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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 17, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 17, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

[*Translation*]

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CANADA-REPUBLIC OF PERU 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, two treaties. The first one will be the free trade agreement between Canada and the Republic of Peru.

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CANADA-REPUBLIC OF PERU LABOUR COOPERATION AGREEMENT

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, a treaty entitled, "Agreement on Labour Cooperation Between Canada and the Republic of Peru", accompanied by an explanatory memorandum of this treaty.

[*Translation*]

I am proud to table this document, which is our labour agreement with Peru. This agreement has been well received.

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[*English*]

CANADA-REPUBLIC OF PERU ENVIRONMENT 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, another agreement and treaty entitled, "Agreement on the Environment Between Canada and the Republic of Peru". As before, an explanatory memorandum is enclosed with the agreement.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 2007 annual report on the Employment Equity Act.

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[*English*]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 28 of the Conflict of Interest Code for members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to present to the House a report of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner entitled, "Response to the Motion Adopted by the House of Commons on June 5, 2008, for Further Consideration of the Thibault Inquiry Report".

* * *

INDIAN OIL AND GAS ACT

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-63, An Act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on National Defence on Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development concerning the case of Omar Khadr.

Routine Proceedings

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development recommending that the committee report to the House of Commons a potential breach of privilege resulting from the release of information contained in a confidential draft report prior to its presentation to the House.

I also have the pleasure to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development recommending that any time the House stands adjourned during June and July 2008 and the committee has a report ready, the said report may be deposited with the Clerk of the House and shall thereupon be deemed to have been presented to the House.

• (1005)

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in relation to our study and review of Canada's service sector.

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MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY ACT

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce C-568, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act (speed limiters).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this legislation, an act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act, speed limiters. I thank my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo for seconding the bill.

Each summer we witness carnage on our highways caused by excessive speed. This legislation would require all vehicles manufactured after January 1, 2010, to be equipped with speed limiters so vehicles cannot travel at more than 150 kilometres per hour.

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

[Translation]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, consultations took place with the parties, and I am expecting unanimous consent for the following motion: "That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act may be called for debate today; a member from each recognized party may speak for a maximum of 10 minutes, after which the bill shall be deemed concurred in at the report stage on division, and deemed read a third time and passed on division."

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

The hon. member for Wascana has the floor.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Just to be clear, Mr. Speaker, is the government House leader referring to Bill C-60?

The Speaker: Yes. Does the government House leader have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

The Speaker: There is a no. There is no unanimous consent.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, presented on Monday, June 2, be concurred in.

I take a keen interest in today's debate, and I must say I am very angry, because this is a crucial issue for the economic future of my riding, Laurentides—Labelle, and it concerns the whole Laurentian region.

For several months, the people in my region have been discriminated against by the federal government. I am enormously concerned about the future of the Mont Tremblant International Airport in La Macaza and the future of the entire Upper Laurentians area. The airport's short-term survival is threatened because of the inaction, laxity and inertia of this Conservative government and the incompetence of the Minister of Public Safety.

Before I talk further about what I would call unfairness and discrimination regarding the Mont Tremblant International Airport, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my colleague, the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, for his support and solidarity on this issue and for introducing a motion in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security that reads as follows:

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights, as is the case with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City.

I would like to say how important, or should I say how urgent, it is to find a solution to the discrimination by the Canada Border Services Agency against the Mont Tremblant airport. The imposition of customs charges on this airport by the agency means that the airport is the only one in Canada that has to pay customs charges on its regular flights.

The airport authority is faced with an impasse that could result in the short-term closure of this important economic development tool. It will be a real disaster for the Laurentian region if the airport closes. This Conservative government must realize how hard this region has been hit by the forestry crisis.

Forestry was—I repeat, was—the main industry in the regional municipality of Antoine-Labelle. In the past two years, the vast majority of the sawmills in this area have had to close, leaving some 1,500 people jobless. This is a tragedy for a single-industry region.

Routine Proceedings

Despite the Bloc Québécois' repeated calls for short-term solutions to the problems forestry companies face because of factors such as the softwood lumber crisis and the higher dollar, the Conservatives have turned a deaf ear, preferring to give priority to their friends in big oil.

To minimize the negative impact of the forestry crisis, local elected officials and various stakeholders from the Laurentians region got down to work and redoubled their efforts to come up with an economic recovery plan.

Several projects to diversify the economy of my region have emerged from this plan. Over the years, the Laurentian region has forged a reputation for itself in becoming Quebec's top year-round vacation destination. Visitors flow in from around the world to be charmed by its unique scenery and its tourist attractions. Since the early 1990s, the town of Mont-Tremblant has shown unprecedented vitality with the development of the Tremblant tourist area.

The Laurentians boast the highest concentration of downhill ski centres in North America and are also the destination of choice for snowmobiling in Quebec. With its nearly 10,000 lakes and rivers, the region attracts its highest tourist traffic in the summertime.

Numerous hunting and fishing outfitters, national parks and wildlife preserves, forests, fishing, hunting, the Symphony of Colours festival in the fall, cross-country skiing, dogsledding, biking and other activities are all features that attract tourists from abroad.

Each year, thousands of visitors from Europe, Asia and the United States travel to the Laurentians for a vacation at an outfitter's camp, a tourist concept which has evolved over the years to meet the expectations of foreign guests.

Needless to say, the second largest economic sector in the Upper Laurentians is none other than tourism and the Mont Tremblant airport is among the most important economic engines driving the economic vitality of my region.

●(1010)

The Mont Tremblant airport is the key to the Laurentians. It is an important tool that brings the entire world to our door.

To make it easier to understand this major issue being discussed today, I would like to provide a brief background on the trials and tribulations the airport authority has encountered. These difficulties jeopardize any new agreement with airlines and travel wholesalers from Europe, the United States and South America that might want to offer the Laurentians as a travel destination to their clientele.

The airport was created in 2003 by a consortium of municipalities, CLD, CFDC and private shareholders. It was certified by Transport Canada for regular commercial flights.

Canada Border Services Agency officially designates the Mont Tremblant airport as a point of entry to Canada that can clear international flights.

The authority also receives financial support from Economic Development Canada for infrastructure in order to meet the agency's security standards. To date, the airport authority has invested several thousands of dollars in installing equipment to clear international passengers.

In July 2007, the Mont Tremblant International Airport signed a contract with Continental Airlines for daily flights from New York. In light of that agreement, the airport president is launching a series of representations with the Canada Border Services Agency and is also calling on the office of the Minister of Public Safety for a meeting to discuss the customs charges.

Despite multiple requests, there has been no response and in December 2007, the day before the first flights from the United States were due to arrive, the Canada Border Services Agency bullied the airport president into signing contracts obliging him to cover the customs charges or no flight could land at the airport. That is how the Canada Border Services Agency conducts its business: under a cloud of threats, with no ethics or respect.

It is easy to understand that the authority's hands were tied and that it had no choice but to sign the agreement so that all the reservations that had been made well in advance at accommodation centres and tourist bureaus in the region would not have to be cancelled. Not signing would have been economic suicide for the entire region. The contract signed under duress committed the airport to paying \$1,093.68 for every plane that lands on its runways. That is nothing less than extortion.

The airport authority is obviously unable to pay such steep amounts, and worries that when these charges are passed along to customers, they may change their minds about vacationing in the Laurentians and choose less costly destinations. Passing these charges along to travellers means that the cost of travel packages goes up, and therefore fewer people will visit.

In January 2008, we did some research and realized that this airport is the only one of its kind in Canada paying customs charges for regular commercial flights.

The Minister of Public Safety informed the president in writing that the agency does not provide after-hours services without recovering its costs. He clearly did not understand the president's requests, since the airport is asking for an exemption from the charges for regular commercial flights, not those outside regular hours. The minister also explained that the agency is conducting a core services review, and that it is examining options. He proposed a meeting with a representative at his office to discuss the issue.

In February 2008, the Canada Border Services Agency invoices were piling up. The Prime Minister's office was contacted to once again explain how important this airport is to the economy of the Laurentians and the surrounding regions, that it acts as a gateway to Quebec, and that tourists arrive every day to spend significant amounts of money, which obviously results in considerable economic spinoffs for the government.

Routine Proceedings

•(1015)

Since December, over 3,500 foreign visitors have flown into the Mont Tremblant International Airport. Economic spinoffs are estimated to be over \$1 million, and the agency's bill for the most recent months of operation amounted to \$100,000. To date, all efforts have been in vain, and no concrete solutions have appeared. The current impasse involving the airport is threatening potential contracts with other transporters. The airport authority will be facing the same problem.

I personally asked the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the lieutenant for Quebec, about the exorbitant customs charges imposed on the Mont Tremblant International Airport. I asked him whether he realized that his government's inaction was causing irreparable harm to the development of the tourism industry in the Laurentians. The minister refused to answer, and in the end, his colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, gave me a stock answer about how the fees are the same across the country. Actually, he singled out Rigaud, but Rigaud does not have an international airport. The minister's answer was not really an answer. That was when I realized that the minister had no concept of the problem facing the airport.

In April, the airport general manager and I met with Joel Bernard of the Minister of Public Safety's office. We got the same stock answer: the agency is reviewing its services; it would be difficult just now to exempt the Tremblant airport from the customs charges currently in force; and the minister would not want to set a precedent in this case.

Nobody is asking the minister to set a precedent. All we want is fairness. The solution we proposed to the minister is simple and would solve the airport's problem by changing its service code to AOE-50, clearance of 50 passengers, just like the Montreal and Quebec City airport. That would correct the injustice perpetrated against the Mont Tremblant International Airport.

Once again, we believe that if the minister wants to, he can deal with this file quickly without setting any precedents for other Canadian airports.

Only two Quebec airports have that service code, while in Ontario alone, there are ten or so.

Despite the general manager's desire to find a practical solution, the problems mounted. On May 14, 2008 and without any prior notice, the Canada Border Services Agency seized the airport's bank accounts because the airport still could not pay the customs charges. Unable to continue under the circumstances, the general manager indicated that he would shut the airport down entirely on May 15 at midnight. The debt has now risen to \$95,000 for the last six months.

I repeat: more than 3,500 people have used the airport, helping this region maintain a reasonable level of economic activity despite an unemployment rate of more than 10%.

Does the minister's inaction and indifference indicate Ottawa's deliberate intention to force our airport to close? How can they explain the fact that Ottawa provides free customs services to about 10 airports in Ontario but only two in Quebec, in Montreal and Quebec City?

Faced with the threat of closure, the community reacted strongly. There was an outcry in the media. A number of local decision-makers came together and even the Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade in the Quebec National Assembly, Raymond Bachand, contacted the public safety minister to ask him to intervene quickly. But nothing was done and nothing changed.

In the meantime, all the elected officials in the region, the county wardens, mayors and members of Parliament and the National Assembly, requested a meeting in the offices of the Minister of Public Safety. Just a few hours before the meeting was to occur, the minister did an about-face and told us he preferred to keep politics out of the meeting and just wanted to see the airport manager. Another fine demonstration of this minister's lack of transparency.

•(1020)

But now it is time for some political choices to be made. In the days following the minister's refusal, a delegation of elected officials from my riding came to Ottawa anyway in the hope of meeting with the phantom Minister of Public Safety.

Once again, he declined their invitation. What a lack of respect for my constituents. The leader of the Bloc Québécois did meet with them, though, and said he backed them fully. Ever loyal to its values and convictions, at least the Bloc is still defending the interests of Quebec and its regions. That is why we introduced this motion condemning the minister's scandalous lack of action regarding our airport.

This motion condemns the contempt and arrogance the government shows for Quebec, the regions of Quebec and my riding. Is this simply the result of an incompetent bureaucracy, without clear political direction, flying by the seat of its pants when it has to make decisions? It is impossible to know because the government refuses any and all meetings with the elected officials of my region.

Even the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the Conservatives' Quebec lieutenant refused to meet with them, on two occasions. On May 26, in response to these repeated refusals, I again put my question to the Minister of Public Safety, to get him finally to take the problems caused by the unfair customs charges at the airport seriously.

Once again, I got an unacceptable and incoherent answer from the minister, suggesting that options were being studied and that the code assigned to the Mont Tremblant International Airport was similar to the code for 200 airports in Canada. He even claimed that his department had acted speedily on this issue. I am still trying to find out what he was talking about and what actions have in fact been taken by his department in this matter. Nothing! There have been nothing but vague replies full of falsehoods.

The Mont Tremblant International Airport is unique in its class. It is an airport used mainly for tourism. It is the only airport that pays customs charges for regular commercial flights in Canada, period.

If the government does not want to contribute to economic development in the Laurentians, that is its political choice; but for the government to impede that development by sticking spokes in the wheels is unacceptable. In the face of this blatant injustice, every politician in Quebec supports what we are calling for, and the three opposition parties in Ottawa supported the motion to resolve this imbroglio.

The current impasse involving the airport is threatening potential contracts with other carriers from Europe and Mexico, which are currently negotiating with the airport authority. The authority finds itself handcuffed and held hostage, caught in a vicious circle. As long as the \$1,100 fee is charged every time a plane lands, it will be impossible to sign any new commercial agreements. The airport is unable to bear those costs.

Since the Conservatives came to power over 24 months ago, we have witnessed the serious damage and setbacks the regions of Quebec have suffered, all because of their incompetence and a profound lack of leadership and vision. Yes, sir!

They are so blinded by their ultra-conservative right-wing ideology and their obsession with national security that they are paralyzing the entire machinery of the government. The minister keeps saying that options are being studied, when designating the Mont Tremblant International Airport AOE-50 is obviously the fastest and most effective solution to the problem.

Will the Minister of Public Safety have the courage and the backbone to stand up and finally make a decision that will get us out of this quagmire? Is he finally going to pull his head out of his ideological straitjacket and realize that every region of Canada has its own particular character and that not everybody lives off oil?

My region until recently lived off the forestry industry, and I would note in passing that it has not received the assistance that was expected from the federal government in connection with the crisis in recent years.

• (1025)

It now relies in large part on the tourism and agri-food industries. The Mont Tremblant airport is the cornerstone of what has become essential diversification, given this government's mismanagement of the forestry crisis.

My final point is that these great politicians with their dubious principles should take careful note of the fact that we will not be abandoning our demands and we will be doing everything possible to remedy the situation.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear my hon. colleague explain what she means—and I believe her—when she said, if I understood correctly, that the Mont Tremblant airport is the only airport required to pay these unfair customs charges. So the people watching may understand—and not for the benefit of the party across the floor, since it has little respect for anything, least of all members who are speaking—I would like her to explain this. It is important for those watching us.

• (1030)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her very relevant question.

Routine Proceedings

The Canada Border Services Agency recognizes the Mont Tremblant airport as an airport of entry that can receive international commercial flights. Quebec City and Montreal share the same status. Because such certification from the Canada Border Services Agency was urgently needed, a contract between the agency and the Mont Tremblant airport was negotiated surreptitiously and under pressure. However, the airport is being forced to pay customs charges for regular flights during the day, unlike all other Canadian airports, which do not pay for such regular daytime flights.

I am repeating this because the minister does not seem to understand it. We have raised the issue and pointed this out several times. Every time, the reply is nonsense. I would like to take the time to explain it. It is important that the government fully understand that forcing this airport to pay such charges puts the brakes on its economic development and on any future agreements. We have really reached an impasse.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before resuming debate, I have the honour of informing the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following public bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-210, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (suicide bombings).

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety has the floor as we resume debate.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the economic prosperity of all regions of Canada is important to our government. The Canada Border Services Agency has a mandate to always balance the need to facilitate the movement of legitimate trade and travellers with the need to support national security and public safety priorities.

This dual role of facilitation and security creates significant demands and pressures on both resources and overall servicing capacity and requires a constant balancing act. Efficient borders support trade and tourism; safe and secure borders keep criminals and other dangerous elements out.

I would like to remind the House at this point that the Mont Tremblant airport authority signed a cost recovery agreement with the CBSA. Prior to signing the agreement, CBSA informed the Mont Tremblant airport of all the costs associated with the services. Although the contract with Mont Tremblant airport expired at the end of March, CBSA continued to provide services until April 6, 2008, to ensure continued service during the airport's important tourist season.

Routine Proceedings

The Office of the Minister of Public Safety has met a number of times with representatives of the Mont Tremblant airport. The government is hopeful that a resolution can be found. There are different options the government is currently looking at to help the airport.

As I have mentioned already, the economic prosperity of all regions of Canada is important to our government. In fact, we have delivered \$47.5 million in infrastructure investment to the Mont Tremblant region.

We have proven our support. The Liberals did not deliver. The Bloc will never be able to deliver.

Our government also recognizes that the development of these small airports contributes to economic prosperity. We are committed to address the 13 years of Liberal neglect.

This is why the Minister of Public Safety has launched an initial internal core review of the services that CBSA is providing at airports across the country. The first phase of this initial review was completed in the fall of 2007.

As a result, our government granted expanded customs service, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to Macdonald-Cartier International Airport in Ottawa and the Halifax Robert L. Stanfield International Airport. An overall final review is ongoing and further options are being considered.

The Minister of Public Safety has also directed CBSA to meet with the Canadian Airports Council to examine the level of services provided at airports across the country and to discuss options to cost recovery. He is looking forward to receiving potential options stemming from these discussions.

Our government wants to see all regions of Canada prosper, including that of Mont Tremblant, and will continue to work to develop options to address core service delivery.

• (1035)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the parliamentary secretary's comments.

In fact, the review of cost recovery within the Canada Border Services Agency started under our government and was getting close to being finalized when the election was called and the new government came to power. It has been in power for over two years now, but on this side of the House we are still waiting for a new cost recovery policy.

If I may, just by way of background, I will highlight what my understanding is of the circumstances. In the mid-1990s, our government decided to grandfather the services provided by the customs portion of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, which ultimately became part of the Canada Border Services Agency. All existing services provided by customs operations would be grandfathered and any new operations would have to be on a cost recovery basis.

That applied to any new airports and any new ports. The port in Prince Rupert is a good example. It came on stream later and was presented with the option that the customs presence it would need in order to clear goods coming in would be on a cost recovery basis. It

was difficult to establish how it was going to compete with the Port of Vancouver when the Port of Vancouver's services had been grandfathered and those of the Port of Prince Rupert would be on cost recovery basis.

I suspect, and I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could confirm it, that the Tremblant services were part of a new suite of services that were on a total cost recovery basis.

It seems to me, and I think the parliamentary secretary alluded to this, that the department is looking at core services and non-core services as being the more rational way of deciding what is on a cost recovered basis and what is part of core government services. I am wondering how that review is coming along and when the department, the minister and the parliamentary secretary will be able to brief Parliament on the new approach to cost recovery as it relates to customs.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for making it perfectly clear, which is opposite to what the Bloc did, that it was not this government that made this change. It was changed a long time ago. It was changed for the purposes of cost recovery. That is simply what is going on with Mont Tremblant. It is purely in that vein.

The core services review of which my friend just spoke is certainly ongoing. I am of the opinion that there will be updates on that very shortly, although I am not certain of the exact date.

This process, as he indicated, has taken some time. It is meant to be thorough. Hopefully we will address many concerns expressed with respect to the core services review of airports and those things that the Canada Border Services Agency is responsible for. It is absolutely true that it is on a cost recovery basis for CBSA people to attend at airports on international flights.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety clearly explain to the people of Mont Tremblant why this is the only airport in Canada with regular commercial flights during normal hours of operation that must pay customs charges?

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the member's statement is totally accurate. These are charter flights that come into the resort area. It is an area that is important to us. It is important from the perspective of the Mont Tremblant area. These are not regularly scheduled flights, to the best of my knowledge. They are charter flights that come in at different times. The CBSA people have to attend when the planes are coming in. They cannot be stationed there on an eight hour a day basis.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised by the answer given. In fact, everyone knows that there are regular commercial flights during normal hours of operation at the Mont Tremblant International Airport. The entire community, all tour operators and all airlines advertise them and recognize them as such.

Routine Proceedings

Am I to understand that we need only prove that these are regular flights for the parliamentary secretary to undertake, on behalf of his government, to abolish the charges in question? Is that what we are to infer from his answer?

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, my understanding was that the international flights are charter flights. There are other flights in and out of the airport, but not necessarily international flights.

[*Translation*]

Some hon. members: No, no, they are regular flights.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: If I have the wrong information, I am more than happy to get that information. I will share it with my colleague.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the parliamentary secretary to try to accelerate the review of this cost recovery policy, because it is creating a lot of anomalies and situations where there is unfair competition.

I can recall that courier companies were set up at various airports, for which there have to be customs services either 24/7 or very early in the morning. As the shipments come in, they have to be processed through customs.

There was an anomaly. A new courier company would come in and its services would be on a cost recovery basis, while the other courier services would be part of grandfathered core services. This creates some competitive issues.

Issues also arose at the Detroit-Windsor border, where there were opportunities to move more trucks on a ferry, but because of this cost recovery policy, the customs services were going to be on a cost recovered basis. That did not help in terms of the business case of moving more trucks across the river on a ferry to take some of the congestion off the Windsor-Detroit bridge.

I think it is a matter of some urgency now. I am surprised, frankly, that solutions have not been forthcoming. It was our Liberal government that brought in the grandfathering policy. That was done in the mid-1990s out of a need to deal with a \$42 billion deficit.

Is it the most sound policy given today's circumstances? No, it is not. That is why our government started that review. We were close to seeing some resolution, but then the writ was dropped and there was an election.

However, the Conservative government has had more than two years now. I plead with the parliamentary secretary to get the Canada Border Services Agency to come up with some solutions to this problem as soon as possible.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, my colleague makes quite a point that the Liberals changed the policy in the mid-1990s. They had 10 years. It is the same Liberal story: "We're almost going to get it fixed". In that 10-year period, they obviously recognized that they had created some anomalies, as he suggests. They did not fix it during that time.

The Minister of Public Safety has asked for that review to take place. We have only been in power for a little over two years. I

understand the need to urgently address it, which it will be done, but I would hope that he would have as much patience to see us get through it as he did not have when they were in power for 10 years and never fixed the problem. They created it, then were almost ready to fix it, and the writ was dropped and the parties changed.

With all due respect, if he is prepared to wait a bit longer, I think that solutions are at hand and the matter will be addressed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have a moment for a few final comments on this matter because I am speaking about a problem in my region. Since coming to power, the current government has blamed the previous government whenever it has been criticized for its inaction, inertia and inability to take tangible action.

We are going back and forth. The Conservatives are unwilling to take a firm stand and implement the necessary measures. The Minister of Public Safety has the authority to take immediate action in this matter. If he had some political will, the problem would have been solved a long time ago. Instead, we—

● (1045)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I will allow the hon. parliamentary secretary just a few seconds to respond.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member listened to my colleague across the floor talk about how this changed 10 years ago, she would probably understand. We have put \$43.5 million into infrastructure in the Mont Tremblant area. She talks as if we had completely ignored the area. That is absolutely not true. As usual, all the Bloc can do is bark anyways.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mont Tremblant and its ski resort are the region's economic driver. Indeed, deeply affected by the forestry crisis, this region of Quebec is counting on its tourism industry for its survival. All stakeholders joined hands to find a solution, and they found it. They chose to diversify their economy with tourism development.

The tourism industry is now firmly established in this region. The Mont Tremblant Ski Resort attracts international visitors, particularly Americans. This year, we learned that, while Canadians were getting warmed up in Mexico, Mexicans were coming here to experience winter and ski at Mont Tremblant.

Also, the region has an airport providing fast and easy access for foreign tourists. Mont Tremblant International Airport, the third largest in Quebec, is a major economic development tool for the Hautes-Laurentides region.

It was under the Liberals in 2004, more specifically under the then Minister of Transport, the hon. Jean Lapierre, that the Mont Tremblant airport really got under way. As early as 2002, the stakeholders in the file had collectively decided to acquire an airport by rehabilitating the old military airport of La Macaza, located in the region's geographic centre.

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Still under the then Minister of Transport, the hon. Jean Lapierre, a company was formed: the Aéroport international de Mont-Tremblant inc. This company includes the municipalities around the airport, the CLD and CFDC development agencies, the municipality of Antoine-Labelle, and also a few small shareholders from the private sector.

The community's involvement and its motivation to develop the economy of this sector are not new. The decision by the Canada Border Services Agency makes this an even harder pill to swallow. It is actually indigestible.

I would like to tell you about some of the action taken by the partners in recent years: they have restored the runways; they have built a superb terminal; they got certification from Transport Canada to allow the operation of regular commercial flights; they got an air security designation from the federal government; they got a designation from the Canada Customs Agency recognizing it as an airport of entry to Canada; they got financial support from Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions so that infrastructures could be put in place; and from CATSA they got the implementation and operation of a security checkpoint with X-ray equipment—entirely at their own expense.

The people of the community have done their job and they have done it well.

To digress, if I may, CATSA agreed to provide services for free. Unlike the Minister of Public Safety, this authority understood that the Mont-Tremblant airport is an international airport.

Despite all the goodwill of stakeholders, the appreciation of the Canadian dollar has deeply affected the regional economy. And now, this government wants to make things even worse.

The Canada Border Services Agency is demanding that the Mont-Tremblant airport pay for customs services for international passengers. It is the only airport in Canada that has to pay for these passengers.

In 2006, the daily cost of customs services was \$374. It stands now at over \$1,100, and it is an unbearable financial burden.

The Minister of Public Safety does not want to do anything to help this area that got together in response to the severe impact of the forestry crisis. We do not need anybody to make the situation even more difficult. But that is exactly what the government is doing. It will not listen. It does not want to understand that Mont-Tremblant will be less appealing as a tourist attraction if it loses its airport.

I want to remind all my colleagues that the Mont-Tremblant airport is the only airport with regular commercial flights in Canada that has to pay for customs services. When private jets from New York or San Francisco land there, customs clearance charges will apply. But if there are charges for commercial flights, they will have to be paid by the airport, because it would be irresponsible to try to pass them on to passengers or carriers.

•(1050)

These customs charges would have a considerable negative impact on tourist visits to the region.

Approaches have been made to the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. I have consulted the website of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, and there I found out about the program they call Community Diversification. Do you know what one of that program's objectives is? I quote: increase communities' capability to attract tourists and skilled individuals. How can the minister encourage communities to develop their tourism sector while his government is knocking the feet out from under that very same sector?

Is this government aware of the extent of the loss this represents in terms of economic spinoffs if the Tremblant airport is forced to close? Yes, the Mont Tremblant airport may have to contemplate closing down if the Minister of Public Safety refuses to resolve the problem of the Canada Border Service Agency custom charges.

The Mont Tremblant airport is an essential component of the region's tourism-based economy. You only have to look at all the revenues generated by visitors using the Mont-Tremblant airport, all the related jobs, all the related income tax, all the sales tax collected on tourism dollars, compared amount to what the Canada Border Service Agency is demanding, to realize that the decision to make the airport pay custom charges makes no sense. It is a bad decision, and very close to being a ridiculous one.

The Mont Tremblant airport is developing in the same way the Vail-Eagle airport in Colorado did. There are a number of parallels between the two. Both service major ski destinations and so their specialty is tourist travel. This type of development forges a synergistic partnership between tourism companies. The partners in developing the airport, the ones who created the program then played the role of catalysts, attracting the attention of consultants, churning up interest by hotels and seeking the support of surrounding municipalities.

Traffic at the Vail Colorado airport increased rapidly, and the figures for the first year of operations at Mont Tremblant are similar to the ones for Vail in 1989-90. In 1989-90, Vail handled 5,956 passengers. In 1997-1998, this figure rose to 172,634, an amazing jump. If Mont Tremblant airport progresses at the same rate, the regional economy will be really healthy as a result.

Airport status is a complex thing, it must be understood, and has not got any less complex under the Conservatives. Many people are calling for a thorough review of airport policies, but the Mont Tremblant airport cannot wait for its status to be reviewed.

Mont Tremblant International Airport has two separate contracts with the agency, one for 15-passenger aircraft and the other for 50-passenger aircraft. The proposal is to continue to pay customs charges for small planes and to ask for a revision of its status for large planes from recovery to non-recovery.

To clarify; they are seeking to have the customs charges dropped for commercial aircraft only. Some other airports in Canada are calling for changes to the number of hours allowed. This is not the case for the Mont Tremblant airport.

I was told that a change of status application had already been submitted. That application is based on the fact that: first, the airport has already accommodated over 100 flights with 50 passengers; second, its infrastructure complies with the agency's requirements; third, the return of American carrier Continental Airlines has been confirmed, and two new carriers, namely American Airlines and Mexicana, may also begin to provide service there; fourth, tax revenues alone far exceed the costs generated by the agency, and; fifth, Quebec is lagging far behind Ontario, in terms of the number of airports that can accommodate aircraft with 50 passengers.

We are convinced that stakeholders involved in the Mont Tremblant airport issue have made very significant progress, both for the airport and the Upper Laurentians.

Not only is the decision to charge compensation fees at Mont Tremblant airport bad, it is also unfair.

• (1055)

It is unfair to all stakeholders who got together to save their region's economy. It is also unfair to employees of that airport and to their families, because they are adversely affected by it.

The Mont Tremblant airport is experiencing a major boom. It handled over 1,000 commercial flights over the past year. In fact, the number of flights has doubled every year since 2004.

Since last winter, Continental Airlines has had a daily service between Mont Tremblant and Newark, close to New York City. Let us not forget that the contract with Continental Airlines was signed before customs charges were imposed. While it is true that stakeholders at the airport signed this agreement, it must be realized that they did it with a loaded gun to their head. They had no choice.

This new requirement by border services is jeopardizing the signing of other contracts with carriers from other countries. The Conservatives threatened to seize the airport's bank accounts to pay customs charges. They jeopardized the airport's survival. With the unanimous support of the Quebec National Assembly, the Quebec minister of economic development, innovation and export had to plead with his federal counterparts to have Revenue Canada lift the order for seizure. Is this the Conservative government's idea of economic development?

The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security has studied the issue and tabled its third report, which contains the following recommendation:

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights, as is the case with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City.

Elected representatives from the Laurentian region at all levels of government strongly support the Mont Tremblant International Airport in asking Ottawa to exempt this airport from paying customs charges. My colleagues will agree with me that the site and facilities at Mont Tremblant are exceptional. This destination attracts a prestige clientele and has found its place again as a high profile international tourism destination.

Recognizing Mont Tremblant as such an exceptional destination, the Government of Quebec has announced that it would open a

casino on the site. Is the federal government pulling the rug out from under its provincial counterpart by maintaining its decision to have the Mont Tremblant airport pay customs charges?

The Conservatives are showing once again that they have abandoned the regions of Quebec. In a region affected by the forestry crisis, the Mont Tremblant airport is an essential economic driver, particularly for the tourism sector.

The economic survival of that region is based on international tourism, and future infrastructures must meet the expectations of that clientele. It all depends on the airport being able to survive. Without the airport, there is no salvation.

Therefore, I am asking all my colleagues to support the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. The decision to have the Mont Tremblant airport pay customs charges is unfair and a serious threat to the economy of the entire region. Good common sense must prevail. The Minister of Public Safety must cancel the decision to impose customs charges to the Mont Tremblant airport.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. After consultation, I think if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, in relation to Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, the bill may be called for debate today; a Member from each recognized party and an independent member may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes, after which time the Bill shall be deemed concurred in at the report stage on division and deemed read a third time and passed on division.

• (1100)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I will be brief, because I am certain that my colleague, the member for the riding most specifically affected, will have questions.

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Our colleague has talked about common sense, and of course economic development. We know that the tourist season in Mont Tremblant is as busy in summer as it is in winter.

I would draw an analogy here. Does my colleague have the impression that if the member responsible for the Banff and Lake Louise region were having this problem, it would be solved very quickly, or would have been solved a long time ago now?

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question, which is entirely on point. I am persuaded that if we had this kind of situation in Lake Louise or Banff or Jasper, the decisions would have been made very quickly. However, the situation in those regions is very different, since the distances between major centres where there are international airports are much shorter than between the international airports, such as Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport in Montreal, and Mont Tremblant International Airport.

My colleague is perfectly correct: tourism in the Upper Laurentians is not simply a matter of skiers who go to Mont Tremblant during the winter. It is much more than that. A lot of tourists travel there in other seasons. I am referring to two other possibilities: fishing season, fishing being hugely popular in this region of Quebec, and also hunting season, hunting being also very popular. As well, the Americans are great fans of those sports, as you know. There is therefore a need for rapid, economical and easy transportation to get to the region. Getting there from Mont Tremblant International Airport is very easy and simple. The distances are short for getting to the mountain, to ski, or the lakes, to fish, or the woods, to hunt.

I also referred in my speech to the fact that it is impossible at present to compare the number of airports in Ontario where commercial flights with around 50 passengers can land and the number of such airports in Quebec. In fact, in Ontario, the number of airports is very high as compared to Quebec. In Quebec, at present there are only two places where it can be done, with the support of border services: Montreal and Quebec City. In Ontario, there are many more places.

In reply to my colleague's question, I would say I am convinced that if the situation existed in Alberta or elsewhere the response would have been a lot faster.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments. I will now recognize the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle. I hope she realizes that, when the Speaker rises, she has to sit down.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): I apologize, Mr. Speaker. It goes to show just how passionate I am about this. Please understand also that I am putting all my heart into it because the future of my region is at stake.

I would like to comment on what the member for Hull—Aylmer has drawn attention to. He referred to regional economic diversification programs on Transport Canada's Internet site.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Canada Economic Development actually.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you. I find it passing strange that the government would publicize such programs through the Internet or what not.

In a telephone conference with people at the office of the Minister of Public Safety, a staff member interjected vigorously, telling me that they were not there to look after economic development. The attitude and mindset of the Conservative government running our country are pretty clear. It makes me wonder if there is anyone able to take charge in that government, if anyone has enough leadership to ever decide to take action. No need for a three or four year long in-depth study.

We are talking about a specific case or situation requiring that we take the time to look for solutions. We have been hearing the same old tune for over two years, while the government stubbornly refuses to understand what the problem is regarding the airport and that the economy of our region is in jeopardy. I think that would be enough to spur into action any government with any real desire to see its wonderful country work and prosper.

● (1105)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Laurentides—Labelle, who I am sure is very familiar with this issue since she is from that region.

She is completely right. I mentioned two things in my speech that had to do with Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions. First, in the past, the airport has received financial support from Economic Development Canada to structure itself. Second, as I said, the website for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions talks about community diversification and increasing communities' ability to attract tourists and skilled individuals.

However, we should note that Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions has its own minister, while the department responsible for customs, the Department of Public Safety, has a different minister. I get the impression that these two ministers do not talk, meet or discuss things very often. Otherwise, it would make sense for the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec to ask his colleague to bail him out and help save one of the most beautiful regions in Quebec. I would not say it is the most beautiful, because that title surely belongs to the area around my riding of Hull—Aylmer.

Jokes aside, the region of the Laurentians and Upper Laurentians is known around the world. People go there to ski, fish and hunt. It is an extraordinary region. Because the Conservative government refuses to act—which I assume is related to its duplicity—the region could end up paying a deadly economic price.

I implore the Conservative government with all my heart to take a close look at this issue. I assume that our colleague from Economic Development Canada could point out the Upper Laurentians to the Minister of Public Safety on a map, using Google or whatever else it takes, and show him where he could find the Mont Tremblant ski resort and the Mont Tremblant airport, so that the Minister of Public Safety can incorporate these words into his everyday vocabulary.

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•(1110)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this important motion on the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, which reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), your Committee has considered a motion in the name of the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin and has agreed to report the following:

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights, as is the case with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City.

A number of things that just took place in this debate deserve an immediate comment.

It is clear that the Conservative government asks members to talk about a bill without being at all prepared to do so, without checking the facts. That is amazing. The very wording of the report explains what the issue is all about. Regular commercial flights are being targeted. The government's spokesperson—the Conservatives have such contempt that they do not even send a minister—claims that this is not the case. It is incredible to be here and to see that, despite all the resources at its disposal, the government would delegate someone to utter such nonsense, to make such foolish remarks in this House.

The issue before us today is simply a matter of regional economic development. However, it is as if the very notion of regional economic development, particularly in Quebec, is anathema to the Conservative government. One just has to look at the contemptuous attitude displayed by the minister, who is showing off and travelling in Quebec, just like Maurice Duplessis, as a Quebec minister recently pointed out, to distribute his little envelopes of taxpayers' money for projects that he, alone, decides to support.

Shortly after the holidays, I was in Rimouski and I revisited a centre that I had had the pleasure of visiting before, when I was Quebec's minister of sustainable development, environment and parks. I am referring to Rimouski's marine biotechnology research centre. That centre is truly one of those regional economic development gems that Quebec seems to have a knack for creating. And it is because it is so successful that the Conservatives want to destroy it.

It is a little as though Mont Tremblant were starting to get a bit embarrassing. It is too successful, so the government is going to start putting obstacles in its way. That is what is happening here today. There is no real reason for this sort of discrimination against Mont Tremblant airport, aside from the fact that the government gives preference to other airports in Canada, where such rules do not apply. That is how the Conservatives discriminate against Quebec, and I for one have had just about enough of it.

With their questions and comments, the Conservatives are trying once again to tell us that their problems are the Liberals' fault, but enough is enough. They have been in power for two and a half years, even though they have a minority government. It is about time they stepped up to the plate for the good of everyone.

Under our Constitution, aeronautics and customs are federal responsibilities. When it comes to customs, the government should at least apply the same rules everywhere.

The motion is very clear. The Rivière Rouge international airport should be treated like other international airports, meaning as an airport of entry, with no customs charges on regular commercial flights. What is the problem? This is how all other airports are treated. The Bloc member responsible for this issue made that point. The member who represents the riding could not have been clearer.

This is not an answer. It is ridiculous for the Conservatives to keep rising and blaming the Liberals. Certainly, the Liberals are incompetent. That is why they are no longer in government. But the Conservatives have to start shouldering their responsibilities when it comes to this international airport.

When I talk with Americans, to give them an idea of the size of Quebec, I like to remind them that Quebec is two and a half times the size of Texas. It is an image they can grasp quite quickly. When I talk with Europeans, I like to tell them that Quebec is three times the size of France, which has the largest area of any European country. It is a striking image that also reminds us, given our population, that Quebec is a huge land mass that we need to develop in, of course, a sustainable and viable way.

•(1115)

Tourism is the one thing we have to bring people to a region. We are doing all we can to have protected areas, national parks and so on. We have wonderful resorts and people come here from all over the world.

Let us not forget that tourism is the number one industry in Quebec. Over the years, as my colleagues explained, we have succeeded in investing considerable amounts of money in this airport to ensure that any regional economic development initiative takes into account not only the environment but also various socio-economic aspects, and it pays off. Jobs have been created; it works. Governments at all levels have been involved in this file for years and it is now producing results and generating spinoffs in neighbouring regions.

So why such a relentless attitude on the part of the Conservatives? They are always there to throw obstacles in the way of any initiative that has to do with regional economic development in Quebec. We have to wonder.

Since we are on the subject of air transportation and small airports, it is important to remind members of what is happening at the Mascouche airport. This issue will soon be coming back to the House since the federal government's commitment to that airport will end in 2011. In fact, it even seems that if the city of Mascouche is able to repay its debt to the federal government, that airport could disappear even sooner. However, the threat that is already hanging over the second largest uncontrolled airport in Canada, after Buttonville, in Ontario, is a hindrance to development.

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In Mascouche, five flying schools generate 75 permanent jobs. But there is more: in terms of regional economic activity for tourism in the greater Montreal area, that airport is crucial. Recently, legal proceedings between the city and the Government of Quebec have been initiated to determine who has a right of release. It is a complicated matter and I will not get into the details of what is before the courts.

Nonetheless, this proves the extent to which the government must assume its responsibility to ensure that this part of our infrastructure is maintained and preserved. The federal government must intervene to ensure the survival of the Mascouche airport and ensure that the Rivière Rouge international airport in the Upper Laurentians is treated the same as other Canadian airports. The current situation makes no sense.

I will read an excerpt from a letter from Gilles Lapierre, president of Aviateurs et pilotes de brousse du Québec:

The Mascouche airport is the largest uncontrolled airport in Quebec and the second largest in Canada. It accommodates 15 aviation related businesses, including 5 flight schools, and employs 75 people. Its geographic location makes it a leading private and commercial aviation training centre and it is recognized as the place where pilots from the metropolitan area cut their teeth. It is also a strategic centre for volunteer search and rescue operators and for transporting the sick, the injured and organs to local health institutions, including the Lachenaie hospital centre currently being built [the construction is now completed] and it is used as an alternate airport for Dorval and Mirabel...

This is another airport matter that will soon be studied in this House. Nonetheless, if the government keeps on serving up people who do not have even have ministerial responsibility to replace ministers in matters such as this, we will end up with the same result and will have to find a solution here in this House. We will be forced to stand up and ask questions to figure out what is at stake. Is there anyone on board who knows how to fly a plane?

I want to make it clear that although this is a minority government, it still has responsibilities. We have a Minister of Transport. He is the überminister for everything that moves in Quebec. I am anxious to see what the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities will do to save the Mascouche airport. It is not the municipality's fault. I am not criticizing Mayor Marcotte, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing over the years. He does his job as mayor and has his own strictly local concerns, and that is normal. He tries to do his best with his own priorities.

Nonetheless, the federal government must have a broader vision and look from a higher vantage point at regional economic development and infrastructure such as airports, like the Rivière Rouge airport at issue today, or the one I just mentioned, closer to Montreal in the Mascouche area.

• (1120)

We are very disappointed in the federal government's attitude towards this infrastructure and towards economic development in Quebec in general. What we are discussing today is only the tip of the iceberg.

I had the chance to play a part in the development of this airport when I sat in the Quebec cabinet. I know the Laurentians well—my family hails from that region—and I appreciate the area, which has always struck me as important given geopolitics and economic development in Quebec.

It is sad that no one in this government's cabinet, which boasts about supporting the recognition of the Quebec nation, can make their colleagues understand occasionally that they will be severely criticized the next day in the House of Commons because they were asleep at the switch again. They should be wondering if there is anything they can do to help the airport.

Previous federal governments, the Quebec government and municipalities went to great effort to build an airport at Mont-Tremblant, this important site for developing tourism and therefore regional economy in the Upper Laurentians, and that effort is beginning to pay off.

Could the government do something intelligent? Apparently not. They send in someone who is not even the minister responsible for this file with explanations obviously prepared by junior employees, who did not even have the intelligence or common sense to study the file and learn what it is about.

The answer I heard earlier was shocking. It was absolutely shocking to hear a Conservative representative say earlier that we are not talking about regularly scheduled flights. The Bloc members were quick to correct him. Let him rest his mind for a moment. I will read the recommendation to him once again so that he will understand:

[*English*]

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights—

[*Translation*]

Did the member understand that?

[*English*]

“for regular commercial flights”.

[*Translation*]

That is what we want. Our colleague should not start talking about something else. He should not just repeat what he has in his papers prepared by department officials. He should take three seconds to read the official document from the committee that he has right in front of him and try to understand what we are saying. Maybe then he will see how shocking it is for us, who have been trying for years to prioritize regional development all across Quebec and in the rest of Canada too, to hear someone in the House simply ignore the clear wording of the resolution before us, talk about something completely different, and blame the Liberals and the previous government. He should stand up and start assuming his responsibilities.

While on the subject of assuming responsibilities, I want to extend an invitation to the Liberals. I just listened to my colleague from a riding in the Outaouais region imploring the government from the very bottom of his heart. For 20 minutes he bent our ears about the “aréroport”. The document I have in front of me, though, is about an “aéroport”. Maybe he was talking about something else, but in my document the *é* comes before the *r*. He went on for 20 minutes about the “aréroport” but should just learn instead to stop begging the Conservatives. He should just stand up and vote with us to defeat this Conservative government.

As usual, his are empty words. The Liberals are incapable of standing up straight. They do not actually believe in anything. They rise here in the House, they make fine speeches in favour of regional economic development, and they ask questions about the cuts currently being made to institutes like the Marine Biotechnology Research Centre in Rimouski. But the only concrete thing they are capable of doing is cutting back and imposing rules and restrictions on facilities and infrastructure in Quebec that do not exist in the rest of Canada.

That is really what we are talking about today. When it comes to Quebec, the Conservatives impose restrictions and additional costs that do not apply in the rest of Canada for similar things under similar circumstances.

Instead of reading us papers prepared by his staff, instead of pretending the Bloc members are wrong to say these are regular flights, can the hon. member just take two minutes to read the resolution before us? The report could hardly be clearer. All people want is equal treatment for the Rivière-Rouge airport in comparison with what is done in other jurisdictions in Canada. The wording could hardly be any clearer in this regard.

Although the Conservative government still tries to make us believe it is interested in Quebec and the development of Quebec, everything it does proves just the opposite. People often say in English:

[*English*]

“You can talk the talk but can you walk the walk”.

[*Translation*]

The Quebec version of this is even more colourful and much better: “Il faut que les bottines suivent les babines”. The Conservatives need to start not just talking the talk but walking the walk when it comes to regional economic development.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the new member for Outremont was a wonderful member in Quebec and accomplished all kinds of great things but, unfortunately, he is with the NDP and will only have the opportunity to run off, as he has done this morning.

The member suggests that we have ignored Quebec. I am wondering if the new member is fully aware of the \$43.5 million we put into infrastructure in Mont Tremblant and whether he is as fully aware, as he thinks he is, of the other 14 airports in Canada that are paying the same types of fees as are being paid at Mont Tremblant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it would probably be best for me to answer my knowledgeable colleague in English.

[*English*]

What the member has just said is completely false. It is not borne out by the facts.

First, as has been amply demonstrated by the Bloc and the NDP who have moved this motion, Mont Tremblant is the only airport in

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Canada to have such fees imposed on regular commercial flights, full stop.

Second, I know it is difficult and maybe the member has trouble so I will read the motion for him again. It states:

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport...be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights....

That is the condition in the text, nothing else. Therefore, would he please stop embroidering and inventing and read the text and then come to a decision. The rest of it is of no interest to us or anyone else in the region.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Outremont for arguing on behalf of my region. After calling a number of things into question in his speech, he mentioned the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the Quebec lieutenant, whose riding, it just so happens, abuts mine. His riding surely benefits from the economic spinoff of tourists coming to the region.

The member was wondering what the minister planned to do. Here is a hint. As I pointed out twice in my speech, we asked for a meeting with the minister, the Quebec lieutenant, to come up with solutions and ask him to put pressure on the Conservative government. Twice, we were told that his agenda was full and that he did not have time to meet with us. That happened with other ministers from other departments that are involved too. We repeatedly asked them for meetings with elected officials from my region. We were not asking for a social gathering. People needed a meeting about this issue as quickly as possible.

It is clear that the Conservative government does not really know how to govern. It understands neither good governance nor ethics. How can the government turn down requests to meet with its citizens?

Several of the people who are now members of the House of Commons have been active at other levels of government, such as at the National Assembly of Quebec. I myself worked for a Quebec member. When a group asks for a meeting to discuss an important issue or file, it is the minister's duty to meet with that group. That is what being polite and ethical means. Those of us who get elected, who represent our country, who represent the people of our riding and who have a seat in a legislative body have an obligation to respond to the people. This government has an obligation to deal with the people. Their position on this is absurd.

I do not know what the member for Outremont thinks of this. He was once a member of the National Assembly, so can he comment on this?

● (1130)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague who just asked this question.

Sometimes, I receive many requests for meetings. The only time a member of Parliament or minister, whatever his or her responsibilities are, will bluntly refuse such meetings is when the matter is already settled and it is not of any interest any more.

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This is the clear message being sent by our überminister, our great Conservative potentate for Quebec. He is telling us very clearly that he is not interested at all in what happens with the Rivière Rouge airport. It is a shame.

I took great care to mention the Mascouche airport, thinking that it must be on his radar screen, but I am not even sure it is. Once again, this is on the northern fringe. We are talking about the only airport between Mascouche and Rivière Rouge, with the exception of Mirabel, with all the turmoil it has experienced, and a very small airport for parachutists near Saint-Jérôme. It is really the only infrastructure of any importance. Others have been lost over the years in the greater Montreal area, and the loss of this airport will be a real problem. The Les Cèdres airport, on the other side, much further away to the west, would be of no interest whatsoever.

People are not sure they want to invest because of this uncertainty in economic development issues. A lot of things depend on the available systems and infrastructure. If they are nonexistent or if there is too much uncertainty, investments are not made and jobs are not created. This shows the silliness of the Conservatives in an issue such as this one. It is really distressing, because in this motion, we are only asking for fair treatment, the same treatment other, similar airports get elsewhere in Canada.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I really liked the remarks of our NDP colleague. We appreciate his party's support. The hon. member drew a parallel with the recognition of the Quebec nation, and I am pleased with that, because a nation also needs economic development.

The Bloc has introduced a number of bills concerning the Quebec nation, and the NDP supported the last one, which provides that the French language charter should apply to jobs under federal jurisdiction in Quebec. We appreciate this support.

We also have another bill to exempt Quebec from Canadian multiculturalism. I presume the NDP will support us once more. I would like to highlight the fact that Mr. Julius Gray gave us his support today for this piece of legislation. I hope the NDP will be on board.

I have a question about commercial flights. Are these flights commercial or are they not? A little earlier, I asked the parliamentary secretary whether this was the basis of his position or whether he thought these are not really regular commercial flights. The motion has been read several times by the member for Outremont, and it appears to me that it emphasizes clearly that it deals only with regular commercial flights.

Does the hon. member think that, if the Conservative position were right—and we do not agree that it is—the Conservatives could very well support the motion, thinking that it does not commit them to anything, since it is not true? Does he agree with this interpretation?

• (1135)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber is quite right. That is exactly it.

I would remind the House that the third report states:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), your committee has considered a motion in the name of the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin...and has agreed to report the following:

That the committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights...

If it is not a matter of regular commercial flights, there is no problem; it does not cost the government a single cent. However, if regular commercial flights are involved, we are merely seeking the same treatment as everywhere else in Canada. Is that clear enough?

It is now up to the Conservatives to explain to us why, from their perspective, this airport should be treated differently from every other airport in Canada in similar situations and circumstances. That is the question.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion before us today. I would like to begin by emphasizing how beautiful the region served by the Mont Tremblant International Airport is. I am very familiar with the area. I am not from that region exactly, but I spent some time in my youth in Saint-Donat, which is nearby. Furthermore, a new road was built a few years ago to link the towns of Saint-Donat, Lac-Supérieur, Mont-Tremblant and others. Thus, we feel a little closer to the people of the Mont Tremblant area, not geographically, but at least in our hearts and in our minds. People from around the world are investing in Mont Tremblant, but more than anything, many people come to relax, to have fun, and to enjoy the magnificent scenery and fantastic tourist attractions.

This corner of our country, of Quebec and even of Canada we could say, has been popular for quite some time. For many years, people mostly from Quebec and the surrounding area have been skiing at Mont Tremblant, enjoying activities in the Mont Tremblant national park and visiting the village's fantastic restaurants. The area's reputation is growing. Residents of the Laurentians and the Lanaudière area have been going there for decades. Then it was discovered by Montrealers, followed by people from Quebec City and many other parts of Quebec. People are travelling from further afield: from the United States, the east coast and even the west coast. How do we get all these people to this fantastic and magnificent region? It takes an air link, that much is rather obvious.

The issue came to the forefront very quickly and led to several developments. People in this community took charge and developed a quality international airport providing regular commercial flights which, interestingly enough, make it possible for travellers from anywhere in the United States, via certain cities, to fly directly to Mont Tremblant. They do not have to land in Montreal and then travel 1.5 hours by land, if there is little traffic which, unfortunately, is not very often the case in Montreal. The situation could deteriorate in the next few years with the repairs, construction and increased road traffic in future.

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This international airport, which allows American tourists to fly directly to Mont Tremblant without going through Montreal, is a necessity. The number of passengers, the fact that we can establish regular commercial flights and the economics of this relationship prove that there is a demand and that we have to provide this service. I would like to point out how vital this airport is to the economic development of the region. If the airport were to close, or if unfair or disproportionate conditions were imposed that crippled its operations, the entire region would be affected.

My colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue will certainly agree since this airport also serves more remote regions like Abitibi. I know that because I have talked to people who use it frequently. When leaving the Abitibi region and having to drive through the Laurentian national park, one has already been on the road long enough without having to go all the way to Montreal, especially with all the traffic.

● (1140)

It is an essential economic development tool for a region that has been severely affected by the forestry crisis. Again, it must be said that, in both cases, it is largely due to the incompetence or even the powerlessness of this government. I do not like to use the word “powerlessness” because the government has the ability to do things. If the government really were powerless and could not take action, we could say that it is not its fault since there is nothing it could do. But that is not so. The reality is that it has decided not to take action for reasons that are purely ideological. This is true for both the forestry crisis and the Mont Tremblant airport.

During the forestry crisis, the Bloc Québécois called for a series of measures to help this industry, be it through refundable tax credits for research or through forward averaging. Concrete measures needed to be taken to help these people get through these difficult times and this government did not answer the call.

Long before that, there was the softwood lumber agreement, which was greatly unfavourable to Quebec and the forestry sector. The agreement was signed and supported by the Bloc Québécois, because our forestry companies were in such a tight spot that there was no other solution but to sign this agreement. Need we be reminded that this agreement was not satisfactory to Quebec and that we could have got much more if we had stood up for ourselves. If the Conservative government—and even the Liberal government before it—had agreed to offer loan guarantees to the companies in question so as to ensure them the liquidity they required to meet their needs, we would not have ended up in this situation. The forestry companies would have been in much better shape financially and we could have continued the legal battle with the United States much longer. We could have won that battle. We would have been in a position of power to negotiate a better agreement. The Conservatives, just like the Liberals before them, did not do it. So we ended up with an agreement that we had to accept reluctantly and that weakened our forestry industry.

What we can see is that there was a series of actions, by both the Liberals in their day and the Conservatives of today, that weakened the forestry industry and that by extension weakened the people of the Mont Tremblant region and the Laurentians in general.

What does that lead us to conclude? First of all, these people pulled themselves together to develop and maintain their forest industry. They did not give up. They are very combative and vigorous people. They also realized that they had to diversify their economy and compensate with other sources of economic activity. Tourism, thanks to the amazing natural setting of this region, the proverbial and legendary hospitality and the welcome extended by these communities, turns out to be a golden economic opportunity to try to make up for the effects of the forestry crisis caused by the negligence of the current government and the previous one.

What is happening? There was plenty of talk about it this morning. We have an airport, which is an economic development driver that attracts tourists—as I said a little earlier in my speech—from Quebec and the United States. People only have to connect to one airport in the United States for access to the rest of that country, and from there they can fly directly to Mont Tremblant.

This is a tool that works well, but there is a problem because the government is imposing unfair and inequitable treatment on it by requiring fees to cover customs services at this airport when it receives regular commercial flights.

● (1145)

It is the only airport in Canada that finds itself in that situation. It is surprising that, when the hon. member for Outremont, or some Bloc Québécois members pointed this out, namely that it is the only airport in Canada in that situation, some Conservative members said that it is not true, that it is not the reality, that it is not the case. We even heard the parliamentary secretary treat a colleague in such a way that I cannot provide details. But the fact is that we heard the parliamentary secretary strongly dispute that statement.

Yet, these Conservative members cannot even name one other airport that is in the same situation. They say it is not true, that there are other ones, but they are not telling us which ones. Is it a state secret? If the information is public in the case of the La Macaza airport, why would it not also be public in the case of other airports? Come on. This is ridiculous.

If the Conservatives know about another Canadian airport that must pay custom charges for regular commercial flights during normal business hours, then let them tell us. Otherwise, as the old saying goes, they should forever hold their peace and stop bothering us and denying the obvious, namely that the Mont Tremblant airport is the only one in that situation.

This is so true that the only time a Conservative member rose in this House to name another airport, he mentioned the Rigaud airport. Of course, this is a bit ridiculous, because there are no international flights landing in Rigaud. In fact, there is not even an airport in Rigaud. This shows the amateurism displayed by the government regarding this issue. It shows how unimportant this issue is to the government. In fact, no one is able to answer questions on this issue. No one in the government felt that it might be a good thing to have something intelligent to say about this issue.

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This morning, we were told that our motion would not be supported, because there are no regular commercial flights at La Macaza, at Mont Tremblant. However, I remind hon. members that the motion refers specifically to regular flights. Perhaps, if we repeat it, the government will understand that we must vote on the wording of the motion before us:

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights, as is the case with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City.

This morning, when we received the committee's motion and my colleague tabled it in this House for adoption, no one on the government side realized that it involved regular commercial flights. They said that there are no regular flights to Mont Tremblant. Consequently, the government could very well implement this recommendation, since it would not have any impact. Why is it refusing to support this motion, which applies only to regular commercial flights? The reason is that it knows we are right. It knows that there in fact regular commercial flights and that Mont Tremblant is the only airport in Canada that is in this situation.

We want a clear statement from the government that this is not an issue; that it is not going to put money into that airport; that the problems are ours to deal with; that all we have to do is pay, and that is the end of it.

We have reason to wonder about the way the government is handling this issue. Municipal councillors, elected representatives at all levels of government and all economic players are being ignored. The government does not even bother to acknowledge their inquiries, answer their questions or meet with them.

• (1150)

The airport was literally forced to sign a contract to pay these customs charges a few days before its first international flights landed. They came into the office like some sort of bullies and demanded that airport officials sign; if they did not, they would no longer be allowed to land planes on their runways. That amounts to extortion and is not a normal way of doing business. They seize bank accounts and operate as if the people at the Mont Tremblant airport were common criminals they are afraid will skip out on them.

I would like to reassure the government that it has nothing to worry about: they are not about to pack up the airport during the night and move it to Barbados. They are not going anywhere; they are staying where they are. If there are problems, it is pretty easy to find the people who run the airport. There is no need to treat them like criminals or take such radical action.

The reality is that the Conservatives are not all sensitive to the concerns of Quebeckers and the situation in Quebec, despite the fact that there are MPs from Quebec in the Conservative caucus. Those people are never there. They did not speak up in this House today and they will probably not speak up. If they do, it will obviously not be in defence of Quebec, but in defence of the government.

I often say that the main difference between a Bloc Québécois MP and a Conservative MP from Quebec is that the Bloc MP is there to defend Quebeckers to the government while the Conservative MP is there to defend the government to Quebeckers. The role of a Conservative MP from Quebec is to say how kind the federal

government is and that it does wonderful things and hands out goodies. Conservative MPs from Quebec neglect to say that when the time comes to take real action that will help us develop and grow as a nation, the Conservative government is nowhere to be seen. We saw evidence of this recently in the case of economic development funding for not-for-profit organizations.

There is a model that everyone across the board supports in Quebec. From labour to management to every member of every party at the National Assembly and municipal officials, everyone supports it. There are only ten Quebeckers who disagree, namely the Minister of Labour and his nine Conservative colleagues from Quebec. These ten individuals are the only Quebeckers holding that view. There is ten of them and seven million of us, and they are interfering with how we want to do things. They claim that they can do what they want because it is their money. If they are going to do harm, they should give the money to the Quebec government, which will make proper use of it. It is not because we have the power to do something stupid that we should do it or that it is the intelligent thing to do.

This gives an idea of how insensitive this government is to Quebec's demands. In the medium and short term, as Quebeckers, we have to ask ourselves how come, under whatever government, be it Conservative or Liberal, Quebeckers are never able to fully implement their development model or make any of the choices they would like to make. They always have to beg permission from Ottawa, whose priorities are different from ours and which often acts in a totally paternalistic way, as we have seen on the part of the Minister of Labour.

The reason for this is that we are part of a country in which we are a minority. Obviously, the only efficient and durable solution for Quebeckers is to achieve sovereignty and become an independent country. All these futile discussions and epic battles against the federal government are nothing but a waste of energy that Quebeckers could be using instead to build a stronger society. As a sovereign nation with full control over our taxes and the ability to pass all our own legislation and speak for ourselves on the international scene, we would not have to constantly beg Ottawa for these services...

• (1155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle has the floor.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Jeanne-Le Ber for his wonderful presentation, which, among other things, was about my region and the problems faced by my airport, the Mont Tremblant airport. I would also like him to comment on the statement made previously by the Parliamentary Secretary to the invisible Minister of Public Safety. Earlier, he was full of praise for the thousands of dollars that the government invested in the infrastructure of Tremblant's international airport.

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Was that a favour? A gift? Was the Tremblant airport the one and only airport to receive funding? Did it receive this money in the form of subsidies? I think it did. I do not think that they did the Mont Tremblant airport a special favour. Logic tells me that after having invested so much money, as the parliamentary secretary pointed out, it would be smart to keep supporting this airport. Will we face yet another scandal?

We invested in a Montreal airport, and one day they simply decided to shut it down, even though the money belonged to taxpayers. If the government is really serious and has been boasting about providing the airport with funding for infrastructure, in my opinion, they should be consistent.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, in fact there is something utterly inconsistent in this government policy. Let us say on the one hand that it is obviously not a gift. The Conservatives often portray the spending of our tax dollars as a gift. We often hear the Minister of Labour say that he has allocated and handed over x amount of money to such and such an organization and so forth.

The Minister of Labour needs to understand that it is not his money. I doubt he is earning enough as a minister to go around distributing millions of dollars out of his own pocket. The money obviously comes from Quebec taxpayers. The least the federal government could do is invest in Quebec infrastructures.

When the time comes to invest in structural initiatives, Quebec never gets its fair share of federal spending. Research centres are one example that springs to mind. If we look at the National Capital Region alone, there are dozens of centres—I cannot recall the exact number—but for purposes of comparison, the number is irrelevant. There are dozens of research centres on the Ottawa side, the Ontario side, but none on the Quebec side, not one research centre.

If we look at investment in different fields of research, fields that have productive benefits, Quebec is severely under-represented relative to its population and the taxes it sends to Ottawa.

In Mont Tremblant, there is investment in infrastructure. Great. That is a good thing, and there is nothing to criticize on that front. But the government must be consistent. If it believes in that airport, it cannot penalize it by treating it unfairly, by treating it in a way that is special but negative, extremely negative. The government should not freeze bank accounts or threaten to close such an important airport.

My colleague drew a very interesting parallel with Mirabel Airport, because Mirabel Airport was also something of a questionable political decision in its day. The subsequent decisions were equally questionable, that is, transferring everything to Dorval, which will soon reach its saturation point.

Our impression is that the federal government, Liberal or Conservative, favours Toronto as the hub of Canada's airport system, to the exclusion of everyone else. In terms of airport policy, this government's only thought is to support Toronto.

As for the rest, in Quebec, the decisions on Dorval and Mirabel were a fiasco across the board. We see it now, too, in the case of the Mont Tremblant airport. It is yet another discriminatory decision that is not in Quebec's interest.

I hope that during the question and comments period the Conservatives will be able to tell me the name of this famous other airport that is being treated the same way, that is, getting regular commercial flights and having to pay charges.

• (1200)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member for Jeanne-Le Ber, and it has two parts.

At the end of his speech, he talked about how Quebec should separate and exercise its own powers. The results of a study have just been released showing that Quebecers are already paying \$300 million for a revenue department, when there already is one in the Canadian government.

That means that \$300 million is already being wasted in Quebec because of duplication by a provincial revenue department, and there is already a department called Transport Canada that is responsible for airports. Does my colleague think that in this particular case Quebec should be responsible for its airports? What additional costs would that mean for the citizens of Quebec? What would all the people at Transport Canada who are currently working in Quebec do? While we are on the subject, is Mont Tremblant under Quebec's jurisdiction or Canada's?

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased because I will probably have some good quotations next time I want to promote sovereignty. My colleague has shown very clearly that in fact, in terms of duplication, money is being wasted in Quebec and Canada because two governments are providing the same services or carrying out the same activities. There has been a lot of talk about income tax, which accounts for \$300 million, but there is much more than that.

At the time of the Bélanger-Campeau Commission, the figure \$3 billion was talked about, if memory serves. But let us assume that the figure is only \$1 billion. If we consider the fact that since then, the federal government has interfered even more in matters under Quebec's jurisdiction and so has expanded the number of duplications, we might think that the money to be saved by a sovereign Quebec would be quite substantial. That money could be used to really offer services to the public, rather than duplicating some of the work. I agree, filing two income tax returns is a little ridiculous.

In fact, this House is probably going to be asked to create a single tax return for Quebec. If I understand what my Liberal colleague was saying correctly, we might have the Liberal Party's support to have a single tax return used in Quebec. Obviously, Quebecers will not give up the few powers remaining to them and the little control they have over tax policy, to turn it over to the federal government without being able to control it. In fact, our proposal would be to have a single tax return in Quebec, and I hope the Liberals are going to support us. The Quebec revenue department already collects the GST within Quebec for the federal government, and so it would be very simple to have a single income tax return in Quebec, and to have a portion of the taxes sent to the federal government at the same time as the GST money.

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In a sovereign Quebec, who will manage our airports? Quebeckers will. That is the goal. At present, the three parties in Quebec are unanimous on that question. If Quebec were a sovereign country, there would be no customs charges at Mont Tremblant airport because that would be considered to be harmful to the economy. The money that the government saves, it wastes because of the lack of economic development.

The comments we just heard is music to the ears of sovereignists.

● (1205)

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add my comments to those of the other hon. members who have spoken so far, especially my hon. colleague from Laurentides—Labelle. I would like to congratulate her on her speech.

For the benefit of those watching us, I would like to repeat the text of the motion before us:

That the committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights, as is the case with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City.

We could name many more airports within our borders. I would like to reiterate that I am speaking here today out of solidarity with the Quebeckers who live in that area and with my hon. colleague, the member who represents that riding. It is an important topic for all communities that are trying to revitalize themselves, take matters into their own hands and enhance their economic development. These communities and the people of Mont Tremblant, or elsewhere, are taking action to succeed. It is appalling that this cannot be resolved because the Minister of Public Safety refuses to make a decision.

As a brief aside, the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber was talking about the other members from Quebec—mainly Conservative members—who do not seem to care about the well-being of our fellow Quebeckers. I would like to assure him that other members from Quebec are doing a good job and care about the problems facing the people of Quebec. This is not exclusive to the party of the member in question.

What is the problem? What is the Gordian knot? It is a matter of treating a region, an airport infrastructure and an economic sector fairly. Why do I say “fairly”? Because in the committee report, in the presentation given by the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin to the committee on May 26, he began by saying:

The Mont Tremblant Airport is the only Canadian airport where passengers who land on regular commercial flights during working hours, which are generally from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., have to pay a customs fee.

Further in his presentation he added:

—the situation is the same for Canada's other 200 small airports,

He meant that those airports are not victims of undue charges. He continued:

—but none of them charges customs fees to commercial flights—

Obviously he was referring to the same core hours.

Why, all of a sudden, in the Mont Tremblant case, does the government, which made a mistake and knows it, not remedy the situation as soon as possible?

For the Conservative government, in my view and in the view of others making similar observations, it is simple. It is a matter of this government showing a concern for fairness. It is a matter of this Conservative government showing an interest in resolving an impasse. First it must recognize that there is an impasse; it has to have the willingness, the intellectual honesty to say that it made a mistake, that it will right the wrongs and resolve this impasse.

● (1210)

What more do they need? They need the willingness to sit down with people, agree to the requests for meetings made by the colleague who spoke to us this morning and by other stakeholders. The minister and his representatives have to sit down at the table and find a solution. That is called working with stakeholders. It is nothing extraordinary. It is the duty and responsibility of any government to do so. Every government is responsible for managing the common good and it is part of the common good to try to find a solution when they know there is inequity. Finally, they have to be motivated by a vision of the good of the communities, wherever those communities may be.

As an aside, earlier I asked the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer a question. I was truly under the impression that for commercial and economic reasons—it is an impression but I believe it is justified—if there were an airport providing commercial flights from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the Fort McMurray area or in other regions of Alberta where a regional airport would be economically very profitable, a solution would be found. I suspect that would be the case—and I am entitled to my opinion. This government is giving us indications that it quite often favours certain regions or certain economic sectors at the expense of others. I will now come back to the matter at hand.

What are we really talking about here? Once again, it is about economic development. It is about a very important catalyst: a regional airport. I and those of my colleagues who are fortunate enough to have one or two in their regions know what it means.

Infrastructure of this kind generates a lot of benefits, for example jobs. It provides a gateway to particular regions, helping not only tourism but other very vibrant sectors as well. In our case, in the Lower St. Lawrence region and in Rimouski, I am thinking mainly of all the research centres, the university and the knowledge-based institutions. There is a tremendous amount of coming and going. We have the Rimouski regional airport, in addition to the one in Mont-Joli. This is very important infrastructure for key sectors of the economy, whether in industry, commerce or tourism.

So what is it all about? It is about economic development and fairness, or lack thereof in this case. It is also about service from the Canada Border Services Agency, which is responsible for the people and goods that come into our region and for protecting the border. This agency, like all federal departments and agencies, is responsible for providing services. Providing protection is obviously one part of its responsibilities.

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We have to be open to the people who come to our regions. We have to recognize what an important contribution they make, in this case to the Upper Laurentians. The people who go to Mont Tremblant are usually far from poor and their presence has spinoff effects that are felt not just in this region but as far away as the large cities. The ripple effect is all the more important therefore.

• (1215)

When we take this example, what is it really all about from a wider perspective? It is unfortunately about abandoning the regions once again. We have gone through a lot of this over the last two years and a half since this government came to power. It is not a new government any more but it still does not have enough experience to make wise decisions and make them quickly. I said it is abandoning the regions because we have already seen a lot of situations where the government was not only unwilling to act but did not even respond. There are many examples.

I am going to go a bit beyond the airport question to talk about our region. A lot of our infrastructure is still in bad shape. There is the wharf in Rimouski East, for which Transport Canada is responsible. We are still waiting for some dredging to be done. We are waiting for Fisheries and Oceans Canada to take care of the marina. We wait and wait because nothing gets done and there are no new decisions we can tell the people back home about.

There is also the whole area of deregulation. Two and a half years ago deregulation began. Personally, on behalf of a whole coalition from the Bas-Saint-Laurent, on behalf of my fellow citizens, I have denounced this and criticized it, and I will continue to do so. Deregulation of basic telephone charges will mean that over the years people in remote regions will pay a staggering amount for the service they receive.

I am talking about abandonment. There was also the matter of the infamous trust. Unfortunately, once again what we have witnessed in our regions is the implementation of an entirely inadequate measure. Members will recall that the trust was allocated equally across Canada instead of meeting the specific needs of populations in crisis, in the forestry sector, to be specific.

To add to what I am saying about the abandonment of the regions, I will say that this trust completely ignored a very important sector of Quebec's forestry economy, and that is the private woodlot producers. It is as though they did not exist.

Finally, to come full circle, there is Canada Economic Development for the Regions of Quebec. The minister, we know, is determined to put an end to the recurrent funding of not-for-profit organizations before making sure that there will be a plan for them to obtain the funds they need. We heard him say yesterday in this House, in answer to a question I asked, that research centres, for instance, can always turn to Industry Canada. Are not-for-profit organizations now expected to start shopping around among the various agencies for funding?

We know that these organizations fuel the economy, generating jobs and new technologies. They are often cited as examples not only in Quebec, but also in Canada and internationally. But the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec says he is fed up with people leaning on him—

and he has shown us often enough what he means—so he has decided to drop this responsibility, though he said there would be a little transition period of a few years.

These are some examples—and I am drawing a parallel with the Mont Tremblant airport—that show that, when the time comes to make appropriate decisions, to sit down at the table with stakeholders and find a solution, we may make mistakes. Making a mistake does not matter. What is important is to admit it and then to take the necessary corrective action. That is what is vital for the individuals, communities and businesses we represent.

• (1220)

So I hope that my colleagues in this House will vote in favour of adopting this report. It is important for Quebec. Obviously this affects me since I live there and I know it well. Be it the airport at Mont Tremblant or another airport, I am just as concerned. We have to find a solution.

I invite my colleagues in this House to vote bearing in mind that tomorrow it could be the place where they live. We have to vote in favour of this motion for concurrence.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great deal of attention to my colleague's remarks, and I was impressed. She represents the riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. I was moved that she talked about Rimouski, because this city and Rouyn-Noranda have a lot of things in common. My colleague's riding has the great privilege of being on the shores of the St. Lawrence River, and it enjoys the wide open space of the river. But the people in both ridings are similar and, most important, we have something in common. If I rise in this House today about this extremely important issue, it is because it has a direct impact on the regions.

We will never talk enough in this House about the small regional airports. We have one in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the one in Rouyn-Noranda. And my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has one in Val-d'Or. These two airports are vital to our region. I can understand the importance placed on these small airports and I can see why my colleague took the floor. This issue is exceedingly important.

But I wonder about the people who may not grasp the importance of this debate on the Mont-Tremblant airport. Abitibi-Témiscamingue is just north of Mont-Tremblant. The successful operation of this airport is of interest to us not only to bring tourists to our area, but also as a means for us to travel elsewhere. Tourists who visit Mont-Tremblant very often go up further north.

Can my colleague explain to us the importance of regional airports for regions in Quebec and especially for the Upper Laurentians, given the subject of this debate?

• (1225)

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am going to repeat some of the things I said, because it may be that he missed a couple of my comments.

Routine Proceedings

We are talking about regional airports, whether it be Mont Tremblant, Rimouski, Mont-Joli, Bromont or others. Right away, people who know Mont Tremblant are going to think about tourism.

That is indeed very important, because large numbers of tourists come to Mont Tremblant and the surrounding area, given the tourist infrastructure that is available year-round. They come to admire the fall colours, or, as my colleague from Hull—Aylmer was just saying, to fish or to hunt, with a lens, or with an actual hunting weapon. They come for the skiing, for all the sliding sports, and they come for the fresh air. They can go hiking, walking, mountain biking, and so on.

For the tourism industry, this is very important and it generates the usual benefits in terms of employment, in particular in food services and accommodation.

As well, we must acknowledge that people who travel by air generally have a few dollars left to spend. They do not arrive with a limited budget and they have a few dollars that they invest in our region, and we are happy about that.

To answer my colleague, that is not all, as I said earlier. There are economic benefits for business and industry. In a regional airport, there are people—I was just talking about knowledge institutions—who are in the business world, who come to sign contracts, to hold meetings, to get training, and so on. These are people who are engaged in trade. Similarly, there are times when, depending on the size of the plane and the space reserved for cargo, there are also commercial products being moved, and not just the individuals sitting in the plane.

All of the economic aspects have to be considered when we talk about a small or medium-sized regional airport. All of these benefits are of crucial importance, and that is why I cannot agree, as I am sure a majority of my colleagues cannot agree, that there is no solution to be found on the question of what the Canada Border Services Agency is charging this airport authority.

There are ways of doing it differently. We know about methods for customs preclearance or customs clearance for travellers on regular flights who can get what we call a “pass”. There are all sorts of ways to go about it so that the Canada Border Services Agency is helping, so that we do not always need customs officer, or four or five people, on site. Today, in this age of globalization, there are different ways of doing things.

We have to find a specific solution for Mont Tremblant. I am told that it is the only airport, out of 201 airports of that size in Canada, that is penalized by the Canada Border Services Agency. So this has to be resolved, it has to be resolved quickly, and no one in this House should stand for anything less.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is a very honourable member and certainly defends her rights as a member of this chamber. She works very hard on behalf of her community. I can understand the passion she has presented to the House with regard to the matter before us.

Recently we debated a private member's bill to do with providing tax credits to graduates who, after graduation, would locate in certain regions of the country with the intent of promoting regional economic development. This appears to have some parallels in terms of being an opportunity to promote public interest through what I would consider to be a regional economic development initiative.

Could the member give us some thoughts as to whether this piecemeal approach, as opposed to a more coordinated approach to assessing the priorities and the needs of the various regions of Quebec or other parts of Canada, would provide better public interest, or whether it is simply a matter of every member of Parliament fighting for his or her own region as opposed to the greater public good? It is an important question from the standpoint of responsible government. Maybe the member would like to make some comments on that.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

It makes me smile. We need to take a look at the past and remember one thing. Everyone here should remember, even if they have not been sitting here since 1980, that there never used to be such a thing as private members' business. How can a government have vision and suggest new ideas to help communities, if not with the assistance of the members who work very hard and introduce private members' bills and motions?

In response to my colleague, the people who have been listening to us and following politics and our debates for two and a half years will not be surprised to hear that we do not rise day after day in this House simply to attack the government. We do this because day after day, the government shows a complete lack of vision.

It has no coordinated vision for economic development. We have a minister responsible for western economic diversification, one responsible for Atlantic Canada, and another one responsible for Quebec. The latter has just made some decisions that completely fail to meet the needs of the regions of Quebec, and that are unfair in terms of economic development.

Once again, it is not well thought out or put together. When a government that is responsible for governing a country lacks vision, it is not only worrisome, but it is also literally a tragedy.

In conclusion, I would like to tell my colleagues that I see a link between adopting this committee report and passing the Bloc member's excellent bill to revitalize our regions. We need to revitalize our regions. The members opposite need the vision to make this happen.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to congratulate the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle. Everyone listening to us today should know that if we are debating the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport, it is because we have a colleague, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle, who is doing her job as an elected official and telling us about the initiative taken by people in her community that was related, of course, to economic development and tourism.

Routine Proceedings

There is nothing nobler than to take up a cause, work with the community, and try to correct injustices. I will have a chance to show that there really is an injustice here.

The Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport is not a minor issue. First of all, in the history of the regional development of Quebec, the Laurentians are part of our collective imagination. Who, in Quebec at least, has not heard *Les belles histoires des pays d'en haut*, by Claude-Henri Grignon, who won the Athanase-David award in 1933? It takes determination to accomplish one's goals.

The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle is another Father Labelle. I am not referring to her looks, of course, but her determination to ensure the development of the Laurentians, which is one of the most beautiful regions in Quebec. Father Labelle wanted to develop Saint-Jérôme and the surrounding area—at the time they spoke about colonizing of course. A railway was needed to connect it to the other more or less urban centres of the times.

It is rather sad to see a government in 2008-09 that is so insensitive to the regions. We are certainly talking about regional development when we have a community that was accredited in 2002 for international flights thanks to an initiative of the local development board, municipalities and private shareholders.

Why is it that we members of the Bloc Québécois are forever up against a government so utterly insensitive to regional development?

I want to take a few moments as a Montrealer to tell the House about the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, who incarnates the crudest, basest, most disgusting incompetence possible. It can scarcely be imagined that this kind of minister still exists.

He decided, with the stroke of a pen, to pull at least \$50 million out of the Montreal economy. For what must have been grossly ideological reasons, given his total lack of calibre and the meanspiritedness and pettiness of the policies he pursues, this minister decided if non-profit organizations are getting involved in economic development it is inappropriate because that is not their mission.

There is a connection between the decision this minister made in regard to exporters, the aerospace industry and Montreal International, to take just a few examples, and the decision that the Canada Border Services Agency made in regard to the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport, which was discriminatory.

Why are we dealing with discrimination here? Discrimination consists of different treatment in comparison with the whole.

• (1235)

I have just heard some figures given by a colleague—ones I have not checked but will use as well—saying that 201 comparable airports, that is of similar size, are exempt from charges, but that in the Laurentian region the Mont Tremblant airport had to pay customs charges when an international flight lands there and has to be processed through customs.

How can we explain this to our fellow citizens? How can the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle explain to her fellow citizens, to local developers, that everywhere across Quebec—and in Canada, I

would add—there are no customs charges during the time period when there are not supposed to be any, except in her particular region? This is even more serious because everyone in Quebec realizes that the Laurentian region has a very specific tourist character.

All hon. members, of course, believe that their area is the loveliest. I might mention that Hochelaga-Maisonneuve is celebrating 125 years of existence this year. Hochelaga-Maisonneuve was an autonomous Montreal municipality, an area of economic prosperity. People called it the Canadian Pittsburg, because of its burgeoning footwear industry. The town joined Montreal in 1918. My colleague Louise Harel, who is known for her sense of humour, has remarked that there has always been an anti-amalgamation tradition in the east of Montreal.

All that to say that the Laurentians are an extremely special tourist attraction. I do not know whether the minister responsible for the agency has even set foot in the Laurentians. I would remind hon. members that this region boasts 10,000 lakes and rivers, which contribute to its tourism potential. There are numerous outfitters, national parks, nature preserves, and activities such as walking nature trails, fishing, hunting, the fall colours festival and cross country skiing. There is open space for walking, for hikes, for romantic strolls—this is a region that brings out the romantic in people—something you will acknowledge in yourself I am sure, Mr. Speaker—for getting out in nature behind a dog sled or on a bicycle. Tourism is one very vital aspect of life in the Laurentians.

I would also like to pay tribute to my colleague, the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, he of quick wit, and he who has served well in the National Assembly. I believe he has been recently honoured by the Barreau du Québec. This honourable member is well known for his silver tongue. He is an orator, a talented litigator, a man with a strong grasp of effective language. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who stands strongly behind this region, proposed a motion in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, to which the agency reports and where its estimates are voted on, if my information is correct. I will reread that motion, which has been accepted and has nothing ambiguous about it. It reflects the wishes of the committee and those wishes need to be expressed in the House. The minister must allow himself to be influenced by the committee motion, which reads as follows:

That the Committee recommend that the Rivière Rouge Mont Tremblant International Airport (YTM) be recognized as an airport of entry into Canada, without customs charges being imposed for regular commercial flights, as is the case with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City.

I have to ask: where is the Quebec Conservative caucus when it comes to defending the interests of Quebec? Did anyone besides the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle and her colleagues from the Bloc Québécois stand up? We have a situation here where the future regional development of one of Quebec's finest tourist region is mortgaged. The Conservatives from Quebec should be equally supportive of economic development in Quebec. There are times when partisanship has no place and we have to join forces. When one region of Quebec is under attack in its economic development, it is all of Quebec that comes under attack. Again, as I said, the Laurentians region is a unique tourist attraction.

Routine Proceedings

•(1240)

There is no indication that the ten Conservative members from Quebec have offered any support to the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle. We need everyone in this House to clearly understand how urgent the situation is.

Each time a plane lands at the Mont Tremblant international airport in Rivière-Rouge, it costs the airport administration \$1,093.68. Naturally, that is in addition to the airport's regular operating costs, which makes it uncompetitive. That should be troubling enough in and of itself.

All members of this House have to understand that this is a situation unique to that airport, which is not found in Montreal, in Quebec City or in any other similar size airport anywhere in Canada.

I am gripped by anger and indignation. I have no intention of having an unparliamentary behaviour or showing any disrespect to anyone in this House, but I do believe that all parliamentarians have to understand the urgency of the situation.

I will stop here because I am so angry I can barely contain myself.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague from Hochelaga. I am always really impressed by his performances. It is a shame that the Quebec bar cannot award him a certificate to take cases to trial, because I think that my colleague would make a very good litigant.

That being said, I have a question for the hon. member. In his opinion, how important are regional airports to regional development in Quebec? Does he think they are important? What does he think they mean to the regions? I know that he is an inquisitive and important man, and that he is quite familiar with the city, but I also believe that he is interested in knowing more about all regions of Quebec. I was wondering, so I thought I would ask him. Can he comment on how regional airports impact regional development in Quebec?

•(1245)

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our loquacious colleague of the class of 1975 A.D. We all know that our colleague is a veteran litigant and an accomplished lawyer, and that his mission has been to push back the boundaries of the legal profession. I thank him for pointing out that I completed my law degree but not the bar admissions courses, and that it is not my intention to seek admission to the bar any time soon.

That being said, he was correct in saying that several factors contribute to regional development. These may be natural resources, labour, people's mobility, connections between population centres, and of course, communications. In this case, communications go hand in hand with an impressive tourism infrastructure, one of the most beautiful in Quebec.

He was quite right to suggest that I reiterate here the tremendous importance of ending the discrimination that the Mont Tremblant airport administrators are dealing with.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I were cynical, I would say that I hope to lose this debate. But since I am not cynical, I am going to do everything I can to try to convince my friends across the way—to use that lovely expression I learned in

the National Assembly—and especially my friends across the way who speak French and come from Quebec.

Deep down, like my leader, I believe that the politics of the worst-case scenario are the worst kind of politics. Losing this debate would give us a huge electoral advantage and would demonstrate that the representatives Quebeckers elect in the federalist parties are unable to convince their colleagues that a given situation is really unfair to Quebec.

I will also try to convince my other friends across the way to intervene, friends I have made over the years while serving on committees, including the public safety committee this resolution comes from.

I get the feeling that this debate is not a partisan debate. If we continue to use the sort of language we are currently using to hurl insults at each other, we will not accomplish anything. I believe that there certainly is a conflict, but it is between part of the administrative branch and the political branch of the government. I offer as proof the fact that when the minister talks about this issue, he makes such gross factual errors that it is obvious he is misinformed.

When I hear the history of the local authorities, a history I have followed, I can understand how the animosity between the local authorities and certain officials began. During this debate, members have reported that the local authorities felt as though they were forced to sign an undertaking that made the Mont Tremblant airport the only airport that had to pay the government customs charges on regular commercial flights. It is true that the local authorities signed, and I understand their explanation.

Since I have been involved in this file from the very beginning when I was transport minister in Quebec, I would like to say a few words on the history of this project. It is a nice success on which we want to build an even bigger success. This success has to be credited to all three levels of government. Indeed, as mentioned earlier by the parliamentary secretary, investments in this project came from the local, Quebec and federal governments. The success that we want to achieve in making this request is to make these investments profitable. I am sure that all Canadians, from Victoria to Corner Brook or to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, would be happy if more American tourists came to the Mont Tremblant area. Of course, we would have to eliminate the obstacles that are causing problems.

As I said, I was there at the very beginning. The investments that were made in Mont Tremblant were very successful both for the developers and for the entire region. It was pretty incredible for these investors to get their money back after spending so much. And not only did they get their money back, but they are making huge profits and are generating significant economic spinoffs in the region.

This development came just at the right time. While a large number of jobs were lost due to the forestry crisis, this development created many other jobs.

Call it a geographical coincidence, but there just happened to be a practically unused airfield near Mont Tremblant. It used to be a military airport. This airport met international standards in that the runways were long enough to accommodate very large aircraft.

Routine Proceedings

•(1250)

The thinking was that with a few changes, they could increase tourism in the Mont Tremblant region even more. Until now, tourists flew into Mirabel Airport or Montreal Airport and drove the rest of the way. They came up with an idea, an idea which they put forward when I was part of the Quebec government. They found out how many private airplanes there were in North America. They said that people who own private planes were looking for places to go. It is a rather luxurious way of life, to be sure, but when you own a plane and have the means, you want to use it for your own enjoyment. They said they wanted to advertise to that audience. Since most of the big owners of private planes are in Greater New York and Boston, they would run advertisements with photos to let them know that in an hour or an hour and a quarter, they could be skiing or snowmobiling or fishing in the summer.

The advertising campaign targeting that specific market was successful, so successful that they were approached by a major airline, Continental. Continental proposed reaching out to a less affluent audience, middle-class people, and felt it could attract enough people to offer regular flights.

Previously, officials of the Mont Tremblant airport had no objection to passing on customs charges to those rich owners of private planes. Once regular flights started, there was a class of less affluent people. The price would affect the number of people coming to the region. There was competition with other destinations, such as Vail, Colorado. However, they had an advantage for people in New York: they were closer. The same idea would bring even more people here.

That idea was put forward, and the aim was to grow the market. This is where the story gets a bit confusing. Yes, they changed categories and are now an airport that receives regular commercial flights. They would like to be treated like other airports in Canada that receive regular flights. Within the administration, there is someone who still sees it as a small local airport, whereas it has changed categories. Just before changing categories, everything was negotiated. They were ready. They came to sign and were told that they would have to pay the charges. It was to be the only airport with regular commercial flights that would have to pay customs charges.

The customs charges, in relation to the economic benefits that kind of clientele brings to the region, are completely offset by the money those people will spend here, by the GST and taxes they will pay and the economic spinoffs. Generally, the idea is not to make it more expensive for tourists to come to Canada, at least not if the goal is to attract lots of people. That is why the ministers' representatives told us they signed.

What I hope is that someone from the other side will get to the root of the problem. When the minister talks, it is clear that he is not familiar with the file. When the parliamentary secretary talks, it is clear that he knows the file a little better, but he does not appear to have a full understanding. However, one thing is certain, and I am going to speak about it in political terms.

•(1255)

For the past little while, I have been hearing, in this chamber, my friends across the aisle who speak French tell us that we, on this side,

cannot do anything, that they are the ones in office. Will they wake up? Will one of them bother calling local authorities to get explanations and to confront those explanations with those provided by the government?

I know these issues because I have seen many during my political career. When we listen to one side, we think that it is right. Then, when we listen to the other side, we realize that the first one had omitted something. At that moment, we get the impression that the latter side is right. However, when we go back to the other side, we get another explanation. So, it is normal to change one's mind like that, until we have dealt with all the issues.

In a case like this one, the minister does not have the time to do that. However, there are surely francophones across the aisle who care about Quebec's economic development, who are proud, as we all are, of the success of Mont Tremblant's tourism industry. Unfortunately, these people do not bother taking a closer look at the issue.

Incidentally, I approached one of them, namely the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, who told me that this file was on his desk and that he would deal with it on that same day. That was several weeks ago. I hope he did that. It seems to me that if he indeed dealt with the issue, he should be able to influence the members of his caucus, so that, this time, the political level can take precedence over the administrative level. Because it is the political that would be right.

I do not think that it is out of meanness that the government refuses to do that. However, I think the Conservatives are ill-informed. They should confront what the administrative level is telling them about this issue with what local authorities are saying.

Members opposite are constantly telling us that we, on this side, cannot do anything, but that they can get things done. Then, let them prove it. Let them get the facts about this issue. They will see that we are right and then they should put pressure on their minister.

What is the point of having three ministers from Quebec in this government? There used to be four. There could be four again, if there a cabinet shuffle. What is the point, if they cannot intervene regarding this issue? They justify themselves.

That is why I said, at the outset, that if I were a cynic, I would want to lose. Because that would again prove what was said so eloquently by the member for Jeanne-Le Ber: when you are a member of a federalist party in power in Ottawa, you are not there to defend Quebec; you are there to defend federalism to Quebecers.

That is why I am attempting to convince those opposite to look into the matter. The fact remains that this is an injustice for Quebec. We are being put into a category where we are the only ones to pay customs charges for regular commercial flights during normal hours of operation.

The Mont Tremblant airport is only asking that no customs charges be levied for these flights, as is the case at all other Canadian airports. Customs charges apply only to flights that are not regular.

Routine Proceedings

Mont Tremblant Airport did not object to the individuals paying the customs charges for flights on small aircraft that are still available and are profitable for us. However, when they wanted to change category because an American carrier was preparing to provide regular flights, they wanted the same treatment as that given to other regular flights in Canada.

How long does it take to make an administrative change in Parliament such as the one we are discussing?

• (1300)

In parliaments in general, it takes a while; here, however, it takes longer than elsewhere. Perhaps it is somewhat more complicated. But if we wait for a reform, we may end up putting the airport out of business. Who will be the loser then? Not only will Quebec lose, but so will the rest of Canada because it will not collect the GST. Those people who travel to Mont Tremblant could go to Vail. They may not necessarily visit Canada again.

I would like our friends opposite, if they are not convinced, to think about it because there will be a vote on this motion. I am certain that the people of Mont Tremblant will take their photographs and show them around town. It may happen just in the Laurentians. However, people elsewhere might pick up on the idea.

This is a clearcut case of unfair treatment of Quebec and it shows the ineffectiveness of our representatives within a federal political party in power.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, with all due respect, I remind my colleague that one can be a member from Quebec, be federalist, and love Quebec all at the same time. He and I both love Quebec equally. It is possible to be a federalist member from Quebec and to fight for Quebec here in this House.

We have seen the actions of the Conservative government over the last two years, we have seen the crisis in the manufacturing industry, we have seen what is going on with our forests, and we get the impression that the Conservative government has completely abandoned our workers, particularly those in the forestry industry. The industry in this region has suffered a lot. There have been job losses and the region is in a tight spot. It decided to move forward and focus on tourism. To develop tourism, it very much needs its airport, and this issue needs to be handled fairly.

Does my colleague not believe that this is another way the government is being unfair towards the Laurentians?

Mr. Serge Ménard: Perhaps, but that is not a debate I want to have.

I see that my colleague is not aware of my previous speeches. I think it is possible to love Quebec and be federalist, that it is possible to love Quebec and be sovereigntist, and that it is possible to love democracy.

Eventually, there will have to be a vote. My colleagues opposite should note that all the members from Quebec, whether they are from the Liberal Party, the Bloc or the NDP, support this motion.

I am not saying that my colleagues do not love Quebec, I am saying that all the members from Quebec are on the same side in this case, except those who are in the party in power.

• (1305)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment.

I would like to use my time to thank my Bloc Québécois colleagues who participated in this morning's debate. I really appreciate their support. I would also like to thank the members of the opposition and other parties who also made their opinions known and who let the Conservative government know how disappointed they are by the government's attitude towards this file. I think that we can say, after this period of debate, that the opposition is unanimous and that it is calling on the government to take a stand because this issue is urgent.

If I have to repeat myself, I will address the Conservatives in the jargon pilots use when in distress: "Mayday. Mayday. There is a problem. It is an emergency. You must take concrete political action to save my region."

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, it was not a question, but rather a comment. However, perhaps it will allow me to clarify something that was not understood. If I am trying to avoid turning this into a political debate, it is precisely because I hope to convince people in this case. I do not care about winning. It is in my political interest to lose, as that would make things even worse. I do not believe in taking that tack. As the Bloc Québécois leader says, it is the worst kind of politics.

I would also like to point out that not only is it important, but it also means getting a return on a federal contribution. If that airport had to shut down because it could not afford to pay the customs charges, which other airports do not have to pay on regular commercial flights, the federal contribution would have been wasted. What we are now trying to do is, in fact, secure a return on the investment, a local, Quebec and federal investment in the Mont Tremblant airport.

The government must therefore give the airport a chance by applying the same rules as everywhere else. If they refuse, it would suggest that they do not understand all the arguments they gave. That is why I am convinced that the government members who are speaking to us have been misinformed by the machine, the machine in which an antipathy has developed that is having a disastrous effect on this file. A conflict exists between the government machine and the local authorities who felt bullied when asked to sign the agreement at the last minute.

• (1310)

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those opposed will please say nay.

Government Orders

DARFUR

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred to the time immediately before private members' business tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Accordingly, the vote stands deferred until just before private members' business tomorrow.

The House will now resume with the remaining business under routine proceedings.

* * *

PETITIONS

CANADA HEALTH ACT

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my petitioners are asking that the five principles of the Canada Health Act should guarantee reasonable access to medical services for all Canadians.

People in Renfrew county in the district of Nipissing and all of eastern Ontario are suffering from a critical doctor shortage where thousands of patients are without a doctor and being denied reasonable access to those services only a family physician can provide.

The petitioners say that the province of Ontario is promoting a two-tier health system between those communities which, in desperation, are offering substantial financial incentives to attract doctors to the further detriment of other municipalities that cannot afford to do so at the expense of clean water, broken sewers, et cetera.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament and the Minister of Health to immediately commence the dispute avoidance and resolution process under the Canada Health Act to provide a simple and timely solution to the critical shortage of family physicians in Ontario.

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by Canadians, many of whom are my constituents from towns in my riding in Alberta, including Camrose, New Norway, Kelsey and Bawlf.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enact legislation that would recognize unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during an offence against their mothers, allowing two charges to be laid against the offender instead of just one.

The bill would give rights and legal protection to unborn children. I voted in favour of Bill C-484 which specifically addresses this issue and the concerns of those who have signed the petition.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sad today to present yet another petition with signatures collected by Canadians for Action in Darfur who want to stop the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

The petitioners note that since 2003 over 400,000 people have been murdered and 2.5 million have been displaced and that Canada has a responsibility to work with the international community to end these atrocities.

The petitioners want the House to know that every signature on this petition represents 100 dead innocent people in Darfur.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

(Bill C-60. On the Order: Government Orders:)

June 17, 2008—Report stage of Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee—Minister of National Defence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to an order made earlier today, Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as amended, is deemed concurred in at report stage on division.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1315)

Hon. Helena Guergis (for the Minister of National Defence, CPC) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this important bill to amend the National Defence Act.

First, I want to thank hon. members of the House from all parties for the cooperation in expediting this important bill.

The purpose of the military justice system is to deal with matters that pertain directly to discipline, efficiency and morale of the military.

Government Orders

To maintain the armed forces in a state of readiness, the military must be in a position to enforce internal discipline effectively and efficiently. Breaches of military discipline must be dealt with more speed and frequently punished more severely than would be the case if a civilian engaged in such conduct. As a result, the military has its own Code of Service Discipline to allow it to meet its particular disciplinary needs.

In addition, special service tribunals rather than ordinary courts have been given jurisdiction to punish breaches of the Code of Service Discipline. There is thus a need for separate tribunals to enforce special disciplinary standards in the military.

Bill C-60 is an act that will ensure our military justice system remains one in which Canadians can have trust and confidence. It will enhance the fairness of the military justice system, both from the perspective of the accused person and the Canadian public. It will ensure that members of the Canadian Forces enjoy a right to choose how they will be tried that parallels the rights found in the Canadian civilian criminal justice system.

Remedying an impasse that was created by an appellate court judgment, it will ensure that justice can continue to be done for accused persons as well as for victims. It will preserve the viability of the military justice system in fulfilling its key role to the maintenance of discipline, efficiency and morale upon which the Canadian Forces depend.

In particular, the bill will closely align procedures for the selection of the type of trial by court martial, as well as court martial decision making, with the approach in the civilian criminal justice system, but it will also preserve the attributes that are essential to satisfy the unique needs of the military justice system.

The need for a separate system of military tribunals distinct from the civilian criminal justice system has deep historical roots and was affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1992 in the case of *R. v. Généreux*.

The Canadian military justice system is designed to promote the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces in the ways I have already mentioned, but it must also ensure that members of the Canadian Forces are dealt with fairly.

Key to ensuring this over time is the supervisory jurisdiction of civilian appellate courts such as the Court Martial Appeal Court and the Supreme Court of Canada. As with any justice system, these appellate courts sometimes highlight the need for adjustments in our military justice system.

One such instance is the Court Martial Appeal Court's decision of April 24, 2008 in the case of *R. v. Trépanier*.

The court found that the exclusive power of the director of military prosecutions to choose the type of court martial that would try an accused person, and the duty of the court martial administrator to convene the type of court martial thus selected, violated an accused person's constitutional right to make full answer and defence, and to control the conduct of that defence.

The court held that these provisions of the National Defence Act violated the charter and were of no force and effect. Importantly, the court refused to stay its decision, effectively removing the authority

to convene courts martial, an essential step in bringing matters to trial.

Leave to appeal the decision in *Trépanier* is being sought from the Supreme Court of Canada, along with a stay of execution of the decision. However, neither the appeal nor the stay will provide a clear, timely, and certain solution to the problems created by the *Trépanier* decision. Left unaddressed, trials by court martial cannot be conducted. Serious offences may go unpunished and victims will not see justice done.

Bill C-60, now before the House, is the government's legislative response to this Court Martial Appeal Court's decision. It will bring clarity and stability to the court martial convening process, and allow the process to continue to function.

First, the bill will simplify the court martial structure by reducing the number of types of courts martial from four to two. The remaining types of courts martial will be the standing court martial, which has a military judge sitting alone, and the general court martial, which has a military judge sitting with a panel of five members.

Second, the bill will establish a comprehensive framework for the selection of the type of court martial. It sets out which serious offences must be tried by general court martial and standing court martial respectively, and in all other cases permits the accused person to choose one of the two trial processes.

Finally, the bill will strengthen court martial decision making by providing military judges with authority to deal with pretrial matters at an earlier stage in the process and enhance the reliability of verdicts by requiring key decisions of the panel at a general court martial to be made by unanimous vote rather than by a majority vote as at present. That brings it more in line with what we would see in a civilian court with a civilian jury.

• (1320)

We have had good cooperation at the defence committee in working this through fairly quickly. We went through clause by clause last night at the defence committee and received agreement in almost all respects. One clause was debated and deleted. That did not take away from the effectiveness of the bill that left committee last night.

We have added one important aspect to the bill and that is a mandatory review and report after two years. After two years of the new bill being in force, it will be referred back to a committee of the House or Senate, or both, in a report issued that will guide the House in follow-up action.

An amendment that was defeated was in fact a sunset clause. The danger with a sunset clause is that it would put us back in the same situation that we are in today, where, in effect, the military justice system has ceased to function because courts martial cannot be convened. All of this is done with the best of legal advice from the judge advocate general branch and from a panel of very qualified and distinguished legal minds.

Government Orders

The benefit of all of these legislative amendments is that they will allow the court martial process to function. They will bring clarity, certainty and stability to the military justice system. More importantly, the impact of not making these amendments is that courts martial cannot be convened. The court martial process will become paralyzed. Very serious offences may go unpunished and victims will not see justice done.

Currently, there are about 50 cases that are in danger, as time goes by, of not being brought to justice. That simply should not be acceptable to anybody in the House, the Canadian public, and it is not acceptable to the Canadian Forces.

My plea to members of the House is to pass this measure quickly and get it to the other place, so we can pass it into law by the end of this session. The government is not trying to force something in a hurry. We are up against a timeline. The fact is that the decision came down in Trépanier only about seven weeks ago. For anybody who has been in the House for longer than the orientation session, they will know that there has in fact been fairly quick movement to bring necessary changes like this forward.

It is important that members of the House and all parties come together and pass Bill C-60 that would allow the military justice system to continue, and ensure that justice is done and seen to be done both for the accused and, more importantly, for the victims.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act. Bill C-60 seeks to amend certain provisions of the National Defence Act, which I will refer to as the NDA from now on, to be in line with our constitutional standards.

The Court Martial Appeal Court, CMAC, decision struck down the subsection from the NDA providing for the convening of courts martial in the military justice system.

Bill C-60 addresses the need for a legislative solution. It reduces the number of types of courts martial from four down to two: the general court martial for more serious offences or the standing court martial. It ensures the military justice system is in balance with our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I think that is an important point to make because we want to make sure that our men and women who are in uniform have all the same rights and freedoms as other Canadians. We are not taking anything away from them; we are not giving them anything special. We are just asking them to be at the same level as any other Canadian and I think that is only fair.

What precipitated Bill C-60 was the Trépanier case. On April 24, 2008, the CMAC decision was made for the Trépanier case and this was a catalyst for the bill because the section under attack was deemed unconstitutional. It found that the current provisions in the NDA violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms under section 7. Trépanier argued very effectively that putting the power to choose the type of court martial in the hands of a prosecutor violated his rights to a full answer and defence, and to control his defence.

What are the problems with the current provisions? As I mentioned earlier, it gives exclusive power to the prosecution to unilaterally choose the court martial before which a trial takes place

and these provisions are unconstitutional. As a result, these provisions are no longer operative and since they have been struck down, they cannot operate in a military system. Therefore, what we have is a complete paralysis of the justice system within the military.

This prevents new trials from proceeding and uncertainty about those trials that have already commenced. As mentioned earlier by the previous member who spoke, this could have an impact of up to 50 cases this year. Therefore, the decision that was put forward in the Trépanier case obstructs many victims from obtaining justice due to this paralysis.

Why was Bill C-60 introduced? There was a need to provide a legislative remedy to convene pending cases. We need to modernize and change the provisions to improve their fairness and meet constitutional standards and we need to ensure that the military justice system is fair and does not violate individual charter rights.

We have a need to provide timely and fair trials to individuals so that the victims can obtain justice. To sit here in limbo and not pass Bill C-60 would mean that many people, who are in a situation where they are waiting for their case to proceed, would not have the right to go ahead. That could cause many problems down the road as well in cases where it would take too long. That would be a whole other issue that would come before the courts.

Basically, what we are looking at is legislative reform here today and we are making those changes. They are happening very quickly. I will talk to the rush of this particular bill a little later.

However, I just want to talk to some of the concerns that I have regarding the bill. While I support the bill and understand its urgency, and it is crucial to ensure that there is nothing that we have overlooked, I am a little uncomfortable with passing the bill in under two weeks and without the thorough review that I think it deserves. The role of a parliamentarian is to examine bills carefully and ensure that there are no negative long term consequences.

Last night the defence committee met. The members went over the bill and had long discussions, but I think we could have used probably a few more witnesses just to clarify some of the finer points. Overall though, I am very comfortable with what we have come up with. There have been amendments and that is something that I think has been dealt with fairly handily.

When I spoke earlier, I mentioned about rushing through and that is something that is always a concern when we are passing a bill that will have a long term effect on any legal proceeding. To circumvent any problems that may arise down the road, we proposed an amendment.

● (1325)

The committee has approved that amendment. In order to address the concerns about the speed at which Bill C-60 has been put through, the committee proposed that a mandatory parliamentary review be done in two years. This would ensure there were no flaws or unintended consequences. This would not affect the legislation if passed. It would not paralyze the military system.

Government Orders

One of the other possibilities was to have a sunset clause. My concern with a sunset clause is that if there were a sunset clause and by some act of fate the parliamentary system did not act quickly enough, the act would have to be suspended again and we would be right back where we are today without a proper procedure. The military system would be paralyzed again. It would create an injustice not only to the accused, but to the victim of the crime. A sunset clause is one area that has been looked at and spoken to sufficiently and it is not a viable option, but reviewing the act to make sure that everything is in place and there have been no injustices is probably key.

Ultimately, I support passing this bill to resolve the constitutional violations and to provide justice for the victims, on the condition that a mandatory parliamentary review within two years be in place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I did not want to go back to the first part of my last presentation. However, some people, and even some members, are still asking me why the military needs to have its own system of justice, instead of trying soldiers in civilian courts. I would therefore like to take a minute to explain to the people watching that this is an international practice. In fact, I believe that all countries have a military justice system.

Anyone who is wondering about the validity of military justice should read the report by Mr. Justice Lamer, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, who conducted a study of military justice to determine whether it was as valid as civilian justice. He concluded that it most definitely was and added that, although military justice worked well on the whole, he felt some minor changes were warranted.

I just wanted to clarify that, because many people wonder why the military has its own justice system. Some people see this system as an exception and have a hard time accepting it, but all countries have a military justice system, and it would seem that military justice is as valid as civilian justice.

Why is Bill C-60 before the House this week? As I said the last time, the military justice system has a multi-tiered structure. For example, minor offences will be dealt with in summary trials presided over by commanding or senior officers, who do not necessarily have legal training. In fact, nearly 90% of cases are minor offences that will be dealt with immediately in summary trials.

However, there was an urgent need for action regarding courts martial. There are four types of courts martial. A ruling from one of the four types of courts martial can be appealed to the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada, and that is what happened in the case of *R. v. Trépanier*. On April 24, the appeal court ruled that provisions of the act violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that, as a result, there would be no more courts martial. The government asked whether it was possible to postpone implementing this decision for a year, so that it could make the necessary preparations and adjustments, but the court refused.

So, since April 24, we have been in a kind of legal limbo. We were summoned and told why action was urgent. The Bloc Québécois understood the urgency. We did, however, want to revisit certain elements, and that is why this bill is at the third reading stage today.

When the Court Martial Appeal Court brought down its decision, we told ourselves that a bill needed to be introduced to make changes. The government took the matter seriously and prepared Bill C-60. But what struck us as less serious is that it took one very important aspect before the Supreme Court. In fact, the government considered the judgment in *R. v. Trépanier* as having constitutional repercussions, which it wanted to have settled by the Supreme Court. That seems to us to be incongruous. I had confirmation of this yesterday from some military lawyers. In fact, the government can examine what constitutional changes arise out of this judgment, but there is also a danger. The Supreme Court of Canada—and this was confirmed to me—could study Bill C-60 and recommend that changes be made to it.

We could then end up on a collision course between the Supreme Court and the Parliament of Canada in connection with Bill C-60. That is why we speak of incongruity. The House will probably not get the point, but we would recommend to the government that it quite simply back off from its Supreme Court appeal, because it might cause complications. This is strictly our point of view, but one worth raising.

I will now return to the point raised by my Liberal colleague. We were in favour of a sunset clause in order not to end up in the same trap as with the veterans charter.

I remember a few years ago, at more or less this same point in the session, when everything becomes urgent, that the focus was on the importance of a veterans charter.

● (1330)

It was passed much more quickly than Bill C-60. It actually went through all stages in one fell swoop. That ended up causing huge problems later on. The fact is that, when legislation is passed that way, no witnesses are heard and no discussions take place. We move right along, with the consequences this entails.

Understandably, to prevent the same thing from happening with Bill C-60, we suggested a sunset clause. This clause allows the legislation to be passed but ensures that, two years from now, it will have to be passed again. That is different from what the Liberal Party is proposing, which my hon. colleague discussed earlier. The Liberals are proposing a complete overhaul in two years. Let me remind the House of what that means. The committee can meet and make recommendations to the minister to change some things, but the minister may well come out and say that he does not accept the recommendations and will not change those aspects we would like him to change.

So, should a problem arise after Bill C-60, the first thing that would happen is that we would have to wait two years. Then, after the overhaul takes place, the minister will not be required to act on the committee's recommendations. With a sunset clause, however, we start afresh. What has already been done is not redone, of course, but if problems have been encountered in the application of the act following its passage, we would be on much stronger footing to argue our position and amend the legislation per se.

Government Orders

We were very disappointed when the two majority parties, namely the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, did not adopt the sunset clause.

I want to talk about the Liberals' attitude. I have noticed a change in the Liberal Party in the past few months, namely when it comes to debating Afghanistan. I remember quite well the Liberal Party saying that the mission would end in 2009 and that it would not be extended beyond that. Much to everyone's surprise, the last time the Liberal Party talked about Afghanistan it said that it would support the Conservatives and allow the mission to carry on until 2011. The same thing is happening in the committees. I sense a change in attitude. The Liberal Party is probably doing well in the polls. It already sees itself forming the next government and it is already reacting as such. It does not want to complicate matters. Instead of adopting important principles, perhaps it should be a little more flexible because soon it might occupy the benches on the other side of the House.

I see that the Liberal Party is in bed with the Conservative Party. I noticed that with respect to Afghanistan and I often see that in the Standing Committee on National Defence. I cannot wait to point this out to my Bloc Québécois colleagues in caucus tomorrow. This is systemic and that is too bad. Sometimes some parties will close their eyes on important principles at the thought of ending up on the other side soon and in an attempt, while they are still on the opposition side, not to create a problem they will have to deal with once they are in government. That is the sad reality. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Party will be bedfellows from now on. In my opinion, that was very apparent in this bill, just as it was in the debate on Afghanistan.

This situation is deplorable. I am calling on my colleagues to rise above this partisan battle. In studying bills, they have to defend the interests of the people, the troops or any other group. That has to be the priority in any analysis and the hope of sitting in government benches must not govern their behaviour in Parliament.

● (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here today really on an emergency basis because of problems arising from the Federal Court of Appeal decision in the *R. v. Trépanier*.

The problems we are addressing with regard to the military justice system precede Trépanier. That decision came down at the end of April of this year. The problems the court was addressing in that case, and which were resolved rather summarily by dismissing the charges against Corporal Trépanier, stem from a long-standing frustration on the court's part that successive governments have not dealt with the needed reforms in the military justice system.

In this regard, it is important to recognize that Justice Lamer was commissioned almost six years ago to prepare a report. He prepared a very lengthy and detailed report of the analysis of the problems with the military justice system and set out very clear and specific recommendations on how to deal with those problems. That resolution surfaced first in a bill under the former Liberal administration and then in the form of Bill C-45 under the current Conservative administration.

The process has been very slow. We heard from the parliamentary secretary that Bill C-60, which is before us today, was a very quick process, and he is accurate in that regard.

The overall process has been extremely slow and unacceptably slow for the Federal Court of Appeal. For that reason, the court struck the section down in the National Defence Act that dealt with this part of the military justice system and, in effect, dismissed the charges against Corporal Trépanier.

Those are serious charges against him, with no reflection on whether he is guilty or innocent of the charges. The reality is, at this point, if that decision stands, then the charges will not be dealt with on their merits.

What was determined in the Trépanier decision was the system that allowed exclusive authority to the prosecutor to determine the type of trial an accused person would have within the military justice system was simply unacceptable in the context of Canada today, and in particular with regard to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Bill C-60 addresses this issue. Again, the bill is the same as in the recommendations from Justice Lamer and what is still contained in Bill C-45.

The government has been very slow on moving Bill C-45 ahead. It has given priority to a number of other bills and let this one languish, and that is unacceptable. Any number of other issues may be confronting our military justice system, in terms of issues under the charter, that could find us in the same situation in the next few months or the next year or two.

We absolutely demand that the government move Bill C-45 forward rapidly so we can deal with it. It has substantial support from all the opposition parties. Some specific provisions need to be corrected and some additions need to be made to it, but the bulk of the bill is one that has wide support among all the parties. I urge the government to move rapidly on it when we come back in the fall.

With regard to the specific provision in Bill C-60, as we have heard from some of the other speakers, with the exception of a couple of the paragraphs and clauses, it had all party support. In particular, by limiting the jurisdiction or the authority of the prosecutor and giving much more democratic and civil libertarian provisions to the accused, so the nature of the trial would appear at least on the surface to be more equitable, these have all been incorporated in the legislation in the form of Bill C-60.

I point out in particular that we have done away in Bill C-60 with the former format of having four different types of trials that there could be. We have reduced the number to two, which again, to a great extent, mirrors the situation in our criminal justice system generally for civilians in this country.

● (1340)

If Bill C-60 is passed, we will have a system where there will be a single judge, and generally speaking that will be for the less serious offences, and the accused will have the right to choose a judge and a five member panel, which would be in the form of a jury, if I can make the analogy with the civilian system.

Government Orders

In addition to that, although we have had panels in the past, a combination of a judge and a three member panel, there will now be five members on the panel. As opposed to the current system, the panel will have to be unanimous in its decision if a person is to be acquitted or convicted, again mirroring the situation in our criminal justice system and generally in our society.

That is a major step forward. There were several others perhaps of less significance, but it is a bill that all the parties were prepared to support.

Yesterday in committee we made two changes to the bill. One was to delete a whole clause. There was quite some disagreement over this in terms of the discussion. In particular, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence argued strenuously at the time, as he is wont to do every so often, that by deleting clause 28 in its entirety, we would be taking rights away from the accused. I know he still believes that.

My assessment of clause 28 was just the opposite. By leaving it in, we were curtailing the rights of the accused. Ultimately we were able to reach a consensus among the opposition parties to delete it. I know I have not convinced my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, but I will continue to try to do that to establish that we were right in deleting it. In the end, the opposition parties voted that down.

Another issue came up for debate in committee, which resulted in a change, not the one we necessarily wanted or not the only one we wanted. We were quite supportive of the position that the Bloc Québécois took, its critic in particular, in wanting a sunset clause. It is simply bad legislative process to run bills rapidly through the House. We know from many years of bad experiences that when we do that, we expose ourselves, as a legislature and our community as a whole, to mistakes being made.

I know my colleague from the Bloc has been very clear on a number of occasions that he is experienced. I have had the same experience as well where we have agreed to run a bill through rapidly and then, in retrospect, have realized that we made a mistake or simply left a gap in the legislation. The Bloc member's proposal to put in a sunset clause seemed to me to make good sense. We were supportive of it and, unfortunately, could not gather enough support to press it through.

The mandatory review that the Liberals proposed, which was adopted ultimately by a majority of the committee, and is in the bill before us today, has two major problems. We know, again, from many years of experience in analyzing mandatory reviews that all too often they are never conducted.

One of the flaws in our legislative process is that there is no penalty to the legislature or the government if we in fact do not put in place a mandatory review. Even though the legislation is clear that we have to, if it is not done, there is no penalty. There have been repeated occasions where bills have passed through the House, become law and the mandatory review is never carried out, or is carried out years after it is supposed to be.

The other problem with the mandatory review, and my colleague from the Bloc mentioned this, is that even if it is done, there is no imperative on the government to accept the recommendations that

come out of it. It can simply say that it will not proceed with the recommendations and the changes needed are never pursued. Whereas with the mandatory sunset clause, the government would have no choice but to address the issue if in fact a major problem arose.

Although overall we in the NDP support the legislation, we have serious problems with not having the sunset clause. Beyond that, hopefully the bill will resolve the issue that Trépanier has created and we can continue with the criminal justice system within the national defence system.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, first I want to mention something that I believe is important although it is not related to this debate. Yesterday, in my speech on Bill C-29, I talked about the lack of consideration and the unfairness that independent members have to endure. Our presence in this House is just as legitimate as that of the 304 members with party affiliation.

The Conservative government, among others, regularly seeks the unanimous consent of the House to deal with certain issues as quickly as possible. All parties and independent members should at least be informed. It is essential if we want to do our job. I repeatedly—and being as persistent as I am, when I say repeatedly, I really mean it—asked both the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Chief Government Whip to have the decency to inform all four independent members. They just chose to be stubborn and took a malicious pleasure in not doing that, even when other independent members or myself were in the House when a motion was introduced.

I have no reason not to do my job by letting bills or motions go through by unanimous consent without being consulted, which means without even knowing what it is about.

As members of Parliament, the essence of our work continues to be to develop legislation that is fair and equitable. Therefore, it is only normal to know what it is that the government wants to ram through the House of Commons. That is what I wanted to say on this.

Bill C-60 seeks to correct a problematic situation created by the court martial appeal court in the Trépanier case. The fact that an accused cannot choose before which court he can defend himself was ruled inconsistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the chief military judge more or less lost the power to convene a court martial. The government wants to break this impasse before the end of the session, to allow courts martial to be convened.

The bill also introduces other procedural changes. Most of them are clarifications made necessary by other judicial decisions, such as clarifying the limitation period with respect to summary proceedings.

Yesterday, the bill was referred to a committee, which heard experts. The committee did its job. Its report is published in the blues. The committee cancelled the transitional provision in clause 28 and ordered a mandatory review, within two years of this bill becoming law.

This not only makes perfect sense, it is also good insurance. Given the speed at which we are proceeding to deal with this issue before the end of the session, at least we can be assured that, in two years from now, this issue is going to be re-examined and it will be possible to take action.

In conclusion, I believe that legislative work can be done diligently and respectfully, and I think it is important to point this out today.

• (1350)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to order made earlier today, Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, is deemed read a third time and passed on division.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

TSAWWASSEN FIRST NATION FINAL AGREEMENT ACT

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC) moved that Bill C-34, An Act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to stand today in relation to Bill C-34 and speak at third reading.

This is important legislation, which culminates after much time, in relation to the B.C. treaty process, the first historic modern treaty out of British Columbia. Our government is very proud to have achieved this incredible treaty.

I thank all the opposition parties for their support on the bill and we look forward to sending it to the Senate for final ratification.

• (1355)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very excited to rise today and talk about this historic agreement that has very great support in three governments.

As we know, last week a historic agreement was made. It was a day for the ages when we had an apology for first nations people.

I also remember the day when the member for LaSalle—Émard made that agreement. I remember the great tears flowing for residential schools. That apology finally came.

However, as everyone said that day, it was just the beginning. It is not the end. The next step in the process is to actually improve the lives of first nations people. The agreement last week allowed us to move forward together to solve those problems. One of the tried and true methods is a template of the agreement that we are about to approve in this Parliament today.

I want to compliment the Tsawwassen First Nation, especially Chief Kim Baird and her council, and the B.C. government, led by Gordon Campbell. It is a great day for the people of Tsawwassen and

those of Delta, Richmond, Vancouver, British Columbia, and indeed all of Canada.

I congratulate those people who have been working on this since 1993, with the statement of intent to enter the treaty. There were all sorts of members of Tsawwassen First Nation, many negotiators and people from the three governments.

This is very exciting and historic because it is the first urban claim south of 60 to occur in Canada. It is a great day for the 358 Coast Salish people who make up the Tsawwassen First Nation.

The traditional territory of the Tsawwassen First Nation covered 279,000 hectares. Tsawwassen rights will be extended on that territory. These are certain rights, as occur in all the modern treaties; for particulars, fee simple land of 724 hectares, 290 from the reserve, 372 from the Crown, from B.C., and 62 that are still in the municipality of Delta.

This is also a historic agreement because it is the first to be approved under the B.C. treaty process, so its ramifications could extend far ahead of this agreement with the 358 Coast Salish people. It could have ramifications for thousands of other first nations people in British Columbia.

Another exciting element of this is of course that it was a negotiated settlement, not a litigated one. It is of course much better when governments and people come together to come to a historic agreement like this rather than fighting it out in the courts. I know that this particular government certainly prefers that way of solving issues rather than having governments legislate.

The vote on this was also exceptional, with 130 members voting for it and only 50 against, which is 69.5%, a huge majority. I do not think we have ever had a Government of Canada with that type of majority.

I will continue after question period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There will indeed be 16 minutes left for the hon. member for Yukon. We will now have statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY COMMISSION CENTENNIAL

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of informing my hon. colleagues that the International Boundary Commission, the agency responsible for making, maintaining and mapping the Canada-U.S. border, is celebrating its centennial this month.

Statements by Members

Through the IBC, Canada and the United States have collaborated for over 100 years to peacefully maintain the longest shared border in the world, 8,893 kilometres long, from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic Ocean.

The work of the IBC is fundamentally important to our national interest and to law enforcement, land administration, customs and immigration, and the management of transboundary resources.

The IBC exemplifies the close and enduring Canada-U.S. relationship.

I ask the Speaker and my fellow members of Parliament to join me in celebrating the centennial of the International Boundary Commission.

* * *

● (1400)

EDUCATION

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate the 2008 graduating classes in my constituency on their recent and upcoming graduations.

Students from the University of Prince Edward Island, Holland College, the Culinary Institute, Colonel Gray, and Charlottetown Rural High School have already walked proudly across the stage to accept their respective degrees or diplomas or will do so soon.

These graduates have worked hard to achieve their goals. Their perseverance, determination and hard work have paid off.

For many of them, this milestone marks the beginning of exciting opportunities and options that are now available to them. Of course, they all know that their education is far from over.

This is a very significant accomplishment and a very important step in ensuring their futures. I trust that all members will join me in applauding the commitment of these students and in wishing them great success in the future.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ACCUEIL BONNEAU

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 9 Accueil Bonneau, a residence and outreach centre, commemorated the 10th anniversary of the explosion at the building housing this homelessness organization, in which three people died. There was a lot of emotion as volunteers, employees and dignitaries gathered at the memorial service.

Despite the tragedy, Accueil Bonneau has remained very present in the city. With its four residences that can house 116 former homeless people, its shelter at Saint-Gérard-Magella, and its affirmative action and social services, such as distributing meals and clothing, this organization is very important to the homeless of greater Montreal.

Accueil Bonneau has 225 volunteers, serves 320,000 meals a year, hands out 60,000 articles of clothing, and has just one motto: believe, sow, grow. The Bloc Québécois would like to honour Accueil Bonneau's 130 years of dedication.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand a letter from the immigration minister in regard to the case of Ms. Augustina Lodo and her family. She is a refugee from the Sudan who first applied for status in Canada in 2007. She left the Sudan after her husband was killed for his religious convictions and faith.

Faith groups in Smithers and across northwest British Columbia have raised their voices and have raised money in support of Ms. Lodo and her application, yet the letter from the minister rejects that application, saying that things are safe in the Sudan and that she should return with no fear of persecution.

She was beaten. She was severely persecuted. Canada's own government issues on its website a warning to all Canadians not to travel to the Sudan and not to partake of this region for fear of similar violence.

Our country's shame in dealing with the Sudan can only be recompensed and justified if we open our doors and our hearts to those still facing persecution. I urge the minister to change the content of the letter.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 8, 2007, 23-year-old Karine Méthot was struck and killed by a vehicle. As if that tragedy was not bad enough, her family soon found out through the media that the driver of the vehicle had eight prior impaired driving convictions.

Despite their tragic loss, Karine's family members have worked tirelessly to collect more than 23,000 signatures in support of stricter sentences for convicted drunk drivers.

Véronique Bélanger and Karine's family want harsher sentences to honour Karine's memory and the memory of other victims like her.

I am proud to be part of a government that is working to protect innocent people from drunk drivers.

When the Tackling Violent Crime Act comes into force on July 2, 2008, a person arrested for driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol will face stiffer sentencing.

Our government will continue to do whatever it takes to keep our streets and our communities safe.

In memory of Karine.

• (1405)

[English]

RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, June 13, over 1,000 people in my riding of Brant, including the five Campbell sisters, participated in the annual Relay for Life.

This event raises very significant funds for the Canadian Cancer Society. It is a very moving, poignant event, as the first lap of the 12 hour relay is walked by individuals who have survived a bout with cancer.

It is stirring to see them, young and old, take a celebratory walk, cheered on by hundreds of supporters. Also stirring is the sight of hundreds of luminaries: candles lit in honour and memory of family members and friends who have died of cancer.

Kudos to this year's chair, Ms. Sam Snider, the very dedicated staff at the Brant chapter of the Canadian Cancer Society, and in particular the many volunteers and participants, without whom this terrific event could not have taken place.

* * *

CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during his leadership run, the current Liberal leader was unequivocal in his opposition to a carbon tax.

Shortly after his win, rumours surfaced in the west that he might be rethinking his position. This prompted a visit to Edmonton, where he made his memorable though cryptic statement: "I'm not here to kill the milk cow...". While milk cows were no doubt reassured, human beings were skeptical.

Edmonton Journal columnist Lorne Gunter wrote: "Just watch. Soon [he] will begin insisting he never promised to avoid carbon taxes". But the Liberal leader was adamant, even writing in a letter to the editor that his plan "will not include a carbon tax".

In October he returned to Edmonton to speak to a business crowd and promised that "there will be no carbon tax".

Today, faced with at least \$60 billion in scattered spending promises they have no idea how to pay for, the Liberals appear set to announce guess what? A carbon tax.

Meanwhile, Canadians from coast to coast will be asking the same question: "Honey, what's that guy with the green scarf doing to our milk cow?"

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, June 15 to 21 is National Public Service Week. With the theme "Recognizing our history, while building our tomorrow", the week commemorates the importance of federal public service employees, their professionalism, their initiative and their constant efforts to provide quality service to the public and contribute to its well-being.

Statements by Members

The week is also a chance to improve work environments and to foster communication between government institutions and crown corporations. Many public servants also play an important role in their communities, where they serve in various capacities.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues join me in acknowledging the work of all public servants and in thanking them for their valuable contribution.

Happy Public Service Week.

* * *

[English]

CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, the Liberal finance critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, admitted that the Liberal national carbon tax plan will actually hurt some Canadians. He said, "I cannot say to you that no Canadian will be unharmed by this".

In fact, one group that will be hurt by this regressive carbon tax is farmers. This morning, the Liberal agriculture critic and Liberal MPs from Mississauga—Erindale and Brant voted against their leader's plan.

Burdened with a carbon tax, farmers would be forced to pay more for gas to fuel their tractors, more to run their combines and machinery, and more to export their products.

Little by little, Liberal MPs are telling the truth about the negative effects that a regressive carbon tax will have on every single Canadian.

As the Liberal leader gets set to unveil the details of his punitive tax on everything, Canadians are wondering if he will finally tell the truth and admit who exactly will be hurt by this tax trick.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Winstone Zulu is a man on a mission: to educate the world about HIV and tuberculosis, both the challenge and, more importantly, the solution.

Winstone was the first Zambian to publicly acknowledge his HIV status in 1990. In 1997 he contracted TB. He was cured, but he knows first-hand the toll that it takes.

He watched four of his brothers die due to a lack of access to TB drugs, drugs that can provide a cure for about \$20.

In the space of one week in 1990, his brother Erasmus, his wife, and his brother Christopher died.

Nelson Mandela said we need more advocates like Winstone. Indeed we do.

Statements by Members

Today, Results Canada and Aeras have brought Winstone here to remind us that TB is not inevitable and does not need to be a death sentence.

Canada must do more to stop TB, to save lives, and to support heroes like Winstone Zulu, who has lived the nightmare of TB and is now working toward his dream of eradicating it.

Our fellow citizens of this planet deserve no less than that.

* * *

●(1410)

CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberals continue to try to spin that their leader's massive carbon tax plan will not lead to more costs for Canadians, despite statements to the contrary by the member for Markham—Unionville and the member for Halton.

The Liberal finance critic said "I cannot say...that no Canadian will be unharmed by this". The member for Halton, the Liberal leader's senior communications adviser, said, "This added cost will find its way into oil and plastic, transportation and food. In fact, most corners of our lives".

More experts are coming forward to acknowledge that this tax trick will indeed lead to higher costs and will hurt some Canadians. Diane Katz, head of energy and environment policy for the Fraser Institute, said, "Lower income people will be worse off because a carbon tax will increase the price of everything".

When the Liberal leader unveils his plan tomorrow, will he finally be honest with Canadians and explain exactly who will suffer under his tax trick?

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, health care is a top priority for Thornhill residents. From packed emergency rooms, to wait times, to locating a family doctor, they expect and deserve better results from the Conservative government.

In 2004 the federal government, provincial health ministers and aboriginal leaders signed a historic 10 year plan to strengthen health care. The plan aimed to improve areas such as catastrophic drug coverage, aboriginal health, primary health and home care.

Yet since 2006 the Conservative government has systematically neglected the accord. It is ideologically opposed to a national health care system, writing a blank cheque with little accountability and few reporting mechanisms to assess progress.

Shockingly, when asked recently about home care, the health minister responded, "We're not going to get involved".

Health care is a shared responsibility. Canadians deserve a federal government that takes the lead on health care. Instead, we have a government and a minister that fails to act, denies responsibility and will not get involved.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois recently received the support of four major Quebec unions in its efforts to get the Prime Minister to move from words to action and give tangible expression to the recognition of the Quebec nation.

Today, it is the turn of Julius Grey to support the Bloc Québécois initiative. This lawyer specializes in matters of individual freedoms and urged members of the House of Commons to vote in favour of Bill C-505, which I introduced, to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and thus allow Quebec to develop unimpeded its own model of integration for immigrants to Quebec.

The vote on this bill will be held tomorrow and will be a very revealing test of the sincerity of MPs and the Conservatives. Rejection by the Conservative government of Bill C-505, to exempt Quebec from the application of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, would send a very negative message as we approach St. Jean Baptiste Day.

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[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, June 15 to 21, is National Public Service Week. It is a time to commemorate the importance of our federal public service employees.

National Public Service Week was launched in 1992 to recognize the many contributions public servants make to Canadian society. Through their professionalism, resourcefulness and hard work, they contribute greatly to our Canadian way of life.

[*Translation*]

The women and men who make up the public service are one of Canada's most valuable resources, and it is important to acknowledge the work they do and the role they play within our society.

[*English*]

Sadly, on Sunday, former chairman of the Public Service Commission from 1965 to 1976, Mr. John Carson, passed away. Mr. Carson was instrumental in highlighting the need for bilingualism within the public service. We honour his contribution.

[*Translation*]

We are very proud of our public servants and of the fact that they are an integral part of one of the most respected public services in the world.

[*English*]

On behalf of all members of this House, I extend our thanks.

*Oral Questions***GENERAL MOTORS**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call upon the government to act with respect to General Motors and to tell it that it broke a contract with the people of Oshawa and that it broke a contract with the people of this country. The government has to stand up against companies like that. It is unfair for companies to bargain in bad faith.

It is about time the Conservative government brought in an auto policy. Instead, it brought in a new tax on vehicles and relocated that into a small pilot program. That is not going to save our auto industry.

A hybrid truck was supposed to be manufactured at this plant and that would have provided future jobs.

It is up to the minister and the Prime Minister to step in and tell these companies to live up to their obligations and bargain in good faith as a matter of policy in Canada.

* * *

• (1415)

CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax being proposed by the Leader of the Opposition is going to drive Canadian farmers out of business. Canadian farmers will not be able to compete with their competitors when they are paying more to fill the fuel tanks on their tractors, paying more to run their combines and paying more to ship their goods to market.

Today the Conservative MPs at the agriculture committee voted to protect Canadian farmers from the devastating effects of a carbon tax.

The bad news for Canadian farmers is that one of the Liberal MPs voted in favour of the carbon tax. The bad news for the Leader of the Opposition is that three Liberals, his own agriculture critic, the member for Mississauga—Erindale and the member for Brant, all voted against the carbon tax. It seems the Liberal leader is having some trouble convincing his own MPs to buy into his tax trick.

All Canadians can rest assured that this Conservative government will not stand by and watch the Liberal leader get away with his carbon tax trick.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, today, seven days from the Quebec national holiday, I wish to address all the people of Quebec, and particularly those in my riding.

On June 24, we shall celebrate our identity and our culture.

Yes, let us celebrate this new enriched identity, honouring everything that has given us the strength and courage to speak French, but to welcome the world's languages as well.

Let us celebrate this new culture, reinforced and enriched by our hospitality.

Let us become a single people as we celebrate 400 years of history, of openness, of shared values that are the envy of others.

My wish for us is the right to be, to welcome, to protect, to look far into the future together.

Bonne fête nationale to all Quebecers.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economy is in retreat. Consumer confidence is plummeting. Two thousand jobs were lost at Air Canada today, and Canada's productivity is lower than when the current government took office.

Every economist knows that GST cuts do much less than income tax cuts for productivity, but the Prime Minister was more interested in political gimmicks than sound economics.

Will he at least take responsibility for leading Canada to its unenviable position as the only shrinking G-7 economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, in spite of challenges that we know exist in the economy, the reality is that we continue to have overall strong employment and income growth. Part of the reason for that is that this government has cut taxes across the board. It has cut personal taxes. It has cut consumption taxes. It has cut business taxes. Every single time we cut those taxes, every single time, the Liberal Party opposed those things.

Now the Liberal Party wants to raise taxes across the board as part of its insane environmental and economic policies. That is wrong for Canada.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is insane is the government's economic and environmental policies, because both of those policies will cause energy prices to rise.

Only the Liberal plan puts money back in people's pockets, especially the pockets of the most vulnerable Canadians. Only the Liberal plan will help unleash innovative market forces that will return Canada to the top of the G-7. Canadians expect this kind of sound economic and environmental leadership from their government.

Why is the government so totally missing in action on both the economy and the environment?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we want to see missing in action, we just have to look across the floor whenever we have a vote here.

Oral Questions

The reality is the Liberal Party has opposed every tax cut that this government implemented, and the Liberal Party now wants a new tax to fund \$60 billion in unfunded spending commitments. The people of Canada are not going to be conned.

• (1420)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the government's rhetoric, Canadians are starting to realize that when it comes to the economy, Tory times are tough times.

Our economy shrank by a third of a per cent. A majority of Canadians say we are headed for a recession. Thirty thousand manufacturing jobs vanished in the first four months and 2,000 Air Canada jobs today.

How can the Prime Minister ignore all these warning signs, look these unemployed Canadians in the eye and tell them that they never had it so good?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we recognized the economic challenges this country would be facing a year ago. That is why we took action in the fall. That is why when I travel internationally, most G-8 leaders wish they had the kind of economy that Canada has.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something. Those guys can call in the Auditor General; they can call in the RCMP; they can call in whomever they want, but when they try and claim a new tax is revenue neutral, nobody is going to buy it.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government does not care about good hard-working Canadians losing their jobs. In the first four months of this year, Statistics Canada reported that 30,000 jobs were lost from the manufacturing sector. That does not even take into account the 2,600 jobs cut at GM and now the 2,000 jobs cut at Air Canada.

Canadians have a right to know what the Conservative government is going to do about this crisis. Is this what the finance minister meant when he said that we have strong financial fundamentals?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not only what I meant when I said we have strong economic fundamentals, it is what the OECD said last week when it looked at the Canadian economy.

Who said this? Let us just see. "You need to have stimulus for the economy". We had stimulus for the economy. We had 1.4% of GDP and we put money into people's pockets. Who said this? "To really stimulate the economy, you need to put money directly into people's pockets". My goodness, that was the member for Markham—Unionville.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has the floor.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): The OECD, Mr. Speaker, also said that we are heading for a recession and ours is the only G-8 economy that shrank.

[*Translation*]

More and more workers are losing their jobs and all the government can find to do is to be on the attack.

Why does the government not have any solutions for Canadians who are losing their jobs? What concrete actions will the government take? Is the Minister of Finance expecting these laid off workers to believe that everything is just fine in this, the best of all possible worlds?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member ought to check her facts. In fact, we saw a rebound in manufacturing jobs, not only in Ontario but also in Quebec in the month of May. Those are the facts and that is what happened in the month of May in Canada.

Let us look at what the OECD said about this economy, about the economic fundamentals that we have right: the job growth, the lower interest rates and the future that we have because we have a plan called "Advantage Canada" that we are implementing. The plan the Liberals have is for a huge new carbon tax, a new tax on fuel oil for Canadians, on gasoline, on a whole—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we have learned that Julie Couillard's mother, Diane Bellemare, was appointed for a three-year mandate as chairperson of Saint-Jérôme's Board of Referees. This political appointment came on August 1, 2007, when Ms. Couillard was dating the then minister of industry.

Can the Prime Minister tell us if the member for Beauce, then the minister of industry, was present when the name of Ms. Bellemare, the mother of his girlfriend at the time, was submitted to cabinet for the position?

• (1425)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Diane Bellemare was appointed in 2007. She had previously been employed by the Fondation de l'Hôpital régional de Saint-Jérôme. She was responsible for managing and coordinating fundraising activities and communications. All government appointees are qualified, as is the case with Ms. Bellemare.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. We already knew what he just said. The question is whether or not the minister of industry was at the meeting when Ms. Bellemare was appointed.

Was the member for Beauce there when this partisan appointment was made—yes or no? The question is very clear.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, all government appointments are fully qualified. In the case of appointees for positions, such as the EI chairperson, which, in the case of Madam Bellemare, was her appointment, they are required to demonstrate knowledge of employment insurance, as well as knowledge of the geographic area to which they are appointed, which, in her case, was St. Jérôme. In her case, she matched those qualifications. She has a record in the area of several hospitals where she has worked, the St. Jérôme hospital foundation and the St-Eustache Hospital foundation. As in the case of all our nominations, she is qualified.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if we understand correctly, the industry minister at the time was present at the cabinet meeting when Ms. Bellemare was appointed.

Diane Bellemare was appointed as chairperson of the boards of referees for the Saint-Jérôme district. The minister's office says that the candidate was subject to a security check. That check must have discovered that this woman is the former partner of a man convicted of growing marijuana and is the mother of Julie Couillard, whose shady past is known to the RCMP.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, who is responsible for these appointments, admit that this looks suspiciously like a case of favouritism at the expense of the public interest?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, all appointments are subject to security checks.

[English]

All appointments to the Employment Insurance Board are the subject of rigorous security checks and this was the case with Madam Bellemare.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the checks were so rigorous, they must have discovered her past.

Julie Couillard was in possession of sensitive documents for weeks. She tried to win a contract for Kevlar while in a relationship with an advisor to Michael Fortier. She did everything she could to get access to Conservatives and airport security services, and her mother got a job that was actually a partisan appointment.

Is this not abundant evidence that the Couillard affair is a matter of public interest and that the Prime Minister is concealing a number of things from us?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard nothing in the question from the hon. member that suggested anything untoward about Madam Bellemare herself. I heard a lot of comments about other people but nothing about her.

I will point out that members of the Employment Insurance Board of Referees work typically about two days per month. It is a part time job and on those two or three days a month they hold hearings with regard to their regions for those who are making appeals related to employment insurance claims.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals are so concerned about all of these lost jobs, lost jobs in the thousands, we have to ask ourselves why they allowed confidence motions to pass in this House 43 different times to allow the government to stay in power.

[Translation]

The tar sands have an impact on our environment, the economy, wildlife and vegetation and human health, especially the health of aboriginal communities.

Instead of stepping up the development of the tar sands, as he is doing with the Kearl project, will the Prime Minister stop issuing new permits for new tar sands projects, yes or no?

● (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has received a report but has not yet made a decision.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting answer. All the investors are under the impression that the Kearl project is going ahead. If the Prime Minister is saying here on the floor today that he is finally willing to agree with the grassroots organizations coming forward, the environmentalists, the businesses, the mayors, the councillors, the labour unions and now the NDP who are saying that there should be no new approvals in the tar sands, I would like him to stand and say so because it would be the right thing to do, given the consequences of the development right now.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to doing the right thing. We have strong environmental statutes in this country. We are going to ensure that these rigorous standards are fully utilized to ensure we do the right thing for the environment.

What has gone on for far too long is uninhibited development up in the oil sands, which is why, for the first time in Canadian history, we are bringing in national regulations to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, something the previous government failed to do. We are also tackling the issue of smog and air quality, again, something that has lacked national leadership under successive Liberal governments.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL SECURITY**

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security is examining the matter of the ex-foreign minister and Ms. Julie Couillard, which deals with missing secret documents, RCMP contradictions, a federal appointment for Ms. Couillard's mother, government contracts and much more.

The committee must be able to do its work. Will the government today consent to passing a motion in the House for warrants for the member for Beauce and Julie Couillard to appear before the public safety committee?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Vancouver South has characterized his inquiry at the public safety committee about Madam Couillard as being about finding out who else she has relationships with because he would like to know. I am not sure the House of Commons should be issuing warrants for that but I will leave that to the House.

From the government's perspective, we have chosen to pursue this matter in a much more serious fashion through a review by the Department of Foreign Affairs, which has the ability to draw upon the relevant resources and agencies of government to do so.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the unanswered questions are piling up, the government refuses to cooperate with the public safety committee, refuses to take expert advice that a foreign affairs review will not be enough, refuses to answer legitimate questions on national security and refuses to call a public inquiry.

Will the government finally act and call the public inquiry today or does the Prime Minister have something else to hide?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government took action some time ago in a serious fashion by having the Department of Foreign Affairs commence a review, together with the support of the agency's it has.

In terms of unanswered questions piling up, I know the member really is interested in who Madam Couillard has been sleeping with because that is what he told the *Ottawa Citizen* and CBC's *The National*.

That is not the kind of question piling up that we think the public wants to spend a lot resources getting to the bottom of.

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[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we are going from Mom Boucher to Mom Couillard, but we should really be talking about Ms. Bellemare.

The Couillard web is a wide one: the Department of Foreign Affairs, Transport, Public Works and Government Services. Now, it is the turn of the Department of Human Resources. Actually, it is the turn of the Quebec lieutenant and Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, who is responsible for giving his

approval to the Prime Minister for any political appointments in Quebec.

My question is simple. Why did the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Quebec lieutenant agree to the appointment of Julie Couillard's mother as chairperson of the Board of Referees in the Saint-Jérôme region?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when someone seeks employment with the Employment Insurance Board of Referees as an EI chairperson, the person is interviewed by officials at the Department of Human Resources. Those are public servants who conduct that review.

In the process of that review, to determine if a person is qualified, the person is examined on his or her knowledge of the employment insurance system and the geographic area he or she will be dealing with.

In addition, we as a government look at the persons's background. In the case of Ms. Bellemare, she has a good professional background having worked for the St-Jérôme hospital foundation, the St-Eustace Hospital foundation and—

• (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly, through her relationship with the Conservatives, Julie Couillard not only took advantage of Max, she took advantage to the max. That is the problem: attempts to infiltrate, possible influence peddling, access to secret documents, interest in airport security, appointment of Julie Couillard's mother, and it does not stop there.

Who in this government will confirm that the Prime Minister's Office was aware that the member for Beauce spoke to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, and that the former foreign affairs minister was there when Ms. Bellemare's name was put forward to cabinet? We want some answers, please.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, in making these appointments the government seeks to appoint only qualified individuals.

In the case of Madam Bellemare, I have spoken a little bit about her work with the St. Jérôme hospital and St-Eustache Hospital foundations. She also worked with the Fondation de l'Hôpital du Sacré-Coeur de Montréal.

She was found acceptable by the Human Resources public servants who examined and spoke to her about her background and understanding of the employment insurance system and her understanding of the geographic area of St. Jérôme. On that basis, her appointment was recommended and ultimately made.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the big prison break at the Sarpoza prison in Kandahar greatly undermines the Afghans' trust toward NATO and the government it supports. On February 18, 2007, two officials from the Correctional Service of Canada posted in Kandahar warned Ottawa of the risk, and I quote from the report, "It is recommended that our first priority be to secure the perimeter of the institution". The result: nothing was done.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his negligence and his improvisation is putting lives at risk today? Canadian troops and Afghan civilians are threatened by this—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect, I do not think the hon. member is somehow suggesting that a suicide bomb attack, where explosives were placed on a fuel truck, could have been prevented in any way by having a thicker wall at the prison.

Since the fall of 2007, we have helped the Afghan authorities, where the Afghans were running this particular facility, to construct a perimeter of watch towers, exterior security lighting and strengthening the infrastructure.

Those were investments and efforts that were made by the Canadian government, working with the Afghans who were running this facility.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that could have been avoided if the minister had had proper information services, but he did not.

On another note, the Afghan mission cannot succeed if we do not win the hearts of the Afghan people and the public. We learn from the mouth of a Canadian chaplain that officers tell Canadian soldiers to ignore sexual assaults committed by the Afghan army against the public. That does not make sense. By closing our eyes, Canada becomes an accomplice to those crimes.

Is that a new way of winning the hearts of the Afghans?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely false. The hon. member's statement is absolutely false.

[English]

We are in Afghanistan to help promote human rights and protect individuals. That is why we are investing in programs, with immunization and health care. Any suggestion that Canadian soldiers would deliberately turn a blind eye to assaults like this are abhorrent and should not be raised on the floor of the House of Commons.

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to Nature Québec representatives, the international joint commission's new water level management plan could have dire consequences for the St. Lawrence River and cause the disappearance of Lac Saint-Pierre, which UNESCO has designated as a biosphere reserve.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us if the government intends to support this new plan?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward to receiving this plan. We understand the IJC has consultations under way and we would like to see those consultations completed. When receive its report, we will respond appropriately.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the approval order refers to benefits for Lake Ontario, while offering no guarantees for the St. Lawrence River or Quebec's interests. In the name of fairness, benefits must be guaranteed both upstream and downstream from the dam.

Does the minister intend to register his opposition if the commission goes ahead with the new order?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are looking forward to receiving the report from the IJC. We are looking forward to the completion of consultations. Whatever we do will be in the national interest.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over a year ago, Correctional Service Canada informed the Conservative government about the deficiencies in security at Sarpoza prison, the first priority being to secure the perimeter of the institution.

The government had more than ample warning and failed to respond to these warnings by its own officials. It failed our soldiers, it failed Afghans and it failed Canadians.

Why was there a lack of intelligence? Is this the government's version of catch and release?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, this is a very serious incident. I do not think the hon. member should make light of it with his puns. This is an after the fact prognosis now by the member opposite. The Canadian government has invested in all kinds of infrastructure, including at the Sarpoza prison.

Oral Questions

Since this incident, we are working with the Afghans, not only to secure a cordon on the area, but also to recapture fighters and to see that this facility is rebuilt so the Afghan government and the Afghan security forces can continue to raise their ability and their capacity to provide security to their population.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is shameful is the government knew about it since February 2007 and did nothing. It put our soldiers at risk and for that, it is held accountable.

This is a devastating setback for the Afghan government and for our NATO mission. Rather than respond effectively, the government has ignored, and continues to ignore, the legitimate questions on this side of the House regarding the detention of Taliban prisoners.

What concrete steps is the government going to take to ensure that the work our soldiers are doing is not in vain?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for his support for the extension of the mission, the transformation that involves investment in infrastructure and the excellent programming work that is being done by CIDA.

Our efforts include the efforts of Correctional Service Canada to raise the capacity of the Afghan officials of the Afghan prison to treat and ensure that Afghan prisoners are treated humanely and to continue to ensure they live up to international standards. We are there to help that country improve its capacity to provide security and to protect its sovereignty for the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Corporal Travis Scouten, a Canadian soldier who served in Afghanistan, tells us a shocking story. He talks about sexual assaults committed by Afghan soldiers against civilians and the Canadian Forces' inability to intervene.

This is not a matter of partisan politics. We have a responsibility towards the Afghan people and our soldiers cannot stand idly by while such atrocities are committed.

Is the government taking these allegations seriously? Will the government take action?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Certainly, Mr. Speaker. This is a very serious matter and these are very serious allegations.

[English]

However, let us be clear that in no way, shape or form have Canadian soldiers or the Canadian government ever condoned or excused allegations of sexual abuse against children in our country or anywhere else.

Let us be clear about something else. Let us for once just show a modicum of respect for the timeframe that it takes to investigate and look into serious allegations such as this. Let us not cast aspersions without doing a little research into the facts first.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no talking about his responsibilities.

[Translation]

This House has every reason to be concerned about this government's reliability. When there were allegations of torture concerning Afghan detainees, the government remained silent.

Following these new allegations of sexual assault, can the government assure this House that these tragic incidents will be taken seriously and not swept under the rug?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking these allegations very seriously.

● (1445)

[English]

Let us be honest. The previous allegation about abuse was in fact revealed on the floor of the House of Commons by this government. Therefore, let us again put facts before fiction and rhetoric.

We are absolutely committed to looking into these matters. I met again with leaders of the Canadian Forces, the Chief of the Land Staff, to see that we do a complete forensic examination of all evidence, to look into all these allegations and get to the bottom of it.

That is the difference between simply pointing the finger and doing something about it.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today more Liberal MPs admitted that their leader's regressive carbon tax plan would crush family farms. This morning at the agriculture committee three Liberal members followed this government's lead and only one blindly followed his leader. This tax would destroy jobs, increase the home heating costs, electricity and gasoline.

Could the agriculture minister tell the House how the Liberal leader's plan for this new massive carbon tax would also affect farmers in my riding and across Canada?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we were treated to the sight of Liberals scurrying for cover at the agriculture committee.

As the House knows, farm fuel, fertilizer, chemical and transportation costs would go through the roof if the Liberal leadership were ever given a chance to implement its tax.

Unlike the NDP, Canadian producers will never be fooled into accepting or supporting a Liberal carbon tax.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the DFO has a mandate to protect fish and their habitat, but at least 16 Canadian lakes are about to be reclassified as toxic dump sites for mining companies. From B.C. to Newfoundland, these lakes are fish-bearing waters and it is illegal to put harmful substances in them, but the government is in the process of using a loophole in the law to allow mining companies to dump their toxic sludge in them.

Why are the Conservatives choosing to help the mining industry by giving it access to cheap waste disposal methods for its toxic waste?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in mining operations tailings are produced. Tailings can be stored on land or in water. It is much more responsible to store them in water.

Any damage done in relation to fish or fish habitat has to be mitigated where there is no net loss to either fish or fish habitat. There is a major environmental study done before any go ahead is given. Therefore, every aspect is covered before anyone can do any damage to the environment.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely nonsense.

The minister knows in his own province that DFO environmental assessment officers even said that they did not do a good enough job on Trout River Pond and hopefully they would do better in the future.

The Conservatives are giving those mining companies a huge subsidy by allowing them to use freshwater aquatic systems that are fish-bearing lakes as cheap waste disposal sites. What they should be doing is having independent linings and holes filled with water and put the tailings in those, free and clear of any natural water system.

Why is the government continuing to pander to the mining companies at the sake of fish and their habitat?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what this government is really doing is seeing industry progress in the country to create jobs in the areas where they are badly needed. Any water that is damaged in any way, there has to be assurance that there is no net loss to either fish or fish habitat. Mitigation has to occur. It always occurs. When it does not occur, the company does not get a permit to move ahead with the operation.

* * *

[Translation]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's refusal to announce the reinstatement of the court challenges program immediately shows to what extent it has taken minority language communities hostage. Now, almost two years after eliminating the program, the government is still not being clear about when or even whether it will be reinstated.

Why is the minister putting partisan politics ahead of the interests of minority language communities?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not about politics. Our government and the FCFA reached an out of court settlement that we are very proud of. All parties negotiated in good faith, and we agreed to respect the confidentiality terms.

[English]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is appalling to see how the government has taken linguistic minority communities hostage. Precisely because they are a minority, these communities need stability and predictability, without being subject to partisan threats.

Why is the government using linguistic minority communities for its own narrow political gains?

• (1450)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, in the throne speech last fall and in the latest budget, our government committed to releasing the second phase of the official languages action plan by the end of spring. As always, we will keep our promise.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years the court challenges program, established by previous Liberal governments, has helped all minority groups to have access to the courts to protect their rights. For example, the program has been very useful for the advancement of women's rights. Given the limited scope of the government's new court challenges pretend program, women's organizations would still be shut out.

Will the government commit to re-establishing a court challenges program to which all minorities would have access?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the confidentiality conditions governing this agreement will remain in place until further notice.

That being said, we made a clear commitment to women's groups: we announced additional funding for programs—a 76% increase to enable more Canadian women to achieve concrete goals.

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): However, no access to the courts, Mr. Speaker. One of Canada's strengths has been the ability of all minorities to defend their rights. That is why the government should not be able to exclude minority groups from the court challenges program. The Conservative government is sending the message that in its Conservative eyes all minority groups are not equal. They are cherry-picking who can defend their rights and who cannot.

Why will the government not ensure that all Canadians can defend their rights and prevent problems rather than making mistakes and apologizing later?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned repeatedly, the terms of the agreement are still confidential. When we can make them public, we will.

That being said, our government has done so much for Canadians, whether they belong to minority groups or not. The Liberal Party is proposing a carbon tax that would hit all Canadians, including minorities.

* * *

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today in a letter, Quebec's minister of economic development spoke out against the disdainful remarks by the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec about not-for-profit organizations. He wrote:

These are disrespectful words and insulting to a great many businesses, economic leaders, and men and women who contribute... to the growth of the Quebec economy.

Is the Prime Minister aware of the level of exasperation among Quebec's elected representatives and economic stakeholders, and will he reverse this bad decision by his minister and restore funding for these bodies?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would point out to the hon. member that we are going to be continuing to fund organizations of an economic nature, but on a the basis of individual projects with clear timelines. Moreover, this decision provides us with some scope to intervene in all regions of Quebec.

I would remind hon. members that, as a result of the last budget, an additional \$1.6 billion went to the Government of Quebec. We share a federalism of openness, and remedying the fiscal imbalance has freed up \$242 million more for the Quebec minister.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the bad decision by the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec demonstrates his lack of understanding of the economic dynamic of Quebec. For example, the mandate of the Quebec Film and Television Council is to attract foreign productions here, through ongoing actions, not just one-shot efforts. Its tireless and efficient efforts have resulted in a doubled economic spinoff from film in Quebec between 2006 and 2007. It

could end up closing as early as this fall, thanks to the minister's cuts.

Will the Prime Minister reverse this bad decision by his minister and will he restore the funding of the Quebec Film and Television Council in order to avoid its closure?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say again, we are active in all regions of Quebec. Our budget has remained around the \$200 million mark this year. There is even an additional \$24 million over two years to enable us to develop the body of infrastructures around the cruise ship industry, which will be of great benefit to Quebec.

I would like to take a few moments to speak about the greater Montreal region. Do the words Ubisoft divertissement Inc. ring a bell with the hon. member? We contributed a repayable amount of \$8 million out of a total \$18 million project, which created 500 jobs in the greater Montreal region.

* * *

● (1455)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, is stepping down at the end of the month. She has already been congratulated by people the world over for her courage and candour, but here, this Conservative government is remaining silent, humiliating Canada in front of the international community.

Is it true that the Prime Minister himself has asked that Canadian representatives say nothing?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Shame on her.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we congratulate the work of Louise Arbour. We very strongly support the United Nations in its pursuit of the protection of human rights and will continue to do so.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the human resources committee heard from UK officials about their fuel poverty strategy. They say new taxes on the domestic use of fuel and power have an unacceptable social impact.

The groups adversely impacted by higher fuel taxes are people living on low incomes, the elderly, rural residents, and young, single women. They cautioned that Canada should look carefully at the winners and losers before pursuing such policies.

Can the Minister of Human Resources tell this House about the impact of a Liberal carbon tax on vulnerable members of Canadian society?

Oral Questions

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only are the Liberals going to take away the universal child care benefit and plunge 24,000 Canadian families into poverty but they are going to raise the GST. Now they want to raise the price of gasoline, home heating fuel, natural gas and electricity.

It sounds to me like the Liberals are very confused. Instead of launching an attack on poverty, they are launching an attack on the poor. Shame on them.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN SPACE INDUSTRY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 40 days ago today, the government took the NDP's advice and rejected the sale of MDA. Now that we know Canadians can keep MDA, the next step is to protect the future of our space industry.

What steps has the Minister of Industry taken to protect the Canadian space industry's future contracts and the jobs of Canadian scientists and workers in the high-tech sector?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the time since the MDA decision there has been a significant contract that was let specifically to MDA. It was a contract that related to the maintenance on the international space station, particularly the sliding arm, the Canadarm, and the apparatus on which it functions.

We will continue to work with MDA. MDA has been an extraordinary Canadian success story and we will continue to work with it in building this industry.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, re-announcements of already committed funding just does not cut it.

A recent study has painted a grim picture of Canada's space industry. Among the major problems are the fact that Canada is second to last among the G-8 in funding the space sector. There is a frozen budget and a revolving door of leadership at the Canadian Space Agency. There is the need for \$1.5 billion of investment over the next five years to rebuild the space agency capabilities.

Will the Minister of Industry now act concretely and resolve these problems or will he jeopardize the future of a sector so important to our national identity and sovereignty? Will he act?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will act and I have been acting. The Canadian Space Agency continues to be something that all Canadians and the government are extremely proud of.

If one wants a dose of pessimism, however, it always seems to come from the NDP. When I speak to Canadians who are working at the Canadian Space Agency or Canadians who are working in the industry at companies such as MDA, they are proud of what they have achieved. They are proud, for example, of the recent mission and the Canadian weather station on Mars. One only needs to look to the NDP to find depression.

• (1500)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Louise Arbour has spent the last 12 years prosecuting and working firsthand to combat abuses and indignities against the world's most disenfranchised. She is world renowned as one of the most courageous and accomplished women this country has ever produced.

However, the *Human Rights Tribune* states:

Sources close to Ottawa said that instructions came directly from the Prime Minister's office to offer no praise for Arbour—

Is this true?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member already asked this question and I think we did praise Louise Arbour. I congratulated her. We thanked her for the good work she has done.

I would just take this opportunity to reinforce the hard work that Canada is doing across a range of areas to promote and protect human rights in the world.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the government is taking real action on climate change. Through our ecoAction program we have helped build green technology right here at home in Canada through projects that will provide real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants.

Sadly, the Liberal candidate in the Guelph byelection, Frank Valeriotte, does not agree. He says the government should not help industries invest in new technology.

While the Liberals may not agree that we need to invest in green technology, can the Minister of the Environment tell the House how the government has delivered for Canadians regarding the fight on climate change?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have invested millions of dollars both through regulation of industry and in government funds to support the fight on climate change.

I am surprised at the candidate from Guelph with respect to his desire not to support these industries. What I am excited about is the honesty of one of the Liberal members opposite. He wrote:

Ultimately, this added cost [the carbon tax proposed by the Liberals] will find its way into oil and plastic, transportation and food. In fact, most corners of our lives.

I cannot name the Liberal member, but I found it on a website called www.garth.ca.

*Points of Order***EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS**

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, prior to the March 2007 budget, Canada only had one equalization formula for all provinces. Now we have three unequal equalization formulas. Nova Scotia has the choice between the O'Brien formula and a new formula. It expires in 2020. Eight provinces have the O'Brien formula. They expire six years later. Newfoundland has the amended 2005 formula but no O'Brien formula.

At one point, the minister saw merit in having one principle-based equalization formula. Does he have any intention of reverting back to that and having one equalization formula for all provinces, instead of three?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we were able to, with the assistance of the O'Brien panel, move to a situation where we have fiscal balance based on certain principles. That solution has been accepted by most of the jurisdictions in Canada, including the province of Nova Scotia. As Premier MacDonald said:

We have the agreements in place...[Nova Scotia is] receiving the full benefits of the offshore (accord)...I hope that our MPs, especially some of our Liberal MPs...are going to stand up and be counted.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Bekele Geleta, newly appointed Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question from the leader of the New Democratic Party regarding the permit process for the Kearl oil sands project, I implied that the government had not taken a decision on that. In fact, the government has accepted all the recommendations of both the first and the second environmental review process on that particular project, although the permit process is still under way.

My apologies to the leader of the NDP for any misinformation I conveyed.

● (1505)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Willowdale is rising on a point of order. We are going to hear it.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the members opposite that my concern is actually no laughing matter.

When I was referring in my question regarding Louise Arbour, the President of the Treasury Board very loudly yelled out, "She's a disgrace". I would ask if the member opposite would in fact do the dignified thing and withdraw his comments.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this gives me an opportunity to clarify my comments.

The comments that Louise Arbour has made in respect of the state of Israel and the people of Israel are in fact a disgrace, and I stand by those words.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, based on discussions that I have had with my colleagues, I think that you will find, should you seek it, unanimous consent to return to presenting reports from committees so that I, as the chair of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, may table the special committee's first report.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to table a petition in memory of Karine Méthot.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to revert to petitions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I present this petition today on behalf of the Karine Méthot family.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a member opposite, in statements by members prior to question period, made a statement that a number of us had voted with the government as if we were against the carbon tax.

The fact of the matter is that the Prime Minister's Office put out misinformation in a media release on the motion that was passed by committee. The motion passed by committee is for a study on the carbon issue.

Points of Order

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any question that this is a point of debate and not a point of order.

I might just quote this:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food study the effects of a carbon tax and any other broad based environmental tax and ensure that Canadian farmers are not saddled with a carbon tax which would further increase their input costs and hurt their competitiveness.

That is what the member opposite voted for.

The Speaker: There is another point of order. Members seem to have gotten into the rule books today in a very substantial way. The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

[*Translation*]

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. During question period, in reply to a question from my colleague for Hochelaga, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec cited a number of projects from a list. I would like him to table this list pursuant to the Standing Orders.

• (1510)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was reading from my notes. Should I give them all my notes prepared for question period? The answer is no.

[*English*]

The Speaker: We will move on.

The hon. member for Don Valley West is rising on a point of order.

MEMBER FOR DON VALLEY WEST

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order which really is not a point of order. For this, I beg your forgiveness, Mr. Speaker, but only after I have finished.

The two toughest decisions in politics are when to get in and when to get out. The tougher decision is when to get out, because in politics, one never knows what lies around the next corner, what new catastrophe or opportunity may suddenly appear just in time to change one's life forever. If one just stays on a little longer, who knows what may happen. Nowhere is this truer than in a minority Parliament. So, the temptation to stay on is great, just to see what happens next. In this regard, I am reminded of the British army officer whose men would follow him anywhere, just out of sheer curiosity; not, of course, that this reflects in any way on the management style of my current leader or his predecessors.

How extraordinarily privileged we are as members of this House, members of Parliament, to be part of great events as they unfold, witnesses to history, as we were last week when the residential schools apology was delivered, or as we were earlier in this Parliament when we were present for that remarkable debate on the question of a Quebec nation within a unified Canada.

Here in this place the stakes are high, the issues really matter, and we all feel we can make a difference. That is why we are drawn to politics. It is exciting, worthwhile and unpredictable. It is also a bit like playing the horses: addictive, potentially dangerous to one's health, and tough on family life.

I have enjoyed my fourteen and a half years here. I have learned a lot, made good friends in all parties and, I hope, in some small way worked with all of them to make Canada a better place.

In Arnold Bennett's novel, *The Card*, the countess asks of a rising young politician, "But with what great cause is he associated?" This is the question that each of us must ask of ourselves; not, "Am I great?" but "Is my cause great?". Because the cause is always greater than we are, and each of us can take a greater pride in the causes we have advanced as members of Parliament than the formal titles we have achieved.

But none of us can serve our causes, or Canada, without the loyal support of the people who work with us and who make us look good. Over the course of fourteen years, I have been lucky enough to have worked with many talented and dedicated people and also, I would add, with many splendid parliamentary interns. I cannot name them all, but I want to make special mention of two long-time associates and friends, Kathy Kocsis and Andrew Bevan, and the current crew in Ottawa and Toronto, Catherine, Bo, Delaney, Jonathan, Steve and Angela.

As I look around this chamber, I also want to acknowledge my friends in all parties, in the Liberal caucus, the whole Liberal team on the Hill, my leader, the officers of this House and all the people who serve in it. I also want to recognize all the support staff of the committees and the Library of Parliament, all the men and women on the Hill who protect us, clean for us, serve us in the cafeterias and generally make our lives agreeable, and you, Mr. Speaker, for struggling so valiantly to create an atmosphere of non-partisan civility and camaraderie in a time of trouble.

• (1515)

I want to make special mention of the pages who buzz around so efficiently and have learned cheerfully how to interpret the eccentric demands of the member for Don Valley West, which he conveys by a unique form of sign language. Now here is a little lesson for the rest of you. Ready? Watch carefully: glass, ice, lemon, and make that fizzy water. What a legacy.

I also want to thank the people of Don Valley West, who have supported me through five elections; my constituency association and its long-serving president, Dennis O'Leary; Pam Gutteridge, my first and last campaign manager; and above all, my family, especially my wife, Trish, helpmate indeed, and my son, Ian, who made it all possible and who have been my greatest supporters. I should also mention that my son, Ian, graduated today from grade eight, just as I am graduating from grade fourteen and a half.

In politics it is always important to pick our moment to leave before the moment picks us.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

And what a moment. I am lucky to have a new career as the headmaster of the Toronto French School. I am returning to my roots, to the education of young people and, even better, to the French language.

[English]

As I say goodbye, I leave with my idealism intact. I leave with a certain regret, but also with satisfaction and pride at having been one of the select few, a member of the House of Commons of Canada, one of you, one of us.

Thank you, merci, au revoir, goodbye.

The Speaker: Is the hon. member for Halifax rising on this point of order?

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a word or two on the same point of order, I welcome the opportunity, on behalf of my caucus and also on behalf of Nova Scotians, if I may be so presumptuous, to extend hearty congratulations and best wishes to the member for Don Valley West.

I do so, in part, because I believe there is not as widespread knowledge as there ought to be, and as there deserves to be, about the very considerable contribution the member for Don Valley West made to the educational development of Nova Scotians and people who chose to go to Nova Scotia to be educated at the University of King's College when the member served as president of the university.

I should make special mention, because I know many people in the House have had sons and daughters who have chosen to go to attend the University of King's College, not because the member was still serving as president, but because he, and I think the record of the House of Commons should show this, was the founder of one of the most outstanding educational programs in any university anywhere in our country, the foundation year program that continues to attract an astounding numbers of applicants, not so many selected because there is not room for all the students who would benefit from the program.

The member's decision to return to the educational field is very good news for those who will study under his tutelage at the Toronto French School. I hope this will not seem unduly partisan, that the member also had a very abbreviated political career in Nova Scotia where he also ran as a provincial member, just once. I am sure if he had run again, he might have been elected the second time. I had to run three times to be elected. I am very glad the member chose to make another bid for public office. He has served the House well. He has done it with honour. He has done it with substance. He has done it with principle.

I cannot say a single occasion that I could remember where he engaged in cheap talk or cheap tricks. I congratulate him heartily. My wishes go to Trish and his son, Ian, that they will enjoy a higher quality of family life than is possible when one serves in this insane place. I, too, look forward, not to stepping into his partisan footprints or following his partisan path, to doing precisely the same after the next election.

I congratulate the member for Don Valley West.

● (1520)

The Speaker: On behalf of all hon. members, I thank the hon. member for Halifax for her contribution to this matter and, of course, the hon. member for Don Valley West for his point of order today.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Liberal colleagues of the member for Don Valley West, we wish him every success in his new career.

In this place and in our caucus we have always benefited from his good advice, his hard work, his intelligent judgment on the various issues that he was called upon to comment on and to deal with from time to time. However, I think all of us recognize and want to pay honour to his commitment to principle, his civility, his passion and his dignity.

This place has been a better place because that hon. member has been with us. We thank him and wish him Godspeed on his way.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGEMEMBERS' RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN PARLIAMENTARY
PROCEEDINGS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River on May 26, 2008, regarding the report of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner in relation to the hon. member for West Nova.

[English]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River for having raised the matter and I would also like to thank the hon. government House leader, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre and the hon. member for Mississauga South for their interventions.

In raising this question of privilege, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River underlined the importance of the privileges of freedom of speech and the right to vote for members, privileges that are of such fundamental significance that they are claimed explicitly by the Speaker at the beginning of each Parliament. It was with this in mind that he questioned the validity of the Conflict of Interest Code for members being interpreted in such a way as to limit unduly the freedom of speech and right to vote in the House and in committee not only of the member for West Nova but of all members. This concern was echoed by the members for Winnipeg Centre and Mississauga South.

The member for Scarborough—Rouge River took issue with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioners contention that being a defendant in a libel suit was tantamount to having a private interest since this interpretation would open the way to limiting the rights of members through the simple act of filing a lawsuit.

Specifically, he challenged the interpretation given by the commissioner of the term liability as used in the code, claiming that the commissioner's extension of the meaning of the word liability to include the sort of contingent liability represented by being named defendant in a libel suit was unreasonable.

In his remarks, the government House leader pointed out that the rights to free speech and to vote were not absolute and in support of this view, he cited a passage from page 26 of Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, wherein it is indicated clearly that there are limits to the privileges enjoyed by members. He stated that the House itself established the code and gave to the Ethics Commissioner the authority to interpret it.

• (1525)

[Translation]

Further, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons argued that if members feel that the Code requires amendment, this ought not to be accomplished under the guise of a question of privilege but rather through the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, whose mandate it is to review the Code.

[English]

It should be noted at the outset that no one is suggesting that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, in her consideration of the present case, did not recognize the importance of the rights and privileges of members. Nor was any concern expressed that she had not exercised the highest standards of diligence or that she had not acted in good faith.

As Speaker, I am profoundly aware both of the importance of the particular rights and privileges which members are accorded in order to allow them to carry out their functions and of the special responsibility that I have in that regard. My role in relation to privilege is very clear.

[Translation]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice contains several key passages which will be of interest to the House. First, at p. 261, Marleau and Montpetit states that:

It is the responsibility of the Speaker to act as the guardian of the rights and privileges of members and of the House as an institution.

Further, at p. 262, it goes on to say that:

The duty of the Speaker is to ensure that the right of members to free speech is protected and exercised to the fullest possible extent—

Then, at page 125 there is the following guidance to the Chair when it is deliberating on whether there are sufficient grounds to find a case of *prima facie* privilege:

—the Chair will take into account the extent to which the matter complained of infringed upon any member's ability to perform his or her parliamentary duties.

[English]

This brings me to the questions raised by the government House leader regarding the propriety of attempting to remedy the current situation via a question of privilege. The hon. government House leader is quite correct in pointing out that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has a mandate to review and report on the Standing Orders and the Conflict of Interest Code. However, it must be pointed out that there are other paths available to the House to effect changes to the Standing Orders or to the code and that the House has on occasion seen fit to take them. Ultimately the fundamental requirement for any change to our Standing Orders or by extension to the Conflict of Interest Code, which is an appendix

Speaker's Ruling

to our Standing Orders, is that any such change must be agreed to by the House as a whole.

[Translation]

As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states at page 215:

Although the means by which the House reviews the Standing Orders vary greatly, the Standing Orders may be added to, changed or repealed only by a decision of the House, which is arrived at either by way of consensus or by a simple majority vote on a motion moved by any member of the House.

The reference given for this passage is a ruling by Mr. Speaker Fraser in *Debates*, April 9, 1991, pp. 19236-7.

An example of this freedom each member has may be found in the order paper where there is at present a motion to amend the Standing Orders standing in the name of the hon. member for Crowfoot.

[English]

The Chair notes, as additional information before the House, that in the case at hand no mechanism is in place that guarantees an opportunity for the House to disagree with a report such as the one at the centre of this question of privilege. Although there are provisions for a debate on concurrence in the report in the usual fashion, no deadline exists to bring such a motion, were it to be moved, to a vote. All that the code provides for, in section 28(10), is for the automatic concurrence in such report after 30 sitting days after the day on which the report is tabled provided the question has not been disposed of earlier.

[Translation]

Let me turn now to the substance of this question of privilege, namely the impact of this report by the Commissioner on the ability of members to carry out their parliamentary duties.

There is the suggestion, not entirely unfounded in my view, that unless steps are taken to clarify the notion of liability in the Code, the mere launching of a libel suit will now be sufficient to limit members' freedom of speech and their ability to vote.

[English]

It is this particular aspect of the situation which the Chair finds most problematic from a procedural point of view since, as was noted, the current case carries with it the very real potential of affecting every member of the House.

I want to stress that as your Speaker I am not being asked to pass judgment on the decision of the commissioner in this case. Rather, the Speaker is being asked, given the facts presented, to determine whether, on the face of it, the matter is sufficiently grave and of immediate consequence for members to warrant consideration by the House on a priority basis.

I put it to the House that when the mere filing of a libel suit against a member, whatever the ultimate disposition of the suit may be, has the effect of placing restrictions on the ability of that member to speak and to vote in the House and in committee, it appears reasonable to conclude that the privileges of all members are immediately placed in jeopardy.

Speaker's Ruling

These privileges are not absolute. For as the government House leader has pointed out, members themselves have agreed to impose certain limitations on them. In fact, there was further agreement on this matter the other day when a motion was passed on a supply day dealing with this very issue.

Nonetheless, I believe it remains my duty as your Speaker to ensure that all measures to safeguard their very existence are taken. This is particularly true in the circumstances before us where an interpretation of the rules that we have adopted entails consequences which appear to be so obviously unintended by the very members who created the rules.

For these reasons, I believe the matter has met the necessary conditions to be given priority consideration by the House. Accordingly I rule that this is a *prima facie* matter of privilege and I invite the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River to move his motion.

• (1530)

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope members on both sides of the House will appreciate all aspects of your ruling today and the non-partisan way in which the matter has generally been addressed and debated in the House on more than one occasion recently.

At your invitation, Mr. Speaker, I will move a motion that I think will suit the moment and suit the issues. While it would not impose a burden, if adopted by the House, that has to be delivered upon by the procedure and House affairs committee, it would at least invite that committee to review matters.

I will move the motion and I gather the House will debate it or adopt it as it sees fit. I move:

That for the purpose of better assuring the privileges of this House and its members, including our ancient and undoubted privilege of free speech, the subject matter of the Speaker's ruling today on these issues be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for its consideration, and if necessary, to study and/or consult with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and/or report to the House.

The member for Wascana would be prepared to second the motion.

The Speaker: Debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1535)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words in support of the motion.

It has caused us within the NDP and, I think, those within all opposition parties a great deal of concern as to whether the ruling by Commissioner Dawson would continue to inhibit our conduct in the chamber, at committee and just generally in terms of our ability to do our job.

I welcome the motion and I welcome your ruling, Mr. Speaker. It may not be entirely appropriate but I congratulate you on the ruling. I think it is extremely important that we no longer feel the pressure, at least those of us in the opposition parties, that we have felt since

the ruling came down from Ms. Dawson, that we were not able to do our job. I think we all felt a concern in what we would say in public.

It was a ruling that to me seemed to fly in the face of the long tradition we have had, going all the way back to Westminster. I think we can argue that this right was granted to us when parliaments first began being formed within the Westminster system. It was a right that we had to respect. I have to say that the individual case that we are dealing with should not have had that right taken away in any way.

We have all listened to a lot of the speeches that were given on that opposition day. I listened to all members from all parties. We all felt that, in spite of what Ms. Dawson found, we understood how she found it, how she made those decisions and how she came to the conclusions that she came to. Even she acknowledged in the report and in her determinations the type of impact and effect it would have on us.

As I was reading her decision, if I read between the lines it was as if the commissioner was almost reluctant to make the determination she made but felt compelled to do so by the wording of the mandate that she had been given within the code.

Mr. Speaker, the ruling you made was extremely important. I think all of us in this House recognize the responsibilities we have to act responsibly in terms of this very special privilege we have been given. It is the members of this House alone who have this privilege throughout the country and we recognize its importance and that it is not to be abused.

However, we also must recognize that even where it is abused in individual cases that right should not be taken away from all of us. I think inevitably the only way you could conclude the decision that we had from the commissioner was to that effect.

We sit here and try to do our jobs as best we can. We try to be responsible and then we get hit, I would almost say blindsided, which is not meant in any way to be a criticism of the commissioner's decision. We could go back and probably point fingers at ourselves for not properly drafting the wording by which she was being mandated. We need to take some responsibility in that regard.

I do not have a sense that the government is willing to move on changing that mandate given that it was one of its members who initially raised the complaint before the commissioner. I do not believe we are at a stage where we can correct the wording. In any event, we do not have the time to correct it so your ruling, Mr. Speaker, is timely in that regard as well.

I want to go back to the issue of the abuse because the commissioner was obviously concerned about the impact on the victim if the power we have here is abused. I recognize that. However, all members of the House, those who are here and those who are not, should know that it puts greater pressure on us to act responsibly and we cannot shirk that duty to act responsibly.

Speaker's Ruling

● (1540)

By the same token, we cannot give up. At this point, I am really addressing my comments to members of the governing Conservative Party who were willing to say, because of the individual cases of irresponsibility, as they saw in this case and maybe in others, that the commissioner did and should have the authority to curtail our freedom as members of Parliament to speak as freely as we possibly could.

The members of the government need to step back and take a look at the history of the Westminster Parliament that we and a number of other countries have adopted and implemented, particularly in the Commonwealth.

We do not see this kind of limitation placed on parliaments elsewhere that I have been able to discover in any event. The consequences of this decision would be unique to Canada, the fear I suppose being that if it were to happen here, would it happen subsequently in Australia, New Zealand, in England or in some of the other parliaments in the Commonwealth.

We must be conscious of not creating that precedent, if I can put it that way, in the legal sense and have it followed elsewhere. We need to curtail it here and to fight strongly for the rights that we should have in regard to our ability to do the very best job we can for our constituents.

At times we do need to say things in the House and in committees that we might not perhaps otherwise say. We respect the limitations we are under and we know we have limitations. In the last few years we have had a ruling around the responsibilities we have under human rights legislation. We recognize that. We recognize that our conduct is bound by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the House.

Having said that, it does not seem to me that those two examples in any way should take away our right to speak freely, as we have historically had.

I pride myself, and I think we all do in the House, that I come here on behalf of my constituents to advocate for them, to defend them and to protect their rights. Because we have been given that right and responsibility by the constituents who have elected us and sent us here, we bring with it a duty to do our utmost to provide that protection and to advocate as strongly as we possibly can.

If we were to give that up, the very essence of why we are here and why our constituents have sent us here, we would be abandoning that duty. We would be giving it up, which may sound melodramatic but it is as fundamental as that.

We have the responsibility in the House to do whatever we can to maximize protections to our constituents, the citizens and residents of Canada. It is not too harsh to say that if we are not prepared to the maximum to stand up for those rights they expect us to protect by protecting our own rights, our ability, in effect, to do that job, then we probably should not be here.

The motion put forward by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River is extremely important. The Speaker's ruling today is extremely important because I believe it sets back into balance the rights that we have as members of Parliament. The responsibility to

carry out those rights always remains with us individually and that we do not abuse them.

In the particular case that prompted Commissioner Dawson to make the ruling that she did, that legal case that is in the civil courts, whether there has been abuse and whether there has been defamation is to be left to the courts and to be dealt with there. If there is a penalty to be paid, then it should be paid there. It is not a penalty that the member should suffer in this House or in committee doing his job as a member of Parliament and, more important, it is not a penalty that any other member should have to suffer, which is what is happening here.

● (1545)

The Speaker's ruling today was extremely important, timely and one that was badly needed. Once again, I congratulate the Speaker on his ruling.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Windsor for pointing out some of the aspects of this that have been troubling to many of us, especially those of us who were present at the ethics committee, which was the genesis of the whole incident.

Two things trouble me and it may be helpful to ask him because of his legal background. One is the ruling by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner when she made the statement that members are in fact in a conflict of interest if they are named as a defendant in a lawsuit.

As this concerns a legal question, it would be helpful guidance for those of us who are not lawyers if those members in the House who do have a legal background could explain how just being named in a lawsuit is seen as a liability, even before we know the outcome of that lawsuit or any blame is assigned by the courts of law, and the untenable situation in which it puts a member of Parliament.

I would ask the member to dwell somewhat on the concept of liability. Just because someone is being sued is that already a liability, a pending a liability, an unfunded liability or whatever, and when would that take effect?

One of the worrisome things about this case is that as soon as the papers were served, even before the defendant knew he was being sued, the Ethics Commissioner ruled that the person was in a conflict the day the papers were filed at a courtroom in another city somewhere else without his knowledge. Actually, the member for West Nova learned from the newspaper that he was being sued and it seemed the Conservative Party member who found fault with the situation knew about it already. Somebody told the Conservative Party that this lawsuit had been initiated even before the defendant knew about it.

How can members be barred from speaking at a committee if we do not even know we are being sued but we find ourselves deemed to be in a conflict of interest because papers have been filed somewhere? Could the member speak to the untenable situation that puts members in as well?

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, it is an important issue that needs to be addressed and it comes back a bit to the comments I made in my opening remarks about the way we drafted the mandate that the commissioner was under in the code. We did not clearly define what liability meant. The commissioner obviously drew the conclusion in a very narrow sense of what liability was.

Again, if we read the part of her report that dealt with the issue of liability, she was trying to make it very clear that she was interpreting it very rigidly and in a very narrow scope. She clearly was saying that liability arose at the time the action arose in court and perhaps, although she did not say this but I think we would have to draw this as an inevitable conclusion, it happened at the time that the alleged defamation occurred. It was really back when the member was alleged to have made the offending comment. Therefore, the liability actually arose at that point.

The context of it obviously had to do with a future liability. When we look at liability in the sense that she was, which is what is in the code, a liability arises out of some conduct but may not be realized until the future. It was in that context that the commissioner found that liability was that broadly to be interpreted. However, it really is a very narrow focus of what the word meant. It would be relatively easy, from my perspective, to change the code so we could more clearly define what we mean by liability.

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is an important debate that we are having on the member's motion today. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh has spoken very eloquently in support of the motion in speaking about the importance of parliamentarians' ability to speak freely and democratically without fear of an imposition on our abilities to operate as members.

I want to ask the member for Windsor—Tecumseh a question. He is of course speaking in support of the Speaker's ruling, but the motion itself speaks to a reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We know what has transpired over the last year at committees, which was a lot of, and I have to use the term, dirty tricks, with committees not meeting or being shut down by the government, which in a strange way was trying to undermine the work of Parliament.

We have heard allegations of a 200 page dirty tricks book to be used by committee chairs to try to, in a very real sense, stop debate and the work of parliamentary committees. However, in this motion, we now are essentially referring the subject matter of the Speaker's ruling to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Given some of the games that have been played in the procedure and House affairs committee by the government, I wonder if the member for Windsor—Tecumseh feels that is advisable or whether he has any concerns about how the government has been misusing committee tactics to try to shut down debates on important issues like this one.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the points my colleague has raised in his question. I must admit that I was not quite sure what was going to be in the motion by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

I must admit that I am a bit concerned about this being referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs because of the antics that have gone on for seven or eight months now, led entirely by the government, as the NDP sees it, in order to protect its interests in another area.

One kind of wonders about the ruling by the Ethics Commissioner when we see the kind of conduct that has gone on in the committee, with the government members protecting themselves from what I believe are ultimately going to be some very serious repercussions because of the in and out scheme.

I must admit I was half hoping that the member for Scarborough—Rouge River would get up to debate this so I could ask him whether he has concerns over the referral to the procedure and House affairs committee. Is the motion simply going to get stalled in committee by government members refusing to meet?

I know there are ways in which the committee can call for a meeting and conduct it without the chair being present; the chair has to call the meeting. My concern right now, as I understand the situation, is that there is no chair. I believe the procedural rules of the House would allow for a committee meeting to be held even if the government members opted not to show up or take part.

That will be the next question. My colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River might be able to give us some more information on that, should he see it appropriate to speak today on the motion. I am concerned about it.

I also sit on the justice committee. That committee has been thwarted for some two months now because of the conduct of the chair, also a government member. It is not good for democracy that we have this happening. I am a little concerned.

We are talking here, as I have said in my opening remarks, about the very fundamental issue of being a member of Parliament. Could it be thwarted, in spite of the very strong ruling from the Speaker, by government inaction in the procedure and House affairs committee?

Not being entirely sure what the outcome of that is going to be, perhaps I could pledge to my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River that we in the NDP will do whatever we can to support the motion going ahead at the procedure and House affairs committee.

• (1555)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it perhaps is not too common when a member moving a motion does not rise to lead off in debate. I did not do that because it was not clear to me—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member. I am informed that, as the mover, the hon. member has already spoken.

Mr. Derek Lee: Not as the mover, Mr. Speaker. I moved the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member has spoken. I wonder if the hon. member might like to rise under questions and comments in response to the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, which I am about to recognize.

Speaker's Ruling

The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to take too long on this point of order, but I had just finished saying to the House that this was not a very typical procedure. I was given the floor to move the motion. I read the motion and sat down. Then the Speaker called for debate. I did not rise, so I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that I did not speak to the motion. I merely moved the motion.

While the Table looks for precedents to try to figure out where we are on that, I will ask you, when you have dealt with this point of order, and I do not expect you to deal with it immediately, if it is in my favour, that you will immediately allow me to make some remarks. I do have some things to say and it was not clear to me that there was going to be significant debate on this.

An hon. member: Ask for unanimous consent.

Mr. Derek Lee: I suppose I could ask for unanimous consent that I be allowed the floor to speak to this motion. If there were unanimous consent, I would speak for a normal time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There is unanimous consent and it seems that there is a great deal of goodwill toward the hon. member.

Mr. Derek Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That relieves the Table and the Chair of sorting out that sticky point of order.

I thank my colleagues for allowing me an opportunity to address the House. I want to say three or four things.

First, I have an immediate response to the question put by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who questioned whether or not it was foreseeable that the procedure and House affairs committee would be able to deal with the matter being referred to it. The motion I moved was put in a kind of “if necessary” conditional mode, because we all realize that at this point in time the procedure and House affairs committee is not meeting given its inability to elect a chair.

The reason I put the motion in the conditional mode is that the House, as most of us will realize, has already fixed the alleged problem. It is not alleged any more.

There was a problem in the Standing Orders and the Conflict of Interest Code, flagged by us here and partly by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, so in the supply day motion last week, we adopted a new wording, essentially an exception to the Conflict of Interest Code in terms of its definition of what an asset or a liability would be.

Therefore, because we have already fixed the actual problem in the Standing Orders, there is no actual need for the procedure and House affairs committee to take on the issue and fix it. What it might wish to do is review with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner any related issues that have come up as a result of the rule change and any changes in procedure that perhaps should be there to assist members of the House in dealing with the kinds of issues that come up in conflict of interest, and those types of things.

Thus, if the procedure and House affairs committee actually never gets around to dealing with it in the next while, the referral from the House will still be there when it eventually gets traction. I am sure the Ethics Commissioner will want to provide some advice, if so advised, on these issues.

Because we had already fixed the problem last week, thanks to my party's decision to make this a supply day matter and thanks to the eventual vote adopting the change to the rules, I did not think there would be a huge amount of interest in pursuing too much debate on this. However, having embarked on this, and I thank my colleagues for allowing me the opportunity to speak at this particular point in time, there are two or three issues I want to put.

The first issue, as has been said so often here, including by the Speaker, is the fundamental nature of our free speech right and privilege in this House. What is a privilege or a free speech right for one member is a right for all members. I was slightly disappointed during the debate on the supply day motion on this very issue. I thought I would see more unanimity among members in supporting and promoting the free speech rights among members.

For partisan and political reasons, one never expects total support on anything around here, but I did expect to see more traction on that. In the end, it worked out just fine, but I would leave members with one question. What if, on this particular matter, in any old Parliament, there had been a majority government? Would the matter have been fixed? It is not clear.

We have to remember that in this particular circumstance, for better or for worse, we are in the context of a minority government where no one party dominates the House. Thanks to that, the apparent reluctance last week of many government members to fix the rules was displaced by the majority of the House. Some may call it the tyranny of the majority, others may now stand in fear of the tyranny of the minority; whatever, the House did very much freely and democratically decide to fix the problem and the rule.

● (1600)

I want to talk just a bit now about the problem, and it may add a little bit of understanding to how the problem has come about. The rules of conduct for members of Parliament and the conflict of interest rules have focused on the potential problem of members furthering their own personal interests when they do their public work as MPs. We thought the rules had nailed that down and fixed it, but the problem arose in this particular case when the commissioner, in looking at the definition of both an asset and a liability, because a private interest of a member can be an asset or a liability, she made it even more complicated. I do not object to her doing this because it was not unreasonable for her to do this, but she adopted into the definition of liability, the concept of a contingent liability.

For sake of discussion here, because I am going to point out something else in just a moment, if it is possible to import the term “contingent liability” and add it into the concept of liability, one could also have a potential asset.

Speaker's Ruling

I want to put on the floor here for the purposes of my remarks that the concept of having a potential asset and a contingent liability might, under the previous interpretation of our rules, have impaired the ability of members to speak and vote freely in the House. We all know that more than one member here has commenced a lawsuit. I believe the Prime Minister has commenced a lawsuit. I am not fully informed on that and I am sure members will correct me if I am wrong, but having commenced a lawsuit, the Prime Minister, as a member of the House of Commons having commenced the lawsuit, now has two things, I would suggest to the House. He has a potential asset in a recovery in that lawsuit and if it is a potential asset, then perhaps he should be recusing himself from voting or speaking on any of those issues in the House of Commons.

However, we have changed the rule now, but if the rule had stayed, I just put that question out there. Would the Prime Minister have become handicapped here as an MP, or would any other MP become handicapped because he or she commences a lawsuit and therefore has a potential asset?

The flip side of that is when one commences a lawsuit, one also has the possibility of losing a libel or slander lawsuit, a lawsuit for defamation. If one loses, the court system here in this country whacks the person up pretty good with legal costs, in fact, a lot of legal costs. Based on the old scale of solicitor and client costs, a loss in a libel or slander action could occasion hundreds of thousands of dollars of costs. That is a contingent liability, in my view. There is a possibility of a loss; there is a contingent liability. Even if one is suing in a lawsuit, let alone the issue of being sued in a lawsuit as a defendant, does one not have a contingent liability? If it is a contingent liability, based on the previous ruling of the Ethics Commissioner, we had a possible need to recuse and not speak. That could happen to any person on either side of the House.

• (1605)

The fix in the rules, the change we made last week, was intended to remove from that basket of issues the asset or liability, the personal interest where one has become a party to a lawsuit. The change in our rules referred to being a party in a lawsuit. It did not refer to being a defendant, or a plaintiff, or a third party, simply a party to a legal action.

I do not see anyone standing up and smiling and cheering here, but as of last week the circumstances that might have a member as a party to a lawsuit and therefore acquiring a contingent liability or a potential asset has been removed from the conflict of interest paradigm. I think we have fixed it.

I think I have answered the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. I have made reference to our ability to make the fix last week, possibly because we were in a minority government scenario and the votes necessary were there in the House. I say that on a fairly non-partisan basis, because I know there were members in parties on both sides of the House who truly had some questions and differences in relation to the motion that was ultimately adopted.

It is never an easy fix around here to get things through a House like that. It did happen and I think we should all be pleased by that outcome.

That would close my remarks and I thank my colleagues for that opportunity.

• (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River will indeed appreciate today the goodwill that he has established with his colleagues over the last 20 years that resulted in them giving him unanimous consent to speak.

As he knows, I was not inclined to give him the right to speak. In response to the point of order that he raised, page 476 of Marleau and Montpetit supports my own hesitation and I will read one sentence for his edification:

After a motion has been proposed to the House, the Speaker recognizes the mover as the first to speak in debate. If the mover chooses not to speak, he or she is nonetheless deemed to have spoken...

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the House saw fit to grant unanimous consent because I have another question for my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River. I want to apologize if I keep referring to his riding as RIVER Rouge. That is the river that runs on the Detroit side of the border down my way and I confuse the two.

I want to posit something to him. I have been picking up some discussion among the members of the Conservative government that the vote that carried that amendment to the rules last week was not binding because it needed to go through the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Today in the Speaker's ruling on the original privilege motion brought forward, he made no reference to whether that was binding. I am wondering if the member for Scarborough—Rouge River could comment on this position that I have heard bandied about, that because it did not go through the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the motion that we passed last week changing the rules in fact is not binding on the House until it has been reviewed by the procedure and House affairs committee with a recommendation report coming from it, and only when the report was accepted by the House would the change be binding on all of us.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I think the Speaker firmly dealt with that in his ruling today in referring to Speaker Fraser's decision in 1991, but even if Speaker Fraser's decision did not exist, I would have thought it would be clear to all members that it is the House that decides on what the Standing Orders are, not a committee.

A committee is there as a referee from the House to deliberate, study, recommend and report and that is what the procedure and House affairs committee does. It is the normal practice of this place to refer such matters to that committee. It is a committee that is particularly well equipped to deal with these issues. The agriculture committee, for example, would not be a committee to which we would send a rule change.

Speaker's Ruling

I am even of the view that in normal times we should not adopt a rule change without first referring it to the procedure and House affairs committee. We should not do it just as a matter of practice, because making rules is sometimes a fairly delicate surgery. I could gather 10 or 20 MPs, have a chat and we could probably come to a conclusion, but not when it comes to rule making and the traditions of the House. For heaven's sake, even the Ethics Commissioner seemed to have missed the totally fundamental piece of our free speech privileges when she did her work, and she is very skilled as a lawyer. I think these things should go to the procedure and House affairs committee.

That is why in my motion today, even though we fixed the problem, I still say that we should refer the subject matter to the procedure and House affairs committee in the event it wants to take a look at it and report back. My motion uses the phrase "if necessary".

In the end, this House absolutely and clearly has, and never did not have, complete and full jurisdiction on this floor, when the mace is sitting on the table, to make changes or rules for the operation of the House. We can also make laws for the country, but when we make rules for the House, we make them right here in this House and they do not have to go to a committee.

As an example, I believe the member for Crowfoot, who is an experienced member of the Conservative Party, has a motion as an item of private members' business that would have the House adopt a change to the Standing Orders. While I have already said that I do not think the House should coldly, blindly and on a summary basis make a rule change just like that without referring it to the committee or broadly consulting, the House clearly has the jurisdiction to do it and it did it last week.

I was the author of the motion, but I must say that before I moved it, I realized the significance of it and I consulted considerably with members opposite, members on this side, members of different parties. The table was fundamentally involved in assisting me in crafting the motion that was ultimately put before the House. I did that because I knew the complexity and importance of getting it right.

I am not sure all members in the House have a head for that kind of work, but I am one of quite a few members who take an interest in the rules of the House. I wanted to make sure I got it right and I worked very hard at doing my homework. The motion today was similarly crafted to not impose a stricture on the procedure and House affairs committee because it is not sitting, but at least give it the ability to deal with the issue if it feels so advised when it starts meeting again.

•(1615)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Scarborough—Rouge River for presenting his motion today. This is an important issue to be discussed in the House.

I had asked the member for Windsor—Tecumseh earlier about what has happened with committees in the House of Commons. The member refers in his motion to essentially referring this matter to the procedure and House affairs committee and he has given some very valid reasons for it to be referred to that committee.

However, we know that many committees have been rendered dysfunctional by what has been essentially a dirty tricks campaign by the Conservative government to try to undermine committee work and stymie the work that is taking place in committees. We have seen this time after time after time. We also saw this with the yet unproduced 200 page dirty tricks manual that was given to committee chairs.

I am wondering how the member for Scarborough—Rouge River feels about his motion, if it is adopted here, being referred to the procedure and House affairs committee with the dysfunction that we have seen occurring in that committee.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, if I had my way, I would get the question called on this particular motion and let the House get back to debating legislation. I think the government wants to get on with Bill C-7.

With reference to our committees, colleagues have to recognize that Parliament, with the House of Commons as a political instrument, is at this point filled with four parties, not one of which has a majority. We are dealing with a minority House and things happen in the context of minority governments and minority houses that would not happen normally in a routine majority government scenario.

The fact that we have a couple of committees, and we have more than a couple now, which are not properly working is a function of the stalemate that exists to some degree in and around this House now.

The government is trying to get its agenda through. Opposition parties each have their own agendas. There is a lot of competition on those competing agendas and sometimes the clash and the pressure creates the gridlock.

The procedure and House affairs committee, the justice committee, and maybe one or two others are feeling the strain. I wish that were not the case and there may only be one solution, which is to go back to the people in an election. But because the committees themselves are not the fundamental components of our House of Commons, the House itself is, we are still able to meet here today.

We are still getting some business done and, as I say, the government would really like to get back to dealing with some legislation. We just have a few days left this week before the summer recess. I will stay here for the debate, hoping it will not go on forever and ever.

As a member of Parliament, I was placed in the position today by the Speaker's ruling of having to move a motion. I suppose I might not have moved any motion, but he did invite the movement of a motion. I crafted it and I hope—

•(1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member now.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has the floor.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I almost missed my speaking opportunity because of the outpouring of praise and affection for my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River. We appreciate him making it possible for us to spend some time today reflecting on this important matter.

We do recognize and appreciate the contribution he has made not just now but throughout the years, especially on matters championing the privileges and the rights of members of Parliament to enable us to do our job thoroughly. He has made this his business. He has studied this and gained some expertise with great credibility.

I am proud to speak to this motion briefly today. The member has called upon us:

That, for the purpose of better assuring the privileges of this House and its members, including our ancient and undoubted privilege of free speech, the subject matter of the Speaker's ruling today on these issues be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for its consideration, and if necessary, to study and/or consult with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and/or report to the House.

I compliment the member on the language that he has chosen. It is stirring, moving and almost romantic in its tone and content.

This is a very worthwhile motion and very worthy of our time, especially perhaps in the twilight days and hours of this session of this Parliament. It is fitting that we pause and reflect, and take note of what has caused us some difficulty in this session. This gives us an opportunity to see what we can do better in future sessions of this Parliament.

It is especially important that this member and others have seized on this issue because in the last few weeks we have been dealing with a really troubling matter. We have been wrestling with something that I am no stranger to and that is the time honoured tradition of the corporate SLAPP suit being used as an instrument to silence dissidents and to silence opponents.

This became a great speciality of corporate America and corporate Canada in the sixties, the seventies, and the eighties, when environmentalists and other protest groups were starting to become a nuisance to the corporate sector in many ways.

One effective way to silence critics is to slap them with a lawsuit, even if it has no merit whatsoever. Even if it is frivolous, it is going to tie up opponents, cost them a fortune, slow them down, and scare the pants off them because they could lose their home and their security. In all likelihood, the corporate entity has a lot more ability to fight a protracted court battle than the persons being sued.

That is the corporate SLAPP suit as I know it and it has raised its ugly head around here in recent weeks and months. It seems as though the Conservatives have stumbled upon a valuable tool, an instrument that they can use to silence their opponents. Members should not just take my word for it, but if we do not do something about this and nip it in the bud, there will be so much paper flying around here in terms of corporate SLAPP suits and libel chill we will think we are in a snowstorm.

All someone would have to do in the context of the Conflict of Interest Code that forms a part of our Standing Orders is go down to the local convenience courtroom, as in convenience store, and file a frivolous lawsuit. A statement of claim will cost \$1,000. At that very

moment, under the rules that we are seeking to amend today, the member being sued would be silenced and barred, and prohibited from raising that subject in any way, shape or form in the House of Commons or at a standing committee. Members would not be stopped from speaking outside the House if they choose to risk digging themselves in deeper. They would still be free to talk.

In the very place where it matters, in the very place where we have privilege, not absolute privilege but pretty darn close to absolute free speech, that member of Parliament would have effectively been silenced. In fact, a lawsuit is about the only tool that could effectively silence an MP because we rigidly cling to the ancient parliamentary privilege of free speech. That is why I said I appreciated the language my colleague chose.

• (1625)

It is an ancient and time-honoured tradition, but by this fairly simple action, anybody with \$1,000 could shut me up.

Hon. John McKay: Don't tempt me.

Mr. Pat Martin: My colleague says, "Don't tempt me", but what is worrisome to me is that I have some strongly held views on some subjects and I have, from time to time, felt compelled to speak out on those matters.

Let me use one example. The Liberal MP whom I beat was the chair of the committee that toured the country on the drug patent review to extend the drug patent laws for the pharmaceutical industry, which has been called the biggest corporate giveaway since the railway lands were afforded to the CPR in the 1880s. It was a multibillion dollar gift to extend the drug patent laws, so that they could high-grade year after year and ignore the generics or the fact that we could make drugs cheaper and get them into the hands of sick people. That did not matter. The Liberals delivered to big pharma in a big way and it was appalling.

I said some very strongly worded things about big pharma and its conspiracy to milk sick people and to squeeze every last ounce and every last nickel that it could from sick people. If it wanted to silence me, and I should not advertise this, but it could go down and file a statement of claim that I had said something that exceeded what I should. Even if I was being abundantly careful or cautious in my language, it could file that statement of claim and under these rules, as was interpreted by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, I would not be able to raise big pharma in this House until that court case had gone down its tortuous route through every level of appeal. It could be three, four or five years that I would be silenced on that issue that I was passionate about.

I think every member of Parliament here would concede that that would be fundamentally wrong because it would not stop there. As soon as it became known that it was that easy, anybody who is passionate about any issue could be silenced in the exact same modus operandi, the same methodology.

Speaker's Ruling

That is why it is so important that we interrupt the proceedings and the debate on bills today to take this one step back, a pause and reflect, and correct this unacceptable situation before we move forward.

We have to lay the foundation and the ground rules. We have to correct them and fix them, so that we can do our job effectively when we come back in the fall if and when Parliament is reconvened.

I was a witness to the remarks that triggered this whole incident to some degree because they stemmed from activity at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. I have the honour of being the vice-chair of that committee and I know very well the member for West Nova, who found himself in hot water and really whose case triggered all the activity that flowed from it.

For our own protection, let us revisit what happened there because it could happen to any of us tomorrow. Let us review one simple fact.

Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney sued the people of Canada for \$50 million for saying that he took money from Karlheinz Schreiber. We later learned that he did take money from Karlheinz Schreiber, but in the meantime, we settled that \$50 million lawsuit and we gave him a \$2.1 million settlement, something a lot of Canadians are still furious about. In fact, it makes my blood boil a little just talking about it.

Let us keep in mind that of that \$2.1 million, only \$1.3 million was for legal fees. Over \$700,000 was paid to a PR firm to sell Canadians on his side of the story, so in fact the taxpayers of Canada ended up paying a PR firm, so that Brian Mulroney could sell us a cock-and-bull story that nobody in their right mind would believe, now that we know some of the details associated with sacks of money and secret hotel room meetings.

• (1630)

What got the member for West Nova into trouble was that he said something along the lines of retelling some of this story on a CTV news show, *Mike Duffy Live*. Immediately, Brian Mulroney's lawyers, no strangers to the corporate SLAPP suit, no strangers to manipulating the legal system and no strangers to parliamentary rights and privileges, having been a former member of Parliament and a former prime minister of Canada, came down with the hammer. Again, the classic, time honoured tradition of the corporate SLAPP suit reared its ugly head and the member for West Nova was served notice that a statement of claim had been filed for a libel suit against him. That is what triggered this whole mess.

In the context of an MP's right to speak freely in the House of Commons and in a parliamentary committee by extension of his rights in the House of Commons, no one is recommending that any MP can be irresponsible, go out and say wildly slanderous things and somehow be free of a libel suit. There is nothing in the context of any of the debate to date that advises we lighten up on what MPs can and cannot do outside of the realm of parliamentary privilege, even in the area of the scrub area, which is a grey area. It is not clearly defined what an MP can or cannot say. We are advised to be cautious. We are advised to be respectful, et cetera, or we may find ourselves sued.

What we are trying to clarify is that if a person is in fact named in a lawsuit, frivolous or warranted, that should not preclude the person from speaking about that subject in the House and in parliamentary committee during the period of time that the lawsuit winds its way through the legal system. This is the difference and that is what happened to my colleague from West Nova.

He could still speak about whether Brian Mulroney accepted any kickbacks in the Bear Head project or the Airbus scandal. He would be free to talk about those things outside, on TV, in the press, anywhere but in Parliament. However, the worst thing happened to him. He was one of the most effective members on our committee in dealing with these complicated subjects. He was barred and precluded from raising that subject at all at committee or in the House of Commons. We lost his voice as we moved forward in the study of whether Brian Mulroney accepted kickbacks and whether those bags of cash were in fact some kind of payment for services rendered other than to go off to sell tanks to China and other countries, where armaments are not supposed to be sold.

That is what got us into this whole mess. I was there. I think it is helpful and instructive in fact for members of Parliament to take note of how this happened. As I have said, what happened to my colleague from West Nova could happen to any of my colleagues in the House of Commons today at any moment.

To take it to a ridiculous extent, we could all be silenced. If the House of Commons was getting to be a real nuisance and pressing the nerves of too many outside interests, private individuals, businesses, corporations, anybody could silence us with a lawsuit tomorrow. That is why this had to be dealt with urgently.

We tried at the access to information committee. I moved a motion that was not unlike the motion my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River brought into the House as a Liberal opposition day motion. In fact, it was almost word for word. It was deemed to be out of order, that our committee could not deal with amending the Standing Orders, which has the conflict of interest code inherent in them. Only the procedure and House affairs committee could deal with the issue of amending the Standing Orders.

We all know that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has been in a logjam for months. It has been completely stonewalled by a filibuster triggered by the government side.

New things are happening in Parliament of which people should take note. First, there is the fact that we now have had an interpretation of the Standing Orders where being named in a lawsuit actually silences a member. The other thing is we have government side members using another time honoured tradition, filibustering, to stifle democracy at standing committees right across the parliamentary precinct. This is unprecedented. I hope perhaps when we come back in the fall, steps will be taken to address that as well, because that grinds democracy to a halt just as surely as silencing members of Parliament grinds democracy to a halt.

Speaker's Ruling

We were unable to refer this matter to its logical place of business, the procedure and House affairs committee. We tried urgently at the ethics committee, knowing full well it was beyond the mandate of the ethics committee, but in a sense of urgency, because we could not allow this situation to develop any further. Members' freedom of speech, a member's right to speak freely on subjects, was being jeopardized and challenged by the ruling of the Ethics Commissioner.

• (1635)

We should make it clear that our committee did not find fault with the ruling of the Ethics Commissioner. In fact, we have confidence in the Ethics Commissioner, but her hands were tied. Given the language of the Conflict of Interest Code, of the Standing Orders of the day, she made the only ruling she could, given the facts that were presented to her and the situation in which the member for West Nova found himself. No one is criticizing the member for West Nova. I found it very helpful because we owe the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner a debt of gratitude in a way. She quite rightly alerted Parliament to a set of circumstances that could not be allowed to continue or we would be unable to do our job properly.

It is useful to take note again of what happened at our ethics committee. That really led to the situation we find ourselves in now.

It was November 15 when the member for West Nova attended the committee as an acting member. There was a motion at that time that we investigate the Mulroney-Schreiber airbus scandal, as it came to be known, because Mr. Karlheinz Schreiber was on the verge of being extradited back to Germany, removed from Canada to face criminal charges in Germany for influence peddling, bribery and paying off politicians in that country, the same thing he is being accused of or that we believe happened in our country.

Therefore, there was a sense of urgency. We were trying to get this motion to the floor. As I moved the motion that we deal with it, we were interrupted by the member for Dufferin—Caledon, a Conservative member and a vice-chair of the committee. I am the one opposition vice-chair and he is the other vice-chair. He said:

The point of order, Mr. Chairman, is that I believe [the member for West Nova] should recuse himself from this committee. He cannot use this committee as an examination for discovery—or a question, as it is now known in the legal field—to further his personal action. Justice must appear to be done, whether it's in the courts or whether it's in this committee.

In other words, he was accusing the member for West Nova of trying to take advantage of his privileged position on a standing committee to interview the person who was suing him for libel, the argument being that the member for West Nova would have had an unfair competitive advantage over the citizen who was suing him if he were allowed to grill him in an aggressive manner with the cameras rolling in the public eye.

This took us all aback. No one had ever considered or contemplated that a member of Parliament was automatically deemed to be in a conflict of interest just because he or she was named in a libel lawsuit. This seems to be something that was cooked up with Mr. Mulroney's lawyers and the Conservative Party of Canada. The member for Dufferin—Caledon was sent in there with a pretty good set of notes, a binder and a set of facts to argue the case that the member should not be allowed to question Brian Mulroney.

Very suspicious as well was the fact that the member for Dufferin—Caledon knew about the lawsuit before the member for West Nova who was named in the lawsuit. Somehow the Conservative Party had some privileged information about the fact that Brian Mulroney's lawyers had traipsed down to a courthouse and filed a statement of claim.

This led us to another worrisome realization. By the interpretation of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, she determined that the very moment the statement of claim was filed, the person named in the statement of claim was in conflict of interest and had a personal interest in the case and therefore should be silenced. A gag order effectively would be placed on that person and he would not be allowed to ask questions or speak on that subject in the House of Commons.

• (1640)

I am very concerned this situation arose. I am grateful that we have had the opportunity to address it in an opposition day motion and I am urgently—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has now spoken for 20 minutes and we will now have questions and comments.

I see that the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster is eager to ask him a question and he has the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Winnipeg Centre had so much more to offer to the House of Commons and he had not completed all of the information. What further points did he want to make to the House?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to finish at least one of the thoughts that I was trying to develop before I ran out of time.

Let me conclude the way I began. The whole purpose of this exercise is to deter and to stop this time honoured tradition of the corporate SLAPP suit from infiltrating into the House of Commons and into our parliamentary process. Libel chill should not silence members of Parliament. We cannot allow it to silence members of Parliament. It would be too easy. As I say, it costs \$1,000 to file a statement of claim to begin the process of libel proceedings of a defamation lawsuit.

In this case, Brian Mulroney sued the people of Canada, not the Government of Canada, for \$50 million for saying that he took money from Karlheinz Schreiber and the government paid him an out of court settlement of \$2.1 million for the defamation lawsuit, claiming that he was defamed.

Therefore, he is no stranger to this practice. Believe me that did silence things. Back then when Brian Mulroney filed that first defamation lawsuit, the RCMP slammed shut their investigation, all avenues of investigation ended, the government issued letters of apology, it apologized to everybody under the sun for having implied even that he may have taken money from Karlheinz Schreiber and then paid him \$2.1 million.

Speaker's Ruling

I guess he learned that trick so well, that he did it again. As soon as a member of Parliament became a nuisance, became too effective, he slapped another lawsuit on him. Then the rules of the House of Commons kicked in to do his dirty work for him. It was not even the courts necessarily that silenced him this time. He exploited a loophole, a weakness in the Conflict of Interest Code, which forms a part of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, and that effectively silenced my colleague from West Nova.

I do not care from what party my colleague. It is fundamentally wrong. I will stand in this place and defend his right to speak even if I do not agree with what he says all the time. It is wrong when any one of us is attacked in this way by an outside force, especially when it is really in self-interest. The self-interest in this issue is not on the part of my colleague, the member for West Nova. It is on the part of the guy who sued him, who was watching his backside. We were getting too close to the truth about what happened between Brian Mulroney and Karlheinz Schreiber and he and his lawyers went into damage control and tried to silence MPs.

We cannot allow that to happen. I am proud that we are working hard today, in one of these final days of this session of the 39th Parliament, to correct this situation so it cannot happen again. By the time we resume in the fall, we hope it will be in the context of new rules where libel chill will not silence MPs and this whole notion of the corporate SLAPP suit will no longer affect my right to stand in this place and say the things that need to be said.

• (1645)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. 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 Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Public Transit; the hon. member for Yukon, Burma.

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

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member. In our committee, the Subcommittee on Human Rights, we have heard significant testimony in the case of Omar Khadr. There is an interest that when Lieutenant Commander Kuebler, his lawyer from the commission in the U.S., was up, he provided testimony. I am fearful now hearing this that perhaps it might have even opened the door for another country to file a lawsuit to prevent testimony or to limit the activities of one of our committees. This is very disconcerting.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, that does raise an interesting point. As I understand the ruling from the Ethics Commissioner, she cautioned Parliament that she had no alternative but to rule in the way that she did, but she did make this point. I am going to refer to her words because I do not want to misquote her. She said on page 24 of her original report dated May 7:

Concerns have been raised about the use of lawsuits, more particularly libel suits, to prevent a Member from performing his or her duties in the House of Commons. I cannot predict whether this may indeed become a problem and I hope it does not. Should this become a serious concern for Members...the Code could be adjusted to except libel suits from the ambit of "private interest" for the purposes of sections 8 and 13.

In other words, she recognized that it could become a problem, and we have realized that it is a problem. If the liability associated

with a slander suit puts one in a conflict of interest where one is trying to promote one's own private interests by asking questions about it, then we have been effectively muzzled and gagged.

I believe that pressure could come from outside the country. A lawsuit is a lawsuit in a jurisdiction that we recognize and that has the rule of law, such as the United States. My colleague raises a very interesting question. It would make MPs that much more vulnerable again and re-emphasizes the urgency for addressing this unacceptable situation.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I will ask a question similar to one that I asked the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

The gumming up of the works, the dirty tricks of the Conservative government in the committee structure, means that the motion referring this matter to the procedure and House affairs committee is itself one that is likely to be derailed because of the 200 page dirty tricks manual that the Conservative chairs use at the committee level.

We have seen the problems with procedure and House affairs. Could the member for Winnipeg Centre comment on that aspect of the motion?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I, too, am concerned with the referral to the procedure and House affairs committee. As we know, the Conservatives have been operating with what we call the anarchist's handbook at committees. They flip it open to page (b), (c) or (d) based on the urgency of the situation.

Having said that, I would like to move an amendment to the motion of today. I move: that at the end of the words "free speech" we add "and ensuring that nothing in the Conflict of Interest Code or the Standing Orders inadvertently interferes with or diminishes from the privileges of members of the House of Commons".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I will take the amendment under advisement for the moment. We will return to debate and recognize the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

• (1650)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, libel chill and SLAPP suits: that is how the Conservative government has been governing and that is the kind of impact we are seeing in this House of Commons.

It is very appropriate that today the member for Scarborough—Rouge River has moved this important motion, which we will be debating in what I think will be some interesting discussions around the extent to which, given the Speaker's ruling, we can simply manifest our ability as parliamentarians to speak responsibly but to speak fully on any issue that the House is seized with. This is a fundamentally important principle, as members well know, and I will come back to it in a moment.

Speaker's Ruling

However, very fortunately, I am following the member for Winnipeg Centre and the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who both have spoken very eloquently on what the Conservative government has been attempting to do with members of Parliament and on what this Speaker's ruling that we heard perhaps just 90 minutes ago is doing to re-establish that principle of parliamentary privilege, of parliamentarians speaking out on issues that matter to their constituents and also on issues that matter to the nation.

Earlier, the Conservative government wanted to bring forward Bill C-7. Bill C-7 is also known as the unsafe skies act. Essentially what it would do is diminish safety and security in our airline industry and bring what we call self-serve safety into the realm of transportation.

We know that SMS did not work in the railway industry. Derailments skyrocketed and fatalities increased. We saw there that SMS did not work and the NDP has been speaking out very diligently and very responsibly, of course, but very loudly, about the perils that are contained within the bill.

If the Conservatives had their way with this libel chill attempt, any company that wanted to try to shut us up could simply slap down a lawsuit and say that we could not talk about the increasing number of derailments in British Columbia or about the environmental devastation.

Would it be a spurious lawsuit? Of course it would, but this principle that the Conservatives have been trying to bring in is essentially that one could bring in that libel chill or that SLAPP suit whether the facts were provided responsibly or not. Then the parliamentarian would essentially be muzzled for the period of that lawsuit.

Let us think about that. Let us think about the impact on discussions around Bill C-7 if the public is unable to find out what self-serve safety, the safety management systems that the Conservatives are trying to bring in for commercial airlines, has done to the railway industry. No one in the House disputes the fact that we have seen a skyrocketing increase in derailments over the last few years, that we have seen increasing fatalities, or that SMS in railways has been a complete and utter schmozzle, but the SLAPP suit essentially makes that fundamental ability to speak out on these—

• (1655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. The hon. Minister of Natural Resources is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gary Lunn: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to bring to the attention of the Speaker the fact that the member is going on about Bill C-7. In fact, we should be debating the amendment to the question of privilege, not Bill C-7. I would call relevance on this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The point of order made by the hon. Minister of Natural Resources is well taken, especially since Bill C-7 is the next debate up.

Meanwhile, I wish to rule on the amendment presented by the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre. It is not receivable. It was not presented during his debate period but during questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. He will want to get back to the subject at hand right now, which is the motion moved by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to the motion. I am showing to what extent it could impact on other areas of legislation if the ability to provoke libel chill and SLAPP suits is kept.

It is, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, completely relevant to raise those issues. Whether we are talking about the railway industry or business aircraft, a company could choose to bring a spurious lawsuit when we raise, for example, the escalating number of accidents we have seen with business aircraft since SMS were brought into that sector.

A company could follow the Conservatives' example and put in a libel chill, a SLAPP suit. Then what happens to my ability as a member to speak out against the increasing number of derailments we have seen in railways under SMS, to speak out against the increasing fatality rate that we have seen in business aircraft since SMS were brought in, relating it of course to what would happen if we brought it in for commercial airlines generally? My ability to speak on those issues would be impugned.

It is very relevant. I know you understand that, of course, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Natural Resources obviously does not.

I would like to flag that at the end of my speech I will be offering an amendment to this excellent motion that has been brought forward by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

I spoke about the libel chill, the SLAPP suit that was essentially put in by the Conservatives. The attempt then, with this definition, is that once a lawsuit is brought in, essentially that parliamentarian has handcuffs around his or her arms. The deaf community likes to use handcuffs to signify that a person using American sign language is essentially stopped from communicating.

I have a great many deaf constituents in Burnaby—New Westminster. There are two schools for the deaf. I think the American sign language term is a very appropriate one for this: essentially handcuffs are put on the arms so that the deaf cannot communicate. With the SLAPP suit, the libel chill, it is the same principle: the ability to speak is impugned. That is the essential problem.

We have seen this type of libel chill used in other countries. It is used very deliberately to try to shut down opposition politicians. We can think of a number of Asian examples where lawsuits have been brought in and have essentially stifled an active and democratic opposition from being able to speak out on important issues: issues such as rail safety, for example, or business aircraft safety, commercial aircraft safety and the use of self-serve safety systems and how much that would impact on the public's ability to travel safely in Canada.

Those kinds of issues would be stifled if we had the principle that a libel chill or a SLAPP suit could simply shut down a member's ability to speak. These are fundamentally important issues.

Speaker's Ruling

Now I would like to come back to what I mentioned at the beginning of my speech before I was interrupted, inappropriately in my mind, by the Minister of Natural Resources.

• (1700)

Mr. Pat Martin: It was meanspirited, I thought.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre says it was meanspirited, and I think it was.

Because members of the Conservative government are nervous when we start talking about the real impact of Bill C-7, they jump up to try to shut down any mention of Bill C-7. It is very similar to the libel chill SLAPP suit that we are talking about in the motion itself, which is essentially that libel chill they exhibit here in the House. When we start talking about the impacts, boy, they just jump up and try to shut us down. It is very unfortunate, but we are certainly seeing their reaction in the House. I cannot understand this, but I will come back to it later. Now—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake is rising on a point of order.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the member is just using baffle-gab and filling up his time with words. He is not dealing with the relevance of the motion. He is trying to refer to Bill C-7 and he is jumping all over the place, but he is not tying anything in to the debate about referring the Speaker's ruling to the procedure and House affairs committee and making sure that the privileges of members of the House are protected.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you rule that he stays focused. That may be very difficult for him, but I would ask that he keep his comments on par with what we are discussing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake and I ask the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster to sit until I sit.

I will seek from the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster the goodwill and good faith for which I know him to focus his remarks on the motion that was presented by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, and to wait for the other debates that are being scheduled in order to debate those other issues.

I would ask him to focus on the issue at hand. I trust that he can do that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this is very much related to the matter at hand. It is the whole question of libel chill and SLAPP suits.

I would like to go back to the evolution. Obviously, Conservatives do not like any mention of the words “air safety”, so I will stay away from mentioning SMS, self-serve safety, and the unsafe skies act. I will stay away from all those issues and focus on the motion, but it is important to note that when there are sensitive issues, there is a libel chill that is possible.

The ruling of the Speaker today is very salutary because it essentially says that those libel chills, those SLAPP suits, are inappropriate given the nature of parliamentary privilege. The Speaker said very clearly in his ruling that it is the responsibility of the Speaker to act as the guardian of the rights and privileges of members and of the House as an institution.

He cited Marleau and Montpetit, which of course as you know, Mr. Speaker, is our parliamentary bible. He went on to quote Marleau and Montpetit to say that the duty of the Speaker is to ensure that the right of members to free speech is protected and exercised to the fullest possible extent.

Therefore, when we talk about air safety, we are protecting free speech and the ability to speak on that issue. I am making a link between air safety issues, though certain Conservative members in the House do not like that, and the issue of libel chill and SLAPP suits.

How did these rights develop? We can go back to the Magna Carta, which was the first document that essentially said that there was no longer absolute power, that there were rights to free speech that were enshrined for democratically elected representatives. Of course, in those days, we are talking 900 years ago—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Again, I must interrupt the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to the member for Burnaby—New Westminster that as long as he is going to make historical references, he should actually go beyond the Magna Carta.

The Magna Carta and all that preceded it was based on the premise of the courts of assize. The courts of assize, as you well know, of course, Mr. Speaker, was an invention some would say by the Normans who preceded all of the Anglo developments that followed William of Normandy. Those first courts of assize took place in my home town.

I wonder if the member for Burnaby—New Westminster—

• (1705)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence. We are all anxious to listen to the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster and I am sure that under questions and comments, the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence will bring these points up.

Meanwhile, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has the floor for another six and a half minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: I will have to disagree with you on one point, Mr. Speaker. It is quite obvious that Liberals and Conservatives in the House are not interested in hearing at all about parliamentary privilege and how it relates to speaking out against their safety issues. They just pop up the moment the words “air” or “safety” or “protect safe skies” are mentioned.

I will not go back beyond the Magna Carta because I only have a little over six minutes left in my time, although I know my colleagues will be bringing that up and particularly the 11th and 12th century. I am going to have to skip over that evolution.

Speaker's Ruling

The important principle that was enshrined in the Magna Carta for the first time was the right to parliamentary free speech and that right was shared by nobility. It was not widespread to everyone. It was the first time that absolute monarchs actually had their ability to shut down democratic debate curtailed. That was a fundamental evolution in the development of our parliamentary system, one that has been copied and used around the world.

In subsequent centuries, the ability for free speech was gradually widened. Through the civil wars in the 16th century a battle took place around the right to free parliamentary speech and absolute despotism was in constant conflict. It was not as if there was a linear development of parliamentary free speech or parliamentary privilege throughout this period. There were times when we went backward. There were times when despotism imposed itself, even in the British parliamentary system that we use today.

We come to the 18th century and the foundation of the first parliament in Nova Scotia in what is now known as Canada, the country that we are all proud to represent.

From that point on in 1758 legislatures developed throughout Canada the gradual enshrining of democratic free speech and parliamentary privilege. That continued on up until this Parliament.

What happened in this Parliament? That is really the question. Why are we debating this motion today rather than talking about air safety or unsafe skies? We are talking about this parliamentary motion because something happened over the last few months. What happened was the provision for libel chill.

Through a number of circumstances detailed by the member for Winnipeg Centre the definition of parliamentary privilege was essentially reduced. If a lawsuit was brought in, whether legitimate or not, whether spurious or not, a member, according to the definition, was circumscribed from speaking out on that issue. That is the problem. That is what we are looking at here. Essentially, that libel chill was brought in as a result of government direction and as a result of that interpretation.

That is why the member for Scarborough—Rouge River raised this important point of privilege. That is why today, fortunately, we have the Speaker's ruling on this issue of parliamentary privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask you at this time just to indicate to me visually how many minutes remain in my time because, as I mentioned, I will be providing an amendment at the end of my speech. If you could advise me when there is a minute left I will be more than pleased to offer my amendment, which I am sure will trigger more discussion in the House on this important issue, and I am sure will trigger more points of order from the Conservatives who object to any mention or discussion around air safety.

We have the Speaker's ruling, your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and I am speaking of you as part of a collective body of Speakers.

Mr. David Christopherson: The royal you.

Mr. Peter Julian: The royal you, as the member for Hamilton Centre says.

This interpretation is an extremely important one. It says that it appears reasonable to conclude that the privileges of all members are

immediately placed in jeopardy by this so-called provision of a libel suit that places restrictions on the ability of a member to speak and to vote in the House and committee.

● (1710)

That is really the importance of the motion today. But we believe in this corner of the House, always working to improve things, that this motion could be improved and as a result, after free speech, I will propose the following amendment.

I move to add, after the words "free speech":

and ensuring nothing in the Conflict of Interest Code of the Standing Orders inadvertently interferes with or diminishes any privileges of the members of the House of Commons.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I will take the amendment under advisement for the moment.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found it useful that the member for Burnaby—New Westminster guided us through some of the parliamentary history that got us to the set of privileges that we enjoy and value in the House of Commons today.

I remind members that the motion put forward by my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River uses language that I think captures both the tone as well as the content of what we are trying to achieve today, when he makes reference to the ancient and undoubted privilege of free speech. I find that almost romantic. It is really quite beautiful the way that he has phrased that.

I want to thank my colleague for guiding us through the stepping stones of development that got us to the situation we enjoy today.

I think it would be helpful for the people back home who may be watching this today if there were other examples that we could cite that may possibly come up where members of Parliament would be barred, prohibited or blocked from commenting on in the business or the corporate or the commercial world.

In the transportation industry, for instance, would there be examples in the state of affairs that is developing in that commercial sector where it would want MPs to stop talking about it? It would be instructive, I think, if we had an example at hand that he could share with us today.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg Centre because the example that I can give, given that he has asked me this question, is the issue of transportation safety and bills before this House, such as Bill C-7.

The bill is a very clear example of where libel chill or a SLAPP suit could essentially impinge on members of Parliament. There are, for example, the NDP members in this House, who have been fighting Bill C-7. This is a bill that essentially provides for self-serve safety, delegation of safety to the companies themselves. There are company CEOs, some of which will do a good job and some of whom will not do a good job.

We have been comparing what has actually happened in SMS, first with rail safety and, subsequently, the imposition of SMS in business aircraft. In both cases, we saw an increase in the number of fatalities and an increase in the number of derailments.

If we were speaking out on those issues, it is quite likely, as the member for Winnipeg Centre references in his question, that we could have a spurious lawsuit because we were using facts and responsibility. That is what we are raising. Essentially, we could have a SLAPP suit brought in if we kept on before today's Speaker's ruling and before this motion was brought before the House. Such a libel chill or SLAPP suit would, essentially, circumscribe us from being able to comment on those issues.

We could not comment on the fact that it did not work for railway safety, that it made things worse. We could not say that SMS did not work for business aircraft safety, that it made things worse. Surely, particularly with the cutbacks that we have seen in flight inspectors, a couple of hundred positions that have basically been gutted and are unfilled through attrition, that essentially this means the same sort of dangers inherent in bringing SMS into commercial aircraft.

If I were to raise that in the House, we could have a libel chill. The member for Winnipeg Centre is doing Canadians a favour by raising this issue. It is something that could happen if we do not adopt this motion and the amendment that I have offered as well, and if we do not move forward to ensure that this decision of the Speaker is enshrined in the House of Commons.

• (1715)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his amendment.

As I have been sitting here listening to this debate, I am reminded of what I used to speak to new Canadians when they come to Canada, and the member for Hamilton Centre will have heard me in Hamilton when I point to the pin that I wear that allows me access to this place and gives recognition of my status, having been elected as a member of Parliament to speak on behalf of my constituents.

It strikes me, the fear that that would transfer from this House to there, if the ruling had not come down in favour of protecting us, particularly because some new Canadians come from countries where they fear their government, they fear their police and they fear their military and we would be adding one more chill to all of this.

Again, I commend the member and would ask him if he feels the same would occur in his community.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has been doing a stellar job on the subcommittee on human rights, which is part of foreign affairs and international trade. I know he has the congratulations of members from all four corners of the House.

He is raising these issues of human rights internationally, so he knows very well of what he is speaking. He is absolutely right as well. Rights are not something that can simply be diminished. Rights are something that must be maintained and any diminution of the human rights that we have, such as the right to speak, need to be closely safeguarded against. We need to ensure that kind of thing does not happen.

That is exactly what happened with the libel chill SLAPP suit provisions that the Conservatives were bringing in. That is exactly the kind of thing that we saw happen and the Speaker's ruling, thankfully, very clearly contradicts that. It clearly says:

Speaker's Ruling

For these reasons I believe the matter [raised by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River] has met the necessary conditions to be given priority consideration by the House and accordingly I rule that this is a prima facie matter of privilege and I invite the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River to move his motion.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, your collective decision has then been essentially incorporated into the motion that would allow this ruling to be brought to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and then reported to the House. The NDP has moved what we believe to be a further improvement to the motion as originally moved by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

I thank the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for his question. As always, it is relevant, right to the point and effective.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Notwithstanding the pun about the royal you, the royal we find the amendment to be in order, although not in the usual penmanship that we find with our normal clerks.

• (1720)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need to underscore the importance of this debate. I know there are probably government members who will at some point, either on the floor or in some fashion, be asking why are we wasting our time on this when we should be dealing with blah, blah, blah.

The reality is that stopping and dealing with these kinds of fundamental issues are crucial when they happen because we soon forget about them and go on about our daily business. This is not a partisan issue and it is not even about us. It is about those people who are elected to sit here. Today it is us but there will be a day when it will be someone else. So this is about the rights of members of Parliament. As time goes on, those issues will pop up and at that moment, as you had to do today, Mr. Speaker, and as the Table had to do, there is a scramble to determine what the ruling should be.

The first thing that is looked at is the precedent for when it came up in the past, what was said, what the circumstances were and whether any of them were similar to the issue at hand. It could be decades before anything remotely similar comes up. However, a parliament in the future expects that those who came before would have done their job, just as we are fortunate enough that parliamentarians who came before us took the time to lay down the foundations that are truly the basis for our democracy in this great country. Therefore, this is important.

It would be fair for someone to ask, because I know it crossed my mind, that we have had the issue come up, we have had the ruling, we had a review and another report as a result of actions taken by the House, what is left to do? That is a fair question. The amendment is particularly important because it talks about ensuring that if there are any unexpected results from this rule change, which, in the world of the CIA is called “blowback”, will it affect other things that we have not thought of. Given the fundamental importance of this issue, it makes every good sense to ensure we do the job thoroughly and properly.

Government Orders

If the committee could spend as little as five minutes taking a look at it and saying that everything is okay, so be it. However, if it is not, we need to grab it now, wrestle with it while the issue is fresh in front of us, while we have actually made changes to our Standing Orders or the code which forms part of our Standing Orders, so that when it comes up again in the future the homework will have been done and we will have done collectively what we believed was the best we could do in the interest of current and future parliamentarians.

If anyone thinks that this is all inside baseball, that nobody really cares about this and that even though we can think it is a big deal, no one else does, I would like to place on the record two editorials from the *Globe and Mail*. Unless I missed the memo, the *Globe and Mail* is still considered to be the national paper of record. That is the paper that takes it upon itself to watch the national scene in a very detailed way on a regular basis as opposed to most of the other great newspapers and the not so great newspapers, which will, from time to time comment.

If we were wasting a lot of time on this issue or if it were not important, believe me the *Globe and Mail* would be the first to say so. On May 12 of this year, the *Globe and Mail* stated:

• (1725)

In March, at the height of the Chuck Cadman affair, [the Prime Minister] threatened to personally sue [the leader of the official opposition] for libel over allegations of attempted bribery. Few would suggest that, had the Prime Minister followed through, the Liberal Leader would have had to recuse himself from parliamentary debate on the controversy. But based on a ruling last week by the federal Ethics Commissioner, Mary Dawson, [the leader of the official opposition] would have had little choice.

Among all MPs, [the] Liberal [member for West Nova] was most aggressive last fall in asking questions about the relationship between former prime minister Brian Mulroney and businessman Karlheinz Schreiber. It only made sense that he would sit in on the ethics committee's hearings into the affair when they began in November, establishing himself as one of the few MPs with a strong grasp of the relevant issues.

I did not say that they were always correct. I said that they did not always pay attention.

The *Globe and Mail* goes on to state:

But in response to a query from [the] Conservative MP [from Dufferin—Caledon] Ms. Dawson has ruled that because he was facing a lawsuit from Mr. Mulroney over comments he made during a television interview, [the member for West Nova] had a “private interest” in the matter that left him in violation of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons.

Ms. Dawson is right that [the member for West Nova] — who had not yet been served with a libel notice in November, but was aware of its likelihood—

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that the member is reading very fast, and it must be very hard for the interpreters to keep up. I would ask him to consider the interpreters when reading a text. He is reading far too quickly.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Perhaps the hon. member could have some understanding of the problem with the interpreters keeping pace. If he could continue, he has about 13 minutes left.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I will do that. It is here in both languages in the record. I am just watching my time but I will certainly slow it down a pace.

—should have disclosed this potential conflict at the outset of the committee's proceedings. But her assessment that he should have recused himself from the hearings because the lawsuit gave him a financial interest sets a troubling precedent.

The message has now been sent that it is possible to silence our elected representatives by filing lawsuits against them, regardless of their merit. This may not be Ms. Dawson's fault; perhaps the rules should be amended to make clear that lawsuits do not belong alongside business investments and other assets and liabilities as private interests that present conflicts. But the principle must be preserved that, as parliamentary privilege is meant to ensure, MPs are able to openly air their concerns sheltered from the legal concerns they might face in the outside world. The last thing Parliament needs is a wave of libel chill.

The second *Globe and Mail* editorial was on May 20 and it stated:

It might have been a bit much to expect [the Prime Minister's] Conservatives to rally to the defence of [the] Liberal MP[for West Nova]. But for the Tories to wholeheartedly embrace Ethics Commissioner Mary Dawson's recent ruling against him, and the libel chill that it encourages, displays short-sightedness on their part.

Even Ms. Dawson seemed to recognize that her ruling might necessitate a change in the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons. By the code's definition, she found, a lawsuit filed by Brian Mulroney over comments [the member for West Nova] made in a television interview represented a “private interest” that should have led the MP to recuse himself from committee hearings into the Mulroney-Schreiber affair. But given concerns “about the use of lawsuits, more particularly libel suits, to prevent a Member from performing his or her duties in the House of Commons,” she wrote, Parliament might wish to amend the rules—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The member will have 10 and a half minutes left when we return to this item.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from June 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans), be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the third reading stage of Bill C-29.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung

• (1755)

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

(Division No. 157)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Angus
Arthur	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Baird	Barbot
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bellavance
Benoit	Bevington
Bezan	Bigras
Black	Blackburn

Government Orders

Blais
Bonsant
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cardin
Carrier
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davidson
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Doyle
Dykstra
Epp
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gagnon
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Grewal
Guimond
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malo
Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Mayes
Ménard (Hochelega)
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mourani
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Richardson
Roy
Shiple
Skelton
Sorenson
Stanton
Strahl
Thi Lac
Basques
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 185

Blaney
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie
Casey
Charlton
Chow
Clarke
Comuzzi
Crowder
Cummins
Davies
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Dewar
Duceppe
Emerson
Faille
Finley
Flaherty
Freeman
Galipeau
Godin
Goodyear
Gravel
Guergis
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Julian
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
Lebel
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunn
Lussier
MacKenzie
Manning
Marston
Mathysen
McDonough
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Mills
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paradis
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Priddy
Reid
Ritz
Schellenberger
Siksay
Solberg
St-Cyr
Storseth
Sweet
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Wasylcia-Leis
Williams

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bevilacqua
Boshcoff
Byrne
Coderre
Cuzner
Easter
Fry
Goodale
Hall Findlay
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
MacAulay
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Pacetti
Pearson
Redman
Rodriguez
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
St. Amand
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Turner
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

Bagnell
Bennett
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Chan
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Dhaliwal
Eyking
Godfrey
Guarnieri
Hubbard
Kadis
Lee
Malhi
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Proulx
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Silva
St. Denis
Telegdi
Tonks
Valley
Wilson
Zed — 64

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, if you seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motions: one, “That, in relation to its study on the seal harvest, seven members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel to Brussels, Belgium in September/October 2008 and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee”; two, “That, for the remainder of this session, during its consideration of matters pursuant to Standing Order 83.1, the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to adjourn from place to place within Canada and to permit the broadcasting of its proceedings thereon, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee”; three, “That, in relation to its study of science and technology in Canada, twelve (12) members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be authorized to travel to Waterloo, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec; Sydney, Nova Scotia; Boston, Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. in September 2008 and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee”; and four, “That, at any time the House stands adjourned during June 2008, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has ready a report, when that report is deposited with the Clerk, it shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House”.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, on the last three motions I would give my consent, but on the first one I would not.

The fisheries committee went to all of the fishing provinces in Canada except Nova Scotia. They refused to come and hold public hearings in Nova Scotia. If they will not do that, they should not be allowed to go to Brussels in Belgium.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I would ask then that the other motions I read into the record be deemed adopted by the House unanimously.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. government whip have unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

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

That, for the remainder of this session, during its consideration of matters pursuant to Standing Order 83.1, the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to adjourn from place to place within Canada and to permit the broadcasting of its proceedings thereon, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

(Motion agreed to)

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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

That, in relation to its study of science and technology in Canada, twelve (12) members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be authorized to travel to Waterloo, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec; Sydney, Nova Scotia; Boston, Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. in September 2008 and that the necessary staff do accompany the Committee.

(Motion agreed to)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

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

That, at any time the House stands adjourned during June 2008, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has ready a report, when that report is deposited with the Clerk, it shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1800)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on the point of order by the hon. member opposite.

The fisheries committee was in Nova Scotia. It is too bad that the hon. member was not paying attention and did not realize that it was there.

As far as the two members travelling to Brussels, it is to engage directly with the Europeans over the seal hunt, which is very important to Nova Scotians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unanimous consent for the first motion was withheld. I hope members rising on points of order are not rising to engage in debate.

I will go to the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, the member was not listening to what I said. I said that the fisheries committee held public hearings in all the fishing provinces except Nova Scotia. It did not hold public hearings in Nova Scotia. There are a lot of problems in Nova Scotia, especially along the Northumberland Strait, Pictou—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about the precedent that this is setting.

The issue that the hon. member is speaking of is in relation to a small craft harbour. This House did grant leave to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to examine the small craft harbour file. If we were to create duplication or overlap and start creating parity as to where this committee should travel based on whether or not deals are cut in the House, I would ask the hon. member to respect the fact that the committee wants to express itself on the seal hunt, and if he has a difference of opinion with the hon. member of the Conservative Party from his own province, what he really should do is resolve it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. Resuming debate on the privilege motion.

In my opinion this is very clear cut. Unanimous consent was sought and unanimous consent was denied.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst is rising on a point of order. I hope it is not the same point of order.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, it is not the same point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I am rising just to say it is regrettable that the member for Sault Ste. Marie had to go on his own to Ireland on poverty and the government has refused a trip for all members of all committees to go when—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Orders of the day.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Hamilton Centre has 10 minutes left in his allotted time.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will continue with the riveting reading I was doing, putting on the record the editorial from the *Globe and Mail* of May 20 of this year. I believe I left off with the sentence that states:

But given concerns “about the use of lawsuits, more particularly libel suits, to prevent a Member from performing his or her duties in the House of Commons,” she wrote, Parliament might wish to amend the rules to make clear that such suits do not pose the same sort of “private interest” as business interests and other assets and liabilities.

While all three opposition parties have seized on this option, using their combined majority on the ethics committee to pass a motion calling for Parliament to amend the code accordingly, the Conservatives remain resolutely opposed. They scuttled the proposed change last week by successfully arguing that the committee exceeded its jurisdiction. That argument had merit on purely procedural grounds.

Speaker's Ruling

But it did little to help the House operate as it should.

At stake is the principle behind parliamentary privilege. If it is possible to silence MPs by filing a lawsuit against them, however frivolous, it may become far more difficult for opposition parties to hold governments to account. That may not concern the Tories now that they hold power. But when they next find themselves in opposition, they may come to regret endorsing the precedent set by Ms. Dawson's ruling.

Now I would like to underscore again the comments the Speaker made earlier. It is one thing to hear from all that I have read so far, but the Speaker rules, with a capital "r", in this place and this is the way the Speaker saw it.

The member for Scarborough—Rouge River took issue with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's contention that being a defendant in a libel suit was tantamount to having a private interest since this interpretation would open the way to limiting the rights of members through the simple act of filing a lawsuit. Specifically, he challenged the interpretation given by the commissioner of the term 'liability' as used in the Code, claiming that the commissioner's extension of the meaning of the word 'liability' to include the sort of contingent liability represented by being named defendant in a libel suit was unreasonable.

The Speaker goes on further to say:

It should be noted at the outset that no one has suggested that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, in her consideration of the present case, did not recognize the importance of the rights and privileges of members, nor was any concern expressed that she had not exercised the highest standards of diligence or that she has not acted in good faith.

I will break from quoting the Speaker's remarks to say that I am not aware of a single member either on the floor or quietly out in the hallway who disagrees with any aspect of that. The commissioner did the job the House has asked of her. Let us remember that she is an officer of the House. She is not accountable to the government of the day. There is no one minister or prime minister to whom she reports. She reports and is answerable and accountable to the House as a whole.

It is my sense, and I believe that of every other member, unless somebody wants to stand at the appropriate time and contradict it, that we do not in any way fault her for doing exactly what we asked of her. In fact, if we take a look at her report dated June 17, she goes out of her way in the conclusion to say the following:

The addition of paragraph (b.1) to subsection 3(3) of the Code has the effect of excluding from the scope of private interests any liability arising from a legal action relating to the performance and functions of a Member of Parliament as a Member. Applying sections 8, 12 and 13 to the facts underlying the Report as if the amendment to subsection 3(3) of the Code had been made at the relevant times, I conclude that [the member for West Nova] would not have failed to comply with the Code had that amendment then been a part of the Code. Furthermore, as of June 5, 2008, [the member of West Nova] no longer has any obligations under section 8, 12 or 13 in relation to his previous private interest resulting from the lawsuit.

• (1805)

I thought it said an awful lot about that commissioner and her attention to duty, that she so promptly re-issued another response in light of the actions of the House. The commissioner made an interpretation under the existing rules. I am not lawyer, but it would seem rightfully concluded that the wording we or previous Houses had passed, in the interpretation of the incident case, left the member for West Nova in the position in which he was.

The House then dealt with that issue, moved and passed a motion that changed the code. As a result of that change, the House believed that any other member finding himself or herself in the same situation as the member for West Nova would now be relieved of the responsibility to stay silent.

One could have just left it there because it speaks for itself and takes care of itself. However, I thought it said a lot about Mary Dawson, who I worked with at the provincial level in Ontario, that she took it upon herself to issue a report that made the chronology of what happened clear, why she did what she did, and it is not that long, but most important, concluded with what I read into the record.

As this incident case applies, one can see that we believe the issue has been dealt with adequately. However, the amendment and the main motion both speak to the ongoing obligation of the House, of all of us collectively, to do our due diligence on an issue of such great importance. Therefore, it makes sense that both the amendment and the main motion would be before the House, and I would hope we pass both.

I fully understand we are sending it off to a committee that at this point is not working the way it should. We know the fault lies with the government. Nonetheless that does not mean we should stop doing all our other business because we have a bit of a political bottleneck somewhere in the process. In a minority government, from time to time, it happens. It is disappointing that it is happening with such a researched systematic approach, the anarchist handbook, but these things do happen. In a minority situation if we all work to try to make this place work for the people who we represent, then one finds a way through it.

As difficult as that might be, as someone who has been in a majority government and served in Houses where there are majority governments on the government benches, this is a lot better in terms of the problems we have. Normally when there is an issue like this, what is in front of us is a government using its majority and the procedures to have the effect of shutting members down.

In this case we have an opportunity where it is not any one party that has majority control of the outcome. What a great unique opportunity to ensure we look at this issue in its fullest and in the most non-partisan way we will find, meaning no one party has the majority in the House and therefore nobody has a majority in committee. This stands the best chance of going through this carefully to ensure no other rights are impinged inadvertently as a result of the change that has been made.

However, I am pleased the member for Scarborough—Rouge River and the member for Burnaby—New Westminster have both moved the main motion and an amendment that is helpful to the House. I hope we keep that same attitude and approach and do what is in the best interests of not only those of us who are here today, but, more important, for the members of Parliament who will be elected and take—

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

Routine Proceedings

(Amendment agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the motion, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations among all parties and I think you might find unanimous consent that in relation to the suspension of the House in lieu of private members' business, we see the clock as 6:30 p.m. so we might proceed directly to the special debate on the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Before we proceed to that item, in view of the general support that has been expressed in the House earlier with respect to Bill C-34 dealing with Tsawwassen, I wonder, in the interests of expediting that matter, if we might, now by unanimous consent, deem that bill read a third time and passed?

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

TSAWWASSEN FIRST NATION FINAL AGREEMENT ACT

The House resumed from June 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-34, An Act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will deal first with the opposition House leader's request. Is it agreed that Bill C-34 be read a third time and passed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will now deal with the request of the chief government whip. Is there unanimous consent in the House to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(2), the motion to concur in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance (recommendation not to proceed further with 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)) presented on Wednesday, May 7, 2008, is deemed to be proposed.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Essex for bringing forward this proposal. We all recognize the laudable intent behind this proposal is helping seniors. Accordingly, we applaud the government for bringing it forward. Indeed, the member for Essex has been a strong advocate on behalf of his constituents ensuring their issues and concerns are well represented in Parliament since his initial election in 2004.

Because of the member's hard work, he is able to spotlight this issue, surrounding the United States social security payments to Canadian residents, for parliamentarians. We have been able to discuss and debate it both on the floor of the House of Commons and at the Standing Committee on Finance.

A decision was made by the majority of members on the standing committee to not go forward with this proposal at the present time. However, by facilitating the debate on the matter, the member for Essex has raised the profile of the issues and concerns. Hopefully, some of the matters and concerns that we have had a chance to review in our debates will be considered as we go forward and in future debates.

This government stands for responsible leadership. We need to be prudent during these times of global economic uncertainty and we need to be responsible for determining fiscal policy and how best to manage the competing priorities of Canadians.

That is what budgets are all about and the integrity of the budget process is important to Canada. It allows us to ensure spending decisions and tax measures are thoroughly discussed, debated and considered in a thoughtful manner, where options can be weighed to determine how best to manage competing Canadian priorities, all of which are fighting for scarce resources.

The budget process enables the government to fully consider such factors and to balance priorities and undertake new fiscal commitments only to the extent that they are affordable. Accordingly, the House should return Bill C-305 to the House finance committee for more thorough discussion, debate and consideration, especially as we enter the period of prebudget consultations.

Therefore, I would like to move the following amendment. I move that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following: The seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance (recommendation not to proceed further with Bill C-305, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (exemption from taxation of 50% of United States total security payments to Canadian residents)), presented on Wednesday, May 7, 2008 be not now concurred in but that it be recommended to the Standing Committee on Finance with instruction that it amend the same so as to recommend that the committee be authorized to consider Bill C-305 beyond the deadline set out in Standing Order 97.1.

Routine Proceedings

●(1820)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Northumberland—Quinte West is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in regard to the amendment to the motion.

I submit that the amendment to the motion is in order. The motion that is before the House is a motion to concur in a committee report. It is clearly established that a motion to concur in a committee report is procedurally acceptable.

For example, on May 5, 2005, the Speaker recognized:

—an amendment to refer a report back to a committee with an instruction is in order.

The Speaker also stated that:

—our practice has been to allow the House to give a permissive or mandatory instruction to a committee to amend the text of a report.

This concurrence motion is being considered under Standing Order 97.1. The language used in this Standing Order suggests that amendments too are possible. For example, Standing Order 97.1(2)(c)(ii) states that at the conclusion of the debate:

—the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment, every question necessary to dispose of the motion;

By putting every question successively and without further amendment, the Standing Order implies that amendments to the motion are permissible.

It might be argued that proceeding this way would be inconsistent with the spirit behind the Standing Orders for private members' business, which are designed to ensure a conclusion on a private member's item.

However, while there are provisions to give some assurances that a private member's bill would come to a conclusion, private members' business is not totally immune from procedures that would cause a bill to fall outside of those provisions.

For example, at third reading, the House can refer a bill back to a committee for further study. This is what happened to Bill C-423 at third reading on May 16. An amendment at third reading to refer a bill back to committee does not require the consent of the sponsor, even though Standing Order 93 requires the consent of the sponsor for amendments to the second reading motion.

Although there are strict time limits for debate on private members' bills at second reading and at third reading, there are no limits on debate on Senate amendments to private members' bills. Therefore, the Standing Orders do allow for exemptions to the general manner by which private members' business is managed.

I would also argue that it is permissible for a committee to present a report requesting the authority of the House to have further time to consider a bill beyond what is contemplated in Standing Orders. Ultimately, it is up to the House to decide such matters and the House can choose to give a committee authorities that go beyond what is found in the Standing Orders.

For these reasons, I submit the amendment to the motion is in order.

●(1825)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of members in the chamber are trying to understand what is happening.

I am not sure whether or not the Chair ruled whether the amendment was in order or whether we are waiting for that decision, but the member who rose was debating a decision that we had not heard. One does not rise on a point of order to debate whether or not it is admissible before we have a ruling.

Either the Chair will ask for interventions on the admissibility of the amendment, or it has been ruled inadmissible, so we had quite an interesting intervention, but I think we need some direction so all members can be on the same wavelength.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Mississauga South and all other members will be interested to know that I have not ruled on anything, but I have been very attentive on everything, as I will be attentive to the hon. member for Essex.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think what is happening here is that, obviously, we are moving to amend the report, hoping that it gets sent back to committee. I have asked for this because I had an amendment proposed that did not get consideration at committee. It did not get moved at committee. I would like the committee to have an opportunity to at least fairly examine that particular amendment and its possible implications. Perhaps it will accept it or not.

I know this is sort of an exceptional case, but I am hoping that the Speaker rules that this motion is in order, so we can vote on amending the report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the amendment, but I want to be sure about its technical interpretation. Could the Speaker clarify this? If not, everyone will interpret it their own way. If it means that the bill will just be referred to committee, we will adjust our position accordingly. I just want to be sure that it does not mean that the bill is dead and that only the subject will be referred to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like to thank the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. I will take everything I have heard under advisement, and I will inform the House of my decision shortly.

For now, we will resume debate. The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

[*English*]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to debate 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).

Routine Proceedings

Tax fairness is what we should consider when contemplating this bill. The question is whether Bill C-305 would deliver fairness tax fairness between Canadian residents who receive Canada pension plan payments and Canadians who live in Canada but, due to their previous employment, receive social security payments from the United States.

I will begin with a bit of the complicated history that surrounds this bill. Under a 1984 tax treaty with the United States, Canadians who receive U.S. social security payments were only required to claim 50% of their social security payments as taxable income in Canada.

In 1996, the treaty changed allowing the country, in this case the United States, to tax social security payments that were sent north of the border, rather than these payments being taxed in the country of residence. It instituted a 25.5% withholding tax at the time. This was good news for pensioners with high incomes as the 25.5% withholding tax by the United States was lower than their marginal tax rate in Canada and they saved money. However, for lower income Canadians the rate would have been higher than their marginal tax rate and, therefore, they were left worse off.

Partly as a result of this unfairness for lower income pensioners, the treaty changed again in 1997 when the U.S. stopped the 25.5% withholding from social security recipients and taxation power once again returned to the country of residence, which was Canada. The Government of Canada agreed at the time to make only 85% of the social security income taxable in the hands of pensioners living here.

What Bill C-305 proposes to do is to turn back the clock by returning to the 1984 formula whereby only 50% of social security payments would be considered taxable income by the Canada Revenue Agency.

This is a very quick summary but with our limited time it does some justice to this very complicated issue. During the second reading of the bill, the Liberal members of Parliament agreed that the bill should go to committee so that it could be determined if there were a tax unfairness here and if the bill would appropriately rectify the problem.

During consideration of Bill C-305, the members of the Standing Committee on Finance determined that the bill would not lead to equitable tax treatment between Canadian CPP recipients and Canadian social security recipients. As a result, the committee recommended to the House that the bill not proceed.

I was pleased to see that the Conservative members of the committee were very sensible and pragmatic in their approach to this bill, although this recent amendment might suggest some reversal.

Yes, all members of the committee and all members of the House want to help Canadian seniors to make ends meet. On the surface, it seemed as though this bill might have been a way to do just that. Unfortunately, upon closer inspection of the bill, it became evident that it would create an unfairness in terms of how one group of seniors was taxed compared to another group of seniors. What it would have accomplished is to level the playing field between social security recipients in 1984 and social security recipients in 2008. Suddenly one group of pensioners receiving social security would

have been taxed much less than those who receive Canada pension plan, even if they had similar levels of incomes.

What it would have accomplished is to level the playing field between social security recipients in 1984 and social security recipients in 2008. That is not tax fairness and it is not an appropriate tax policy for Canada.

I understand that there is often an almost irresistible urge to simply vote yes on a bill such as this. It seems so easy: lower the tax burden for some of Canada's seniors who happened to spend most of their working lives in the U.S. instead of Canada. However, when we lower the tax burden for one group of people, it means that other Canadians, including other seniors, will need to fill that void in order to provide the services on which so many Canadians rely.

• (1830)

Once again, I congratulate the members of the Standing Committee on Finance, particularly the Conservative members who, in this circumstance, were able to look beyond the surface of the bill and see that in the larger scheme of things the bill would have created a tax unfairness.

Therefore, I will be supporting the committee's recommendation that Bill C-305 not proceed further. With the committee having debated this matter at some length and reflected upon it, I really do not see the need to return the bill to committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unlike my Liberal colleague, I am very pleased with the amendment that the Conservatives have finally decided to put forward. It is in line with our position in committee—we wanted this change with respect to American pensions.

Today, I urge every person receiving an American pension, or whose parents receive one, to pay close attention to this debate over the coming weeks and months.

The Standing Committee on Finance studied a bill to rectify a long-standing inequity. Let us remember that at one point, the government decided that Americans should tax pensions paid to American pensioners, but there was no way for the United States to collect that tax.

Several members of the House participated in the debate. I remember Herb Gray, who was a member here at the time, and several other members from all over the region, including François Langlois, the member for Bellechasse. Together, we managed to restore the balance so that people could collect their pensions. Then the government set a tax rate that was higher than the one in place before this whole crisis started.

The member who introduced this bill wanted to follow through on a commitment made by the Conservatives. At the Standing Committee on Finance, I do not know why, we ended up wanting to kill the bill.

Routine Proceedings

Members should always be willing to change their minds once they realize their mistake. The Bloc Québécois had said that it was important for the bill to be passed. We voted in favour of that in committee. However, the Conservative majority—we just heard the Liberal critic speak—felt otherwise. Now, the Conservatives are realizing that this bill still needs to be examined for two main reasons. First, on the substance of the issue, we need to be fair to people who collect American pensions, and, at the end of the day, ensure an appropriate tax rate. Second, the Conservatives realized that they were blatantly ignoring an election promise made by their party and brought forward by an MP. He was even cast aside by his own party.

Today, the amendment before us will enable us to continue examining the bill, and hopefully to implement a government measure that will rectify this situation. It is possible that the government plans on dragging this out until the next budget, but at least we will have the chance to once again discuss the issue and rectify the situation.

Some people are perhaps not familiar with the American pension issue. In the ridings I have represented, particularly during the period from 1993 to 2004—the regions of Témiscouata, Les Basques and a large part of the new riding I represent, Montmagny-Sud and L'Islet-Sud—a number of people worked for a living in the United States. They paid into an American pension plan. Now, when they retire, they collect those pensions, just as those who worked in Canada collect the Canada Pension Plan. However, I do not agree with the tax rate that applies to them. It needs to decrease and take into account the fact that the income was earned in the United States. A portion of the income was already taxed the way it is in the United States.

We must therefore find a solution that will be fair to the parties. It is true that we are not talking about large amounts because these people did not earn millions of dollars. Often they are pensioners, families, people who worked in the lumber industry. They worked very hard and this pension plan allows them to retire with dignity. They contributed to this pension fund when they agreed to work in the United States. They must continue to receive these pensions but they must be taxed fairly.

These people have gone through ups and downs. About ten years ago, their pensions were barely taxed. Then, they were taxed at 85%. Now, the time has come to review this matter and the bill will allow us to do just that.

Therefore, I invite the pensioners as well as citizens of the regions in question to learn about this matter because there are significant economic repercussions.

•(1835)

In many border towns in my riding, 25%, 30%, or 50% of retirees receive American pensions. These people make a significant economic contribution to their communities. It may be because of them that the local convenience store remains open.

It is a return on the investment they made by working. It was not easy to leave for weeks or months at a time to go to work. For example, at the time, reasonable work could be found in the State of Maine. But that meant leaving one's family for several weeks or

months and then regularly coming back to seasonal jobs. Obviously it was not easy to make their contributions to the American pension plan. They needed this money for their daily survival, but they made the necessary sacrifices. Now they are happy to receive the amounts accrued.

Our responsibility is to ensure that the tax rate is adequate, fair and justified and that it provides maximum economic benefits for both those receiving the pensions and the economies of the regions involved.

I was ready to make a speech to the effect that the government had reneged on its own promise. That is what it was preparing to do. I think that it realized what it was about to do and decided to pull an about-face. What really matters is that the people in our ridings—those that I and the deputy for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques represent, as well as a number of others along the border—are able to receive the necessary benefits.

Tonight I am committing to one thing. Since the bill has been referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, which will be able to take the time to study it, we will make sure that people let the government know that they want this matter resolved to their satisfaction. It is very important that a satisfactory result be achieved.

As members, we certainly have the responsibility to contribute to a better distribution of wealth. In this case, we will do just that.

Since the beginning of this debate, the Bloc Québécois has been responsible and logical, saying that there must be a reasonable tax rate. We saw the government, and even the official opposition, engage in all sorts of gymnastics when it was decided not to follow up on the bill.

Today the government has seen the reality and the political fallout that would come from such a decision. On the substance, I will give the government the benefit of the doubt and say that it realized the current treatment is unfair and that changes are essential.

We will therefore be in favour of the amendment, which would allow us to continue to discuss this bill.

•(1840)

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like other members of the House, I am in a rather difficult position to address this issue without a determination from the Chair as to whether the amendment, which has been presented at literally the very last minute, is going to be admissible and we are going to send this issue back to the committee.

I am going to give my speech based on the fact that it is not going to be admissible. I came prepared to do that. My speech is going to be highly critical of both the government and the official opposition party. It is going to be critical of the member for Essex and of the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity. Both of those members, in previous parliaments, have had this same private member's bill before the House.

Routine Proceedings

The secretary of state had it before the House on two different occasions when he was in opposition. The member for Essex has had it here on two occasions, in the last Parliament and again in this Parliament.

It is a highly emotional issue for me personally, I have to say, but also for a large number of my constituents. The greatest number of individuals in Canada who are Canadian citizens or Canadian residents receiving social security in Canada live in the Windsor-Essex County area. This has been a very difficult issue for a large number of them.

When I hear the member from the Liberal Party stand in the House and talk about justice and being fair, he obviously does not understand the issue at all. As for what happened here, the Conservatives recognized this, as did a number of members from the Liberal Party historically, including the former prime minister, who was in the riding in Windsor and said he would take care of this. Like so many other Liberal promises, it got broken because they did not carry through.

The current Prime Minister was in the riding and promised to take care of it. He said that it would be taken care of if the Conservatives got into government. We have had three budgets from them now. They have not done it either.

When we hear the member from the Liberal Party stand up and talk about justice, he just misses the point entirely. The issue of justice that is involved here is that the Canadian government, by way of an international treaty with the United States, agreed that it would tax social security benefits received in Canada in the same manner as the United States had been doing it up to that point.

That was the deal we made. In the same treaty, the U.S. agreed to treat Canada pension benefits received in the United States and tax them in the same way they had been traditionally taxed in Canada. That was the essence of the deal. It is as simple as that.

The United States lived up to that agreement. It continues to tax the Canada pension benefits received in the United States the same as if they had been taxed in Canada up to that point.

Canada has repeatedly refused to abide by that treaty. What it has done to a large number of residents in the country, most of whom are Canadian citizens, is that it has refused to abide by the treaty and it has taxed them excessively, above what was originally agreed to.

I always tell this one story about the woman who lived in my riding and went to my church. She and her husband both did. They had lived in Chicago for a good number of years, had built up their social security benefits, were Canadian citizens, and had returned to Windsor to live in retirement.

They were receiving their benefits under social security. They had bought a house and still were paying a mortgage. They both were receiving social security benefits from the United States. They both got hit with substantial increases in taxes because the then Liberal administration did not honour the treaty.

They already had their situation. That is what justice is about. They built their lives in Canada based on what they had been told would happen. They bought the house knowing that they could

afford to do it and then they got hit with these additional taxes from the Canadian government.

They proceeded to lose the house. To this day, that woman still curses our former prime minister, sometimes even in church, because she remembers him coming into Windsor. She remembers a number of his candidates, members of this House historically, who came into the city and said they would take care of this. They said they would see that there was justice on this file. They did not do it.

● (1845)

Now we have the same repeat. We hear the member for Essex and the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism both making those pledges in a very concrete form in this House in the form of private members' bills, and then nothing. With two budgets, they do not go through.

Then this got to the finance committee. I was there on the final day and said to the members of the committee from both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party that they were breaking their promise to the recipients of these benefits and their promise to the United States, and that they were illegally breaking their treaty obligations. Every single member from the Conservative Party and every single member of the Liberal Party voted in committee to strip the bill, so that we have this motion before us now to concur in doing away with any further work on this issue.

It is obvious from my comments that I would be very happy to support the amendment that has been put forward. I do not know if it is in order. I hope it is so that we can keep this issue alive.

This goes back to 1996. I remember that in the very first speech I gave in this House after I was elected in 2000, the very first one, I raised this issue. At that time, I thanked the members of my riding who had voted for me on this issue, because I also pledged at that time that we would deal with this.

I intend to continue to fight for that justice for them, but we are now 12 years from the time they first saw this miscarriage perpetrated on them. What has happened in that time, of course, is that a great number of them have passed away, because they were all at retirement age at that time.

We are faced today with both the Liberals and the Conservatives. There may be some last minute change of heart on the part of the Conservatives if the motion for amendment is admissible, but if it is not, then they have done just exactly what the Liberals did. They went out to the country and led people to believe, in various parts of the country where there are good numbers of these residents and citizens, that they would take care of this miscarriage of justice, and they did not do it.

It is quite obvious that if the results of what happened in the finance committee continue, this Conservative government, like the previous Liberal government, has no intention of keeping its promise to the Canadian people, and that is just an absolute shame.

Routine Proceedings

I will conclude with this. I am desperately hoping the Chair will rule that this proposed amendment is admissible and that we can send this back to the finance committee. Hopefully, as opposed to what we hear from the Liberals, we in fact will look at this from the perspective of where justice really lies on this issue, not being worried about whether we are treating some retirees differently than others. That is not what the issue is.

The issue is that we told these retirees this is the way we would treat them. We told the United States that this is the way we would treat them. We have broken those promises and it is time for some justice to come into play.

Again, we heard from one of the speakers who was concerned about being prudent here. We have heard both the Conservatives and the Liberals advocate strongly for billions of dollars in tax cuts to the oil and gas industry and the banking industry in this country. By comparison, the money we are talking about here, which should be fairly granted by way of a tax break to the retirees, is minuscule. It is in the millions of dollars, but it is minuscule. It is nothing like the billions of dollars that both major parties have agreed to give away and have already given away. We need that justice.

Again, I hope very much that the Chair will see his way through to finding that proposed amendment in order and that in fact we can send it back to committee and keep the issue alive.

• (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before moving on with the resumption of the debate and after consulting with the Speaker, I will inform the House that the amendment has been found not to be in order.

We will resume debate. The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak on the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance and the recommendation on Bill C-305, as presented by my colleague from Essex.

In light of the ruling that you just made, Mr. Speaker, I would like to submit a new amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance (recommendation not to proceed further with 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)), presented on Wednesday, May 7, 2008, be not now concurred in, but that it be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Finance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The amendment is in order. We will go on with resuming debate. The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has been a very instructive debate from the standpoint of how to scramble. Now that the amendment, which was an amendment to a bill that was dealt with in committee, has been ruled out of order, we have this other amendment that deals with the motion that was initially before the House, which was concurrence in the report of the Standing Committee on Finance. That report says that this bill not be dealt with further by the House.

I understand that the amendment that the hon. member just proposed is basically to say that the House should forget about

concurring in the report and that we should defeat the report and send it back to the committee because, if we defeat the concurrence motion, the bill will be back in the House and it will be on the private members' order of precedence at the first hour of report stage and third reading.

I know the member for Essex has been very diligent in trying to protect this bill and he should. He should do everything possible to keep it alive. However, the finance committee, as represented by the member for Markham—Unionville, did give full consideration to this bill and determined that there were circumstances that led to inequities or problems and it could not be repaired.

However, that does not need to be the end of it. I would recommend to the member, depending on how this works out, that if there is an appetite for this matter to be considered with the amendment that was initially put forward, there is a way to do it. If the concurrence motion that is now before us is defeated, the bill would still live, it would go back on the order paper and it would be at first hour of report stage and third reading.

The member would then have two options. The first option would be to submit a report stage motion to amend the bill, which he can do, and then the House would consider it.

If the member feels, however, that two hours of debate at report stage and third reading would not be an appropriate consideration of the technical nature of the amendment, he may not wish to put forward a report stage motion but, rather, to simply have the question put on report stage and go straight to third reading debate, at which time he can then have a recommittal motion moved, which would basically say that this bill not be read a third time but be referred back to the Standing Committee on Finance in order to reassess clause *x* or whatever the amendment is. Therefore, there are two opportunities, either at report stage or third reading stage and recommittal.

I believe the Standing Committee on Finance has provided the House with a clear report and that it did the job it was asked to do. It had careful consideration of the provisions of the bill. The representations on behalf of the member for Markham—Unionville was that there were problems with the bill and that the committee decided that the bill would not meet the objectives that we should be pursuing, not that the issue should not be dealt with.

Accordingly, the matter before us really is the report and whether we have confidence that the finance committee did its work.

Depending on how it works out, the member has some options he can consider and, in the short time available, he can speak with the other parties about an approach to this. It would appear that the finance committee has done its work and that the bill, as it stands now, should not move forward. I do not know whether simply recommitting it without voting on the concurrence motion of the finance committee report and sending it back to the finance committee will to get a different result when the committee has already said that it did not hit the mark.

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•(1855)

The member is going to have to seriously consider whether or not he can get agreement to have a report stage motion seriously considered here, or the support of the House to have a recommittal at third reading to make another amendment that he may feel is necessary to repair or to supplement the existing bill so that it is in a form in which the House would find acceptable.

Having said that, I believe that the House has an interesting question to consider. There is only another 15 minutes to go on this debate and I hope hon. members will give the member an idea of how they feel about the options that are available to the member.

•(1900)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House and debate the amendment now before us regarding the seventh report from the finance committee.

I appreciate the interventions by the hon. member for Mississauga South on the other options he thinks may exist. Essentially he is asking us is to kill a certain thing and to send this back to committee so it can be studied in its fullness.

I did have an amendment to the bill that I would like the committee to consider. It was not considered originally. This would allow the committee to fully consider something it had not considered before.

The member for Mississauga South wants us to kill this opportunity and hopefully those members will support us later on with some other procedural option for changing the bill. That is simply not good enough. We are not going to do his dirty work. I know he and his party, when they were in government, sought every opportunity to kill this particular measure. They are the ones who instituted the crushing tax hike on these seniors. They are the ones who did not care about what the results of that tax hike were to these seniors. I am not interested in doing the member's dirty work, or that of the member for Markham—Unionville, or any one of them.

I am interested in this committee. If I recall, our objections at committee were not the same as those of the Liberals opposite. This phony idea that they have perpetrated for well over a decade that somehow this bill creates tax inequities proves in fact that they do not understand this issue properly. They continue to compare Canadians who live next door to each other, one who collects CPP versus one who collects U.S. social security benefits, and that is absolutely a false argument.

This matter needs to go back to the committee for some fulsome study. I am going to support this amendment and I call on my colleagues to support this amendment to get this bill back to committee. I reject the arguments of the member for Mississauga South.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

An hon. member: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the amendment carried.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The next question is on the main motion, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried.

(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

•(1905)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in this House on May 5, 2008, I asked a question that I feel is very important and for which I did not really receive a satisfactory response. I asked the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities what he intended to do to help consumers who have been taken hostage by the rising price of gas and the absence of alternatives such as public transit.

Not enough is being done to resolve this issue. In Rimouski, for example, there is no public transit per se, although there are alternatives such as carpooling and the taxibus program. It is a good start, but it is not enough and students in particular are lobbying municipal representatives. That is not all. The RCMs in my riding do not offer any public transit. There are 88,000 people in my riding, which is a significant number. It would therefore be useful, economically sound and more ecological to offer public transit between the municipalities and the larger centres.

Let us hope the government does not turn around and tell us that it has already invested and is sharing some of the gas tax with the municipalities. We know that. We want to know the government's new plans, mainly to deal with this crisis and the rising price of gas. In my region, as in many others, the RCMs do not have public transit.

In other words, the government's tangible actions are rare and inadequate from an economic and environmental standpoint. We know that the provinces and the municipalities are in a tight fiscal situation. Municipal governments have to replace aging infrastructure with a precarious tax base, maintain the roads, the wharves and waterworks and supply the towns with water. When all that infrastructure comes to the end of its useful life, it consumes a big part of the municipal budget, which is quite often small, and from which municipalities are expected to invest in public transit.

The investment required across Canada is around \$31 billion to upgrade water treatment, \$21 billion for transport, according to Professor Saeed Mirza, from the University of McGill, and \$22.8 billion for public transit. The government's investment in these sectors pales in comparison and the annual \$2 billion from the gas tax fund even more so.

Accordingly, can the parliamentary secretary explain why his government voted against my motion? Why did he and his colleagues reject my proposal to redistribute the wealth between the oil companies, who are making huge profits, and the people who are victims of a lack of infrastructure?

What is this government waiting for to implement public transit projects in the regions with provincial partners, including Quebec, to encourage energy efficient initiatives and considerably reduce our dependence on oil? That is the path to take, so why not do something to reduce this dependence and transition toward a green economy?

In light of the needs in the regions and the major environmental challenges, this government's responsibilities are overwhelming. When will there be responsible funding for public transit in the regions?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am from a rural area as well, so I understand many of the challenges the member faces. We have a lack of public transportation in our area of the world as well. This is really why the government has already moved ahead of the rising price of gas. We have redistributed wealth, as the member has asked. We have redistributed it from the government back to the pocketbooks of people.

The government is getting things done. We have lowered the income tax levels substantially. We have raised the personal exemptions. We have reduced the GST.

Therefore, thanks to our government's reductions to the GST alone, Canadians this year will save over half a billion dollars in reduced gas taxes. The Conservative Party and the Conservative government know that Canadians do not want higher taxes. They want results.

For the information of my friend across the way, I did talk to someone in my riding. He is the father of four young children. He does not make a lot of money, but he has told me that his accountant has said, because of the tax changes we have made over the last three years in government, that he will save over \$2,000 in income tax this year because of those changes. Therefore, he is saving a substantial

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amount of money. He is able to keep his own money and make decisions about where he wants to spend it.

The opposition and the Leader of the Opposition want to go in the opposite direction. We want to lower taxes. The Liberals want to impose a new tax. The Liberal Party's new plan is to force a massive new permanent carbon tax on each and every Canadian.

We are already struggling with the high price of gas. To impose a tax is crazy. What is more, combined with the Liberals' musing about hiking the GST, the new massive gas tax would mean dramatic new and unparalleled tax increases on almost everything Canadians buy and do.

We know the Liberals love to reach deeper and deeper into the pockets of hard-working Canadians and take more and more taxpayer money to fuel their reckless spending, as they are determined to furiously max out the national credit card. The Liberal leader has already made spending promises that would plunge Canada \$62 billion deeper into the hole. He realized that the only way to achieve those goals would be to impose a huge new tax, a carbon tax that would then enable him to make ends meet.

The Liberals have promised Canadians over the last year, on 10 different occasions, that they would not bring in a carbon tax. Now they say this is something that they are seriously considering, that they want to make it a core policy and presentation in their election platform. The problem with this is it is a tax on everything. It will be a tax on electricity, natural gas bills and home heating fuels. It is just a huge tax grab.

● (1910)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Points of order may not be raised during adjournment proceedings.

Ms. Louise Thibault: What he is saying has nothing to do with my question, and it has nothing to do with the four minutes I spent talking. I do not want to hear about the Liberals' situation. That is not what I said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

[English]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the reason why I should talk about the Liberal carbon tax is it will drive prices higher and higher. The member's concern seems to be about fuel prices. If she wants to talk about the impact on fuel prices, we are looking at another possible 60% hike in the price of fuel from the new tax the Liberals are proposing. We have already moved to give people their money back. We have raised the personal exemption, lowered the income tax and lowered the GST. We have done things to help Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, thank you for informing me that points of order may not be raised during adjournment proceedings.

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I find the parliamentary secretary's comments in the course of an honest adjournment debate scandalous and appalling.

I came back to a question that I raised as an independent, and he used it as a launching pad to toss verbal hand grenades at the official opposition. I do not care about the official opposition. I asked what the government will do for public transit in rural areas because he says that he understands the situation.

I do not want to hear that he met one of his constituents who told him that tax cuts, a reduction in the GST and reduced exemptions will do something. In my region, when there are forestry or agricultural crises and people are not able to take care of their families, those things will not help them. But can we come back to the subject—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I am disturbed to hear the member say that she does not give a hoot about taxes because we do. We think it is important that we treat taxpayer money well. Liberals obviously want to tax people as high as they possibly can and it sounds like the member opposite wants to do that as well. We have made a clear choice to help Canadians in the way that the member is concerned about and we have reacted, and I will give the House an instance.

By 2009 the amount of money that will be transferred to municipalities from the gas tax transfer fund will be up almost 50%. The member knows that. She knows there will be billions of more dollars for local roads, highways, bridges and for municipalities to make decisions about what they want to do with local transportation issues. That is part of the building Canada fund.

We have committed \$33 billion to infrastructure, the biggest infrastructure commitment ever made by a federal government. It came after 13 years of Liberal neglect.

It is important I point out that we have moved to—

•(1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Yukon.

BURMA

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last several months Burma has received unprecedented worldwide attention, and justly so.

Burma is a beautiful country situated between Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand with an extensive coastline along the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal. There are approximately 55 million people living in Burma in an area a little bigger than the province of Alberta and slightly larger than Afghanistan.

Other than Burmans, which make up 60% of the population, there are over 100 ethnic groups, including Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Karenni, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan, nearly 90% of which are Buddhist.

Sadly, however, it is a country wrought with suffering and human rights abuses.

Burma achieved independence from Britain in 1948, thus calling itself the “Union of Burma”. After the 8888 student uprising on August 8, 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SPDC, also known as SLORC, changed the name to the “Union of Myanmar” when it officially seized power. This change has never been recognized by opposition groups nor many English speaking nations. The junta also changed the capital city from Rangoon to Naypyidaw in 2006.

Governments, international institutions and human rights organizations around the world have condemned the military junta's repressive policies and human rights abuses. Violations include rape, arbitrary executions, torture, inhumane treatment, mass arrests, forced labour, forced relocation and denial of freedom of assembly, association, expression and movement. Burma transports trafficked persons, primarily women and girls, to Thailand as factory workers, household servants and for sexual exploitation.

Burma is also one of the poorest countries in the world. It is ruled by one of the world's most brutal military juntas. The military regime forcibly recruits up to 70,000 child soldiers and uses rape as a weapon of war.

Burma is the second largest producer of heroin in the world.

Opponents of the military regime are imprisoned and tortured, including more than 1,100 political prisoners, 13 of whom are fellow members of parliament.

Today nearly 150,000 Burmese refugees and internally displaced persons live in camps along the Thai border, camps that are constantly under attack by the military.

Since its independence from Britain, Burma established a parliamentary democracy. However, due to the military coup in 1962, democracy was crushed, leading to decades of civil war between the military and numerous ethnic groups.

Since the military junta took over, people in Burma have had to face adversities that we in the west can barely imagine.

None of this was more clear than the junta's attacks on innocent monks in 2007 and the recent response to Cyclone Nargis, which devastated nearly the entire Irrawaddy delta region.

As chair of Parliamentary Friends of Burma, it is my honour to work with organizations such as Inter Pares, Canadian Friends of Burma and Rights & Democracy to bring these issues to the forefront and to keep them there.

Last winter I travelled to the Thai-Burma border to show our support for the people of Burma and to find out what else Canada could do. I met with numerous groups and ethnic nationalities, listened to their stories, asked their opinions and brought back with me advice and hope.

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By now most members, if not all, know of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest in Rangoon for almost 20 years. Some members have met with her cousin Sein Win, elected prime minister of Burma, who was exiled in 1990 after her party won the democratic election.

Members will remember that in September 2007 the military junta issued a crackdown on thousands of peaceful protestors, raiding monasteries, indiscriminately arresting Buddhist monks and civilians, beating, shooting, killing, including Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai.

We watched safely from afar the devastation and death caused by Cyclone Nargis just a few short weeks ago. The death toll is estimated at over 100,000. Two and a half million people who survived now face homelessness, starvation and disease. The military junta's inaction, mishandling and hindrance in distribution of international aid only made it worse.

We cannot forget these things.

PFOB has been working hard to keep Burma in the spotlight. Our members have petitioned Ivanhoe Mines and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, which hold shares with Ivanhoe. We have held press conferences, attended rallies and posted petitions and motions in the House.

We met with Burmese monks, including Venerable Pannya Vamsa, Chair of the International Burmese Monks Organization—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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 thank the hon. member for his comments about the situation in Burma. I know the hon. member is the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma, and I too am a member. Both of us have a very strong interest in what is happening in Burma.

First, let me say that cyclone Nargis, that killed so many Burmese, was a devastating catastrophe that took place. I am glad that Canada stood up and has worked with the UN and with its partners to help the people of Burma.

I want to state again that the Minister of International Cooperation has stated that Canada will be matching all the funds that were raised by recognized charitable organizations. I hope that Canadians will rise to the call as the Government of Canada has and will continue to help the people of Burma to overcome the cyclone.

I would also like to state that the world was extremely shaken by the protests when the monks went out on the streets. The protests by the monks had a monumental effect in Burma. Buddhist monks normally do not protest nor are they violent, but they were beaten up and put away which was a very serious violation of human rights by the Burmese regime.

My government and I have stood in Parliament and have condemned those actions. So has the hon. member along with our group. Let me say to the hon. member and to all Canadians that the government has taken stringent sanctions against the Burmese regime. The hon. member was advocating the same thing. The

government has recognized the contribution and the sacrifice of Aung San Suu Kyi by giving her an honorary Canadian citizenship.

Most importantly, I want to say that the Government of Canada and members of Parliament from all parties strongly condemn the government of Burma, and strongly condemn the military regime of Burma in the way that it has handled not only the monk protests but also the way it handled the relief operations for its own citizens when the world was ready to help them.

As a matter of fact, I am going to go one step further and say that the military junta has blood on its hands by not ensuring that the timely aid was reaching Burmese citizens. It was playing politics when its own citizens were dying. I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that the regime has blood on its hands causing the death of its own citizens as a result of cyclone Nargis.

The government does not look on that regime in any favourable light. We were appalled by what happened. I want to assure the hon. member that by working together we will continue putting strong pressure on the regime to change.

● (1920)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I applaud all our PFOB members for their tireless work and efforts in the last two and a half years. We have lobbied the Canadian government for numerous actions and applaud it for denouncing the military junta, for its sanctions, its petitions, and its contribution to help after the recent cyclone and the additional \$2 million to the Thai Burma Border Consortium .

However, we can still do more. We can continue to work with groups such as Inter Pares, Canadian Friends of Burma, Mining Watch, Amnesty International and TBBC. We can work with and continue to lobby countries who invest in Burma such as China, who continually vetoes human rights votes at the UN. We can keep our doors open to NGOs and Burmese groups because they are our eyes, ears and conscience into devastating situations, not only in Burma but in Tibet, Darfur and other regions that must continually fight for basic human needs and rights.

I urge all members, regardless of politics, pride or partiality, to continue their pledge to help the people of Burma to attain the simple freedoms and human rights that all of us deserve and ensure that this beautiful country attains the same democratic liberties that we enjoy in this country.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that the government, through this Parliament and with people like himself and everybody else, will continue to work with other NGOs and other groups to ensure that there is democracy, rule of law, and humanitarian assistance for Burma.

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As the member rightly pointed out, Burma is one of the poorest countries. I think we owe it to the Burmese people. On a personal note, I do have a Burmese community living in my riding. Members of that community do come to me and talk about the situation. I want to commend them also for doing whatever they can to assist the people of Burma to advance peace, freedom and security.

•(1925)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:25 p.m.)

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