my point was actually on the same one as the member for Peace River. Pursuant to his request, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to permit the member from the other side to table a copy of the Kelowna accord as requested. We would love to see it and I am sure he is eager to show it to us.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe this request was already made both in a committee of this House and on the floor of the House and the request was acceded to. The documents were in fact filed.

However, if the government wishes further edification, I would invite those members to refer to page 4 of the sources and uses table of the Government of Canada, dated November 24, 2005, and they

will find the booking of \$5.1 billion in order to fund the Government of Canada's commitments in the Kelowna accord.

The Speaker: I can see we are again into a debate so we will carry on with tabling of documents.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

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, one treaty entitled, "Exchange of Letters Constituting an Agreement between the Government of Canada, the Government of the United States of America and of the Government of the United Mexican States, amending annex 401 (Track III) of the North American Free Trade Agreement", signed in Washington, Mexico City and Ottawa on April 11, 2008. An explanatory memorandum is enclosed with the treaty.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

FINANCE

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to Bill C-305, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (exemption from taxation of 50% of United States social security payments to Canadian residents).

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The report is about tobacco producers.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in relation to the coordination of access to information request system.

This particular database is a central database for all requests filed with the government under the Access to Information Act, and, as we know, it has been discontinued by the government.

The committee passed a motion demanding that the government reinstate this tool, which promotes transparency and accountability, and it encourages the government to make the database available online and free of charge.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to the maintenance of a basic level of information services by conventional television.

* * *

NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY DAY ACT

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.) moved that Bill S-204, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day, be read the first time.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce into this House Bill S-204, which was recently passed in the Senate. The bill would recognize November 15 of each year as National Philanthropic Day, a special day for philanthropic organizations across the country.

I would like to thank Senator Grafstein for presenting the bill in the Senate and Senator Mercer from Nova Scotia who has dedicated much of his professional life promoting philanthropy. I have a special note of thanks to the many AFP association of fundraising professionals across the country, like Paul McNair, president of the association in Nova Scotia.

My own sister, Brigid, is an active member of AFP and is currently working as the campaign director at Mount Saint Vincent University. We are very proud of her and the great work she is doing with philanthropists like Dr. Martha Jodrey.

The bill seeks to encourage Canadians to give time, money and knowledge to help build up our communities and civic society.

National Philanthropic Day would recognize the hundreds of thousands of grassroots, non-partisan groups that give much to communities to strengthen the social cohesion in Canada. Each day the not for profit sectors are on the front lines serving in areas like social services, health care, the environment, arts and beyond.

I hope all members will support this important initiative to help build Canada.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

• (1525)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, there have been good faith negotiations among all parties and I believe that if you were to seek it you may find unanimous consent for a motion: that the House recognize the historic significance of the 60th anniversary of the reconstitution of the sovereign and independent state of Israel; recognize the cultural, economic and scientific achievements of a free, democratic and blossoming society in the face of hostilities; recognize the close relationship between the Governments of Canada and Israel; reaffirm the unwavering support of Canadians to the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from any threat or act of force; reaffirm our commitment to the pursuit of a two-state solution and the creation of a democratic

Routine Proceedings

Palestinian state living in peace and security with its Israeli neighbour; reaffirm its acknowledgement and support of the efforts toward peace made by the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority and commit to assisting in the peace process.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Mount Royal have the unanimous consent of the House to present this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I note that there has been overwhelming, if not unanimous support, for the motion.

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

QUEBEC NATION AND BILL 101

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition with 195 signatures from Quebecers who are calling on the Government of Canada to actively respect the Quebec nation and Bill 101.

[English]

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from 25 constituents in regard to the private member's bill put forward by the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park, suggesting criminal consequences for the murder of an unborn child.

CANADA POST

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition, I have a petition from 134 constituents in regard to Bill C-14 and their concerns with regard to the deregulation of Canada Post.

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. My first petition is signed by 436 people.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to effect necessary changes to CPP policy to ensure that applicants with terminal illnesses are provided with terminal illness special procedures, including those applicants who did not contribute to private disability insurance plans, sickness insurance, employment insurance sickness benefits and other short term sickness benefits, and to exempt them from the four month mandatory waiting period.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition signed by 2,192 people.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to replace the Millennium Scholarship Foundation with a national system of need based grants through the Canada student loans program for students at public universities and colleges.

Routine Proceedings

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, about two months ago, there was unanimous consent of the House to pass a motion mandating Canadian content levels for public transit and to ensure that public funds were used to provide the best value to Canadians by supporting domestic supplier and labour markets. I have additional petitions coming in.

As an update, although the House has adopted this, we will be now taking this motion to the transportation committee for a more fulsome discussion and, hopefully, to see government policy enacted very soon.

CHILD LABOUR

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present this petition on behalf of a group of grade 11 students at Composite High School in Fort McMurray, Alberta, to abolish child labour in developing countries. These students have collected 355 signatures in support of the creation of a United Nations resolution to eliminate the use of child labour. I am proud to bring forward this petition.

* * *

• (1530)

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, the following question will be answered today: No. 232.

[English]

Question No. 232—**Mr. Pat Martin:**

With respect to the study convened on November 13 and 14, 2007, chaired by Trevor Ogden, by Health Canada on the dangers of asbestos: (a) what are the mandate or guiding principles of this study; (b) why was this study initiated; (c) who has been assigned responsibility to ensure this study is completed; (d) how much funding has been allocated to this study; (e) what resources have been made available to this study; (f) what consultations will be taken by this study; (g) who will this study consult with or be receiving contributions from; (h) what compensation will the participants in consultations for this study receive; (i) what new research will be used in this study; (k) will a review of Canadian consumer products containing asbestos be included in this study; (j) is it the intention of the government to change its policy on asbestos as a result of this study; (l) what is the expected time frame for this study; and (m) when will this study be made public?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a) Following are the terms of reference of the expert panel on chrysotile:

Purpose

The panel will consider and report on the dose-response relationships for pleural mesothelioma, peritoneal mesothelioma and lung cancer associated with exposure to Canadian “commercial chrysotile asbestos” fibre.

Panel members’ responsibilities

On November 13-14, 2007, panel members are to attend and share expertise at the Chrysotile Asbestos Expert Panel: Characterizing the Toxicity of Chrysotile Asbestos, in Montreal, Canada.

Panel members, working individually and collectively, are asked to determine the main areas of scientific agreement and disagreement on the toxicity of chrysotile asbestos fibres, and to assess the importance of these agreements and disagreements.

Panel members, working individually and collectively, are also asked to produce a probabilistic estimation of the dose-response relationship for chrysotile asbestos and cancers rather than a point estimate. If dose-response estimation is not possible, panel members are asked to estimate the relative dose-response between chrysotile asbestos and various amphibole asbestos.

If it is concluded that amphiboles are significantly more potent than chrysotile asbestos, the panel is asked to assess the toxicity of “uncontaminated chrysotile asbestos” and the effect of reported tremolite contamination on the toxicity of Canadian commercial chrysotile asbestos.

Considerations

Panelists are to debate constructively with peers holding opposing views, and work together to reach consensus. However, where individual views differ, these are to be reflected in the report.

In response to b) The panel was convened to provide Health Canada a perspective on scientific studies on the health effects of chrysotile that have been published since the last international peer-reviewed study of this substance which was published in 1998 by the World Health Organization.

In response to c) Dr. Michel Camus, Health Canada, had the lead scientific responsibility for ensuring that the panel fulfilled its commitment.

In response to d) Direct expenses of \$101,387.96 were incurred in the preparation for, and conduct of, the panel meeting and the writing of its report.

In response to e) As part of their ongoing, normal duties, approximately nine different officials or administrative staff worked on a part time basis to help establish and support the panel.

In response to f) There were no external consultations for this report.

In response to g) There were no consultations with other parties. The costs of the panel were wholly borne by Health Canada.

In response to h) The chair and each of the panel members were reimbursed their travel expenses and were additionally paid a flat fee for their time.

In response to i) No new research was commissioned in support of the study.

In response to j) It is premature to assess how the panel might affect government policy.

In response to k) The panel did not consider Canadian consumer products in its deliberations. [See terms of reference in answer a)].

In response to l) The panel has completed its work.

In response to m) The panel report will be made available to the public once Health Canada has reviewed the findings. The time-frame for release is yet to be determined.

* * *

[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): If Question No. 225 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Question No. 225—**Ms. Alexa McDonough:**

With respect to Canada's contributions and commitments to international peace: (a) how much has the government budgeted for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre; (b) how has funding for the Centre changed from year to year over the past five years; (c) does the government intend to sustain funding for the Centre; (d) how much does Canada contribute to the UN's Standing Peacebuilding Fund; (e) how does Canada rank in terms of military personnel and police contributions to UN missions; (f) what plan does the government have to increase its military and police contributions to UN missions; (g) is Canada involved in any UN-sponsored peace initiatives or negotiations and, if so, which ones; (h) what follow-up initiatives has the government undertaken to support the Responsibility to Protect; (i) what steps has Canada undertaken to ensure compliance with Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; (j) what initiatives is the government undertaking to support nuclear weapons non-proliferation and disarmament in the international arena; and (k) does the government endorse the principle of a nuclear-free Middle East?

(Return tabled)

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

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to call Motion No. P-29.

Motion P-29

That an Order of the House do issue for a copy of all records accounting for levels of public participation in both of Natural Resources Canada's Energuide Retrofit Program and its successor, the ecoENERGY Retrofit program.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-29, in the name of the hon. member for Yukon, is acceptable to the government and the documents are tabled immediately.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to call Motion No. P-39.

Motion P-39

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of all agreements between the Department of National Defence and the Conference of Defence Associations and the Conference of Defence Associations Institute.

Business of Supply

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-39, in the name of the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, is acceptable to the government and the documents are tabled immediately.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all other notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a procedural point of order. I believe the House leader for the Bloc Québécois was inadvertently distracted when we dealt with petitions. I think he may have a petition to file. I wonder if the House would give its unanimous consent to revert to the presentation of petitions to allow the House leader for the Bloc to file the petition.

The Speaker: Is it agreed that we revert to petitions for this purpose?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The member for Joliette.

* * *

PETITIONS

PHOSPHATES

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the House Leader of the Official Opposition.

This petition comes from citizens in all municipalities in the riding of Joliette, who are calling on the federal government to take strong action against the use of dishwasher and laundry detergents containing phosphates. Detergents containing phosphates contribute to the proliferation of blue-green algae, cyanobacteria, which, as you know, are a major cause of lake pollution.

I am very proud to present this petition.

The Speaker: That is the last of petitions for today.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GENERAL INTEREST TELEVISION LICENCE HOLDERS

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the provision of a locally or regionally produced news service must be part of the operating conditions for general interest television licence holders.

He said: Mr. Speaker, first, I wish to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Honoré-Mercier. I also want to thank the House for proceeding with this debate.

Business of Supply

Obviously, this is not the only place this debate has been held. There has been debate in other committees, and there have been question periods as well. I want to recognize and congratulate all the political parties that have worked on this issue with honesty and in a non-partisan way.

As a matter of fact, this is a non-partisan situation. First, it affects the employees of TQS, and we are all concerned when there is a loss of jobs. Second, there have been meetings with the unions. The Bloc Québécois, the NDP, the minister, myself, everyone has met with the unions. Now it is time to move from words to action.

We made some headway yesterday in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We know that the Bloc moved a motion to this effect. I proposed some amendments, and there was unanimous approval. This is therefore a debate on the substance. It is an important debate. We are talking about the future of our airwaves, the future of our own general interest television. This will have an impact on all the regions of Canada. Nevertheless, the specific objective of this first motion was to discuss, in particular, the future of TQS.

It is not up to us to assume the role of the CRTC. We understand that it is a completely independent agency. We also understand, in the light of the CRTC decision, that after June 2 the government does have one power; the minister has the power to overturn a decision. Our role is to set out a direction and to send a clear message. Our role is to hold a debate on the future of general interest television but, above all, to define the role of general interest television.

For us, general interest television means having a news service in which there is local production and regional impact. In the case of TQS, local means Montreal, Quebec City, Saguenay, Trois-Rivières and Sherbrooke. It may be that, in the future, decisions will be made to that effect and they will have an impact on the rest of the country.
[English]

Let me be clear. It has nothing to do with playing the role on behalf of CRTC. It is about discussing it among ourselves and defining the orientation of what should be conventional TV. From the opposition's perspective, it is clear in our minds.

The leader of the official opposition said clearly for TQS, but also for the conventional TV as a whole, that we could not think about conventional TV without having news services and news services means at the same time that we will have local services and regional services.

It is not only about only Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. We need to ensure we will also have a taste on the ground, on the field, of what goes on through that, and we clearly need journalists to make it happen in those regions.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Surely we will all say that we met the unions at some point and supported the people from TQS. For my part, I want to send a very clear message today on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada. On behalf of our party and our leader to all the unions and the people of the Trois-Rivières area at an important meeting on April 26, the Liberal Party of Canada, which forms the official opposition to this

government, said it thinks that TQS, a general interest broadcaster, would no longer be TQS without keeping a certain amount of news.

It is important to talk about this today. If we were to make a decision, I would want us to define together what the basic direction of general interest television is.

It is also important to us to ensure we send a clear message. When it comes to general interest broadcasters in the field of television and the sale of their licences, we do not think that the news should be considered just another commodity. We cannot allow ourselves, in the name of diversity and the very future of the regions, to send a message that if a broadcaster is losing money, for example, it can get rid of the news to cut costs. It is also a matter of diversity.

This goes back to 1999 and the new television policy. We must ensure that consideration is given to a news service reflecting what is happening in the region or in a community. It is not just a business decision. That is what worries me about all this. I have a feeling that when people talk about the news in those terms, they only think about financial matters.

I myself used to host a radio show on CKVL and I saw the loss of the news service. It is not easy for the journalists and their families but it is also not good for the future of the news itself.

That is why we decided to have a debate today in much greater depth on what general interest television should be. At the same time, we want to send the message that what really prompted all this was obviously the decision about the future of TQS.

Our thoughts are with the employees. What we want is not very complicated. We want Télévision Quatre Saisons to survive. That is important. At the same time, we also think it is important to send a message about the importance of keeping a certain amount of news.

• (1540)

[English]

In English it is like a basic level of information. One cannot think about conventional TV without thinking about having news service.

[Translation]

Whether I am in Sudbury, Winnipeg, Brandon or anywhere in New Brunswick, in Quebec, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Trois-Rivières or Sherbrooke, then for sure when we have what is referred to as general interest television, we would like to have an idea of what is going on around us. I find it hard to imagine constantly having a traffic report about the situation on the Jacques-Cartier Bridge in Montréal when my friends in Roberval are watching television. People want to know what is going on in their part of the world. They are not going to ask the CRTC what the percentage should be and have them give us an exact number of hours. But they are going to say that the principle of preserving this regional aspect and this news service is important.

Business of Supply

The government has done several important things. I want to congratulate the Minister of Labour. I also have a news release from the CSN here. The Minister of Labour could have made an exception to the Canada Labour Code and eliminated the requirement that TQS employees get 16 weeks' notice, but he did not do that. That is entirely to his credit, and it is what someone who is a minister should do: make a decision.

Unfortunately, I cannot say the same thing for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages. She cannot just say that she has written a letter to the chairman of the CRTC, that she went and shook hands with the employees and she thinks this is regrettable. Our role, and I have been a minister in the past, is also to set the direction. We know there is a Broadcasting Act. We know that there are parameters that have to be abided by. But if there is a power to reverse a decision, there is absolutely nothing to stop the Minister from showing what the direction is going to be from now on.

She is being asked to do what our leader called for at the convention of the Association des producteurs de films et de télévision du Québec on April 29 at the Quebec City Hilton. We understand that the CRTC has a job to do, but we are asking that the minister take a position immediately. Does she think that a general interest television station should have a news service? That is what we think. Obviously we cannot talk about general interest television without having that service; otherwise, it becomes more and more of a specialty service.

On a more personal note, I hope that TQS will not have 24 hours of *Bleu nuit* and *The Flintstones*. First, because it is what it is and I do not agree with it, but second, and more seriously, a lot of young men and young women, journalists and technicians, are not sure at the moment whether they will be able to find new jobs, be it at TVA or at Radio-Canada or elsewhere. We have to think about how TQS has been an exceptional school for the last 20 years. TQS had chosen this regional niche to make sure that this kind of diversity had a showcase.

I therefore ask my colleagues to give this motion their unanimous support and show that we are sensitive to and aware of the future of general interest television, and that this includes a news service. Long live TQS with its news broadcasts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[English]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Bourassa for the tone of his speech today. Certainly he was reasonable, with a possible exception, and I do want to draw it to the House's attention, in that I think his characterization of what the heritage minister did in her interaction was perhaps an interpretation. I would submit that it is an unfair interpretation of what occurred.

As he will well know, as a parliamentary secretary I have been asked questions about this and have pointed out the fact that as a former cabinet minister he of all people would know that there are times and places when she can become involved. She did become involved in sending a letter to the CRTC for it to keep her fully

informed and fully apprised of what is going on. She is fully engaged in this issue. At the appropriate time, if further action is required at that time, she will be prepared to take that action. I would suggest that he wants to back off just a little, because I do not think he is being completely fair in his characterization of her.

What I wanted to get from him, though, is a definition of conventional TV for the purposes of this debate today. Does that mean on the air broadcasters? Does that mean people who are at the lower number of the channels that are easier to find on the dial? What does he mean? I need a definition from him so that we all can have a debate around the same concept of conventional television. What does he mean? I would ask him to define conventional television, please.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I know he is doing a good job. His role is to represent the minister and to read the documents that are provided to him in order to defend her.

The minister has opted for the wait-and-see approach. When she goes to see people and writes a letter to the chairman of the CRTC, she is in wait-and-see mode. I believe she could do a lot more. Why? Because her role—and she has the power to do so—is to reverse a decision. So this is important to us and I totally agree with all my colleagues who have made this point.

We have to wonder about the definition of general interest television. We know the difference. According to the CRTC, “general interest” means a television channel that provides a variety of services, whereas “specialty” means that the licence is based solely on a particular theme. For example, the Family Channel caters to a young audience.

Therefore, “general interest” means a wider variety of services. However, we are left wondering if a general interest channel has to include a news component. Everyone knows as well as I do, including the Florian Sauvageaus of the world and Mr. Demers, a former CRTC commissioner who said so himself as reported in *Le Soleil*, it is inconceivable to have a general interest channel without a news service.

The minister has the power to respond and the ability to react. If she has the ability to react, it means to react to something. We want to know what that something is. In short, a general interest television channel has to have a news service.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver Island North.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the speech by the hon. member for Bourassa. I have just a couple of questions.

He gave a pretty good description of what a general interest station is, so I assume he means Rogers and the Shaws of the country that provide basic generic programming.

Business of Supply

In our smaller communities, we have independent, locally owned stations providing quality programming for our local communities, with local input, and they are owned by shareholders in the community. Unfortunately, we see these larger generic stations coming in and putting them out of business.

Can the hon. member tell us how this bill protects those independent and locally owned and operated stations that provide quality local programming in our communities?

Hon. Denis Coderre: I wish it were a bill, Mr. Speaker. It is a motion.

I think we have to be careful when we are talking about Shaw and Rogers. We are not talking about cable distributors. When we speak about conventional TV, like Radio-Canada and CBC, it is TQS and TVA in our case.

Frankly, what I feel about that question from the member for Vancouver Island North is that there will be a time when we have to discuss the future of broadcasting. It is important. The CRTC was created to protect our culture and our sovereignty and those waves belong to the Canadian people, so it is important to have.

However, today the motion is about the definition of conventional TV. I am not playing the role of the CRTC. What I am saying is that Parliament, the House, should provide that kind of decision and that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on what I consider a subject of very great importance. I want to thank and congratulate my colleague from Bourassa for taking the initiative of moving the motion we are debating today.

This debate is important because it is about respecting diversity in terms of the news and promoting the requirement for local and regional content. It is also about strengthening our democracy.

Our society is complex and diversified and our broadcasters must take this into account. Our social fabric is made up of many strands and realities differ from one region to another. Hence the significance of this motion, which states that “the provision of a locally or regionally produced news service must be part of the operating conditions for general interest television licence holders”.

I would also point out that this concept was recognized and reflected during the original discussions that led to the granting of a broadcasting licence to the TQS network.

I would therefore like to spend a few moments on the specific situation of TQS since, to some degree, that is what led to the debate on the present topic.

When it was established, more than 20 years ago, TQS, which is also known as the “black sheep of television,” wanted to handle the news differently. It wanted to deliver news in a different format that focused on local realities. Over time, TQS succeeded in building up its news network throughout Quebec, thanks in large measure to the

creation of numerous regional stations. Those efforts, it must be admitted, played an important role in the diversity of news available.

The TQS network has also experienced its share of financial challenges over the years and now finds itself in a critical financial situation. Ownership of the company is changing and the new owner has decided to introduce draconian measures with serious consequences. Indeed, even before taking possession of the station, the new owner has decided to eliminate the news service in order to reduce operating costs as much as possible.

The closure of the news service and of the regional stations will result in 270 employees being laid off. We are talking about job losses in Quebec City, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières and elsewhere. Quebec, and particularly its regions, is losing an important source of information and, frankly, this is going to have a very negative impact on the local and regional content of the news reports.

The closure of the TQS news service has sent shock waves through the province. I am going to quote a few reactions.

The Union des municipalités du Québec says that “reducing in this fashion the diversity of regional information sources will definitely not allow towns and regions to be better heard and known”.

As for the Conseil de presse du Québec, it said: “This decision jeopardizes the diversity of Quebec's information voices, which is already too restricted by the concentration of ownership in the media.”

The National Assembly of Quebec also expressed its view on this issue, through a unanimous motion which says:

THAT the National Assembly reiterate the importance accorded to diversity of information as well as regional information in a democratic society, and enjoin the Government of Québec to demand that the CRTC maintain the TQS news media services.

This united front shows the importance for a society to have access to various sources of news. We must be able to get our information from different sources. It also shows the importance of having access to local and regional news that reflect regional variations and realities. Finally, it must also be a reflection of who we are.

The case of TQS is important, because it could apply elsewhere. It could apply to the whole country, and that is why today's motion is so critical.

The governments and the bodies that regulate communications and broadcasting have a role to play. We are not trying to get involved or to interfere in a specific market or another. We simply want to ensure that the rights of our fellow citizens and their access to diversified information that reflects local and regional realities are not curtailed.

● (1550)

The new owners of TQS made a cold business decision based strictly on the numbers. This debate, however, is about much more than numbers. It is about democracy, excessive media concentration and the right to objective, impartial, diverse news.

This debate is about the choices we make as a society. We in this House—and very certainly the Liberal members—are here to improve our society so that it reflects our aspirations and values. As parliamentarians, we certainly have a role to play in this regard.

Unfortunately for the Conservatives, government is a necessary evil. They think we should refuse to interfere, no matter what, and just allow market forces to rule. We have seen them withdraw from some very important things, such as Montreal International. We have seen them move with troubling insensitivity and on a purely ideological basis to eliminate such things as the court challenges program. A government, though, is never elected just to make cuts. A government is never elected to gag people who do not think like it.

This motion gives us an opportunity today to send a very clear message. Finally we will be saying loud and clear that news is an essential part of our democratic way of life. We will also be saying, as the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec pointed out, that the vitality of our democracy is based on a diversity of views and news sources.

To achieve this, today's motion is very clear. Its goal is to emphasize the fact that broadcasters who want to get a general interest television licence must provide locally produced news.

It is clear to both the hon. member for Bourassa, who was the architect of this motion, and us Liberals that it is very important in our culture to have locally or regionally produced news. It is also very clear that our culture needs not just protecting but further strengthening.

TV broadcasters play an important role in the dissemination of the culture, language and values of the society they serve. We want to ensure that local broadcasters are up to the challenge of representing these cultures and values.

Of course I understand, as we all do, the challenges our broadcasters face in a market that is ever more competitive and in which television's share is continually being eroded by the advent of new media. The challenges are substantial, and we are very aware of that.

We should therefore support our broadcasters. We should help them grow, develop and be profitable, but never at the expense of our basic democratic principles. We should always continue to work for a more open society. We should always facilitate access to objective, impartial, diverse news. We should continue to encourage general interest television that takes local realities and the importance of regional diversity into account.

That is the spirit of this motion. That is what is all about.

I want once again to thank the hon. member for Bourassa for taking the initiative to introduce this motion, which will be discussed and supported by all the Liberal members. It is an important motion in our eyes and in the eyes of all Quebecers and Canadians. I hope that my colleagues in the other parties will join the hon. member for Bourassa, me, and all the Liberal members in supporting this motion.

● (1555)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Honoré—Mercier for his interest in local and regional news throughout Quebec. In the Quebec City and

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Chaudière-Appalaches regions, TQS offers a much appreciated newscast.

The CRTC is a quasi-judicial tribunal. Of course, it may be tempting sometimes for Parliament or the government to interfere. We know however that, in 1994, a former Liberal minister interfered with the CRTC's decision-making process and had to resign. On that subject, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien used to say that a minister must not interfere with or exert any kind of pressure on independent agencies such as the CRTC. It is as if the Minister of Justice dictated to the Supreme Court what its decisions should be.

With that in mind, I would like to ask a question of my colleague. Seeing that the minister, the government and Parliament must respect the CRTC's independence, how does he see the role of Parliament and of the government in order to avoid any interference on their part with an independent agency?

● (1600)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, it is not about giving orders to the CRTC, and we fully understand that. The CRTC does not take orders from Parliament or the government. This motion is about expressing a wish.

We are taking a strong stance because it is an important issue. I would also remind my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse that it is also our role to express our views in this House and to represent our constituents, and in this case people from all over Quebec who have clearly expressed their desire to see the news service maintained at TQS.

In fact, I was a little surprised to hear my colleague's comments since I thought that maintaining the news service at TQS was important to him. The fact that he refuses to commit himself and that he says that no one should take a stance on this issue is both disconcerting and disappointing. I am giving him another chance to recant if he so wishes.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleague from Honoré-Mercier had the opportunity to participate in the Conseil de presse du Québec hearings. These hearings were recently held across Quebec—the one in Rimouski took place during the past couple of weeks. The council told us that what was remarkable about these meetings was the consensus that emerged in the briefs and opinions presented by the public throughout the regions as to their regional needs. These people need local news, they need to see themselves reflected in that news and their stories told.

As the member said so well, these people need to see a reflection of who they are, and they obviously spoke about the impact of any deterioration in that regard.

Does my colleague from Honoré-Mercier have any comment on the impact of this deterioration, if we allow things like that to happen in terms of our very fragile communities, which I have to say, even if it hurts me to do so, are slowly dying, mainly in Quebec, but undoubtedly in other parts of Canada as well?

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Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. It is clear that she values the different regions of Quebec. This has always been important to her. I did not have a chance to attend the meetings, but I have read a number of documents on the subject, and I will answer her question.

Our regions must be represented in news stories. We must take concrete action to ensure that this happens. We cannot leave this up to the general interest television broadcasters and let them do what they want, because they are interested only in the larger, more lucrative markets. Our regions cannot be left out. They have the right to be heard and the right to be recognized. They also have the right to have their own distinct news service, taking into account local and regional diversity.

As the member said, the regions are currently facing a number of challenges, one being the rural exodus of young people. This will certainly not do anything to counter that.

Once again, I thank the member for her question, and I would like to stress the importance of having local, regional content on our general interest television broadcasters.

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to tell you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member of the opposition for this opportunity to debate a public policy issue that is so important to the social and democratic vitality of our society in general and to the regions that comprise it, in particular, as our hon. colleague just mentioned.

I would like to point out that while the government supports this motion in principle, we have no intention of making any comments about matters that are currently before the CRTC.

As everyone knows, the TQS issue is complicated and we will not take a position regarding this commercial transaction. It is the responsibility of the CRTC, an agency that operates at arm's length from the government, to regulate so as to ensure that the objectives of the legislation are met.

Our government is committed to ensuring a strong Canadian broadcasting system, a strong production sector and the creation of quality Canadian content that is accessible to everyone.

It is typical that a Liberal member would suggest interfering in CRTC decisions, something we would not do, but I am happy to listen to my colleague here today. That is why I feel I must remind the House that the CRTC plays a quasi-judicial role and we must let it do its job.

Despite undeniable progress in communications and information technology, communities basically remain attached to a given geographical area. We have a large country, and the communities at the heart of our nation are scattered across this vast land.

The Canadian broadcasting system is probably one of this country's greatest achievements. Broadcasting helps define who we are and who we want to be. Broadcasting is a tool that enables us to: find out about current issues; share and discuss our ideas and dreams; innovate and take advantage of our entrepreneurial spirit;

give our children the opportunity to discover our world; and give families a chance to spend time together and be entertained.

More importantly, broadcasting provides some of the greatest support for our democracy by helping citizens become better informed. It is a forum for exploration, discussion and awareness.

There are many ways of reflecting a regional reality. Maintaining a "locally or regionally produced news service" is certainly one of them, but one must not overlook the contribution of public and educational broadcasters, which reflect regional realities through various means.

This brings me to the key part of my speech, namely the contribution of broadcasting, and public broadcasting in particular, to the development of a free, democratic and economically strong society, which builds on the strengths of its regional components.

Let us start by our national public broadcaster, whose current mandate is set out in the 1991 Broadcasting Act. Section 3(1)(m)(ii) states that the programming provided by the CBC should reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions.

This goes to show that, at the very heart of the corporation's mandate, there is the idea that the national public broadcaster has to be rooted in the daily reality of Canadian communities. This mandate was recently ratified by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, of which the hon. member for Bourassa is a member, in its report on the CBC/Radio-Canada.

There are many ways to reflect a country's regional diversity. Maintaining a "locally or regionally produced news service" is not the only way. For example, it seems that region-network interaction preceded the current move toward platform integration that characterizes existing CBC Radio-Canada programming. As part of his testimony during licence renewal hearings for CBTV-TV (Quebec) in 2004, CBC Radio-Canada's executive vice-president of French television at the time commented on what had been happening with Cogeco-affiliated stations since the newsrooms were separated in 2002.

He described how program segments broadcast across the network had been incorporating more and more reports produced by regional stations. He also said that integrating the newsrooms had resulted in greater interaction between network headquarters and the regions and had increased collaboration.

In francophone markets, our national public broadcaster produces local news programs, and also reflects regional realities on a larger scale through locally produced programming broadcast nationwide, thereby proving that local vitality need not be confined exclusively to local communities.

•(1605)

The national public broadcaster is not the only one offering a regional perspective in its programming. There are six provincial educational broadcasters in Canada. These services fall within the purview of provincial educational authorities that determine their mandate and provide part of their funding. They are still subject to the provisions of the Broadcasting Act.

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These services must be distributed free of charge as part of basic packages by cable distributors in their province of origin. These services are included in satellite distribution lists and are provided by satellite distribution companies. They may be provided by cable distributors outside of their province of origin, but distribution conditions may vary.

These networks are dedicated first and foremost to education. They play a significant role in their home provinces and communities.

When it renewed their licences in 2001, the CRTC praised educational television services, such as TVO and TFO in Ontario.

The regulatory body stated that they “provide programming distinctly different from that which is generally available to the public. The Commission fully supports the unique and valuable role they play in the Canadian broadcasting system”.

Networks like these provide rich and diverse programming.

For example, from Monday to Thursday, TFO, Ontario's French-language educational television network, broadcasts *PANORAMA* the only live public affairs program for Ontario francophones. TFO also broadcasts magazines and documentaries.

In Quebec, one of the objectives of Télé-Québec is to “reflect regional realities and the diversity of Quebec society”, which it does without a newsroom and by broadcasting documentaries and current affairs programs on society, science and culture.

Michèle Fortin, President and CEO of Télé-Québec had this to say in the 2006-2007 annual report:

Originality, openness to the world, freedom of thought—Télé-Québec has been able to retain, and even refine, its unique and vital signature in the Quebec television scene...adding episodes of the magazine *Méchant contraste*, a program completely produced in the regions and a voice for all of Quebec.

According to Télé-Québec, it broadcasts “programs that have sought to reflect the reality of the regions as a whole and individually.”

In western Canada, the Saskatchewan Communication Network, the public educational television network in Saskatchewan, has the mandate of providing cultural, information and educational programming. SCN rebroadcasts CBC regional and provincial news broadcasts. SCN also broadcasts local news from the Southwest TV News network and other programs that it places in the broader category of news.

In the end, there is no doubt that the underlying spirit of the motion moved today by the member from Bourassa is motivated by a deep commitment to the social, economic and democratic vitality of communities throughout the country. It is this spirit that we support today by standing behind regional and local programming.

● (1610)

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I am very happy to hear that this motion will be supported by the Conservatives. This is about the democratic expression of our people. We are here, so we can give our opinions. We are here not only to speak, but also to follow through on our opinions and vote.

I would like to hear what the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean thinks about a topic he touched on, the CBC.

I have some serious concerns about the CBC in the regions, especially the fact that the *Téléjournal de l'Est du Québec*—I am sure my colleague is familiar with this—is entirely produced in Quebec City. We have the necessary equipment in Sept-Îles, Matane or Rimouski, but since 1993—if I am not mistaken—the show has been entirely produced in Quebec City, even though it dedicates short 20- or 30-second segments to regional content presented by our cameramen and journalists.

The CBC has a responsibility. All that we get are a few news stories on a half-hour evening radio show.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about this, since he spoke about this issue. Should the CBC, a corporation financed by the people we represent, not get more involved in the regions? Is that not part of its mandate?

Mr. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. Obviously, the subject we are discussing here today concerns TQS. CBC representatives are currently involved in giving evidence to various House of Commons committees. Having the pleasure of sitting with a number of my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I know we have already begun asking the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation representative some questions, and we will continue to do so.

To answer my hon. colleague's question, in part, I know that news is extremely important in the regions in Canada and Quebec. As for TQS, we also have a regional program in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean that is very popular with our citizens and that reports what is happening in our beautiful region. There is also another reason. Opportunities are needed for young people studying media art and technology in Jonquière, where we train most technicians and many of the animators on all television and radio programs in Quebec. We must continue to offer these young people opportunities in our regions, in our province and in our country. We will therefore continue working on this issue and closely follow everything that is happening with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

● (1615)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on reading the speaking notes that were prepared for him, but knowing him and his values, I know that he does not necessarily believe everything that was written for him. I would like him to set aside the notes that the Prime Minister's Office prepared for him, speak from the heart and tell us what he really thinks about the cuts to regional news at TQS.

Does he agree with his colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse, for whom I have a great deal of respect, but who disappointed this House earlier when he said that the government should throw up its hands and do nothing to try to save TQS and regional news?

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Mr. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I was able to do a good job of reading my notes because I had carefully watched the member for Honoré-Mercier read his. I even asked for a stand so that, for the first time, I could do what he does.

It is very clear that the government wants to send the message that we want to keep news services across the country so that the people in the regions are well informed. It is very important for us to send the message that we are not getting involved in what is happening with the CRTC at present or in the private transaction concerning the purchase of TQS.

It is clear that regionalists and people in every region of the country want to continue providing Canadians with regional news content to keep them well informed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Compton—Stanstead has the floor for a very brief question.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I have a question on all this fuss about the government not wanting to support the CRTC. Would the hon. member agree to support the Bloc on the creation of a CRTC in Quebec that would be called the CQRT?

Mr. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, court rulings have already stated the framework in which this had to be managed in Canada. In this matter, among others, this is a private transaction. I think the situation has to stay the way it is right now.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to debate the issue of local news and programs within general interest television stations. This debate provides us an opportunity to look at the existing public policy with respect to this issue and to the current investments private general interest television broadcasters make when it comes to the news.

I would like to point out that the government supports this motion in principle. However, we do not intend to comment on matters that are currently before the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC. The TQS issue is a complex issue and we are not taking a position on this commercial transaction.

It is the responsibility of the CRTC, an agency that operates completely independently from the government, to regulate in a way that ensures that the goals of the legislation are met.

Our government is committed to ensuring that we have a strong Canadian broadcasting system, a strong production sector and good Canadian content that is accessible to everyone.

The motion moved by the opposition reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the provision of a locally or regionally produced news service must be part of the operating conditions for general interest television licence holders.

In fact, the content on television reflects how communities perceive themselves and direct their actions.

In broadcasting, over the years, the Parliament of Canada has defined a Canadian broadcasting policy that states the major objectives related to providing television and radio programming in Canada. The Broadcasting Act stipulates that our broadcasting system is made up of public, private and community components,

makes use of radio frequencies that are public property and provides, through its programming, a public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty.

Section 3 of the Act states that the programming provided by the Canadian broadcasting system should provide a reasonable opportunity for the public to be exposed to the expression of differing views on matters of public concern.

The Broadcasting Act also states that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, an independent agency, shall regulate and supervise all aspects of the Canadian broadcasting system with a view to implementing the Canadian broadcasting policy.

The Act lists the general powers of the CRTC. It can, among others, establish classes of licences, issue licences for such terms not exceeding seven years and subject to such conditions related to the circumstances of the licensee, amend any condition of a licence, issue renewals of licences for such terms not exceeding seven years, and suspend or revoke any licence.

That is what is very interesting about the motion we are debating here today. Indeed, the Canadian broadcasting policy as outlined in the act includes objectives regarding local and regional programming and news services. It is also clear about the powers granted to the CRTC in the regulation of licence holders to that effect.

It is also important to mention that the CRTC established the regulations governing general interest television, based on public consultation. This regulatory framework dates back to 1987, and was amended in 1999 and more recently in 2006.

It is important to note that during its review of this regulatory framework in 1999, the CRTC looked into the issue of local programs and news. At the time, the CRTC said that news is a key element in establishing identity and viewer loyalty for a local station. The CRTC also said that general interest television stations could not solicit local advertising in a market without providing local news coverage or other local programming.

● (1620)

The CRTC decided that it would not impose quantitative commitments for these types of programs. However, the licence holders shall henceforth have to prove how they meet the demand for this type of programming and how their content addresses the concerns of their local audiences. This will be done on a case-by-case basis. The CRTC may resort to imposing specific licence conditions for local news and broadcasts.

Private general interest broadcasters contribute to news production and broadcasting. In this regard, general interest television stations have invested more than \$325 million in 2006-2007 in this type of programming, an increase of \$35 million over 2001-2002. News production and broadcasting represents 53% of their total investment in Canadian programming.

The Broadcasting Act sets out the objectives of the Canadian broadcasting policy. The CRTC is responsible for governing the broadcasting industry and ensuring that the objectives of the act are met.

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The CRTC will examine the licence of each private general interest broadcaster in 2009. This process will be public and will allow all interested parties to inform the CRTC of their views. The issue of local and regional programming will be examined at that time. Licence holders with privileged access to the broadcasting system will have a role to play in attaining the public policy objectives.

The Canadian broadcasting system is certainly one of our greatest achievements. Broadcasting helps us define who we are and what we want to become. Broadcasting is a tool that enables us to: find out about current issues; share and discuss our ideas and dreams; innovate and take advantage of our entrepreneurial spirit; give our children the opportunity to discover our world; and give families a chance to spend time together and be entertained.

Even more importantly, broadcasting supports our democracy by helping citizens become better informed. It is a forum for exploration, discussion and awareness.

The news is a key component of that vitality. Geographical proximity to the news is also fundamental, but it is not the only way to enrich Canada's social fabric because the system is made up of a variety of elements that come together to provide Canadians with a wealth of diverse points of view that we need to maintain and improve.

As stated in the Broadcasting Act, the Canadian people must have a broadcasting system that provides access to diverse viewpoints and news from many sources.

That is why the government supports the principle underlying the motion moved by the member for Bourassa.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Bourassa who brought forward this motion, and also my hon. colleague from Honoré-Mercier who spoke to it.

Before I get into a question, this is less about regulations and arm's length organizations and less about the technicalities of the Broadcasting Act. This is more about the general philosophy behind what it is we are trying to accomplish here. To explain what I mean by that, I will use an example from my own area.

In Newfoundland and Labrador right now, we have two provincial newscasts, both of which are successful for the simple reason that it is more than just general news and information in the standard sense, as we would see in a national broadcaster.

What we do see is a crossroads and a way to communicate within all regions in the province. It is a crossroads for our culture. It is a crossroads that we depend on and because of that, it becomes a responsibility. It is a responsibility for those who endeavour to get into the broadcasting business that they will receive certain protections culturally for their businesses so that they can broadcast, but at the same time, this responsibility must be adhered to. That is the only way. With the proliferation of mass communications, the way it stands nowadays, let us face it, we do not tune into news as much as we used to; we actually download news now. We are in an

era of satellite communications where it becomes one source. That local, regional aspect of broadcasting and information sharing, that crossroads of our culture, becomes muted and diminished.

Therefore, it is a responsibility of the Government of Canada, through its arm's length organization, to make sure that this enterprise has a responsibility to inform, to enlighten and to make sure that we are all connected.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Question.

Mr. Scott Simms: I will come to my question, considering that there is such an overwhelming demand, and I appreciate that.

With the proliferation of trade and investment around the world, is it the government's responsibility to protect our culture by protecting and enshrining local news in general television?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, it is important to state from the outset that our government is committed to providing a strong Canadian broadcasting system. Regional content is obviously important. That is why we are saying today that we support the opposition motion in principle.

However, there is more to TV stations and regional broadcasting than just the news, in response to my colleague's question. When it comes to the culture of Canada, it has many different aspects. It is true that television and television content, local news content, is all part of the picture, but there is a larger picture at play as well.

Certainly with these smaller regional television stations, there is a bottom line that must be considered as well. They strive to provide local news content, and local content, but they must also provide Canadian content in their programming. I do not think it would be fair to say that they must do so no matter what the cost, or that they must do so without regarding their bottom line, because some of these are small or medium size businesses that have to take into consideration the financial aspects of their decisions.

Therefore, in general I would say yes, the government supports local and regional broadcasting and the capability to produce and deliver the news from the local perspective. However, we must also respect that the CRTC has a mandate, and that that mandate is arm's length from the government and that it would be inappropriate for the government to give direction to the CRTC.

In fact, that has been echoed by Liberal members today. The Liberal member who spoke just before my colleague admitted exactly that, that we are here to express our intent, to express our ideas, to express what is important to us, but we also must respect the mandate of these arm's length organizations and what Parliament has invested in them, because Parliament has invested certain responsibilities in these organizations.

• (1630)

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 Windsor West, the Budget; the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Airbus; the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis, Bulk Water.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ahuntsic.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleagues and I support this motion because we believe it is critically important for elected officials to make their position clear to the government and the CRTC. Providing locally or regionally produced news services must be part of the operating conditions for general interest television licence holders.

Nobody is trying to interfere with the CRTC's work. The CRTC must remain independent and must continue to apply the required telecommunications and broadcasting regulations. With this motion, we are discharging our responsibility as elected representatives of the people and expressing our vision for the evolution of general interest television, which has, historically, played a major role in the cultural development of our societies, particularly in Quebec.

Yesterday, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage unanimously passed a Bloc Québécois motion calling on the government to defend the notion that local news and production must be maintained in general interest television. I will not read the motion, which is more or less the same as the one before us today.

Although I have not yet heard from my NDP colleague, I am pleased to conclude, based on what I heard yesterday, that he too will support this and that the motion will be agreed to unanimously, just as it was in committee. I think that everyone here wants to support it. We are all working toward the same goal: maintaining local news and production services.

Parliamentarians decided to take action on this matter yesterday and today because of the lack of leadership shown by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages in response to the statement by the new owner of TQS about getting rid of news services. We would not even be talking about this had the minister acted on the questions we asked in the House and given some direction to the CRTC.

She may claim to sympathize with the 270 workers that were laid off and lost their jobs—we saw what happened—but let us not forget the major impact, be it social, economic or cultural, this is having on the regions. Despite the sympathy she expressed, she kept repeating that this was a private transaction. That is disturbing. I think that comes from the old Conservative habit of looking at everything from a consumerism perspective, thus making everything a private transaction. That is disturbing.

Airwaves are public domain, and general interest television broadcasting has its own set of requirements. I could quote lawyer, journalist and Laval University Department of Information and Communications professor Florian Sauvageau, who recognized that it was inconceivable to maintain general interest television while at the same time eliminating all news content.

Let us ask ourselves a few questions. Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages have a burst of common sense and the sudden desire to listen? Will she give directions to the CRTC concerning TQS? It is all fine and well for the Conservative government to say that it will support this motion in principle, but it is not saying anything about TQS. It remains silent on that issue, which is very disturbing. We have just heard that it will support the motion, but will not discuss TQS and cases before the

CRTC. It is one thing to approve in principle, but action is required. This reminds me of the motion on the Quebec nation; the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party supported it in principle, but no action followed. Principles are fine, but we want action as well.

In the case of TQS, for instance, like it or not, the minister's initial reaction was consistent with the rationale behind past statements of hers.

• (1635)

I am going to go back in time for a moment. On October 28, during the ADISQ gala, 18 artist and cultural business groups, including 17 that work mainly in Quebec, called on the minister to use her power to issue policy directives to the CRTC to avoid what they called the laissez-faire attitude of that body, which was shifting toward policies that put market forces ahead of the duty to protect culture and society. What was the minister's reaction?

We got her true response on November 6, when she addressed the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. The minister said, and I quote: "There must be an increased reliance on competition and market forces...". She added: "I challenge you to be open to change, because change will come...". That is scary. She then went on to say: "The status quo is no longer an option. We must create an environment that rewards excellence."

In my opinion, the minister could not be clearer. She rejected the call that came primarily from Quebec's cultural community.

In this sense, the decisions of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and of the Conservative government are very consistent with the policies of the Canadian Alliance, their founding party. In fact, some excerpts from the dissenting opinion expressed by the Canadian Alliance in the Lincoln report are quite telling about their deregulation philosophy. That party said, and I quote: "We would remove content definition regulations." It also added:

Canadian Alliance supports relaxing foreign ownership rules on Canadian industry, including telecommunications and broadcast distribution. We suggest conducting an immediate review to determine whether to reduce or completely remove these rules.

So, they are very consistent and I respect that.

The current Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was then the Minister of Industry, applied the same philosophy when he issued an order calling upon the CRTC to regulate telephony as little as possible. That action was condemned by Quebec's Union des consommateurs and by small providers of telephone services.

As we can see, where there is a will, there is a way. We are talking here about an order saying that the government is going to deregulate the industry and keep it that way. Now, we are told that we cannot do anything and that we must wait.

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Will the minister and this government defend general interest television, not only in principle but also in action as we asked it to in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and as the motion calls for today? The question is there. We can give the government a chance, and we will see. Earlier, the critics did not want to broach the subject of TQS. So we are no further ahead in terms of information about TQS. I am a very optimistic person, and I believe in people's goodwill. I think then that the minister could perhaps listen not only to workers, but also to those of us here in the House who are asking her to act. I could also say that history tends to repeat itself, but we should not be pessimistic. We must stay positive and believe that, perhaps, the minister will do something.

In a completely different vein, but still fundamental to this debate, there is the issue of Quebec's jurisdictions. We believe that Quebec can no longer play the role of lobbyist. We have had enough. We have a unanimous motion from the National Assembly, and we are bringing the minister a message. We want full jurisdiction, and we are convinced that Quebec would be in a better position to properly defend issues related to its own culture, especially in terms of broadcasting and diversity of information.

Historically, Quebec has always asked that broadcasting be recognized as part of its jurisdiction.

● (1640)

In 1929, Quebec premier Alexandre Taschereau held a vote on the Quebec broadcasting act. The federal government responded by adopting the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act on May 26, 1932. It provided for the establishment of the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, which was instituted that same year and was the forerunner of the CRTC.

On February 25, 1968, Daniel Johnson clearly expressed why Quebec had to have a say in communications:

The assignment of broadcasting frequencies cannot and must not be the prerogative of the federal government. Quebec can no longer tolerate being excluded from a field where its vital interest is so obvious.

This vital component of Quebec's development has been defended by Quebec governments of all political stripes. In fact, for all Quebec governments, it is a cultural issue and, like the creators, the news people in conventional television contribute, in their own way, to the evolution of culture and the identity of a nation, which is shaped over time and by all regions of Quebec.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives are allowing Canada to be driven by market forces—we have several examples and I provided a few earlier—rather than defending national identities. Our nation should not be led down a path that does not serve it well.

We will reiterate that supporting our national culture urgently requires, at a very minimum, the application of telecommunications and broadcasting policies that are the responsibility of the Government of Quebec, our national government, which must establish the regulatory framework in its territory. We now need a CRTQ and it is legally possible to establish it with people of good will. I refer my colleagues to our Bill C-540 and urge them to support it.

Quebec could put in place its own policies, particularly with regard to the definition of conventional television, diversity of news

and approval of transactions in the broadcasting sector that reflect the values of Quebec society.

By recognizing Quebec as a nation, the federal government must take concrete action in that direction. It is not just a question of principle or hollow words. They may say that we have been recognized, that we should be happy and that things are good. No. Responsibilities and actions must accompany the recognition of our nation.

Unfortunately, the federalist members from Quebec, including the minister and my colleague, the Liberal heritage critic, whom I respect, have nothing to say about this.

The most incomprehensible of all, in my opinion, is the current Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, a former minister in Robert Bourassa's government, who had quite a bit to say about this issue and said it with a great deal of passion and panache. When he served as Minister of Communications from 1990 to 1994, he said:

Quebec must be able to establish the rules for operating radio and television systems, and control development plans for telecommunications networks, service rates and the regulation of new telecommunications services... Quebec cannot let others control programming for electronic media within its borders... To that end, Quebec must have full jurisdiction and be able to deal with a single regulatory body.

He also wrote to the federal ministers at the time:

While telecommunications are important to Canada's identity, they are even more vital to Quebec, whose future on this continent will demand greater effort.

● (1645)

Today, in his public statements, he is comfortable with a situation that he previously condemned. To my way of thinking, it is no surprise that Premier Bourassa lost the battle.

It is clear that this motion refers to the difficult situation facing TQS. As we have said before, the Bloc Québécois intends to submit a brief to the CRTC calling on it to keep the licence requirement to provide appropriate news coverage.

I therefore invite the minister and all my colleagues in the other opposition parties to follow our lead, even though I am beginning to have doubts about the Conservatives, because earlier the spokesperson did not want to go any further in the debate. I hope with all my heart that the minister will submit a brief to the CRTC.

In conclusion, I believe that the approval of the transaction between Cogeco and Remstar to purchase TQS will be a test of the effectiveness of the new policy on the diversity of voices that the CRTC introduced in January 2008. It is to be hoped that the CRTC will take the broadcasting policy for Canada into consideration. The 1991 Broadcasting Act provides that:

3(1) (i) the programming provided by the Canadian broadcasting system should

...

(i) be varied and comprehensive, providing a balance of information, enlightenment and entertainment for men, women and children of all ages, interests and tastes—

Business of Supply

That truly is diversity. In interpreting that section, we, like many experts, understand that a general interest television station must inform and enlighten, in other words, provide informed and enlightened news bulletins. As an example, I am convinced that the disappearance of the CKAC newsroom had a significant impact on the diversity of voices—and it would be equally significant if the TQS newsroom were to disappear.

I would remind the House that, sadly, in 2005, despite another unanimous motion in Quebec's National Assembly, the CRTC authorized the disappearance of the CKAC newsroom and, unfortunately, the Liberal heritage minister at the time did nothing to stop it. Thus, there is cause for concern. CKAC is one example, and I hope the same thing does not happen with TQS.

I would like to close on a topic—my colleagues will call it unrelated—that is very painful. I must mention it, because it is a very current issue. Speaking of nations, I cannot help but mention that the Quebec nation—without wishing to digress—has asserted itself perfectly well. When the government sends the Governor General of Canada to France to launch the festivities for the 400th anniversary of Quebec, one must wonder whether we are celebrating Canada's birthday or that of Quebec. Excuse me: ridicule has never killed anyone, but it certainly hurts. It is very upsetting for me, for many Quebecers, and for my country, Quebec.

• (1650)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I know that you would want the member to stay on a point of relevance. I think it is regrettable that she has chosen to make these kinds of comments about the head of Canada, the Governor General. I notice that most of the Québécois do not seem to have that much difficulty cashing their paycheques from the Governor General.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member is making a point of relevance.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Ahuntsic has one minute to reply. I would ask her to stick to the topic of the motion. That would be appreciated.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to do so. I do not want to offend the Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, whom I really appreciate. It is my opinion and I respect his opinion. I have a lot of respect for the head of Canada. She is the head of Canada and I have a great deal of respect for her. However, she is not my leader, but that is another issue.

I will simply conclude by asking hon. members to vote in favour of this motion—which they will certainly do—and by asking the parliamentary secretary to convey these comments to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, so that she will provide directions to the CRTC to ensure that TQS, which is a general interest television broadcaster, can survive and still have information services.

[English]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could take my own comments down a peg or two and extend the same kind of courtesy that the member extended to me.

However, the difficulty that I am having, particularly, in this debate, is the fact that Bloc Québécois members, unfortunately, come to this place with a lack of information and a lack of understanding.

The court, at the highest level, has systematically confirmed that the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over issues of broadcasting. This was a Supreme Court decision from 1994. Yet, the members come to this place and say why do we not do this and why do we not do that. The fact is that this has been established clearly by the Supreme Court in 1994.

Also, perhaps the member is not aware of the fact that heritage minister Dupuy, also in 1994, lost his job over the fact that he was interfering inappropriately in matters before the CRTC.

The minister of this government has written to the CRTC, as she may under the regulations and the laws of the land, and has asked to be kept abreast of exactly what is going on with respect to TQS. However, she will not and the government will not interfere in this commercial transaction which is currently before the CRTC.

If at some point in the future it is determined by the minister and she advises the cabinet and the cabinet agrees that there should be intervention, there is a place for intervention, as designed by law.

It is really unfair. It is really inaccurate that this member along with other members in this House are suggesting that the minister has been inactive. It is quite the opposite. She has been engaged, as she may be by law.

I just wonder if the member might want to reflect on that and perhaps just back off a bit over what we will call accusations of the fact that the minister has not been engaged. Quite candidly, she has.

The reason why the members of the government have been saying during this debate today that they are not going to comment on the TQS is because it is inappropriate for the government members to do so. As a matter of fact, it is against the law for the government to comment on this commercial transaction that is before the CRTC at this point.

I wonder if she wants to reflect on my comments.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. He actually asked two questions.

As for a CRTQ, it is true that there was a Supreme Court decision. I would like to explain to him what happened at the time. There was a request for total repatriation of powers, which would have involved changing the Constitution. The Supreme Court refused, on the ground that the airwaves were a federal jurisdiction, so Quebec could not be given full powers. What should have been done was to request a change to the Constitution.

Business of Supply

As we know, Ms. Marois is currently in favour of changing the Constitution on this issue. We are not asking for the Constitution to be changed, but we would like to amend the Broadcasting Act, which is possible. It is not unconstitutional; we checked. We would like an amendment that takes the Quebec identity into account. This would give Quebec some leeway under the law to ask Ottawa for a CRTQ.

In a way, what we are doing with this bill—and I urge my colleagues to vote in favour of this very innovative bill—is creating some space to allow for powers to be transferred to Quebec. This is being done currently with immigration, and also in other areas, such as coastal surveillance. It is possible to transfer powers. We are not asking for a change to the Constitution.

On the one hand, this belongs to Quebec. I fully support Ms. Marois' position of wanting to change the Constitution. But we are not the ones who can do so. Quebec and the provinces are the ones that can.

On the other hand, I completely understand my colleague's point about whether or not the minister can intervene. I do not agree with his opinion. In fact, the minister can give direction, and she has the last word. If the CRTC makes a decision, she can simply say that she does not agree with the decision.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate this afternoon in this debate. We are debating an opposition day motion sponsored by the member for Bourassa, which reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the provision of a locally or regionally produced news service must be part of the operating conditions for general interest television licence holders.

This has been before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage as well. In fact, yesterday the member for Ahuntsic, who just spoke in the debate, tabled a motion that was amended slightly by the committee but passed unanimously. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage expressed its concern that conventional television must support a basic level of information services, including quality regional information services and local production.

That is the motion that was passed yesterday at the standing committee. Everyone can see there is interest in this important issue percolating around Parliament Hill, through the House of Commons today and the standing committee yesterday. That is because this is an issue of importance and it has come to the fore because of the situation at TQS, the television network in Quebec that also serves other areas.

I know my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst had hoped to speak in the debate but because Wednesdays are short days, we are not going to have the entire time period this afternoon and he was not able to participate. This is important to folks in Acadie—Bathurst who also enjoy the programming of TQS.

The situation with TQS is that it is a network that has had its financial difficulties. It is in the process of changing ownership and the new owners have announced that they will be gutting the information services of the network and that 270 journalist jobs and people who provide that service are going to be lost.

All of us in this place and certainly in this corner of the House want to stand in solidarity with the workers who are losing their jobs. Sadly, it is a situation we see repeated all too often in so many sectors where good, well paying jobs that provide good benefits are being lost in very many parts of the country in different sectors. Here it is happening again.

We want to stand in solidarity with those workers and their union as they work to ensure the continuance of their important employment. However, it is more than just that. It also relates to the conditions of licences that are granted and awarded to broadcasters in Canada and the conditions of a conventional or general interest TV licence that requires that the provision of new services be part of that endeavour.

That is what is at the heart of all of this. New Democrats in this corner will be supporting this motion, by the way. It sounds like all parties in the House will be supporting it. For the NDP, the crux of the matter is that the conditions of the licence be respected, that the importance of a local and regional news service be respected, and that a general interest or conventional TV licence be respected through this process with a change in ownership.

I know the workers who lost their jobs and their union understand the financial situation of TQS and have struggled to be responsive to that. They have said that they are willing to negotiate with the knowledge of the financial situation of that network. However, at the same time, they also believe that the broadcaster has an obligation to abide by the terms of the licence and the provisions of broadcasting in Canada, and it is very important that it continue. All of this discussion is happening as a result of those changes at TQS.

It has been noted a number of times this afternoon that the National Assembly of Quebec has also passed a motion. I believe it passed unanimously, pointing out the importance of a diversity of news sources and regional news services in a democratic society and the importance of maintaining the news services of TQS, in particular. It is very important to realize that this was not an insignificant step by the Assemblée nationale and the government of Quebec to make this kind of statement about the importance of this service to the people of Quebec.

● (1700)

I think all of us understand that it was a strong statement that came from the Assemblée nationale and from the government in Quebec. It just reinforces again the importance of maintaining this kind of service and maintaining the determination to see all aspects of a broadcast licence adhered to as these kinds of changes happen in the industry.

It is very important that we show respect for the CRTC and the conditions of the licence. I think that is why it is important that in the House of Commons and in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage we demonstrate that we want to see the conditions of the regulations respected, and that we want to see a healthy and vigorous local and regional news service provided by a conventional television broadcaster, by a general interest broadcaster.

Business of Supply

It is very important that we reinforce that this afternoon by supporting this motion, and by supporting the Assemblée nationale in the motion that it made as well. I think that shows the respect that we have in this place for the CRTC and its work for the provisions of the broadcasting licences. I do not think there is any problem with us reinforcing our belief that those are important principles that need to be upheld.

I know the government has been a little jittery that we are somehow trying to tell the CRTC what to do. I do not think that is happening this afternoon. What we are doing as parliamentarians is saying that the principles involved here are very crucial to broadcasting in Canada, to broadcasting in Quebec and to all regions in the country. We cannot let this slip by unnoticed. Everyone will be on notice that this is very important with the passage of the motion this afternoon.

I think folks in Quebec are a little skittish about this too. They have seen governments in the past fail to protect local news services. There is the example of CKAC, which is the oldest French language radio station in the world. Several years ago the company that owned it closed down its newsroom. We saw a public outcry about that, but sadly the government of the day, the Liberals were in power then, did nothing to ensure the continuance of that news service at that important radio station.

The government took no action and I think that folks are very determined to make sure that this does not happen again with the example of the television service of TQS. They want to make sure that the importance of local and regional news service in a general licence is understood and made clear, and that all politicians from all sides understand that.

I think folks in Quebec were burned by the closure of the newsroom at CKAC and by the failure of the Liberal government of the day to take any action that would support the continuation of that news service and the loss of diversity in viewpoints that it represented at the time. The concern is very directly that history may repeat itself now that we find this situation with TQS.

Over the past few weeks we have had this issue raised in the House a number of times in question period. The member for Outremont was one of the members who raised this issue in questions for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages. I think he raised a very important point when he put this question to the minister. He asked:

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?

He went on to say:

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.

I think the member for Outremont put it very clearly and very strongly to the minister that day about the concern that something important was being lost. Even though, when the changes were first discussed, it was stated that there was no intention of doing away with the news services at TQS, that is indeed what took place not too long thereafter.

What a huge disappointment and sense of betrayal that this has caused among the workers, but also among viewers and among people who care about media diversity in Quebec and all across Canada. It is very important to remember that.

● (1705)

Part of our action today is to let broadcasters and potential investors in the broadcasting industry know that we are determined to see the principles of a general interest broadcast licence and a conventional broadcast licence maintained. There should be no compromise on those kinds of licences.

We are determined to ensure that anyone who invests in that industry, maintains that commitment and does not say one thing one day and then takes a completely different action the next day. We are determined to ensure people do not go back on those kinds of commitments. It is important we reinforce that. The member for Outremont did that clearly and articulately in his questions to the government in question period some weeks ago. When people are granted that licence and when they undertake operations under that licence, we have to ensure that commitment is maintained and no compromise is made to it.

This is an important issue. It is an important issue in Quebec, as we have heard from the debate today, as we have heard from the discussions at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and as we have heard from the debate at Assemblée nationale. The actions of the Government of Quebec have also shown this to be an important issue in Quebec.

However, it is not just limited to Quebec. It is an important discussion to have in all regions of Canada. One organization, one company, one voice in news services does not guarantee a democratic or diverse media. This is why it is important that we take a stand when any one of those regional media voices is on the verge of being lost. It does raise important issues of culture, of language and of information. The member for Outremont made that very clear in his questions in the House, when this issue first broke. We have to take our responsibilities seriously in all these areas.

Most acute is the situation surrounding broadcasters and broadcast licences in Canada. We have to do our utmost to maintain a diversity of viewpoints when it comes to provision of information and news in our country. That was driven home by the Lincoln report, a very extensive report on the broadcasting industry in Canada. Not many current members in the House worked on that report, but members who are no longer here worked on it a few years back. That report is considered one of the most important reports on the broadcasting industry in Canada.

In the chapter on community, local and regional broadcasting, the committee noted its concern that community, local and regional broadcasting services had become endangered species and that many parts of Canada were underserved. In its travels across the country, the committee heard from a surprising number of citizens who felt they had been neglected and even abandoned by the broadcasting system.

It is important to recognize that this concern has been raised for many years and in many different circumstances across Canada. The situation facing viewers in Quebec has raised alarm bells. The provision of regional news voices, regional information services, regional and local programming has been a major concern to Canadians from coast to coast to coast for many years. This is nothing new. When these situations arise, it is incumbent on us to make our position very clear. We stand in support of providing that important kind of local service.

The Lincoln report was clear, and we have been very clear here this afternoon. I hope the message is heard in the places where it needs to be heard.

It is crucial in any part of the country that there be a diversity of voices in the media. As someone from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, I know we are often given as an example of a place in North America where media concentration and ownership of media is at its highest. We are not always pointed out as a positive example.

• (1710)

The majority of people in Vancouver get their news and information from one source, from one company, and that presents a certain concern that there is not a diversity of voices that are heard.

Thankfully we have other competitors for that market, for the interest of those viewers and for the provision of that information, and others are doing a very valiant job of competing with the major organizations. However, it remains a concern when any one market has that kind of concentration of ownership and the development of a single major voice in the provision of information and news services.

We want to ensure we do not lose that in any part of the country. People in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia understand the importance of this. That is why we can stand in solidarity with the folks in Quebec who were concerned about the situation with TQS and with the workers at TQS. We know the kind of situation that is involved.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: With the permission of the House, I wonder if we might see the clock at 5:30 p.m. and proceed to the next vote, which would be a vote on a private member's bill. If I have that consent, we shall call in the members and ring the bells for 15 minutes.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. So we are all very clear on this, we would see the clock at 5:30 and then

Private Members' Business

the bells would ring, so members of all parties would then have an opportunity to come to the chamber to vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from May 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-517, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-517.

Call in the members.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to ensure that my vote is recorded as being in favour of the motion.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. member voted twice and he is trying to clarify which vote he meant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Exactly, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 106*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Blaney
Bonin	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cardin
Carrier	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Comartin
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanji	Duceppe
Faille	Folco
Freeman	Gagnon
Godfrey	Godin
Guarnieri	Guimond
Holland	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Karygiannis	Laforest

Routine Proceedings

Laframboise	Lalonde	Patry	Pearson
Lavallée	Layton	Petit	Poillievre
Lebel	Lemay	Prentice	Preston
Lessard	Lévesque	Rajotte	Ratansi
Lussier	Malhi	Redman	Regan
Marston	Masse	Reid	Richardson
Mathysen	McDonough	Ritz	Savage
McGuinty	Ménard (Hochelaga)	Scheer	Schellenberger
Minna	Mourani	Sgro	Shipley
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray	Simard	Simms
Nadeau	Nash	Skelton	Solberg
Ouellet	Pacetti	Sorenson	St. Amand
Paquette	Perron	St. Denis	Stanton
Plamondon	Priddy	Steckle	Storseth
Proulx	Rodriguez	Strahl	Telegdi
Rota	Savoie	Temelkovski	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Scarpaleggia	Siksay	Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
St-Cyr	Stoffer	Toews	Trost
Szabo	Thi Lac	Turner	Tweed
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	Vincent	Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Thibault (West Nova)	Watson	Vellacott	Verner
Tonks	Wilson	Wallace	Warawa
Wappel		Warkentin	Williams
Wilfert		Yelich	Zed- — 156
Wrzesnewskyj- — 101			

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Baird	Barnes
Beaumier	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Boshcoff
Boucher	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooog
Byrne	Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Coderre	Comuzzi
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cummins
D'Amours	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Doyle
Dryden	Dykstra
Easter	Emerson
Epp	Eyking
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Hall Findlay	Hanger
Harris	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hubbard
Ignatieff	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karetak-Lindell	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maloney	Manning
Mark	Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Matthews
Mayes	McCallum
McGuire	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis

PAIRED

Members

Batters	Bellavance
Breitkreuz	Brunelle
Fast	Gaudet
Gravel	Guay
Harvey	Hinton
Lunney	Malo
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Pallister
Roy	Smith
St-Hilaire	Sweet- — 18

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1750)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The House resumed from May 6 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 107*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois

Private Members' Business

Brison
Byrne
Carrier
Charlton
Christopherson
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
D'Amours
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Dosanjh
Duceppe
Eyking
Folco
Gagnon
Godin
Guarnieri
Hall Findlay
Hubbard
Jennings
Kadis
Karygiannis
Laframboise
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
MacAulay
Maloney
Marston
Masse
Matthews
McDonough
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Mourani
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Ouellet
Paquette
Pearson
Plamondon
Proulx
Redman
Rodriguez
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simms
St. Amand
Steckle
Szabo
Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Vincent
Wilson
Zed — 141

Brown (Oakville)
Cardin
Chan
Chow
Coderre
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Dhalla
Dryden
Easter
Faille
Freeman
Godfrey
Goodale
Guimond
Holland
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Laforest
Lalonde
Layton
Lee
Lessard
Lussier
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Nash
Pacetti
Patry
Perron
Priddy
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Savoie
Sgro
Simard
St-Cyr
St. Denis
Stoffer
Telegdi
Thi Lac
Turner
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harris
Hearn
Hill
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKenzie
Mark
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Petit
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Scheer
Shiple
Solberg
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 117

Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Hawn
Hiebert
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Mayes
Merrifield
Mills
Norlock
Obhrai
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Schellenberger
Skelton
Sorenson
Storseth
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

PAIRED

Members

Batters
Breitkreuz
Fast
Gravel
Harvey
Lunney
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Roy
St-Hilaire

Bellavance
Brunelle
Gaudet
Guay
Hinton
Malo
Pallister
Smith
Sweet — 18

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Baird
Bernier
Blackburn
Boucher
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Comuzzi
Davidson
Del Mastro
Doyle
Emerson

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Cummins
Day
Devolin
Dykstra
Epp

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

TREATMENT OF RARE DISORDERS

The House resumed from May 6 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 426 under private members' business.

● (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*Private Members' Business**(Division No. 108)*

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Atamanenko
Bains
Barnes
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Bezan
Blaney
Boshcoff
Brisson
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooze
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Charlton
Chow
Clarke
Coderre
Comuzzi
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Davies
Del Mastro
Dewar
Dhalla
Doyle
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Galipeau
Godfrey
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Guergis
Hanger
Hawn
Hiebert
Holland
Ignatieff
Jean
Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Layton
LeBlanc
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Manning
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mathysen
Mayes
McDonough
McGuire
Menzies
Miller
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Pacetti

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison
Anders
Angus
Bagnell
Baird
Beaumier
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bernier
Bevington
Blackburn
Bonin
Boucher
Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Chan
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Comartin
Cotler
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cummins
Davidson
Day
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dosanjh
Dryden
Easter
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Folco
Gallant
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Guarnieri
Hall Findlay
Harris
Hearn
Hill
Hubbard
Jaffer
Jennings
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lebel
Lee
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Maloney
Mark
Marston
Masse
Matthews
McCallum
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis

Patry
Petit
Prentice
Priddy
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Savoie
Scheer
Sgro
Siksay
Simms
Solberg
St. Amand
Stanton
Stoffer
Strahl
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson
Tonks
Turner
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warawa
Watson
Williams
Wrzesnewskyj
Zed— 221

Pearson
Poilievre
Preston
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Rodriguez
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Shipley
Simard
Skelton
Sorenson
St. Denis
Steckle
Storseth
Szabo
Temelkovski

NAYS

Members

André
Bachand
Bigras
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Carrier
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Faille
Gagnon
Laforest
Lalonde
Lemay
Lévesque
Ménard (Hochelega)
Nadeau
Paquette
Plamondon
Thi Lac

Asselin
Barbot
Blais
Bouchard
Cardin
Crête
Demers
Duceppe
Freeman
Guimond
Laframboise
Lavallée
Lessard
Lussier
Mourani
Ouellet
Perron
St-Cyr
Vincent— 38

PAIRED

Members

Batters
Breitkreuz
Fast
Gravel
Harvey
Lunney
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Roy
St-Hilaire

Bellavance
Brunelle
Gaudet
Guay
Hinton
Malo
Pallister
Smith
Sweet— 18

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion, as amended, carried.

It being 6:05 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

DOPING IN SPORT

The House resumed from April 8 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of Motion No. 466, which states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should continue to engage in the anti-doping movement, encouraging national governments to follow Canada's lead and ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

It is a real shame that athletes feel pressure to take performance enhancing drugs in order to remain competitive in their respective sports, but we have seen it time and time again, most notably in sports such as major league baseball, cycling, track and field and others.

In some sports, there continues to be a bit of a “look the other way” culture. It is changing, but there is some of that, and it allows athletes, trainers and coaches to get away with using these illegal drugs. It is important that we eliminate this culture in sport and that those who do practise doping are caught and dealt with.

Every time one of them is revealed to have taken a performance enhancing drug, it destroys the image many young people have of these athletes or, even worse, it makes these kids think that doping is acceptable or necessary to be competitive.

Kids do look up to their sports idols. I have two children. My daughter Emma is a great soccer player. My son Conor is a great hockey player and a tremendous fan of sports. He would be devastated if he knew that some of his heroes had succeeded by breaking the laws and also in going against the ethical standards that we insist on as parents.

I come from the riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. One of Canada's greatest athletes, and in fact I would say the greatest athlete, Sidney Crosby, comes from that area. Now that the Montreal Canadiens are out of the playoffs, I hope he wins the Stanley Cup. A guy like Sidney Crosby is someone we can look up to, and the kids can safely look up to him as a hero worthy of emulating.

I would also suggest that my colleague, the member for York Centre, is another one of those athletes who would not take advantage of anything except hard work and sacrifice in order to achieve his goals.

At a time when we are concerned about the epidemic of childhood obesity and when we are encouraging our kids to be more active, we need to promote the values of honesty and sportsmanship that go with that. We have seen in the United States the major spectacle of congressional hearings on drugs in sport. This is an issue that people are taking seriously.

Professional and amateur sports have to remain accessible to athletes who refuse to dope. Those who do it have to be punished accordingly. Of course, the large majority of amateur and professional athletes do not take these drugs, but there have been exceptions that we all recall.

I recall the Olympic Games of 1988 in Seoul and how excited and how galvanized Canada was as a nation when Ben Johnson won the gold medal, but then how crushing and disappointing it was for Canada when he lost it. Floyd Landis was stripped of his title as

Private Members' Business

winner of the Tour de France in 2006 because he had taken synthetic testosterone. On the women's side, Marion Jones, who won medal after medal in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, was disgraced after she admitted she had used performance enhancing drugs.

These athletes inspired millions of people with their triumphs and then they let them down when their cheating was disclosed.

The Olympics are a world class event and we look forward to having them in Vancouver and Whistler. They bring together elite athletes from around the world. They should be free from the doping scandals that we have seen in recent years.

Dick Pound, of course, has been a champion on this file. The former president of the World Anti-Doping Agency and a former vice-president of the IOC, he campaigned tirelessly for better rules to prevent doping. While at the World Anti-Doping Agency, he oversaw an unprecedented strengthening of drug testing and spoke out against nations that were looking the other way when athletes took performance enhancing products.

Canada played an important role in devising the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport in 2005 and was one of the first countries to sign and ratify it. This convention supports international efforts to stop doping in sport through the World Anti-Doping Agency. It demands that we take a stand to locate and punish those athletes who take performance enhancing drugs and encourage other countries to do the same.

Canada complies with the convention through the excellent work of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, which provides educational programs and research and also administers Canada's anti-doping program.

Canada should remain a leader in this area, not only by continuing with our anti-doping program at home, but by pushing other countries to develop their own programs so that we can protect the integrity of international sport.

● (1805)

I am pleased our colleagues on this side are in support of this. Our member for Vancouver Centre has spoken passionately about this. Our member for Cape Breton—Canso has been very involved in athletics, both as a participant and strongly as a coach, and has pushed kids to be their very best, but to the limits of their ability and not beyond, because they were rewarded by using performance enhancing products.

Canada should be a leader in this. The world looks to Canada in this area as it does in many other areas. We need to push other countries to develop their own programs so we can protect the integrity of international sport.

I congratulate the member for Perth—Wellington for introducing this motion. I am proud to support it and I encourage all other members to do the same.

● (1810)

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Motion No. 466, which asks the government to continue to engage in the anti-doping movement and encourage other nations to ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

Private Members' Business

Our government takes pride in its commitments to sport in our country.

In this, an Olympic year, our government announced, in budget 2008, \$25 million for the torch relay in 2010 to help support its voyage through 350 communities across Canada. In addition, we also announced \$24 million over the next two years and \$24 million per year ongoing to support the road to excellence program for our summer athletes.

Canada acknowledges the importance that sport must play as a way of promoting education, health, development and peace. We are aware that doping in sport is practised by a minority of athletes, but that it also has a serious impact on the public image and integrity of sport.

The use of prohibited substances and methods designed to enhance athletic performance is a great threat to sport today. It not only destroys the notion of fair play and the pleasure of sport, but also undermines the health of athletes and often does irreparable damage to the credibility of sport.

In March 2003, 51 governments, including Canada, undertook to develop an international convention against doping in sport by adopting the Copenhagen declaration against doping in sport. Since then, 192 governments have signed the declaration. In so doing, those governments, like ours, underscored their desire and commitment to eliminate doping in all its forms, by developing an international convention that would make it possible to coordinate global anti-doping efforts and to offer an international structure for supporting governments' anti-doping measures.

This convention was also designed to recognize and support the World Anti-Doping Agency and thereby the principles of the world anti-doping code and international standards. It was drafted and approved in a little more than two years, and the necessary "30 states parties" to ensure the convention's implementation was reached slightly more than one year later.

According to UNESCO, this convention was implemented sooner after its adoption than most other conventions, which shows just how important anti-doping in sport is to nations around the world.

Canada is particularly proud of the leadership role it has played in the development of UNESCO's International Convention against Doping in Sport, in particular, by chairing meetings of the international expert panel that developed the convention. Canada is also proud that it was one of the first countries to ratify the UNESCO convention.

This speed in ratifying the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport reflects the political effort and commitment of governments around the world to work in close cooperation with the Olympic movement to fight doping in sport.

UNESCO emphasizes that governments and sports organizations have complementary responsibilities for preventing and fighting doping in sport. In particular, they must ensure that sports events are conducted in a spirit of fair play and protect the health of those who take part in them. Canada subscribes to this without reservation.

The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport also confirms the current practice for funding the World Anti-Doping

Agency, through equal funding by governments and the Olympic movement. Canada makes an annual contribution to funding of the World Anti-Doping Agency. In fact, our contribution is the largest of all national governments.

The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport is the means by which international governments can get involved in the anti-doping movement and show their support for the World Anti-Doping Agency, the world anti-doping code and international anti-doping standards.

To date, 79 countries have ratified the UNESCO convention. Canada was one of the first to do so in addition to being the first country to contribute to UNESCO's fund for the elimination of doping in sport, the voluntary fund, which makes it possible to assist less developed and developing countries.

Canada is one of the international leaders in anti-doping in sport. Our commitment is internationally recognized and our expertise, through the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, is sought after around the world.

The International Convention against Doping in Sport must be a priority for all governments if we want to achieve the ultimate objective of clean, fair, competitive sports around the world. Our government therefore urges non-signatory countries to acquire the necessary tools to join the ranks of convention signatories.

Our nation will play a front line role in encouraging and assisting non-signatory countries in doing so and, in addition, urging other countries to contribute to the Fund for the elimination of doping in sport, the voluntary fund, as they are financially able to do so.

● (1815)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak in support of Motion No. 466, which requests the Government of Canada to engage in the international anti-doping movement and to encourage other countries to ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport which was adopted on October 19, 2005.

Canada played a significant role in negotiating that convention. It was one of the main drafters of the language and the second nation to ratify the convention.

The convention promotes the prevention of and the fight against doping in sport with a view to its elimination, but most important, it puts in place a legal framework to this process that is binding and universal. It sets clear recommendations for international cooperation between nations for harmonization of anti-doping standards and best practices. It clearly lists the prohibited substances that are considered to be doping and exemptions allowable where the athlete may need those substances for personal medical reasons.

Although in 1988 the IOC had developed tools and tests to ensure that athletes did not use prohibited substances to enhance their performance, the 2004 Athens Olympics showed that a record number of athletes had defied the rules.

Doping refers to the use of substances solely to enhance athletic performance. Doping is unethical, but it is also detrimental to the health of athletes. More important, given the hero status that many athletes enjoy, it sends a wrong message to youth. That is one of the reasons we are against it as well. In fact in 2005 alone, 25% of amateur athletes used substances to boost their performance.

If we pass this motion, Parliament will have directed the Government of Canada to continue to support the international convention but more important, it will tell the Government of Canada that it must continue to support its own domestic actions toward that convention. In 2004, federal, provincial and territorial ministers of sport came together to create a national anti-doping convention here in Canada.

That policy sets out clear rules. It speaks about public education and warning citizens. It speaks about giving training, education and support to our own athletes, coaches, trainers and medical personnel. It speaks about taking responsibility to ensure proper conduct, the principle of fair play and the protection and health of those who participate in sport. It speaks about working locally, nationally and with NGOs and organizations to give them the information and tools they need to achieve the elimination of doping in sport. It speaks about promoting research in detection, prevention and understanding of the use of substances that enhance athletic performance and sharing that research internationally. It speaks about contributing financially to assist countries that are unable to afford to undertake the domestic actions and tools they need for contributing to the international convention.

While this policy is important domestically, the convention requires that Canada play a strong role against trafficking in these substances and cooperating in testing athletes.

I support the motion because it would ensure that Canada acted at home and internationally to facilitate anti-doping in sport. I find this supportable in that the motion asks the government to play an active role in implementing the elements of this action plan of the UNESCO convention and to take a leadership role in getting other governments to do so. We have seen that sometimes the Conservative government has tended to walk away from things that we had committed to internationally at the United Nations and often has decided that it would no longer continue them.

I am pleased that this motion calls on Canada once again to resume its place as an ethical international leader in setting standards and putting forward not only the principles of global cooperation, but the advocacy and financial instruments to achieve them.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. There being no further debate, the hon. member for Perth—Wellington has the right of a five minute reply.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as debate on Motion No. 466 comes to a close, I would like to thank my colleagues from all parties who have spoken to this motion. Motion No. 466 calls on the government to continue to engage in the anti-doping movement and to encourage the ratification of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

I would like to thank all those who spoke for their strong support of this motion. It is imperative that we continue to participate in the

Private Members' Business

worldwide anti-doping movement. Canada's participation in the fight against doping in sport means action both at home and abroad.

At home, it is up to Canadians to keep our sports clean. This will take involvement from governments, regulatory bodies, sports organizations, volunteers, coaches and athletes. By continuing to fight against performance enhancing drug use in sport and by partnering with our national sports organizations, we can secure a clean future for sport in this country.

I have spoken previously about one organization in my riding that is doing its part to secure a drug free future in sport. The Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum will again welcome young people this summer to its Kids on Deck summer ball camp in St. Marys, Ontario, where they will be exposed to a positive message encouraging healthy living and drug free competition. I should mention that in my hamlet of Sebringville, Ontario, the softball program has grown from 44 participants to 244 participants in just three years. I can assure this House that all the activities are drug free.

Athletes deserve a level playing surface. Canadian fans expect and deserve fair competition. Canadians should be able to have confidence in the integrity of amateur and professional sport. By continuing to engage in the anti-doping movement here in Canada, we can help Canadians look forward to a clean and fair Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver just two years from now.

Of course the anti-doping movement is an international one and Canada is committed to playing our part on the international stage. That is why we are proud to host the World Anti-Doping Agency headquarters in Montreal. Recently our government announced that Canada's commitment to hosting the World Anti-Doping Agency headquarters will be extended for another 10 years, meaning that Montreal will be its home until at least 2021.

What is more, Canada was the second member state to table its acceptance of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport. The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport is a remarkable international consensus document. It lays out a common framework for discussions regarding the anti-doping movement. It calls on governments to involve athletes and sport organizations in the anti-doping movement. It sets out an agreed list of unacceptable performance enhancing substances.

The international convention is a strong document and it is no surprise that it was unanimously adopted by member states. There is more work to do, as the next step is to have member states ratify this document. Already 79 states have done so. The motion we have before us today calls on Canada to encourage the remaining states that are a party to UNESCO to take this next step and ratify the International Convention against Doping in Sport.

I thank once again the members who have participated in this debate. I encourage all members to support this motion.

● (1820)

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

Adjournment Proceedings

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I hear no dissent on the matter. I declare the motion carried unanimously.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:25 p.m., I wonder if I might seek the unanimous consent of the House to see the clock as 6:30 p.m., so that we could proceed to the adjournment debate. Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow up on a question I asked the finance minister in relation to the auto industry and the budget in particular.

The budget, supported by the Liberals, that the Conservatives brought in has a detrimental effect on the auto industry. In fact, it is actually a cut to the auto industry.

The Minister of Finance seems to not even understand his own document. What is happening is that he is actually taking money out of automotive funding right now. Fact number one is that the ecoAuto rebate program that the Conservatives put in place is, ironically, a program that we have been fighting to get out of the budget. I am glad it is out of the budget but we wanted the money from that program reinvested in a good auto strategy.

The ecoAuto project, which was developed by the government and supported by the Liberals, had Canadian money going to Japan and Korea for foreign vehicles that were being made outside this country. They were dancing on the shop floors of Tokyo city when they heard this announcement because it meant jobs for their citizens, not jobs for Canadians. This \$116 million boondoggle that was put in place did not have any correlation to reducing or putting vehicle purchase to the objectives of the program. It was an utter failure. The industry condemned it and the auto workers condemned it. We are glad it is gone.

However, why the Minister of Finance would not take that \$116 million and reinvest it into auto right now, as we have gone from fourth in the world in assembly and manufacturing to tenth, is beyond me. It is very frustrating to see this opportunity of a real auto strategy lost.

What the Conservatives did lay out in the budget, which is all smoke and mirrors, is a \$250 million program for automotive development. However, that is over five years so it is \$50 million. What they have done is actually taken more money out of a program and lessened that amount for this new program allocation. What is really important is that they kept a new tax on automotive companies in Canada in place that will cost an estimated \$50 million a year.

The Conservatives will keep a tax on automotive companies right now that will bring in the revenue which, later on, they will need to disburse through a program. What we have is a net loss of \$116 million that the government should have given back to workers.

It is not just in ridings like mine in Windsor West. It also is in Oshawa, Oakville and a number of different manufacturing communities around this country, and all the services that we actually get as spinoffs and all the other Canadian aggregate that is necessary from steel, and a whole source of other industries that produce automotive.

Automotive investment right now is going through almost a revolution. We are seeing the industry, not sunseting but changing. There are less jobs in it but, at the same time, it is higher tech and it is actually producing greener, cleaner vehicles. That is why it is important for us right now to have a clear automotive strategy.

We in Windsor have been pushing for the federal government to support a Ford plant so a new Ford engine can be produced in Windsor, Ontario, which is important because those jobs are desperately needed.

I have talked to Canadian citizens in my riding and other parts of this country who have gone to school, got the proper education and did everything necessary but because the government has refused to put in an auto policy similar to its Liberal cousins, we have witnessed the demise of the industry in many respects, and that is not acceptable. Canadians have done their part.

In my constituency, for example, we have a tool and die and mould making industry that is the best in the world but we are losing jobs because the government has not put in the policies. I call on the government to do so.

● (1825)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all concerned when Canadians lose their jobs. This is never an easy situation for both workers and their families. That is why we are supporting workers and communities through our \$1 billion community development trust, helping build a better future through job training to create opportunities for workers, economic development to create new jobs and infrastructure development to stimulate economic diversification.

More than \$357 million of this funding will flow directly to Ontario, where the government has outlined how it will use its funding in its provincial budget.

However, we must keep in mind the global economy is slowing, driven in large part by a slowdown in the U.S. The majority of the vehicles produced in Ontario are exported to the U.S., and clearly American consumers are not buying vehicles at the same rate as they once were.

Adjournment Proceedings

While the Canadian auto sector remains strong and it continues to attract new investments, North American auto manufacturers are all experiencing market adjustments and continue to face global competitive pressures.

That is why we are ensuring the manufacturing sector, especially the automotive industry, has the tools to become more efficient and more innovative, which is vital for their long term economic success. That is why we have reduced taxes significantly on the sector, providing a major economic stimulus. Indeed, our tax relief will result in over \$1 billion in benefits for the automotive sector over this and the next five years.

We have also provided \$250 million for the automotive innovation fund to support strategic, large scale research and development projects by automotive and parts manufacturers in developing greener, more fuel efficient vehicles.

Additionally, we have made a \$400 million investment for an access road to the new Windsor-Detroit border crossing, an investment that will directly benefit the constituents of the member opposite.

We have also enhanced the export development Canada's export guarantee program to increase the guaranteed coverage from 75% to 90%. This specifically benefits businesses in the automotive sector.

We have allocated \$34 million per year for new research through the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, targeted to the needs of key industries such as the auto sector.

In addition, to improve access to E85 fuels, we are giving \$3 million to support E85 fuelling infrastructure and promote the commercialization of E85 fuels.

We have also cut the GST from 7% to 5% and this has lowered the costs of all new cars.

Many, including noted auto analyst Dennis DesRosiers, have been highly supportive of our approach, noting recently:

—together with previous budgets reveals the [federal government] is actually dedicating a significant amount of resources and political capital to the automotive sector and that, for the most part, this Government is taking a proactive and positive approach to helping this industry.

● (1830)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative members from Ontario should be ashamed of themselves. They know the Premier of Ontario has ruled out the community development fund to be eligible for automotive, and they are doing nothing about that situation.

This political battle between the finance minister and the province, which goes back 10 years in political history, is nonsense and is costing Canadians jobs. Workers do not care. They want projects that are supported, which actually lead to jobs and ensure the jobs stay here.

Let us be clear, the \$250 million fund is from a tax on the industry. The Conservatives have put a special tax on the industry, and that is what is generating the funds for the \$250 million.

The \$400 million with regard to the access way in Windsor and Essex counties is from the previous budget. We recently had an announcement in Windsor, where the Conservatives worked with the

provincial Liberals, and it will create a problem with the access road, which will create further delays.

Let us have a full, developed strategy, one that looks at trade conditions, that stops free trade agreements and that has conditions for the investments and jobs related to those conditions specifically. That is what needs to be done to put Canadians to work.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, we understand that certain sectors of the economy have been particularly hard hit by global economic volatility. We have also heard clearly that some communities and workers are facing hardship and are in need of help in a timely manner.

As I mentioned previously, we have taken significant action to bolster our economy in these uncertain times and to further strengthen the foundation for Canada's future prosperity. This includes action to support Canadian businesses, workers, skills development, research and innovation and infrastructure.

While the NDP has called for direct government subsidies to certain businesses and sectors of the economy, I draw the attention of the NDP member opposite to the words today of the NDP leader in Ontario, Howard Hampton, "simply to write a cheque...is really irresponsible".

[*Translation*]

AIRBUS

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I asked a question on February 11 about the Mulroney-Schreiber affair, but I did not receive a satisfactory answer.

We know that this story is extremely troubling. While he was still a member of Parliament, and a few months after his mandate as prime minister ended, this Conservative prime minister accepted large sums of money, namely three times \$100,000 in \$1,000 bills given to him in a hotel. He did not deposit this money into a bank, but into a safe. He did not provide a receipt for this money, nor did he report it. What is more, no one on earth could describe his mandate. No one knows why he received this money and why Karlheinz Schreiber gave it to him.

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This prime minister received three times \$100,000 from Karlheinz Schreiber, a very powerful lobbyist at the time, who himself had received more than \$2 billion worth of contracts from Brian Mulroney's Conservative government, which earned him hundreds of millions of dollars in commissions. The public, everyone, could think that in those circumstances it was money that was perhaps given to the former prime minister as a thank-you for those contracts.

When we asked the government for a public inquiry, Stephen Harper himself told us—as it says on his site—that he would appoint a commissioner once the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics had completed its hearings. The committee wrapped up its hearings at the end of February. The Conservatives then said that they would do it once the committee had finished its work and submitted its report. The committee submitted its report on April 2. The Prime Minister then sought further advice from his special adviser, David Johnston, who submitted his report on April 5.

He received the reports from the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics and from his special adviser, David Johnston, over a month ago. What has he done since? Absolutely nothing. He has not done a thing. He has neither set up a commission nor appointed a commissioner. He did nothing when the ethics committee recommended that an in-depth and completely public inquiry be initiated as quickly as possible. The Prime Minister himself promised that the commission would begin its work once the ethics committee completed its hearings. He then delayed it until the committee completed its work. Our work and our hearings were done over a month ago, and we have not heard anything from the government since.

This government has been dealing with its share of embarrassing situations lately. They have been at the centre of scandal after scandal, and I do not even want to talk about the lead news story earlier today on CBC's French television network about the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I will ask my question one more time in the hope of getting a satisfactory response. When will the Prime Minister launch a public inquiry? When will he appoint a commissioner to conduct that public inquiry?

• (1835)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Just before recognizing the parliamentary secretary, it appeared to me that the hon. member mentioned the Prime Minister by name in her remarks and I would certainly caution her against doing that in the future.

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members will recall, the Prime Minister had asked Professor Johnston to finalize his recommendations on the terms of reference for the public inquiry once the work of the committee was completed.

In November 2007 Mr. Schreiber filed an affidavit in court that included a series of new allegations. In light of these claims, the Prime Minister took the first in a series of steps to get to the bottom of this matter once and for all. The Prime Minister appointed an independent adviser to conduct an impartial review of allegations

respecting the financial dealings between Mr. Schreiber and the former prime minister.

The mandate assigned to the independent adviser included four areas: first, to conduct a review of the allegations concerning financial dealings between Mr. Schreiber and the right hon. Brian Mulroney; second, to make recommendations as to the appropriate mandate for a full and public inquiry into these allegations, including the specific issues that warrant examination; third, to determine whether any prima facie evidence existed to suggest that criminal acts have taken place; and finally, to indicate whether any additional course of action was appropriate.

To fulfill this mandate, the Prime Minister appointed Professor David Johnston, president of the University of Waterloo. Mr. Johnston has impeccable credentials and is widely admired for his considerable legal experience and expertise. An eminent lawyer with a distinguished academic career, Professor Johnston has also served as dean of the faculty of law at the University of Western Ontario and is principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University.

In honour of the commitment made to the Prime Minister to launch a public inquiry, the independent adviser released a report in January of this year. The Prime Minister accepted the independent adviser's report and immediately announced that a public inquiry would be convened once the ethics committee had concluded its work.

I am convinced that only by following this approach can the complete and truthful story of this affair be written. To date the media has reported many allegations. The standing committee has heard many contradictory statements. The principals have filed suits and countersuits against one another. Despite this activity, however, the truth is yet to emerge. We must not let this confusion erode the public's faith in Canada's democracy.

As much as all Canadians, including those on both sides of this House, including the hon. member, are eager to know the truth, we must all be patient. I trust that the independent adviser has provided sound guidance and wise advice regarding the mandate of the public inquiry into the matter.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to be patient, but my patience is wearing thin. Canadians and Quebecers have been patiently waiting for over a month for a commissioner to be appointed to hold this public inquiry.

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The Conservative Prime Minister of this government made that promise himself on January 11. He promised a public inquiry would be held once the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics had completed its hearings. Those hearings are over, our work is finished, our report was tabled in this House on April 2, and the Prime Minister still has not made any announcements. We have not heard so much as a whisper, nor the words “Mulroney” or “Schreiber” escape the lips of the Prime Minister. We have not heard the words “public” or “inquiry”. I know there are other fish to fry. He is implicated in all sorts of scandals, but the fact remains that this needs to be taken care of. He needs to put this to rest and keep his promises.

More and more we are seeing that this government does not keep its promises. When will this commissioner be appointed?

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, as I have already stated, the commitment made by the Prime Minister was to launch a public inquiry. The independent adviser released a report to this effect in January of this year. The Prime Minister has accepted the independent adviser's report and further, immediately announced that a public inquiry would be convened.

I know the hon. member is anxious. We are all anxious, but the fact of the matter is that these things will happen in due course. We know and we trust that the independent adviser has provided sound guidance and advice to us all regarding the mandate of a public inquiry into this matter.

BULK WATER

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 12 I asked a question of the Conservative government during the daily question period about the ongoing vulnerability of Canada's fresh water to the threat of bulk export, principally to the United States.

I know that is an issue that is of concern to you, Mr. Speaker. You even had a private member's bill, I believe, on the subject at one point.

In his answer, the Minister of International Trade persisted with the government's efforts to mislead Canadians on the issue, in my opinion. He has since been joined by the environment minister in asserting that there are ironclad protections against the possibility of Canadian bulk water exports.

Both ministers are failing to acknowledge the real issues that underlie Canada's freshwater security and the uncertainty that continues to surround our ability to ban trade in this vital resource.

While the threat of bulk water shipments to the United States is not imminent, it will surely grow with time. The possibility of water exports beyond trade in bottled water could arise more quickly than we think, especially if we consider that other environmental issues have surfaced suddenly to catch governments off guard. I am thinking of course of the current global food crisis.

The government's efforts to downplay the uncertainty that continues to swirl around Canada's power to prevent future water exports will not be judged kindly by historians. What is more, both the present Conservative government and the Mulroney government

before it have turned a blind eye to threats to Canada's freshwater sovereignty. The government is misleading Canadians on three counts.

First, the government contends that just saying no to bulk water exports makes the threat go away. It is as though the government believes that cabinet ministers' bold words alone will de facto permanently close the door to such exports, that somehow repeated statements in the press by the ministers of trade and environment that Canada's water is not for sale amount to a long term legal protection of this resource, and that somehow the government is the first one to tackle the matter square on, to get the job done as it likes to say.

It is important to bear in mind that the statements that the government is making are really intended for public consumption in Canada. What the government should do is make bold statements to the American government. I understand that might upset some diplomats at the Canadian embassy in Washington, but even former Conservative premier Peter Lougheed of Alberta has said quite categorically that we should be making strong statements to the Americans themselves. As a matter of fact, at a speech to the Calgary branch of the Canadian Club in 2005, the former premier said:

We should not export our fresh water—we need it and we should conserve it. And we should communicate to the United States very quickly how firm we are about it.

What is interesting is that even if we communicate our opposition to bulk water exports to the United States government, and assuming the United States government accepts this position on Canada's part, this would really be of little consequence because the threat to our water does not come from the government of the United States per se. It comes from private interests that would seek to use provisions of NAFTA, especially chapter 11, to secure the right to our water. That is where the danger really comes from.

I think it is really misleading of the government to suggest this, and here is where the government is misleading Canadians a second time. It is implying that there is tough federal blanket legislation across Canada that prevents bulk water exports and that there are serious offences to anyone who would contravene that law when this is not the case. There is federal legislation, but—

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1845)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to address the issue of protecting Canada's fresh water from bulk export. I would like to clarify briefly some of the legal protections in place and I reject the member's assertion that this government and the Minister of International Trade have misled the House.

Amendments to the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act came into force in 2002. They prohibit the bulk removal of boundary water from Canadian basins for any reason, including for the purpose of export. Limited exceptions, consistent with the main purpose of the safeguard, are provided for in the regulations.

This protection is the result of advice sought by the governments of Canada and the United States from the International Joint Commission. The IJC is the binational organization created by the Boundary Waters Treaty to help prevent and resolve disputes regarding waters we share with the U.S. In fact, the IJC reviewed the amendments and commended the Government of Canada for the added protection.

The idea of establishing an export ban has been repeatedly raised as an alternative for protecting Canada's water. However, the prohibition on bulk removals presently in place is a better approach. It is more environmentally sound and consistent with international trade obligations.

The prohibition protects water in its natural state, in its basin, before the issue of its export arises. Thus, water is regulated in its natural state rather than as a commercial good or a saleable commodity.

International trade obligations do not apply to measures that regulate water in its natural state. This approach is supported by a 1993 joint statement by Canada, Mexico and the United States confirming that: NAFTA creates no rights to the water resources of any party; and unless water has entered into commerce and become a good or commodity, it is not subject to the terms of any trade agreement, including NAFTA.

These views were subsequently reaffirmed in 1999 by the U.S. government in its submission filed with the IJC. In it, the deputy U.S. trade representative pointed to the body of international law which makes clear that water resource management rights belong to the country or countries where the watercourse flows. This is precisely what we are doing. We are managing our water to ensure sustainability for future generations.

Canadian provinces have also implemented protections for waters in their jurisdiction. Nonetheless, some have suggested that the federal government ought to, in essence, federalize provincial waters. The Canadian Constitution is very clear on the matter of natural resources, whose ownership largely resides with the provinces. Both federal and provincial governments, acting within their jurisdictions, have established an array of freshwater protections.

In conclusion, governments at all levels in Canada have a role to play in protecting our water. We will remain very steadfast in protecting this unique and vital resource.

•(1850)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where to begin. The member has left so many doors open to make counter-arguments.

First, he must understand that the NAFTA side agreement was a valiant attempt to overcome a glaring weakness in the original Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. The weakness in the agreement was that the exemption for water that had been put in initial drafts of it was later removed by the Mulroney government.

In fact, it was done by the Prime Minister's Office at the time, no doubt, without the knowledge of the international trade minister, who is now a senator. She was asked at a press scrum whether Canada's water was protected. She said, "Of course, we have an exemption in the agreement", and then was told it was no longer there. There is something going on beneath the surface, if everyone will excuse the pun.

Second, the United States does not think much of these agreements, quite frankly. The U.S. State Department considers such side agreements non-binding and merely "gentlemen's agreements".

And third, we do not even know if it is signed. We have never seen a signed copy of this so-called exemption, which is nothing more than a press release. In fact, my office contacted the government at one point to try to get a copy and was told it was not possible to do so.

I would ask the parliamentary secretary, would he give me a guarantee today that he will produce a photocopy or some sort of facsimile of the signed side agreement?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, he said he did not understand which way to go on this issue. I can repeat what I said, so he understands what has been publicly stated by all three governments. It has been stated that it is environmentally sound and consistent that we protect water in its natural state: in its basin. Thus, water is regulated in its natural state rather than as a commercial good or a saleable commodity. That is what we are doing.

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In 1993, a joint statement was issued by Canada, Mexico and the United States confirming that: NAFTA creates no rights to the water resources of any party; and unless water has entered into commerce and become a good or commodity, it is not subject to the terms of any trade agreement, including NAFTA. How much clearer can I be in saying that water is protected in this country in what we believe is the right way: in the basin?

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:53 p.m.)

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