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Monday, February 23, 2009

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Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 23, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1105)

[*English*]

HUMAN PATHOGENS AND TOXINS ACT

Hon. Gary Lunn (for the Minister of Health) moved that Bill C-11, An Act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have this opportunity at second reading to address the important issues of the safety and security of human pathogens and toxins. That is a primary reason behind Bill C-11, An Act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins.

I want to begin by explaining what a pathogen is. A human pathogen is a micro-organism capable of causing disease or death in humans. Examples include: salmonella bacteria, the agent of anthrax, listeria bacteria and the Ebola virus. The need to enhance biosafety in Canada's laboratories and prevent an inadvertent release of these agents is one of the two primary focuses of Bill C-11.

The need to safeguard Canadians from the risk of an intentional release of these dangerous agents constitutes the second primary focus of the proposed human pathogens and toxins act. As we know, the world changed after September 11, 2001. The events of that day highlighted the need for greater vigilance on our part. This was emphasized in the month that followed when an anthrax attack in the United States resulted in 22 identified cases and five deaths.

The cost of a bioterror attack is high, both in terms of lives lost, lives affected and economic consequences. It is the responsibility of government, of this Parliament, to put in place the necessary measures to minimize the likelihood of such an event.

There are approximately 3,500 laboratories that import human pathogens into Canada. These laboratories are regulated under the existing human pathogens importation regulations which have been in force since 1994. They must also comply with our laboratory

biosafety guidelines which are widely accepted as Canada's national biosafety standard.

Unfortunately, these regulations and associated laboratory biosafety guidelines are only mandatory for facilities that import human pathogens. They are not mandatory for the additional 4,000 laboratories that do not import, but which acquire human pathogens within Canada.

While labs working with these pathogens do so in a safe manner and widely apply these guidelines on a voluntary basis, we need legislation and regulations in place to reinforce these safe practices, and establish consistency by ensuring all labs in Canada, whether federal, provincial or private, are adhering to these guidelines.

Canada faces some serious risks as a result of this legislative and regulatory gap. These include risks to the safety of persons working in and around laboratories and risks to our national security. There is always the potential for accidental release of human pathogens or toxins.

As I have said, about 4,000 laboratories in Canada use domestically acquired human pathogens and toxins. The fact that these laboratories are subject only to a voluntary biosafety regime is not acceptable, especially since similar laboratories that import human pathogens operate under a mandatory biosafety regime.

It is time to level the playing field in Canada so that all persons working with these agents, and especially all laboratories, are required to operate under the same rules and to comply with the same national biosafety guidelines.

To this end the new human pathogens and toxins act is designed to ensure that unless exempted, no person may carry on activities with these dangerous substances without a licence and without complying with the laboratory biosafety guidelines.

Beyond accidental release, Canada also faces the risk of a deliberate release of a human pathogen or toxin. This is not a pleasant scenario but one which we must consider fully in order to protect Canadians. To address this risk the new legislation includes a provision for a new national system of security screening for persons handling the most dangerous of these agents. Other than for individuals working in federal government laboratories, there is no such system in place in Canada at this moment.

Government Orders

It is important that the government take reasonable precautions to ensure that while not interfering with research, people handling the most dangerous human pathogens and toxins in Canada have received appropriate security screening. At the same time, the government will seek to ensure that there is a minimal paper burden on those handling less dangerous human pathogens and toxins.

The new legislation will address both biosafety and biosecurity risks through a range of mechanisms including: new criminal prohibitions, offences, and penalties; expanded inspection and enforcement; a new authority to make regulations; and new security screening requirements for persons having access to the most dangerous human pathogens and toxins.

This proposal would render Canada more consistent with its international partners and allies, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, which have all passed new security legislation. It is time that Canada joined them.

This new legislation is needed now. It is required to safeguard the health and well-being of Canadians, especially those persons working in laboratories. It is also required to demonstrate to the Canadian public, and to our international partners, that the Government of Canada is taking very seriously the issue of national security related to dangerous human pathogens and toxins.

The proposed legislation represents a made in Canada approach that would emphasize safety and strong security linkages. The urgency in moving ahead with expanded federal oversight over human pathogens and toxins has been widely recognized. We have discussed this proposal with our provincial and territorial public health colleagues and with the diverse laboratory community in Canada, including academia and the private sector. They have agreed with the need to move ahead and they have shown a keen interest in further discussions concerning details about licensing, inventories, security screening, and how they will be included in future discussions.

We will continue to engage our stakeholders as Bill C-11 moves through the parliamentary process.

As well, we will commence in-depth consultations with stakeholders across the country on the program and regulatory framework. These consultations will help us ensure that we have correctly balanced the needs of biosafety and biosecurity, on the one hand, and the interests of ongoing science and research, on the other. In proposing this legislation, we are building on our existing importation program.

It is important that we turn our attention to applying existing biosafety and biosecurity controls equally to all persons carrying on activities with these dangerous agents across Canada. For this reason, I call on my colleagues in this House to support Bill C-11. I am looking forward to questions.

• (1110)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to clarify the difference between human pathogens and toxins.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, a human pathogen is a micro-organism capable of causing disease or death in a human. For the purposes of this legislation, this includes animal pathogens that can

cause disease in humans. For the purposes of this legislation, toxins are defined as substances produced by or derived from micro-organisms which are able to cause disease in humans and which are listed in schedule 1 of the proposed bill. Human pathogens are divided into risk groups, taking into account varying levels of risk.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, was listening with interest to the proposed bill. I have a question for the parliamentary secretary. How would this relate to existing regulations for import of human pathogens?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, my colleague brings up a very important question because right now there are regulations and legislation that exist for importation. However, for laboratories actually using these pathogens in the laboratory, they are not legislated and regulated in the proper way. That is why it is very important that we move this legislation forward, so we level the playing field for all laboratories in Canada.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary this question. What would be the implications of an intentional release of human pathogens?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, Canadians are concerned. On September 11, 2001, the world changed. There have been attacks in the United States. The member probably remembers the anthrax incidents. There were 22 cases, resulting in the death of five people.

It is about time that Canada brings our legislation and regulations up to the level that our international partners expect. It is not a scenario that one wants to think about. The release of these pathogens and toxins could have severe consequences on our population. That is why I am calling on all my colleagues to work with me, to work with the minister, and to work in committee to get this legislation passed because it is definitely needed.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and his description of Bill C-11. I agree with him that this is a very important issue and we have learned a lot based on some very traumatic episodes in our history over the last little while.

My concern is that all of these great plans will come to nought if in fact the government does not have an underlying framework that respects the question of government supported or sponsored initiatives, whether it be in terms of emergency services or laboratories.

My question to the parliamentary secretary is quite simple. Could he give the House assurances that the government, unlike in other areas, has absolutely no intention of privatizing our public laboratories?

• (1115)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. Our laboratories play an important role for public health in Canada and I would like to assure the member that federal laboratories are going to remain in that framework.

Extensive consultations were held with stakeholders, particularly the laboratories. I want to let the member know that stakeholders, including the biosafety officers at laboratory institutions, welcomed these proposals and generally support the expanded federal oversight of human pathogens and toxins.

However, some important issues were raised at the stakeholder consultations. These include: the documentation requirements for permits, registration, inventory maintenance, security screening of personnel with access to dangerous human pathogens, and potential cost implications of compliance with these new biosafety requirements. The government intends to address all of these concerns by engaging in a wide range of consultations with stakeholders over specific elements of security screening in order that the legislative and regulatory framework is implemented in such a way to allow for efficient compliance.

Stakeholders involved in research and development also asked whether the proposed legislation could have negative implications on their research. As the member brought forward, it is very important that these labs continue with their research.

The focus of the proposed legislation is the strengthening of biosafety. The principles of biosafety do not in any way impede research and development but, rather, aim at those activities proceeding without harming the scientist or the public. The Public Health Agency of Canada will aim to find the appropriate balance between safety and security, and supporting this very important scientific research.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the parliamentary secretary for some of the references he made to the handling protocols of these pathogens. I want to ask him, what specifically in the bill would give satisfaction to the people of my riding, where the level 4 federal laboratory is located?

In the case of what happened recently, a car accident occurred where a FedEx truck ran into a car and its contents spilled out. Guess what was in the FedEx truck? There was anthrax, the Newcastle disease virus, and a number of other serious toxins. People who farm chickens will know that Newcastle disease is not something we want in the community.

There was a level 4 virology lab shipping anthrax and Newcastle by FedEx with no protocols whatsoever, any more than one would give to sending a Christmas gift to a relative. I want to see very strict protocols within this bill and some satisfaction, so that I can tell the people of my riding that we are addressing this appalling issue.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I have actually had the privilege of visiting the hon. member's riding and the very important level 4 lab in Canada. He is correct that these labs handle extremely pathogenic substances, such as Ebola.

That is exactly why the government is moving forward on this very important legislation. We need those specific controls when laboratories handle these substances and transfer them from one lab to another. In the present legislation, it is only mandatory when the laboratories import those pathogens into the country. However, for transfer within the country, as the member so rightly pointed out, it is voluntary. I would point out that the lab in his riding is exceptional and has very high standards, but it is important that the Government

Government Orders

of Canada is able to regulate and watch over the particular instances that the member mentioned.

It is a very good question and I am looking forward to getting this important legislation before a committee, so the experts can appear to be asked those very specific questions. Hopefully, we can support this bill and move it forward for specifically the reasons that the hon. member brings forward.

• (1120)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I seek consent to share my time with the member for Etobicoke North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to speak to Bill C-11, an act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins. The Liberal Party supports improving Canadians' health and safety. We support measures that improve the safety and security of laboratories in Canada for all Canadians. We will scrutinize this bill in committee to ensure that it is as accountable, transparent and useful as possible.

[*English*]

It is important that we establish a legislative framework that extends beyond the present importation and storage regime for pathogens and toxins, especially for things such as anthrax, salmonella and influenza. The current regime is inadequate and not up to the standard of other international regulations. It only requires that all labs that import human pathogens and toxins adhere to the laboratory biosafety guidelines, the LBGs, but these existing guidelines are not mandatory for labs that acquire human pathogens and toxins from domestic sources even though they are applied widely on a voluntary basis as an industry standard. This voluntary approach is no longer good enough. We need to bring Canada into the modern world that actually deals with the biosecurity reality we now face.

Government Orders

The bill would require laboratories carrying out activities with risk groups 2, 3 or 4 human pathogens or select toxins to register with the Public Health Agency of Canada's Office of Laboratory Security. It would subject the licensees with a risk of group 3 and 4 pathogens and possibly select toxins to stricter operating regulations and it would require a permit to import a human pathogen or toxin. As well, as was raised by the hon. member from Winnipeg, the bill would require transfer permits to send and receive any human pathogen or toxin between laboratories within Canada that are not part of the same facility.

It would also require licensees, as part of their annual or biannual update of inventory, to notify the Public Health Agency of Canada of the nature of the disposal of human pathogens and toxins. These changes would bring Canada into line with more stringent regulations in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Although there is a need for the minister to have the ability to improve the safety and security of Canada's laboratories, the powers given to the minister in the bill are very serious. We believe that putting in place the kind of scientific advice that would be important to the minister should be as transparent as possible. I am in favour of there being an advisory committee to give transparent advice to the minister, so it is clear that scientists make scientific judgments and politicians make political judgments.

The Liberal caucus will support this bill at second reading because it modernizes and improves the laboratory licensing system and improves the overall health and safety of Canadians. However, since provinces and territories are responsible for licensing, we will have to further study and listen to the representatives from the provinces and territories at committee to make sure that those jurisdictions are comfortable with this collaborative approach.

I want to thank the minister and her department for the excellent briefing they gave us this morning on the bill. I was relieved to hear that the \$36 million that will be required to implement the bill is already in the fiscal framework and that the bill will protect the health and safety of Canadians by closing the significant gap in Canada's national security framework.

The current regime is inadequate. As we have said, there has been this legislative gap about knowing where these dangerous human pathogens or toxins exist and how they are transferred. It is hugely important as we go forward that there be a comprehensive framework that the rest of the world understands exists in Canada, which is now seen to be a weak link in dealing with human pathogens and toxins through the various controlled activities.

I am very comfortable with the different levels of penalties. Obviously, in this dangerous world, the idea of releasing, abandoning or disposing on purpose a human pathogen or toxin must face the highest possible criminal offence.

It is important that these new criminal aspects include duty of care, the complete prohibition of controlled activities with certain human pathogens, such as the smallpox virus, as well as prohibition of controlled activities with a human pathogen or toxin without a licence.

I am happy that the regulatory framework will be enhanced in terms of the specific licensing requirements, inventory requirements,

security screening requirements, and the outlining of the duties and qualifications of the new biological safety officers.

● (1125)

I am happy that since the bill was last presented, there have been changes to it in terms of the schedules; the transferring and the inspection powers now explain that inspection must be on reasonable grounds; and there is now the ability to move conveyances.

I am pleased that the stakeholder consultation was done properly. No real opposition was expressed, although some issues were raised around the implementation. The need for balance, the technical issues and the cost of complying with the new requirements for the individual smaller labs seem to have been taken into consideration and there is a commitment for continued consultation with the stakeholders.

The basic approach of the bill makes colossal sense. On royal assent, in phase one, the prohibitions, the duty of care, and the offences in the registry will come into force. I am happy that in phase two the development of the regulatory framework will again involve extensive consultation with the stakeholders. Phase three will bring into force the rest of the requirements.

I am very pleased with the collaboration and cooperation of the department on this bill. I look forward to studying this bill in detail at committee.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we live in an era of change and uncertainty. Infectious disease remains among the leading causes of death worldwide and the greatest killer of children and young adults.

New infectious diseases, such as HIV-AIDS and SARS, are emerging. Old infectious diseases, such as malaria, plague and tuberculosis, are re-emerging, and intractable infectious diseases remain an ever-present threat.

Although most deaths from infectious disease occur in developing countries, no region of the world is risk-free. It is, therefore, in the best interests of all countries, including Canada, to support initiatives to control infectious disease.

Bioterrorism also remains a very real threat. As mentioned, in October 2000, letters containing anthrax spores were mailed to American news media offices and two senators. The letters killed five people and infected over twenty others. Broad public health measures were implemented to treat the thousands who were potentially exposed and decontamination of government buildings and postal offices took years. The total cost to the United States was more than \$1 billion.

Microbiological agents and toxins can and do impact global health. In 2003, SARS spread to 30 countries across 5 continents and killed almost 800 people, 44 of them in Toronto.

We must protect Canadian health and we must protect global health. The more we increase biosafety measures, the greater the probability that we will be able to mitigate the deadly effects of infectious disease, even if they are launched deliberately by human agents.

Government Orders

The World Health Organization urges countries to promote biosafety practices for the safe handling, containment and transport of microbiological agents and toxins; to review the safety of laboratories and their existing protocols; to develop programs that enhance compliance of laboratories; and to encourage the development of biological safety training.

Thousands of infectious samples are shipped daily around the world for clinical trials, disease investigations, surveillance, et cetera. Animal and human specimens need to be transported efficiently, legally, safely and in a timely manner. Shippers must be aware of regulatory requirements, personnel must undertake appropriate training and specimens must be packed to protect transporters from risk of infections.

There are new reports of infections resulting from transport related exposures, excluding the 2001 anthrax letters in the United States. However, there have been reports of the transmission of acute respiratory infections associated with air travel as a result of direct person-to-person contact.

Best practices regarding the transport of microbiological agents and toxins must be used to protect the environment and human health. Perhaps more support is needed to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases from other countries and among provinces.

In the laboratory, containment of microbiological agents and toxins is critical to preventing outbreaks of emerging and re-emerging diseases. Over the last 70 years, research to combat infectious disease has resulted in over 5,000 associated infections in the laboratory and almost 200 deaths. Infamously, in 1978 a smallpox laboratory accident caused one death and led to the suicide of the laboratory director. More recently, in 2008 the Bush administration acknowledged that the Plum Island Animal Disease Center, the only U.S. facility allowed to research the highly contagious foot and mouth disease, experienced several accidents with the virus.

It is, therefore, imperative that laboratories have strict facility safeguards, microbiological practices and safety equipment that protect laboratory workers, the environment and the public from exposure to infections, micro-organisms and toxins that are stored in the laboratory.

● (1130)

Responsible laboratory practices will help prevent intentional release, loss, misuse, theft or unauthorized access of biological material, and will contribute to preserving important scientific work for future generations.

New research shows that infectious diseases are now emerging at an exceptional rate, with humans accumulating new pathogens at a rate of one per year. This means that agencies and governments will need to work harder than ever before to keep abreast of the increasing threat.

It is, therefore, imperative that we take every opportunity to protect people and the environment from infectious disease, as emerging infectious disease has the potential to eliminate opportunities for infectious disease eradication or elimination.

In 1969, smallpox remained a devastating disease, killing 1.6 million people that year. Eradication of the disease was achieved because of a worldwide effort that was supported by the necessary political will, human and technical resources and a safe vaccine.

In 1979, the year that smallpox was declared eradicated, HIV was rapidly spreading across Africa and the world. If the global smallpox eradication campaign had been postponed, the world might not have been able to eradicate smallpox as easily as it did in 1980. Biosafety must be paramount, whether in the air, across the land or in the lab.

After six years of planning, I led an expedition to the Arctic to search for the cause of the 1918 Spanish influenza, history's deadliest disease. My research team would safely exhume six bodies with the hope of identifying the influenza virus to make a better antiviral or a flu vaccine.

Opening the graves was akin to opening Pandora's Box as there was the chance of re-releasing history's deadliest disease. Our safety protocols, planned over two years, were approved by a blue ribbon panel hosted by the National Institute for Health and the government of Norway. We did our utmost to provide a safe working environment on the frozen tundra.

After receiving all the necessary permits for transportation, my research team shipped tissue samples, packed in containers to prevent mechanical and temperature damage, from the High Arctic to our most secure laboratory, a biosafety level four laboratory in Britain.

For six years I lived and breathed biosafety, lived with the risk of finding live virus and took every precaution to undertake our work safely and ethically. No formal permission process existed for exhuming bodies. However, we asked permission from the families, the governor of Svalbard, et cetera. We also developed our own biosafety protocols related to exhumation and sampling decontamination.

Strengthening global surveillance is not enough to eliminate or eradicate infectious disease. We need close ties among public health, trade and transportation organizations. We need strong laboratory regulations and an improved means of communicating and reporting to protect the lab workers and the surrounding community from accidental exposure to infectious agents. We also need better collaboration with those monitoring the biological weapons convention.

We have had multiple wake-up calls. This new bill is a step in the right direction. Complacency cannot be an option when it comes to biosafety.

Government Orders

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, my colleagues spoke to Bill C-11, an act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins. Now it is my turn. The summary of the bill reads as follows:

This enactment creates measures to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins and all activities associated with them. It establishes a comprehensive legislative regime that extends beyond the present importation regime. It requires every person conducting activities involving human pathogens or toxins to take all reasonable measures to protect the health and safety of the public.

As my colleagues said, it is important to keep Canadians safe. It is every Parliament's duty to ensure the safety of Canadians within the scope of its constitutional powers. As we have seen, the proposed legislation would require all persons conducting these activities to comply with a number of guidelines. It would ensure consistency by obliging all labs to adhere to laboratory biosafety guidelines developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Licences must be obtained for controlled activities, such as possessing, handling, using, producing, storing, permitting authorized access to, transferring, importing, exporting, releasing or otherwise abandoning, or disposing of a human pathogen or toxin.

The federal government claims that it is entitled to introduce this bill because of its jurisdiction over criminal law. However, at this point, I have to wonder whether the government should really have made this bill a priority. As we know, since the guidelines were introduced over 15 years ago, there have been no incidents in Canada, regardless of whether labs have been following those guidelines.

Also on the order paper is a bill the government introduced in January, Bill C-6, formerly Bill C-52, on the safety of consumer products. The government has known at least since November 2006 that there are problems in this area. The Auditor General said so. Since the summer of 2007, there have been several major recalls, including a recall of toys containing lead. It would have been better if this bill were before the House now, seeing as how there have been no pathogen problems to date under the existing acts and regulations.

We know that the highest risk groups are groups 3 and 4. I would remind this House that the human pathogens in these groups pose a high risk to the health of individuals and a low or high risk to public health. Twenty-four labs in Quebec and 150 in Canada fully meet the guidelines for groups 3 and 4. In addition, the backgrounder on Bill C-54, which is the number this bill had in the last Parliament, states that "The risk to Canadians posed by the presence of human pathogens and toxins in labs is low."

• (1140)

This is still a very important issue. However, this bill, in its current form, must not be allowed to stop or impede lab work, which is crucial to determining the causes of diseases and advancing science through research. In committee, it will be very important to look at this aspect of the bill in depth and to meet with a wide range of specialists working in this field to make sure that they will be able to do this work once this bill has been passed, especially with regard to risk group 2, which poses a lower risk to the health of individuals and public health. Of course, these labs include hospital and university labs where very important research is under way.

I would like to raise another point before I go on to the topic of university research. I am just wondering whether the Criminal Code already covers intentional threats to public safety, such as terrorist acts, and unintentional threats, such as criminal negligence. To my way of thinking, these threats to public health or public safety are already covered by legislation passed here.

I would like to start with the issue that, in the current version of the bill could, in our opinion, pose a number of problems. That issue is research conducted in our universities. The parliamentary secretary told us earlier that the government had held a number of consultations. And at a meeting with officials from the Public Health Agency of Canada, we were told that a number of consultations had been held. However, despite these consultations, researchers still have a number of important questions, especially regarding who will pay the costs of complying with the new requirements. This concern is mentioned in the Public Health Agency of Canada notes, but was not addressed by the parliamentary secretary in his earlier remarks.

We know that university research is already underfunded, yet today, as we prepare to refer this bill to committee, we do not know if assistance will be made available to institutions to help them comply with the new guidelines or if labs will be left to cover all the costs themselves.

Has the government actually conducted studies to determine the impact this new legislation would have on university courses, on how our hospitals operate and on the research industry in Quebec and Canada?

This question is extremely relevant because, as I said earlier, I have not yet received an answer. I understand the government's desire to impose a new guideline so that no products are released that could pose a risk to public health, but as for the operations of laboratories, I have yet to receive an answer.

Government Orders

• (1145)

I simply have one question. Does the government want us as parliamentarians to pass legislation that I think is incomplete, in the sense that it does not address all the concerns raised by the community? It is asking us for *carte blanche*, in a way, and asking us to trust it and wait until later. It seems to be saying that it will communicate with the various stakeholders and labs again, that it will ensure that the regulatory framework will meet their expectations and not pose a problem for their operations. If that is in fact what the government and the department intend to do, why then, from the first draft, from the time this bill was introduced for first reading, has this bill not included provisions to address the concerns justifiably raised by the community?

Once again, the government decided to introduce a bill in this House without assessing the direct impact it will have on the community. If it had done so in a responsible manner, this version of the bill would already include provisions to address the concerns raised by the academic community. We would have already heard the government's response regarding its assessment of the impact of Bill C-11 on university education.

The bill also proposes a number of fines. I understand that when a bill is introduced that will affect the Criminal Code, for example, fines must be imposed. However, what the government wants to do is impose fines on universities and hospitals, when everyone knows very well—and I said so a little earlier in my speech—that there is an abysmal lack of funding for those two kinds of institutions where research is done.

The bill also establishes penalties and fines for anyone who shows wanton or reckless disregard concerning pathogens and toxins. The bill also establishes financial penalties and imprisonment for anyone who intentionally releases pathogens.

I am wondering, as are my Bloc Québécois colleagues, about the need for these new prison sentences given that they are already contained in existing legislation. Are measures put in place by this bill with respect to breach of duty, wanton or reckless breach of duty and intentional release not already in the Criminal Code and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act? And are measures prohibiting intentional misuse of pathogens not included in the Anti-Terrorism Act? These are the questions to ask when the bill is before the Standing Committee on Health.

• (1150)

I am pleased that my colleagues from the Conservative and Liberal parties have agreed to hear important witnesses who, on a daily basis, will have to work under and adapt to this new legislation to establish new standards for storing and handling human pathogens and toxins.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to go back to two or three other aspects that are more directly related to the bill. Clause 39, for example, states:

The Minister may, without the consent of the person to whom the information relates, disclose personal information and confidential business information obtained under this Act to a person from whom the Minister seeks advice, to a department or agency of the government of Canada or a province, to a foreign government or to an international organization—

For all intents and purposes, although those receiving this confidential information are required to maintain confidentiality—as stated later in the clause—I find it rather strange that consent is not required. It should be understood that the person may not be consulted or, at the very least, notified that information will be disclosed. This could be discussed with the minister and his officials in order to clarify this aspect of the bill, which could be problematic if, in fact, confidential information is disclosed without notifying the individuals or institutions concerned.

I would also like to talk about another issue that relates a bit more directly to the bill. Clause 67 states that the minister may make an interim order involving a product in the case of problems with enforcement of the legislation. The minister would then make an interim order effective immediately. The clause also states that the two houses of Parliament need not be informed for up to 15 days.

Should an emergency occur that requires immediate action on the part of the minister, this House should be informed much sooner than that. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary or even the minister would like to touch on that. When it comes to incidents involving public health and safety, all members of the public, as well as all parliamentarians, should be informed and given the opportunity to debate the issues without delay. To me, that means within hours or, at most, a few days. Fifteen days is far too long. Indeed, it would be odd for Parliament not to be informed of a situation endangering public health within 15 days.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the importance of ensuring public safety. We must also ensure that our universities and hospitals can carry on doing their research, and that the government provides more support for research.

• (1155)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes for his speech and comments.

I think that we all agree that we need effective health protection and that this bill could be a step in the right direction. I think it will be very important to hear witnesses in committee in order to ensure that this bill is the best way to guarantee that necessary, useful research poses no risk to Canadians.

My colleague has raised some real concerns about this. He spoke about funding for laboratories and wondered whether these labs would be able to cover the additional costs new legislation would impose.

Some research laboratories have protested because obeying the new law will cost them more time or money.

Government Orders

Is my colleague worried that no funding has been proposed to help these laboratories actually make these changes? Is he also worried by the fact that these laboratories may have to make cuts elsewhere in order to pay for these changes?

● (1200)

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. She is absolutely correct. The parliamentary secretary has also said that the laboratories are not against the bill.

The laboratories are conscious of the risks that their activities pose to public health. However, my colleague rightly pointed out, they are asking how they, with the financial resources they currently have, will be able to adapt their practices and, as I said earlier, not cause any incidents. No incidents have been recorded in Quebec or in Canada. They are wondering how they will absorb the cost—billions of dollars for all of the laboratories. How will they absorb this?

My colleague is right to be worried when she suggests that cuts might have to be made elsewhere in order to obey the law. When there is a finite amount of funding for the work to be done, it is obvious that spending on unanticipated items means cuts elsewhere.

She is also quite right to say that when this bill is studied in committee, it will be very important to hear the stakeholders' concerns clearly and directly from them. Furthermore, we will ensure that this bill includes satisfactory answers for these people, and not simply some future regulatory framework without apparent guidelines or content. Clearly, there must be a balance between safety and research.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up some important comments and questions.

I would like to put on the record the fact that this government is very open and willing to work with our colleagues to ensure we have strong legislation. I think he will agree that this is long overdue. Just because there have not been any particular instances does not mean we should not be ready for something like this to occur because the implications can be incredibly severe.

He brought up questions with respect to funding. I point out that the new legislative regime will be generally consistent with all the existing guidelines. It is expected that most laboratories will be compliant with these guidelines, as they have been since 1990. We are not putting in something that is too unreasonable or something with which the laboratories are not familiar.

If the member has some particularly important witnesses whom he would like to bring forward, the government is willing to work with him in that regard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health for his comments. I am pleased to see—and I also noticed from his speech—that he is somewhat open. We simply do not see such clear and precise openness in the bill, but I am pleased to hear that this government is open to hearing from a variety of stakeholders in order to ensure that there will be no impact

on the work currently being done in our academic and other institutions.

As we all know, the bill stipulates that a list of all users of these products would have to be submitted. What does that mean for a university? Does that mean all the students in the department, all the students who actually handle the substance or all the students who might walk through the hallways and common areas? These are additional questions that must be answered with the stakeholders and with the goodwill of all parliamentarians.

All these comments must be explored during the committee's study of the bill. I am delighted to see everyone coming together to ensure that this bill can be put in place while respecting current practices.

● (1205)

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased we have the opportunity today to speak to Bill C-11, important legislation that deals with human pathogens and toxins. One thing that needs to be said at the outset of this debate is that nowhere is it more important to have a proactive government using all the tools available through the public sector than when it comes to human pathogens and toxins.

We start from the basic premise that the legislation, at face value, looks good. It is long overdue. It is part of a package of antiquated legislation that needs to be updated and brought into the 21st century. However, there also needs to be a new kind of thinking on the part of government, the kind of thinking that appears contrary to the ideological predilections of the Conservative government.

I want to start by putting on the table the overriding concern for Canadians. When it comes to the safety and well-being of Canadians, there can be no shortcuts. There can be no privatization, no offloading and no passive regulatory scheme.

This area demands a proactive government, a strong public sector component and laboratories that are within and only within the public sector, not privatized, no public-private partnerships, no deals with the private sector, no commercialization.

First and foremost, this is about safety. Canadians know a lot about exposure to dangerous pathogens and toxins, and they are worried. They are worried because they have not seen from the government the kind of action that is necessary to guarantee their safety and security at times of crisis.

The record of the Conservatives, and the Liberals before them, is atrocious. Neither party has understood the role of government in this area. The dismantling of our health protection system started under the Liberals and has continued to this day under the Conservatives.

Under the Liberals, we lost laboratories in the federal public service. We lost laboratories that tested for dangerous pathogens. We lost laboratories that looked at interactions between drugs and foods. There were outliers from scientists who felt their scientific judgment had been pushed aside in the name of expediency.

Government Orders

In the past the Liberal government took away the resources and means by which one could actively oversee a system pertaining to human safety, whether we talk about drugs, foods, pathogens, toxins, organs, blood, just name it. Let us not forget the Krever Commission and the whole blood scandal. Let us remember the lessons of our history and ensure that history does not repeat itself when it comes to something as fundamental as human health and safety.

The path set out by the Liberals has been continued by the Conservatives. Did we see a replenishment of inspectors when it came to problems in our food safety systems? Did we see a well coordinated, thoughtful, profound response when it came to something as devastating as listeriosis, which resulted in 20 deaths in our country? No. We saw once more the kind of scattergun approach that the Liberals brought to this chamber. We saw a passive government response that said it would let the industry regulate itself. We saw confusion everywhere, with no central coordination or authority to oversee this entire area.

● (1210)

We have lost something fundamental that has to be regained, that the Conservative government has to recommit to, if we are going to get anywhere with something as profound as protecting people from dangerous pathogens and toxins.

I want to start with some basic principles. This legislation says it will broaden the mandatory application of the laboratory biosafety guidelines from just imported pathogens to include domestic sources as well. It will supposedly ensure that the government has a complete inventory of where potentially dangerous pathogens exist and that sites are licensed appropriately. It says it will parallel the treatment of pathogens in many other industrialized countries, because we are far behind the rest of the world on these issues, and that it will bring the malevolent use of these organisms under the criminal code regime and provide for the inspection of work sites and penalties for misuse.

That sounds good. It sounds progressive and along the lines of what Canadians have been asking for on other issues pertaining to drugs and foods for some time.

It would appear that this bill will make Canadians safer, or will at least make them feel safer. That comes after dealing with Walkerton, SARS, listeriosis, and what have become regular announcements of food contamination and recalls. Just remember that *E. coli*, salmonella, and listeriosis have all now become household names across this country. There are no exceptions across communities in this country.

In Winnipeg, as my colleague from Winnipeg Centre mentioned earlier, we have a level 4 lab. We are very proud of that fact. We are proud of the record of achievement of that laboratory, but we know that it takes a certain ideological perspective to ensure that the public safety is guaranteed whenever such a facility is established in a community. It takes a perspective that says that government's job is to protect people from any dangerous spills or seepage or accident pertaining to pathogens and toxins. It says that the workers in that lab must be safe, that the people in the community must be safe, and that whenever such dangerous pathogens are transported, people everywhere must be safe.

But there was a bit of a problem back in 1999 with that lab. The Liberals were in power. There was a leak, and 2,000 litres of lab effluent were dumped into the public sewage system. That was on June 23, 1999.

It took a community to stand up and demand its rights for government to take action. The Liberals were then in power, and the Government of Canada decided to keep things relatively quiet, to keep it a secret, to not be fully transparent. Health Canada did not publicize the spill. News of it came through media reports.

Naturally the community was very upset. I and my colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre, decided to work with the community to make sure that their voices were heard and that lessons were learned from this incident. In fact, shortly after that spill we launched a community lab safety task force, hosted a round table of experts and activists, and met with many people in the community on this issue.

It paid off. Eventually the government announced a community liaison committee to improve communications, and other measures were taken as a result of this incident.

However, it took the community to speak up about it. There was no full disclosure, and that should never happen.

That is why I started this debate by saying there must some basic principles in place in order for this legislation to mean anything and to work.

● (1215)

At the top of the list is the principle that there must be full transparency and accountability to the public. There can be no secrets. There has to be full disclosure when accidents happen or mistakes are made. The public has to be kept informed every step of the way.

I know that the Conservatives are not naturally inclined to do that, despite all their protestations when they were in opposition and their promises during the last election to be accountable and transparent. We have seen almost no evidence of that. They break their word, they change their minds, and they refuse to disclose when the public needs to be told of an important public policy development. I do not need to go into the long list of issues on that front. We could talk about appointments to the Senate or about breaking their own law on fixed election dates. The list goes on and on. There are all kinds of issues related to the Conservatives' promises of transparency and accountability.

However, that kind of action on the part of the Conservatives cannot be allowed to continue, especially when it comes to something as important as human pathogens and toxins. We are talking about life-and-death situations. There is no room for that kind of culture of secrecy and arrogance to be continued for one second in this country today, especially on this critical issue.

Government Orders

The first issue, then, is public accountability and full transparency.

Second, there has to be coordination. The right hand of government has to know what the left hand is doing. There has to be some semblance of a coordinated system within government to deal with the issues pertaining to human pathogens and toxins, partly because of the public health issue at stake here, but also because of the threat of bioterrorism.

We all have questions today pertaining to the legislation. Is the government any more prepared today than it was last fall with respect to the listeriosis crisis? Is it any more prepared today than when we had the SARS crisis? Is it any more prepared today than when we learned the tragic news of September 11? Do we have a coordinated, centralized shop within government that oversees this area?

I do not think so. I am having a hard time finding it. I know the public safety department is sometimes responsible. Health Canada is sometimes responsible. There are pots of money here and pots of money there. There is a little bit of shifting here and there between government departments, but who is in charge? Where does the buck stop? Which minister is absolutely responsible?

This is a very legitimate concern in the light of a couple of recent developments. In September 2008 the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence found our response capabilities lacking. The Senate committee found that the federal government will not even tell local front-line responders where it stashes its emergency medical supplies. It will not tell them where they are located.

It is interesting that when those who are responsible for delivering emergency services at the local level in Medicine Hat stumbled on a federal supply, the federal government, rather than using the opportunity to build coordination and efficiency, took the supplies and hid them somewhere else. Does that make sense? Is that responsible, accountable, fully transparent government action in the midst of a very serious situation? It certainly does not bode well for future crises that are likely to occur in this country.

Canadians are especially concerned about the government's ability and capacity to protect them from a non-terrorist threat.

• (1220)

I talked about listeriosis earlier. Let me go back to that for a moment because it is our most recent example of what happens when we do not really have a government in charge that knows what it is doing and puts the needs of Canadians first. We only have to refer to the Canadian Medical Association's article in the midst of that crisis to give full meaning to this point.

The Canadian Medical Association Journal actually stated on October 21, 2008, that "...the most visible figures in the recent recall of affected foods have not been public health officials but rather the head of Maple Leaf Foods and the minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada".

Where was the Prime Minister? Where was the Minister of Health? Where was the coordinated response to something as tragic as listeriosis? Why was it left to the private sector to explain the situation? Is it not the job of government to put in place regulations

and standards and laws and programs that the private sector must adhere to? Is it not the fundamental role of government to set the stage and to put in place the framework by which those who operate in the private sector are guided? How was it possible that through consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments we just let this system deteriorate to the point that nobody was in charge, the private sector was regulating itself, inspection capacity was greatly reduced, and standards based on a series of recommendations on paper were not on site? Were there regular surprise visits to meat plants, food stores, retailers, manufacturers, and producers?

No. Rather, there was simply a risk management model that said there might be a problem, that we were going to let business live up to these standards, that we were not going to inspect them regularly to make sure that they were, and that when it happened, we were going to duck and run.

There is the lesson. That is why this legislation is so important today and why we need more than simply the words of this bill before us. We need a whole government plan. We need to know that this government finally gets it and understands that we have to have a precautionary model when it comes to pathogens and toxins, just as we have to have a precautionary do-no-harm model when it comes to protecting people from dangerous drugs and problematic foods. There is no other way around it.

I do not see that here. I do not see the government coming forward with a plan about how it is going to coordinate any government plan in this regard and how it is going to put in the resources necessary to make sure we actually have that kind of proactive do-no-harm model in place.

It is not risk management. It is not saying, "Well, this is out there in the market. These pathogens or toxins exist, and we are going to protect as much as possible", but in fact, "We are going to warn people, and if something happens, then we're going to take action. We'll wait until someone dies or gets sick before we take action."

Has that not been the way of the Conservatives, and the Liberals before them, on all these issues? I think so. I heard someone say no. I think it has been the way, and that has to change.

I know my time is almost up. There is much more to say in terms of this issue, but I want to end by saying that the framework we expect to be in place in dealing with this legislation must include transparency and accountability. It must emphasize public ownership and public sector involvement, and not privatization or P3s. This model must be based on the precautionary principle, the do-no-harm model, and not on risk management. Finally, it must ensure that all Canadians are involved and fully informed and participative in any schemes or programs that address threats to people's food security, threats in terms of bioterrorism and threats in terms of human pathogens and toxins.

Government Orders

•(1225)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg for her thoughtful and well presented case in terms of our support for this kind of oversight and her concern about whether the government will actually implement all of it and do the things that will be required to protect us.

As a member of Parliament in Ontario, I will never forget the Walkerton scandal and the scenario that unfolded in front of us in the days of the Mike Harris government. I think the member might have been around in those days. That was as a result of, yes, some human failure but also the fact that over a number of months into the Mike Harris government there was a moving of oversight on the environmental front of laboratories to the private sector. There was also a reduction in the number of people working for the ministry of the environment which all came together to present to us a very tragic circumstance in which people lost their lives.

In bringing this, obviously wanted, needed and important legislation forward, is the member confident that the government, within which there are many from the Mike Harris days, will actually implement it and not, at the first opportunity, shift it all over to the private sector again and/or reduce the number of people in the ministry of the environment in terms of oversight and reporting on this kind of very important public business? Does she believe the government may continue to cut staff to the point where even the best of legislation and oversight will not actually be effective?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for Sault Ste. Marie who is very knowledgeable about this issue coming from Toronto based on the Walkerton crisis. He asked whether we felt any more confident today than we did back then around public safety with these kinds of scenarios. I am afraid I cannot point to anything that gives me confidence yet that the government gets it and is able to commit the resources and make the policies that will put in place a proactive system that will protect people in the future.

We all learned from Walkerton but I want to go back to listeriosis because that is our most recent example. The Canadian Medical Association said in October, "Overall it would seem that as a country, Canada is far less prepared now for epidemics than in the past". It almost seems like we may be going backwards, not making new advances.

The national advisory committee on SARS and public health told us that the Chief Public Health Officer should serve as the leading national voice for public health, particularly in outbreaks and other health emergencies. However, as in the listeriosis outbreak, the public received its briefings not from the Chief Public Health Officer but from the head of the very company that was causing the problems.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency actually admitted in November that its silence was a problem but the Conservative government said nothing.

I am not sure that the government has learned yet. I think some of us have some good ideas about how we should go forward but we have no sign yet that the government is committed to the preservation of a publicly administered, publicly run, publicly

funded system that has strong oversight based on the precautionary do-no-harm model.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to working with the member in committee on this very important bill. I also want to assure her that we do get it, which is why we are putting the bill forward. We think the bill is long overdue.

If the member believes it is important for the Canadian government to ensure Canadians are safe, will she support the bill as we move it forward? We do need to move the bill forward as quickly as we can to ensure it is debated in committee and then implemented for the safety of Canadians?

I would like to have the member put on the record whether she will be supporting the bill.

•(1230)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, that is a hard question to answer. I have said that the bill looks progressive and positive at face value and that I want to see it studied at committee. However, I also said that it is pretty hard to judge a government action on a very important issue by legislation alone. If the resources, staff and policies are not in place to protect Canadians, we have a serious problem and we need to continue to address it through the course of this legislative process.

I will give a couple of examples of why I have such doubts. One of the Conservative government's first acts on taking power in 2006 was to eliminate the Public Health Agency minister and public health seat at the cabinet table. It took away the whole role at the cabinet table. It also left the Chief Medical Officer of Health responsible to the Minister of Health. According to the CMA journal, this left our country without a national independent voice to speak out on public health issues, including providing viable leadership during a crisis.

We also need to watch for cutbacks and wonder if the government is taking some shortcuts in this area. I mentioned earlier that the government decided to convert to a system of increased food industry self-inspection, which has been widely speculated to have caused some of the problems we have seen with respect to salmonella, outbreaks of E. coli and listeriosis. We also should not forget that the Conservatives cut back the avian influenza preparedness program.

Government Orders

I also want to mention that this area requires in-depth research and a constant injection of funds into research if we are ever going to understand the relationship between these pathogens and toxins in terms of human health. What did the government do in its last budget? It cut back on investments in health and research in the scientific communities, which is an ominous, worrisome response on the part of the government at a time when we need more investment, scientific understanding and coordination between the research communities and laboratories that work in these areas.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's concerns about Bill C-11.

During her speech, she mentioned what happened in Walkerton a number of years ago, which was a terrible tragedy. Walkerton, while not in my riding, used to be part of it. It is just on the edge of Bruce county.

The one thing I and the people of Walkerton do not need to hear is the implication by members of the opposition or anybody else that it was a breakdown in the system. The clear truth of what happened in Walkerton was that two employees did not do their jobs.

The government is bringing forth Bill C-11 to improve the health and safety of Canadians. It was the same thing on the listeriosis outbreak not too long ago, although the government over the last two years hired 200 more inspectors for CFIA. Those are the kinds of things the government has done.

Does the hon. member support improving the health and the risks for health problems in Bill C-11?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I must disagree as vehemently as possible with the hon. member. We have all studied the Walkerton issue. My colleague from Sault Ste. Marie was in the Ontario legislature at the time and knows very well that this was a systemic issue, an issue of systems breaking down, government cutbacks, privatization, outsourcing, off-loading and lack of coordination. It was not just the result of two individuals not doing their job. It was the result of a government that did not invest in the infrastructure and programs that were needed within the public sector to maintain people's safety during a time of crisis.

I will translate that into what is happening here. If that attitude continues, we are in deep trouble. The government can be darn sure that we will not support the legislation if it continues to find bogeymen instead of looking in its own backyard to find the problems that exist. Why in the world is the government cutting back \$42.7 million in this fiscal year, \$52.9 million next year and \$72.2 million more in 2011-12 from the Public Health Agency and Health Canada?

How can we be confident when the government is talking out of both sides of its mouth at once? On the one hand, it is pretending tough legislation but on the other hand it is prepared to privatize our Crown corporations, cut back in terms of the Public Health Agency and provide no coordination when it comes to emergency medical services.

• (1235)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are debating Bill C-11 today, which is an act to

promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins.

The schedules to the bill list these pathogens and toxins. It is really quite a who's who of all the biological bad guys out there and it is pretty scary for a layman to read. I had two esteemed colleagues from my Liberal Party up, who are both doctors and probably pretty comfortable with the words, but there is aflatoxin, anthrax, cholera, diphtheria and dozens of ugly sounding toxins and pathogens.

Any layperson who looks at that would say that we need this legislation, and it is a consensus in the House that we need this legislation. There was a bill in the prior Parliament that did not make it through as it was a short Parliament. My party supports the bill in principle and, if adopted by the House, hopefully it will go to committee.

However, I must point out some issues that I do have with the bill. One issue that I raised previously is an issue that I will raise again, and if nobody moves amendments to this bill, I probably will. The issue concerns the granting by this House of powers to the administration, not just to the government but to persons in the government. In this particular case, they are referred to in the bill as inspectors. It has to do with this whole concept of the House giving power in a statute to the government to make regulations and enforce provisions of the act that are regulatory, in addition to the statutory provisions.

In modern government, we all accept that we need to do that. The real trick is in how we do it, how Parliament does it and whether or not Parliament will scrutinize, review and oversee the regulatory work and the enforcement that happens after the powers are delegated.

It is okay for Parliament to pass a law that says a citizen shall not do X. That is not a delegation. That is a creation of an offence and authorities enforce those offences. However, when Parliament passes a law that gives the authority to a minister or the governor in council to make a regulation, to create some kind of a regulatory offence, that is a delegation. When we do that in Parliament we should take steps to ensure that the enforcement and execution of those powers happen within the law. Parliament has created a method for doing that.

I will address this bill through a lens of our civil liberties, our freedoms. I have always tried to do that as a member of Parliament and I will do it here. I am not doing it just to be critical of the bill. I am doing it to better assure the rights and freedoms of Canadians under this particular legislation.

Sections in the bill would give substantial regulatory powers to the minister and to inspectors. When we are dealing with these human pathogens and toxins, one could expect that we would do that. There is no way we would send the minister or a member of Parliament over to some illegal laboratory to pick up some anthrax. This is done through hard-working, honest and dedicated public servants who need the authority to do that hard work.

I now want to look at the legislation to see how we are asking them to do this. I would refer the House to subclause 41(1), which reads:

Government Orders

Subject to section 42, an inspector may, for the purpose of verifying compliance or preventing non-compliance with this Act...enter at any reasonable time any place or conveyance [such as a motor vehicle or a bus] in which the inspector believes on reasonable grounds that an activity to which this Act or the regulations apply is conducted...

● (1240)

Not just for the purpose of preventing a breach of the act but for the purpose of ensuring compliance, the inspector may enter any place, any reasonable time. We pretty much just give to an inspector the right to do something that not even a policeman could do without a warrant or specific statutory authorization. There had better be a real good reason for this, to give all this power to a particular individual.

We are dealing with some difficult chemicals here, some pathogens and toxins, but here are some of the things that inspectors could do. They can examine the place. They can require the person in the place to do things. They can seize and detain, open and examine, direct the owner or the person having possession, care or control, to do certain things, to move certain things. They can examine and make copies, require any person in the place to do the same, and the list goes on.

These are significant powers. We should keep in mind the basis on which the inspector enters the premises. It is for the purpose, low threshold only, of verifying compliance. That would mean on a bad day, "I think I will go check these guys because I feel like it". It could be that. I am not saying that it would be, but what if that is the case? "I will go into this place to check it because I want to verify compliance. I do not like the way they park their cars in the parking lot", or maybe, "I do not like the owner". This is the power that the act now gives, not by regulation, but by statute, right up front, to an inspector.

Subclause 41(6) says, "No person shall knowingly obstruct or hinder...an inspector who is carrying out their functions". No person shall obstruct or hinder. That sounds reasonable, but let me tell the House that there are occasions where, from time to time, this restriction on hindering is abused. I am not making it up because I represent constituents whom I think have been criminally assaulted by government officials in the Canada Border Service Agency.

My constituents, a family, father, wife, two teenage boys, 14 and 16, came back to Canada at Windsor. They had made some purchases in the U.S.A. and low-balled the amount of money, they underestimated the amount they spent, so they were invited to go to secondary for inspection. It was all pretty reasonable stuff. I have been sent to secondary for inspection. People there are a little bit officious, but they are just doing their job: "Stand up. Move over there. Do this. Do that. Do not talk". Okay, they checked my car. I did not tell them I was an MP.

Anyway, this family came across. The inspectors in that case were border services officers, that is, immigration officials, food inspectors, customs officials, tax collectors. They ended up breaking the arm of my constituent. They broke his arm. They put both the teenage boys in handcuffs and dragged them into the office along with the wife. When all was settled, they charged my constituents with obstruction. These guys behaved like bikers. They beat up this family and then they charged them with obstruction. Here we have a

section which authorizes that Canadians be charged with obstructing or hindering an inspector.

● (1245)

I happen to be a lawyer. I went to Windsor with these people to defend them in court against this charge of obstruction. It was wrong and the charges were dismissed.

Four people were summoned by Her Majesty to come to court that day, to tell the truth, and say what happened. One CBSA official showed up and did not rise in court when the case was called. Those individuals did not even appear to a summons. That was lawlessness. There is no appeal mechanism for that agency. There is an informal one in the minister's office, but there is no oversight.

These are tax collectors, food inspectors, immigration officers, who are running around arresting people, beating them up, but do not show up in court to prosecute a case, so the case was dismissed. It was kind of a happy ending after the man's arm was broken and he missed work. I did inform the minister about this and the minister said not much could be done. Maybe there should be a lawsuit. These are just regular people who do not have a lot of money to start lawsuits to get justice.

The obstruction charge is contained in Bill C-11 and I am very nervous about that.

Clause 42 also has provisions about entering a dwelling house. We crossed this bridge before in the House. Someone cannot go into a dwelling house without a warrant and the bill makes provision for that, happily.

I see a problem with subclause 42(3) which deals with the warrant and going into a dwelling house. It says that the inspector may not use force unless it is specifically authorized. The problem is that the use of force issue is too vague in the statute. It is not clear what extent of force is being referred to. If I have a warrant to enter a dwelling house, do I have the ability to turn the doorknob if that requires the use of force? Do I have the ability to break a window? Do I have the ability to lift the latch?

A warrant to enter a dwelling house, as I understand it now, allows the reasonable use of force. I have a question with respect to this. If an inspector shows up with a warrant and breaks down the door but the owner of the house does not know what is going on and tells the inspector he cannot come in, is that obstruction? Based on the case I described with the CBSA, I can bet my boots that is obstruction.

On the other hand, it might be a good day if the inspector is in a good mood and apologizes for breaking the window but explains that he has to check for pathogens and toxins. Maybe everything would work out.

I am looking at this from the perspective of a citizen. The wording about use of force in that section is, in my view, too vague. It has to be fixed in some way, otherwise there would be a legal issue and by the time the case was litigated and sorted out by the Supreme Court half a million dollars would be spent. I am suggesting that the committee to which the bill would be referred sort that out.

Government Orders

Clause 40 says that when the minister delegates these authorities he or she may restrict the powers of the inspector. That is the wrong way to put it. I think the inspector should only have those powers that the minister delegates to him or her. The minister should not have the whole raft of powers under the statute which he or she could then pull back under authorization because I do not think the minister would ever do it.

• (1250)

There are no criteria for the minister. There is no framework for the minister to act. There is no framework under which the minister could say, “I think I am only going to give you powers 1 to 5 and you do not get powers 6 to 10”. There would be an automatic predisposition on the part of the minister and the public service simply to give all of the powers to the inspector without restriction.

Why would anyone take the time to restrict the powers given to the inspector? Why handicap the inspector? The statute already gives the inspector powers. This is a mistake. The minister should decide which specific powers should be in the hands of the inspector. Then we know clearly what the inspector can and cannot do. The minister knows, government knows and Parliament knows. This way it is an open book.

Clause 40 is a problem and I hope the committee will deal with that. If the committee does not, I am going to do it here in the House. I am giving notice right now.

Last is regulatory activity. Canada has a fairly good regulatory process. It allows the delegation of authorities from Parliament to the government or ministers and sometimes to agencies. I will not read clauses 67 and 68 of the bill, but they provide for the delegation of regulatory powers.

In Canada's system now, normally a statutory instrument or regulation is pre-published before it is enacted, there is consultation, then it is adopted by the cabinet or the minister, it is published in the *Canada Gazette*, and then it is reviewed by the Standing Joint Committee for Scrutiny of Regulations in the House. It is reviewed for compliance with the law, the originating statute, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the criteria adopted by the House. This way we make sure that regulations passed are legal and fair. That has worked fairly well for the last 30 or 40 years.

However, clause 68 of this bill exempts some of the statutory instruments and regulations from the Statutory Instruments Act. It takes it right out. It says these regulations are not statutory instruments. For the layman that may be kind of a foggy term and some may ask what it means.

In some cases in this bill it only means that the regulation is not pre-published and consulted, that it simply is made, and there may be good public policy reasons for doing that. In an emergency, three months cannot be taken to consult. Dealing with risks to human health, sometimes action has to be taken quickly. We do that and authorize regulations to be made without the need to pre-publish and study, et cetera. However, there are a couple of components that are worrying to me and should be to the House.

First, the bill specifically authorizes incorporation by reference. That means an adoption of a rule that somebody else made. Maybe it is a rule made by the European Union or Brazil or Japan or wherever.

That is incorporation by reference. Not only that but it allows what is called ambulatory incorporation by reference, which means whenever Brazil changes its rule, our rule changes. We have to get a handle on that because that is a pure delegation of regulation-making by us to them.

Second is the exemption from the Statutory Instruments Act. We cannot do that. We must allow Parliament to continue reviewing it. We must specifically authorize Parliament to review these instruments under sections 19 and 19.1 of the Statutory Instruments Act. Those amendments should all be made to this bill.

• (1255)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the input of the member for Scarborough—Rouge River on this legislation. He has raised a very important point.

It has always been a challenge for members of the House, whenever we are dealing with legislation that tries to address the possibility of terrorist threats, in this case bioterrorism, to find the right balance between protecting the public and ensuring due process according to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I understand what the member is saying. Obviously, I am concerned that we do not allow a focus on individual rights and freedoms to give any licence to the government to move away from a well-resourced inspection capability that is given all the money and resources it needs to proactively investigate and search for any toxins or pathogens that could cause serious harm to any Canadian anywhere.

However, before we head off to committee, I would like the member to give us some advice with respect to which witnesses he thinks it would make sense to invite to our committee. How does he envisage that fine balance we are always trying to find in terms of human rights and protecting the public?

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the standards that we should be according to the citizens with respect to powers like this are fairly well known to the Department of Justice. The problem is that as every new government moves in, it says to the Department of Justice to make those powers just a bit more robust. The line keeps being pushed. They keep pushing up and they refer to Supreme Court cases and Court of Appeal cases.

I think someone from the Department of Justice not associated with the creation of this bill should be a witness to outline the current standards of civil liberties vis-à-vis government powers. That would be a good standard.

Another example, in clause 71 of the bill, the word “knowingly” has been deleted. A citizen who is in possession of a toxin or pathogen, when the bill comes into force, has a problem unless he or she notifies the minister. It is an offence. That section should contain the word “knowingly”. Clause 6 of the bill contains the word “knowingly”. The citizen should have to know that he or she has the item before he or she is found criminally or quasi-criminally responsible for an offence.

I think the Department of Justice could give some very good answers.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not difficult to imagine how pleased I am to speak to Bill C-11. I thank my party whip's office for providing me with this wonderful opportunity.

This bill may seem technical on the surface. But when we examine it a little more closely, we see that it is a technical bill through and through.

Nevertheless, in spite of its technical nature, this bill is important because it deals with pathogens, those micro-organisms that can carry infection and disease, that can cause devastation and that can transmit viruses and sources of infection. This bill is about pathogens, toxins, laboratories and research. It is also about our desire to ensure that research facilities are safe and secure without adversely affecting research activities carried out throughout Canada.

When it comes to health—my colleagues know this—we can always question if this is a federal jurisdiction. I would like to remind members that when the 33 Fathers of Confederation met, in what was called a constituent assembly, they divided the powers.

Naturally when we examine the facts, we know very well that when we ask which authority has the constitutional power—known as a head of jurisdiction in constitutional law—to intervene in a particular area, we must read sections 91 and 92. We note that health may well be an area of greater concern to the provinces because it deals with providing care to the population and it concerns the operation of health establishments.

In all modern societies, many resources are allocated to the operating budget of the various departments because health is a concern of all citizens. I am pleased to remind members that, from 1995 to 1997, the government refused to make investments in health. There were campaigns throughout Canada and a federal-provincial conference including all health ministers of all political stripes. The Bloc Québécois took out ads in the papers calling on the federal government to assume its responsibilities and to make significant investments through its health transfers. The Bloc was obviously speaking on behalf of the National Assembly of Quebec.

I am not trying to suggest that the federal government has no responsibility for health. For example, we know that the federal government has fiduciary responsibility for aboriginal people. In addition, if I am not mistaken, more than half the federal health department's programming has to do with aboriginal people. The federal government obviously has a role to play in patents, and that responsibility is shared by the Department of Health and the Department of Industry.

I have wondered about the whole issue of patents. Are they in consumers' interests? How do we strike a balance? There needs to be a public policy of investment to promote research. Ten years can easily go by from the time a molecule is isolated to the time a drug is available to consumers. That is an investment cycle involving several million dollars. There needs to be a balance between consumers' interests and policies that promote research, because there are major investments involved.

The federal government has a role to play with regard to aboriginal people, patents and epidemics. Perhaps we need to look at this bill in that light.

● (1300)

This bill says that guidelines exist for pathogens that may be viruses or major sources of infection. The idea is to create a stricter system of regulations for pathogens and toxins.

I read in the bill we received and the research notes prepared by my party that there are thousands of labs in Canada that may not fully comply with policies that are not as strict as what is proposed in the bill.

From now on, we will need a licence or permit to conduct what are being called controlled activities. People in labs will need a licence to possess, handle, use, produce, store, authorize access to, transfer, import, export, release, abandon or dispose of human pathogens or toxins.

We could ask if such a system is necessary. I believe that my colleague, the member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, mentioned that the Bloc Québécois is not opposed to the bill, but we would like to know a bit more about the repercussions. For example, what will this mean for the research institutions? What will this mean for the laboratories?

One of the great advances for humanity in recent years is that we do not simply talk about old age anymore, we now talk about very old age. As a human society, if we are prudent, if we do not drink too much, if we do not smoke, if we do a bit of physical activity, if we go to the gym regularly and if we pay attention to what we call health determinants, chances are good that we will live to be 100 or more. That is what we mean by very old age. We have met centenarians in our ridings. I could ask my colleagues how many of them have, in their activities as a member, met people older than 95 or 100. There are more and more of them. In Canada, it is said that there are more than 100,000 centenarians. I have no doubt, Mr. Speaker, when I look at you and see how healthy you are, that you will be a centenarian yourself, and I wish that for you.

Government Orders

We live in a society in which there are more and more centenarians, in which people are living much longer and in better health, and this is thanks to research. It means we are able to control certain diseases that used to be crippling, and not all that long ago. Remember, just a few years or a few decades ago, mononucleosis was a fatal disease. Today, there are some differences, depending on the strain in question, but people do not die from mononucleosis. It has been called the kissing disease. Of course, I do not wish to get too autobiographical about it.

That said, I think my point is clear. More and more of our fellow citizens are living longer and longer thanks to research, and this research may require the use of pathogens that must obviously be isolated in conditions where this is no contamination, understandably. As an aside—and I am sure you know this, Mr. Speaker—I have 16 years of service in this House and I have had various responsibilities within the Bloc Québécois caucus. My first role was as our research and development critic.

I recall Lucien Bouchard, a great leader whom I respect and regard very highly, inviting me to a meeting in his office. I had been elected in October 1993. At the time, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien had recalled the House for January. We did not sit in November and December because Prime Minister Chrétien had to attend various international meetings with NATO.

● (1305)

When Mr. Bouchard appointed his shadow cabinet, he gave me a very important responsibility: research and development. I told Mr. Bouchard that I was flattered. During the 1993 campaign, we were very concerned, as a political party, about the fact that there had been a lot of public investment in the national capital region, where several public laboratories were—and still are—located, and very little investment on the Outaouais side. There was a lot of investment in the national capital region, but even though research was being done, compared to the numbers for the Outaouais, there was a huge disparity.

The Bloc Québécois wants to make sure that this bill's worthy objectives result in all laboratories complying with human pathogen handling standards. We have been told that several thousand labs in Canada do not follow Health Canada's biosafety guidelines. The government wants to make the guidelines more coercive by introducing a licensing system. It wants to ensure that organizations conducting research will not be penalized. The bill's schedule differentiates between pathogens that can be very harmful to public safety and those that are less dangerous. We see that different classes of licences will be issued.

The Bloc Québécois would like to know what this means for research. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Health when we studied the bill to create the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. In the 1990s, John Manley was the minister responsible for that file: as minister of industry, he was responsible for research and development. The OECD had released a report that lambasted Canada for investing so little in research and development. The bill was introduced.

The Bloc Québécois had a number of concerns. We wanted to ensure that various funding organizations, such as the Medical Research Council of Canada, would continue to support us. In good

years, Quebec received nearly 30% of the funding. We wanted to be sure that, under the new Canadian Institutes of Health Research, we would hold on to our share of research contracts.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research is a network of virtual institutes across Canada. Some of these institutes are concerned with population health, while others focus on cancer, aboriginal people, mental health and so on. The institutes are connected to each other in a structure that can produce interesting outcomes. Certainly, within these publicly funded research labs, research involving pathogens is being conducted. If the bill is passed, what will that mean? That is one question the Bloc Québécois has.

We also have questions about fines. As I said, we are told that biosafety guidelines already exist. In Canada—and I feel it is my duty to share these figures in the interest of full disclosure—there are 7,500 labs, nearly 4,000 of which allegedly do not comply with the guidelines. In addition, 5,500 labs, including 1,100 in Quebec, reportedly import pathogens. This comes as no surprise, considering how vibrant the research sector is in Quebec. There are apparently 24 labs in Quebec and 150 in Canada that are working with group 3 and 4 pathogens and are subject to these guidelines.

● (1310)

This bill tries to impose a system of offences that opens the door to criminal proceedings. We must always be extremely careful when it comes to imposing fines.

I used to sit on the Standing Committee on Health. That was a great time in my life. I was the health critic for at least five years. I focused on research and development. I was a bit surprised when Mr. Bouchard told me he was giving me the research and development file, because I was someone who had trouble plugging in a VCR. But I learned about it, I took an interest in it, and I understood its importance. I then became the immigration critic. Immigration is an extremely important issue, and as I am a member from Montreal, it was an issue in my own community. After that, I was the health critic for five years. Today, I am the justice critic. I have led an interesting life, when you sum it all up.

Government Orders

I would remind the House that when I was the health critic we examined the issue of new reproductive technologies. I was very disappointed to learn something about the regulations for new reproductive technologies. We know that one in five couples in Canada is infertile. Therefore, it is important that the issues of surrogate mothers, gamete conservation and donations be covered by regulations. I am very surprised to see that the regulations we have been expecting for at least two years have not yet been submitted to the Standing Committee on Health. I hope that the Minister of Health will remedy this situation because we worked very hard in committee.

The Government of Quebec went to court to challenge certain legislative provisions with respect to new reproductive technologies, known as assisted reproduction, because some of the legislation's provisions meddled in provincial jurisdiction. Quebec already has its own support system for infertile couples.

Why am I mentioning this? To make a link with the offences established by the bill. Failure to obtain a permit would result in a hefty fine of \$250,000 for a first offence and increasing fines for subsequent offences.

It is not clear to me—nor does the bill provide clarification—how this system of fines will be administered. Will there be an inspection system? How will licences be issued? How will laboratories be monitored? And how will inspectors carry out annual inspections of the 5,000 or so laboratories that are deemed not to be compliant with the guidelines? And what will that mean?

It is a complex bill that may have a noble goal, taking precautions against possible transmission, but certain aspects of it are troubling. I know that the members of the Standing Committee on Health would like to ensure that this bill, before obtaining royal assent, has been the subject of proper consultation. Have universities and hospitals been consulted? Have large research and development associations been consulted? And the pharmaceutical industry, in terms of both generic and brand name drugs, has it been consulted? If we looked a little more closely, we would find that the consultations have been rather superficial.

I am being told that my time is running out, which is too bad because I have many more things to say about a bill as gripping as this one, but I will finish with three things. First, the Bloc Québécois will work very hard in the Standing Committee on Health to make sure that we have a thorough understanding of this bill.

• (1315)

Second, we hope that the principal stakeholders will appear before the Standing Committee on Health. Finally, we will judge the bill according to its merit.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like first to express my deep appreciation to my colleague from Hochelaga on his eloquent address.

As he explained so well, the hon. member for Hochelaga has a wealth of parliamentary experience. I was listening so hard during his speech that I could not check the schedules to find out what the security level is for the pathogens that cause mononucleosis. If he so desires—because this topic seems especially close to his heart—I could delve into this a bit more deeply.

My question is for him because the hon. member for Hochelaga is the justice critic for the Bloc Québécois.

Bill C-11, as written, institutes penalties for persons or institutions that are negligent, fail to take precautions or intentionally release pathogens into the environment. I would like to know if he, as our justice critic, knows whether the Criminal Code already deals with intentional attacks on public safety, such as terrorism, or unintentional acts, such as criminal negligence?

• (1320)

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes for anything more he can possibly do to lift the veil on the kissing disease, also known as mononucleosis. I get the feeling he is very interested in this. I would be eternally grateful to him for anything he can do to refine my knowledge of the consequences.

My colleague is quite right. When it comes to the legal realm, two factors must be borne in mind. In order for charges to be laid, there must first be *mens rea*—a legal term denoting the intent to commit a criminal act—and then there must also be an *actus reus*, or the deed itself.

Take the example of a professor at McGill University who is putting his third-year medical students through their paces. Say they are handling pathogens because they want to study smallpox, a very serious disease. There is nothing small about smallpox. If we were to determine, through an inspection system yet to be established, that McGill University did not have its licence, could the students who engaged in these studies be found guilty? That is what the Bloc Québécois wants to know. Everyone knows, of course, that there are already provisions in the Criminal Code covering criminal negligence and certainly terrorism.

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to turn the member's attention to the whole notion of how government regulates on the one hand and on the other hand provides the coordination of regulation, which arguably it is trying to do with this legislation. When it comes to imposing, embedding and sensible follow-up, it makes me think of the whole crisis with the BSE. The government's own veterinary scientists said that there was a problem. They said that when cows were fed rendered materials, they would get BSE. Instead of listening to them, the government fired them. I think of Shiv Chopra who is now in front of a disciplinary committee. We are spending millions of taxpayer dollars on a guy who has blown the whistle for human health.

Even though we have legislation like this, what needs to be done to protect Canadians against human pathogens and toxins? If we do not have the right people in government, if we do not have the right people hired in the health protection agencies in government, how can this help in the long run?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

I have also been alerted several times, especially when I sat on the Standing Committee on Health, to the fact that scientists who challenge some of Health Canada's regulatory policies can be fired. The hon. member is quite right, therefore, to remind the House that when a regulatory system is being established, it should be left up to scientists to determine how appropriate it is and what the best way to implement it is.

The advice I would give my colleague—and I am sure that my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Health will adopt this as well—is that a bill like this is going to involve a lot of regulations. It would be best if, three years after taking effect, they could be reviewed by the Standing Committee on Health, as will be done for assisted reproduction and the tobacco regulations.

● (1325)

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to speak to Bill C-11, An Act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins. Although technical in nature, this bill is very necessary and important federal legislation. It is a public safety issue as much as it is a public health bill. Bill C-11 proposes a mandatory licensing system for the federal government to track the human pathogens that exist, such as anthrax, salmonella and influenza.

While many Canadians do not consider the flu to be a national threat, we need only remind ourselves of the 1918 flu pandemic, commonly referred to as the Spanish flu, that spread to nearly every part of the world, including the Arctic and remote Pacific islands. The Spanish flu did not claim simply those normally at risk, such as the elderly, infants and the infirm; in fact, it claimed the lives of normal, healthy adults, mostly because it tricked strong immune systems into a catastrophic overreaction. It is estimated that anywhere from 20 million to 100 million people were killed worldwide, roughly double the number of people killed during World War I. Indeed, many of those who survived the horror of trench warfare ironically succumbed to this deadly strain of influenza A, a form of bird flu.

Modern science has made it possible to recreate influenza A and other pathogens. That is why it is necessary to implement government controls to track who is in possession of them in Canada.

Many residents of Toronto remember the social and economic impact of the SARS outbreak in 2003. Severe acute respiratory syndrome is believed to have originated in China, but within weeks it had been reported in 37 countries around the world, including Canada. It resulted in 800 deaths, 44 of which were in Toronto. This virus tested international containment efforts and changed the way Canada deals with pandemic threats.

Many of the staff on Parliament Hill recall the extraordinary measures that were taken in 2001 following the anthrax attacks, when letters containing anthrax spores were mailed to several media outlets and the offices of two U.S. senators. This attack killed five

people and infected 17 others. Anthrax is one of the oldest recorded diseases of grazing animals and is even believed to be the sixth plague mentioned in the book of Exodus. One can see I read religious books. It occurs in nature, but it also has been harnessed as a weapon of war. Sheep and cattle are especially vulnerable to anthrax spores because they are soil-borne and are inhaled or ingested while the animals graze. For the people who did not know about it, I am giving a lesson in agriculture.

Anthrax spores were harnessed as bioweapons in both world wars. Thousands died in Manchuria in the 1930s when anthrax was tested on prisoners of war. It was stored as a weapon of mass destruction in the arsenals of the former Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States until 1971. However, the 2001 anthrax attacks were classified as weaponized or weapons-grade strains of the spores. While that should have made it easier to identify the attacker, it was not until August 2008, seven years later, that the FBI identified the culprit as a scientist who worked at a government biodefence lab.

That is why it is absolutely necessary that Canada and the federal government modernize the capability of tracking human pathogens and toxins. This legislation, Bill C-11, will give inspectors enhanced powers to ensure that the laboratory biosafety guidelines, called LBG, are followed properly. That is why the official opposition supports sending this bill to committee for an in-depth study.

● (1330)

Bill C-11 will require laboratories handling deadly toxins to register with the Public Health Agency of Canada's Office of Laboratory Security. Bill C-11 will require an import permit to bring a human pathogen or toxin into Canada. It will require a permit to transfer a pathogen or toxin between laboratories in Canada. Bill C-11 will require laboratories to notify the Public Health Agency when registered pathogens or toxins are disposed of. All in all, the bill will bring Canada in line with the more stringent regulations in the United States and the United Kingdom.

As has been eloquently stated by my colleague from Etobicoke North, it is in the best interest of all countries, including Canada, to support initiatives to control infectious diseases. The world is now an island. There is free flow of traffic, human beings, goods, services and food. As such, all countries should be alert and develop strategies to minimize the risks from infectious diseases. As I mentioned before, we have seen examples of the avian flu, SARS, et cetera.

Government Orders

Microbiological agents and toxins can and do impact global health. As I mentioned before, in 2003 SARS killed 800 people. Biosafety is essential if we are to mitigate the deadly effects of infectious diseases. The World Health Organization urges countries to: one, promote biosafety practices for the safe handling, containment and transport of microbiological agents and toxins; two, to review the safety of laboratories and their existing protocols; three, to develop programs that enhance compliance of laboratories; and four, to encourage the development of biological safety training.

Thousands of infectious samples are shipped daily around the world for clinical trials, disease investigations, surveillance, et cetera. Animal and human specimens need to be transported efficiently, legally, safely, and on a timely basis. Shippers must be aware of regulatory requirements, personnel must undertake appropriate training, and specimens must be packed to protect transporters from risk of infection.

Best practices regarding the transport of microbiological agents and toxins must be used to protect the environment and human health. Perhaps more support is needed to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases from other countries and among other provinces.

It is therefore imperative that laboratories have strict facility safeguards, microbiological practices and safety equipment that protect laboratory workers, the environment and the public from exposure to infectious microorganisms and toxins that are stored in the laboratory.

Responsible laboratory practices will help prevent intentional release, loss, misuse, theft, or unauthorized access of biological material and will contribute to preserving important scientific work for future generations.

To conclude, this is not a partisan matter. This is about the health and safety of Canadians. That is why my Liberal colleagues and I are proud to support the bill. Bill C-11 is a great improvement over Bill C-54. Infectious diseases know no boundaries. Pathogens are not restricted to one's own airspace. As such, we should do everything to increase biosafety.

Since the bill requires licensing and the provinces and territories are responsible for licensing, it is important to have a further study and review of this legislation. As well, we must ensure that there is transparency, effectiveness and accountability at the ministerial level as well as at the level of inspectors. We need to build trust so that Canadians and the world can be assured that they will be safe and secure when it comes to activities involving pathogens and toxins.

• (1335)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the discussion on this important bill.

The bill requires disclosures, but the track record of the government of disclosing information, even under the Federal Accountability Act, is abysmal. In fact, there is a recent report with regard to the listeriosis outbreak in which 20 Canadians lost their lives. The government has systemically withheld the release of access to information requests for a number of months, thousands and thousands of pages.

With regard to the bill, is it fulsome enough to ensure that not only is it the law in Canada, but that there are repercussions when a government fails to respond to the letter of the law?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, from looking at the bill, I understand that accountability and transparency are issues. It is important that the bill goes to committee to ensure the minister and inspectors do not have unlimited powers and whatever powers they have are transparent and accountable.

I agree with the hon. member that the government so far has not been very accountable in that respect. Therefore, it is important the bill goes to committee for further study.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-11, an act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins.

There is a number of pieces of legislation of a same or similar nature in which I have had some involvement. The discussion that has just taken place in House is with respect to the need for openness and transparency as key issues.

Let me briefly look at some of the basics of the bill.

First, Bill C-11 proposes a mandatory licensing system for the federal government to track what human pathogens exist, those being anthrax, salmonella and influenza, for example, where they are and who possesses them in Canada. It also proposes to provide enhanced inspection powers to inspectors to help ensure compliance with laboratory biosafety guidelines and to ensure that the legislation is applied properly and consistently across Canada.

That is a very succinct but important statement on behalf of the Government of Canada. This is a very important bill for us to have.

As the previous speaker had indicated, in a response to the question that I posed to her, there have been questions of openness and transparency with regard to the reporting of important information to the public.

In terms of the key messages, I think all members in the House are committed to improving the safety and health of Canadians. I have often said that the measure of success of a country is not so much an economic measure as it is a measure of the health and well-being of its people.

When there are circumstances where the health and well-being of people is being impacted by matters beyond their control, such as the importation or storage of such things as anthrax or salmonella or influenza, it is relevant.

Government Orders

We support the measures that have been proposed to improve the safety and security of Canadian laboratories for all Canadians. We want to review the legislation at committee to ensure that it is accountable, transparent and as effective as possible.

The purpose of the act, as I indicated, is to establish the safety and security regime to protect the health and safety of the public against the risks posed by human pathogens and toxins. The bill does establish that legislative framework that extends beyond the present importation and storage regime for pathogens and toxins.

The current regime requires that all labs that import human pathogens or toxins adhere to the requirements, but that these existing guidelines are not mandatory for laboratories that acquire human pathogens and toxins from domestic sources. This is a problem.

Even though they are applied widely on a voluntary basis as an industry standard, voluntary guidelines are not good enough when it comes to the health and safety of Canadians.

The bill also requires that all Canadian labs that possess human pathogens or toxins, regardless of where they were acquired, adhere to these guidelines. Bill C-11 specifically includes a number of provisions which will help to achieve these objectives.

It requires laboratories carrying out activities with risk groups two, three or four human pathogens or select toxins have to register with the Public Health Agency of Canada Office of Laboratory Security. It also subject licensees with risk group three and four pathogens and possibly select toxins to stricter operating regulations.

It requires an importation permit to import the human pathogen or toxin. It requires a transfer permit to send and receive any human pathogen or toxin between laboratories within Canada that are not part of the same facility. It also requires the authorization from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada to export agents on the export control list. It also requires licensees, as a part of their annual or biannual update of inventories, to notify the PHAC of the nature of the disposal of human pathogens and toxins.

● (1340)

These changes are meant to bring Canada in to line with more stringent regulations, which are in place in the United States and in the U.K., for example. It also gives substantial regulatory powers to the minister and inspectors. It will be necessary to further study these powers to ensure the transparency, effectiveness and accountability. This leads me to my specific contribution to the debate, which is with regard to the accountability aspect as well as the regulatory powers.

I have had the opportunity to be a member of the scrutiny of regulations committee, the standing joint committee of the House of Commons and Senate, for a number of years, and was its chair for a couple of years. What struck me was the regulatory guidelines and requirements, as laid out in certain pieces of legislation, tended to push the envelope with regard to a concern about what is called backdoor legislation. Backdoor legislation refers to providing undertakings or responsibilities in the regulations where that authority is not enabled by the legislation itself. It means putting something into the legislation that is not even part of the bill itself,

simply covered under, "The minister may make regulations from time to time".

When the regulations are required by a bill, the bill in the end will not show that it comes into force on receiving royal assent, but will be at a date specified by order-in-council, which is by cabinet. The reason for that is so the regulations necessary and called for under the legislation can be properly drafted, reviewed and gazetted et cetera prior to their enforcement.

There is some concern when we get to matters like this. We have seen far too many examples of where regulations have not been prepared on a timely basis. It represents a reluctance by the government to have legislation come into force. It may just simply be, here is a bill that will do all these wonderful things and it will be the law in Canada when the regulations are done.

Time and time again there have been delays in the implementation of legislation simply because regulations have not been done, and I can give an example.

One was the reproductive technologies act that I was involved with through the health committee. This dealt with the whole question of embryonic stem cell research and the establishment of a committee that would review the application of researchers to do research involving embryonic stem cells.

At that time, the officials told us in committee that the regulations required to make this happen would take something like two years, yet the government said that we needed it, that it was pursuant to a royal commission report on the reproductive technologies. It was urgent and had some very significant recommendations, but much of the legislation from years gone by is still not in place. One of the reasons for that was we put into the legislation that the minister was required to submit the proposed regulations to the committee for its comments. The minister of the day refused to give the committee the authority to amend or to reject regulations. They were simply there for review and comment.

With regard to that legislation, and it is years now after the royal commission report, which was about 15 years ago, we now have a situation where regulations pursuant to that legislation, which was passed at all stages in this place and in the other place, still are not the law in Canada. In fact, the committee to establish it has not been established and all the regulations related to the research permissions or authorizations are not in place.

● (1345)

Notwithstanding that Parliament as a whole, along with the Senate, passed urgent legislation, the law has not been totally put into force because regulations have not been promulgated, which totally frustrates the responsibilities of Parliament to do its job. I hope to have an opportunity to follow up with the new health minister on what the minister is doing in this regard.

However, that is a good example of a situation where legislation has gone through all stages, with two or three months of comprehensive committee hearings, and it is still not fully in force primarily due to regulations and the fact that the government has not even come forward with them.

Government Orders

It is not a matter of whether the regulations were a problem. As the members well know, when we deal with legislation in this place we do not get to see the regulations. We do not get to see those fine-tuning items that give us an idea of the scope or the intent of the legislation. There is a fine line at which a regulation will go beyond what was enabled in the legislation.

The Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations is there to review these things as they occur but after the fact to determine whether the regulations have been properly enabled within the legislation.

I raise that because it leads to the whole question of whether we have backdoor legislation where regulations are trying to do things that were not enabled in the legislation and whether the proviso that there be regulations made, which the government chooses not to make, could delay or even stop legislation that goes through the entire parliamentary process from ever becoming law in Canada.

How can Canadians keep ahead of the curve when they do not know whether legislation that is passed in Parliament will become law. We have far too many examples. It goes to the true question of accountability and transparency.

One of the first things the current government did was bring in the Federal Accountability Act. It puffed its chest and said that it would be accountable. When I first looked at it I thought that people should understand what the expectation was from accountability. I was looking at some of this material on the weekend and I came up with a definition that I challenge the government to follow. The definition of accountability is to explain and justify one's actions or decisions in a clear, concise and truthful manner. To synthesize this down, it means to be honest and give the straight story. I want to understand and I want to understand why the government took that decision.

If a government promises to do something and it does not do it, accountability demands that it explains and justifies that decision. Sometimes we make decisions to do things but circumstances change and it is important to back off and rethink the decisions. There is no point in going forward with something that changes because there is new information. However, when I think of some of the examples, such as promising not to tax income trusts but imposing a 31.5% tax one year later, really did not do much for the government, which boasted that it was helping seniors by introducing things like pension income splitting when it knew that over 85% of seniors would not benefit from it simply because they were in the lowest tax bracket, did not have eligible pensions or were seniors who had no one to split with.

When we take it to that extent, when the government claims that it represents 100% of a group and then does something for a group that only 14% or 15% actually can benefit from, that is not being accountable.

• (1350)

I have many examples of that and I hope to get a chance to talk about them at some other opportunity.

On February 22, CP had an article dealing with access to information requests. It is relevant because the concerns that have been raised by the opposition with respect to this bill have to do with transparency, accountability and openness. According to the Can-

west news service, since January 2008 the Department of Foreign Affairs has prevented the release of more than 160,000 pages of government records on everything from the mission in Afghanistan, to new free trade deals with NATO, to material being left at the home of the girlfriend of the former minister of foreign affairs. It goes even further.

The Access to Information Commissioner has said that the government has demonstrated a systemic problem of inhibiting the intent of the Access to Information Act by having most of the releases vetted by the Prime Minister's Office or the Privy Council Office. This is contrary to the spirit and the intent of the law.

With respect to one of the releases, the government asked for a four month extension but once the four month extension expired the government said that even though it had the documents they were not really relevant to what was asked for so it had nothing to give. The Privy Council Office, on the other hand, turned around and said that it could not give the information because it was secret and could not be given out.

When Mr. Marleau, the Access to Information Commissioner, says that there are systemic problems in the government and that the worst offenders of the spirit and intent of the Access to Information Act are the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, one can understand why the opposition is concerned about accountability, transparency and openness. An officer of Parliament, appointed by this Parliament, has said that it is the Prime Minister's own office that is the biggest problem in ensuring that Canadians do not get the information to which they are entitled.

Access to information, openness and transparency are foundations of our democracy. The Prime Minister, by denying the workability of the Access to Information Act, is taking away the opportunity for Canadians to experience what they can get under a truly democratic system. Canadians have the right to know.

If the government is not going to support the Access to Information Act and its intent and its principles, then now is the time for it to say so. If it wants to back away from the Federal Accountability Act now is the time to say so.

In these challenging times for Canadians, now is the time for the government to put the interests of the people ahead of its own partisan interests. The government has spent all of its time campaigning, not governing, and the country needs the government to govern. The government must be accountable. This litany of unaccountability must stop now in the best interests of the people of Canada.

• (1355)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it surprises me when a Liberal stands and talks about accountability or access to information.

I would love some information on which Quebec riding associations received money in the sponsorship program but I do not see that member offering that kind of access to information.

Statements by Members

I am prepared to set aside most of the bluster of the member as he really did not speak to the bill at all. I am not really sure he knows what bill we are actually debating.

I would love to ask him about a recent announcement in his riding that was positively received. The Prime Minister and the Premier of Ontario recently announced significant upgrades to GO Transit in the province of Ontario. I would love him to talk about how that will benefit the people of Mississauga because it was a great announcement.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to know that we are debating Bill C-11, important legislation that would provide information to Canadians. It would enable us to track human pathogens, such as anthrax, salmonella and influenza. However, the speeches that have been given today by the opposition members have to do with concerns about accountability, transparency and openness.

During my speech, I gave some examples of where we have not had the transparency and openness that Canadians deserve. It is a part of the foundation of democracy. If the member does not agree with what I had to say, I accept that because he has the right to do that, but if his only reaction to a speech that demonstrates clearly that the government has not been accountable to the people of Canada and if his only concern is what somebody did in the province of Ontario when we are talking about an important bill on human pathogens, it tells me more about the member than it does about me.

It is important for us to understand that transparency, openness and accountability are fundamental to the foundations of democracy. The opposition has raised certain considerations. We are prepared to support the objectives of the bill but we do have concerns about the mechanisms in which the transparency, openness and accountability will be delivered given the abysmal track record of the current government.

The Speaker: Order. When debate resumes on this matter, there will be seven minutes remaining for the hon. member for Mississauga South for questions and comments consequent on his speech.

It being two o'clock, we will now proceed to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ISRAEL

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ontario's largest public sector union, CUPE, is targeting academics simply because of their nationality and religion. This behaviour is unacceptable to Canadians and it is unacceptable to this government.

Last week our immigration minister represented the Government of Canada in London at the conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission for Combating Anti-Semitism, where he explained our government's concern. This new anti-Semitism seeks to deny the right of the Jewish people to secure existence in their homeland, the state of Israel.

Surely this should be an issue that all sides of the House can agree on, but unfortunately that is not the case. Even here there are those who want taxpayers to fund organizations that call Israel a racist state and members of the Bloc who circulate videos from banned terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Parliamentarians must stand up and condemn those who deny the Jewish people their right to a homeland.

* * *

• (1400)

HEART MONTH

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Heart Month and I stand to honour the hard work of all the researchers, health care providers and volunteers who work every day to improve the lives of Canadians with heart disease.

Though we have pushed the yardsticks forward, we still have a long way to go. Every seven minutes a Canadian dies from heart disease or stroke. Every seven minutes another family is thrown into crisis.

[Translation]

These are current statistics, but we can change them. By working together, we can save lives both today and for future generations.

[English]

I encourage all Canadians to get involved by educating their friends and colleagues about heart disease, organizing a fundraiser, learning CPR or canvassing their neighbourhoods. United, we can secure a better and healthier future for all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC INTERNATIONAL PEEWEE HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the end of the 50th Quebec International Peeewee Hockey Tournament, which was held from February 11 to 22. It is the biggest minor hockey tournament in the world.

Over the past 50 years, the Carnaval peewees have become a winter-season fixture in the capital. This year, more than 2,300 players aged 11 and 12, from 16 countries, fought for the honour of becoming the world peewee hockey champions. These young players had some unforgettable encounters and, I am sure, left with unforgettable memories.

All of my Bloc Québécois colleagues join me in saluting the work of the organizers, coaches, officials, chaperones and volunteers who spared no effort to make this tournament a spectacular success. I would also like to congratulate the Donnacona—Pont-Rouge Diablos, who were crowned the champions of the C international finals. They gave their all for their coach, Michel Bédard, who is currently fighting cancer.

We are very proud to have hosted the 50th tournament in Quebec City.

*Statements by Members**[English]***SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my office has been flooded with calls from people who are falling through the cracks. We have seniors living in poverty whose pensions are not adequate and whose homes need repair, yet folks cannot tap into government programs because money is required up front and only part of their expense is reimbursed.

[Translation]

A lot of people who have lost their jobs cannot reach the employment insurance office by phone. They are forced to wait four to six weeks because of the delay.

[English]

People are running out of benefits, and the new five-week extension is not applicable to everyone currently receiving assistance.

Immigration backlogs continue to result in family separation, with the very frequent denial of visitor visas. Eligibility for the child tax benefit is often hard to prove to the satisfaction of Revenue Canada. Day care is very hard to secure for young working parents, and students are being punished with the unfairness of student loan programs. Many of our civil servants are overworked and cannot keep up with the increasing demand for help.

[Translation]

It is high time our government found enough resources to ensure that the most vulnerable get the help they need.

* * *

*[English]***PARLIAMENTARY OUTDOORS CAUCUS**

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary outdoors caucus represents the Canadian heritage activities of hunting, fishing, sport shooting and trapping. As the largest federal all-party caucus during the last Parliament, its goal is to preserve and promote these activities, protect them by law and encourage the public to accept them as traditional and environmentally responsible pillars in Canadian culture.

Rural and urban Canadians of all political affiliations, backgrounds, ages and abilities contribute over \$10 billion annually to the national economy through these outdoor activities.

I cordially invite all MPs and senators to join us tomorrow, February 24, in the parliamentary restaurant at 7:30 a.m. for our annual breakfast meeting. MPs and senators are sure to enjoy our keynote speaker, Shane Mahoney of Newfoundland, a treasured environmentalist and conservationist.

We are indebted to Phil Morlock, chair of the government affairs committee at the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, for his advice and hard work in bringing the outdoors community indoors to Parliament Hill. Of course, Mr. Speaker, you are invited too.

● (1405)

WOMEN'S EXECUTIVE NETWORK TOP 100 AWARD

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an extraordinary entrepreneur in my riding, Neena Kanwar, who is recognized by the Women's Executive Network as one of the top 100 women in Canada for 2008.

Mississauga's Neena Kanwar was chosen as a winner in the entrepreneur category. Neena Kanwar is an amazing trailblazer. Neena and her husband, Vijay Jeet Kanwar, co-founded KMH Cardiology and Diagnostic Centres, headquartered in Mississauga. She is CEO of the company, which employs 150 people and provides nuclear medicine, cardiology and MRI diagnostic services in treating heart-related illnesses.

Each year more than 75,000 patients are referred to KMH for medical tests. Not only is Neena a brilliant innovator in her field, but she is a generous contributor to her community, having donated \$5 million to the Credit Valley Hospital to name the ambulatory care centre. As well, she launched the KMH Family Assistance Services foundation, helping people break the cycle of poverty.

I am proud of Neena's accomplishments and delighted that the Women's Executive Network recognized her for her entrepreneurial spirit.

* * *

HEART MONTH

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February is Heart Month. Today the Heart and Stroke Foundation is hosting a demonstration event on Parliament Hill. As a director of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. and Yukon, I am proud to sponsor this event.

Every participant will be given a CPR Anytime training kit, which can be used at home with family and friends to learn these important skills. About 40,000 people experience cardiac arrest every year in Canada. With each passing minute, their probability of survival declines by up to 10%. Using an automated external defibrillator, or AED, combined with CPR within the first few minutes can improve survival rates by up to 50% or more.

One does not have to be a doctor to save a life. We all have the power to restart a heart. By learning CPR and AED skills, we can help save someone when it counts most. MPs, senators and staff are invited to come learn the importance of these vital skills today in room 200 of the West Block at 3:30. Let us put our hearts into it. One day we might just save the life of someone we love.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

ALEXANDRE MALLETTE-LAFRENIÈRE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, young Alexandre Mallette-Lafrenière, who came to symbolize the Shannon tainted water scandal, died in a Quebec City hospital.

The family's nightmare began in September 2007, when Alexandre was diagnosed with brain cancer. At the time, he was given just three months to live. Because of his will to live and his determination, with the help of chemotherapy, he went on to fight the disease for more than 17 months.

Alexandre became a living symbol of the battle the people of Shannon have been fighting for too long: their crusade to force the federal government to do everything in its power to get to the bottom of the link between the incidence of cancer in Shannon and the use of industrial degreasers containing TCE by National Defence and its contractors.

We must not let Alexandre's death be in vain. The federal government must act quickly to acknowledge its responsibility in this scandal and compensate all of the victims.

The members of the Bloc Québécois would like to offer their sincere condolences to the Mallette-Lafrenière family.

* * *

[English]

CENTENARY OF POWERED FLIGHT IN CANADA

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago today at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, J.A.D. McCurdy slipped the surly bonds of earth in powered flight for the first time in Canada and the British Empire. The *Silver Dart* flew 800 metres at a dizzying height of 10 metres and the blistering speed of 64 kilometres per hour. That event was the first of countless achievements by Canadian aviators and industry.

Across Canada this year, we celebrate Billy Bishop's courage of the early morning; our pioneering bush pilots; the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan; the companies that built Hurricanes and Halifaxes; Buzz Beurling over Malta; the 10,000 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice in bomber command; Canadian Sabre pilots over the Yalu River; the world's first jet airliner; the ahead-of-its-time Avro Arrow; the Canadarm; our astronauts, including our own space sailor from Westmount—Ville-Marie; modern-day military and civilian aviators; and all the people who have supported those who danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings.

As one who has joined the tumbling mirth of sun-split clouds, I am very proud to salute all those Canadians over the past century who have trod the high, untrespassed sanctity of space, put out their hands and touched the face of God.

Per ardua ad astra.

OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in just 354 days, Canada will welcome the world's best to Vancouver for the 2010 Olympics. However, as our athletes continue to train for their competition of a lifetime, a bureaucratic competition is set to deliver a devastating blow to one of our country's premiere sport governing bodies.

For the past three Olympic Games, our hockey and sledge teams have worn the Hockey Canada emblem with great pride. The crest is a Canadian branding success story, with sales revenues expected to reach \$20 million this Olympic year. Those increased revenues have helped develop young officials, coaches and volunteers and have kept insurance costs down for over half a million young players.

The COC is placing at risk an incredibly successful business plan should it deny Hockey Canada this opportunity. I urge all members of the House, and indeed all Canadians, to ask the COC to reverse its decision and allow our men's and women's hockey teams, our sledge team and, of course, Hockey Canada's business plan to continue their gold medal performances.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

LE QUÉBÉCOIS NEWSPAPER

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, we learned that *Le Québécois*, the newspaper headed by Patrick Bourgeois, the man who called for violence in connection with the recreation of the battle of the Plains of Abraham, will no longer be funded by the Parti Québécois.

What is the Bloc leader doing? The PQ and the Bloc change their position according to which way the wind is blowing. When the wind changes direction, they change their minds. One day, they have no connection, and the next day they do. In fact, they do have a connection, because they are funding Patrick Bourgeois and his newspaper.

When will the Bloc leader distance himself from Patrick Bourgeois? Taxpayers' money should not be used to maintain ties with organizations that promote violence or disorder. The Bloc must disassociate itself from *Le Québécois* and Patrick Bourgeois as quickly as possible and immediately stop buying advertising in the newspaper. I call on the leader of the Bloc to do as the leader of the PQ did and give orders to his troops immediately.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today on behalf of a group of aboriginal students from my riding. These students are deeply concerned about their future and the futures of all aboriginal students. INAC is currently reviewing programs that provide funding to aboriginal students, and my constituents are worried that their voices are not being heard.

Aboriginal students have made tremendous gains in recent years. They are a growing presence on college and university campuses. Such INAC programs as the post-secondary student support program, which provides grants to aboriginal students, have played an important role in these gains. It is vital that such programs continue to grow.

Today I am calling on the government to ensure that the concerns of aboriginal students are heard and that support for aboriginal students, in particular funding in the form of grants, is maintained and improved.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight some of the great work the government is doing to support local communities across Ontario. Last week Canada's transportation and infrastructure minister, along with his provincial counterpart, announced more than \$1 billion for almost 300 projects across the province of Ontario.

Here is just a sample of what some of the municipalities had to say about this investment.

The mayor of LaSalle, near Windsor, said, "This is the biggest grant in the history of our town. This is a very exciting day".

Said a city councillor from Port Colborne, "It's a great day. I'm just elated. It's unbelievable. This will mean so much for our community".

This significant investment will create jobs, stimulate the economy and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians. This is just another example of how all three levels of government can work together positively to get shovels in the ground and get projects started faster.

* * *

[Translation]

MEMBER FOR CHARLESBOURG—HAUTE-SAINT-CHARLES

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles has once again shown a flagrant lack of judgment. When asked to explain the absence of any Conservatives at the Québec Horizon Culture event, the member acknowledged the Conservatives' indifference towards artists.

I would remind the House of the full statement made by the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. He said: "We are not all that buddy-buddy with artists. That is not what we are about." And there is more. He went on to spew, and I quote him word for word: "—that is \$2 billion spent by you and me, and all workers, so artists can entertain us."

What scorn. He was true to form, as all Conservatives are. After giving the finger to the Bloc Québécois, which made the annual TV review list, after accusing the Bloc Québécois of being responsible for the riots in Montreal North in the summer of 2008, after showing such scorn towards artists, the spokesperson for the Quebec nation said out loud what Conservatives really think.

Oral Questions

● (1415)

[English]

BATHURST PHANTOMS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year the town of Bathurst, New Brunswick lost seven young basketball players in a terrible van crash. One year later the Bathurst High School Phantoms are provincial champions.

These young athletes met incredible loss with incredible strength. They did so in a way that much older athletes could only hope to do.

On behalf of this House I extend our congratulations to the Phantoms of Bathurst for their championship win and for the courage and determination it required. They have done their community and their country very proud.

[Translation]

The courage and determination shown by the Phantoms of Bathurst are a source of inspiration. These young athletes deserve to be congratulated and recognized.

* * *

[English]

BATHURST PHANTOMS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all remember, last year a terrible bus accident took the lives of seven members of the Bathurst Phantoms basketball team as well as the coach's wife.

I would like to inform the House that this past weekend the Bathurst Phantoms won the New Brunswick High School AA Championship with an 82 to 50 victory over the Campobello Vikings.

This team and the community showed remarkable strength in coming together and achieving this success. We want them to know that Canada is very, very proud of what they have accomplished in the face of such tragedy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, it was the unemployment numbers, then record bankruptcies, collapsing housing starts, and soaring trade deficit figures. Now, it is retail sales. They fell 5.4% in December, the largest drop in 15 years. Bad news seems to be overwhelming the government's strategy.

So, the question is, is it going to revise this strategy as the situation worsens? The Prime Minister said one thing; the Minister of Finance said another. What is the government's position?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and I have been clear that what needs to happen is that Canada's economic action plan, the major stimulus to our economy that is contained in budget 2009, needs to be implemented. To be implemented, of course, it has to be passed by this House and go to the Senate. It is good news that some members on the finance committee, including some members of the official opposition on the committee, have expressed the view that the bill should be passed as soon as possible. I look forward to appearing before the committee this afternoon.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister did not answer the question. Everybody on this side of the House wants these measures to be passed rapidly. The question is whether the situation is changing in such a way that the minister already has additional measures in view.

Will he answer that question?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the budget, we were very conservative in our fiscal estimates for this year. In fact, our prognostications are below the predictions by the private sector forecasters.

Unfortunately, we are seeing continuing economic deterioration in the United States and around the world. We are in the midst of a synchronized global recession. Regrettably, we were obliged to plan on that basis, which we have. Let us get the stimulus out and working in the Canadian economy.

* * *

[Translation]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not just in Ontario but across this country Canadians are losing their jobs in the automotive industry. The Minister of Industry said that if companies in this industry went bankrupt, the Canadian government would not be providing bail outs for workers' pensions and benefits.

• (1420)

[English]

What will the government say if these companies do tumble into bankruptcy? Tough luck?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the hon. member is professing, the doomsaying scenario which he seems to luxuriate in, I can tell the House that we are working very closely with the sector, of course, with Premier McGuinty and the Government of Ontario, and with the Obama administration, to ensure that we have a vibrant car industry, not only for the present but for the future as well. That is what we are focused on, on this side of the House.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, retail sales plummeted 4.4% in December alone. Three years with this Conservative government

have meant three years with decreases in this sector, and we are expecting another decrease in 2009.

Can the Prime Minister explain why, despite his so-called expertise in economics, the numbers show that his policies are failing one after the other?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member opposite will know, President Obama visited last week and praised the efforts that had been made by Canada, by the Canadian government, with respect to our economic stimulus. Canada, quite frankly, is a leading light in the world and is being used as a model in the G20, with respect to the way to handle the financial system and the way to regulate. Canadians can be proud of our financial sector.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about here, what really matters, are the people those numbers represent. Decreased retail sales in December mean people out of work in January. As we know, women will be particularly hard hit as they are overrepresented in the retail sector, they are overrepresented in part-time jobs, and they are underrepresented as EI recipients.

What will the Conservatives do now to make up for their pathetic paralysis since the crisis first hit months ago?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member has been. Four weeks ago tomorrow, we introduced Canada's economic action plan in this very House.

The budget implementation act is before the House. It contains massive stimulus to the Canadian economy and major innovations with respect to employment insurance, including extending it, and work-sharing, all of the measures that are necessary to help Canadians who are losing their jobs.

I hope the hon. member will help expedite the legislation.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his joint press conference with the U.S. president, the Prime Minister said, "You say we have intensity, they have absolute — but the truth is these are just two different ways of measuring the same thing." But with intensity targets, there is no guarantee that greenhouse gases will be reduced globally, while with absolute targets come real greenhouse gas reductions.

With such comments, is the Prime Minister not engaging in a dialogue with the U.S. president on the wrong basis, by allowing big oil to continue polluting?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is incorrect. We disagree with the hon. member. Our plan is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020, which is a much more stringent target than that of the U.S.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is very clear. Absolute greenhouse gas reduction targets are based on the polluter-pay principle, whereas intensity targets are based on a polluter-paid approach. Worse yet, intensity targets would cast aside Quebec's GHG reduction efforts while allowing Alberta and Saskatchewan to continue polluting.

Will the Prime Minister recognize that his so-called green policies are nothing more than window dressing and that his government is continuing to serve big oil?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we disagree. The Bloc Québécois has to put partisanship aside and work with the government.

We are working with the United States on a North American approach based on new technologies and the development of clean energy sources like hydroelectricity, for instance.

• (1425)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in an Obama-Biden document entitled “New Energy for America”, the American president's position on combating greenhouse gases is now clear: establishing absolute targets and using 1990 as the reference year.

Will the government acknowledge that any productive discussion or partnership with the United States to fight global warming depends on those two factors?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not agree with that suggestion. We have a plan to reduce greenhouse gases by 20% by 2020. These targets are more rigorous than the targets proposed by Mr. Obama, the President of the United States.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is telling us that he completely disagrees with President Obama. Here is the reality. When we talk about dialogue, it means that both parties have something to say. But that is not the case for Canada in this area. Canada has no known position.

Can the government tell us its position on using 1990 as the reference year and on establishing absolute targets?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member dwells in the past in terms of 1990.

This is a government that is going forward, working on a plan that has been developed with the new administration in the United States. This is a plan that will lead the world in terms of the development of new energy research and clean energy technology. We are working on a dialogue with President Obama and his government that will provide leadership to the world in dealing with this problem, something that has never happened before in our country.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister met with the Secretary General of the United Nations this morning. Numerous UN reports show that poverty in Canada is

on the rise, especially among children, women and aboriginal people. Our record on housing, education, health care and the environment is also suffering. Canada's international ranking is plummeting.

Can the government tell us what the Prime Minister had to say about these problems this morning at the UN?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were very pleased the other day to make our presentation before the United Nations. We dealt candidly and openly with every kind of issue, from aboriginal issues to housing issues and so on. It was a pleasure to talk not only about what we have done, in our case, for aboriginal people, with inclusion under the Canadian Human Rights Act for aboriginals living on reserve, for example, but also to talk about some of the new initiatives.

In my ministry, there is \$1.4 billion in aboriginal-related funding, because we realize there has been a gap which needs to be addressed. We are moving ahead.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, leadership on the world stage really has to start with leadership here at home. What we have seen is that the Government of Canada has been criticized frequently and successively by UN reports for its record on poverty, on women, on the environment, on human rights. Taser deaths were singled out by Italy. Norway pointed to the scale and character of violence against aboriginal women. The United Kingdom added that Canada had to give the highest priority to fundamental inequalities between aboriginal people and the rest of Canadians by settling land claims, among other measures.

Could the government tell us what progress, if any, has been registered with the UN in the Prime Minister's meetings—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can talk specifically about some progress on specific claims settlements in British Columbia, my home province, where last year we settled 31 land claims. That is a record number. In a typical year under the previous administration it might have settled seven or eight. This is 31 settlements.

We also urge the member at the far end of the hall here to help us pass the matrimonial real property rights bill, which would finally give aboriginal women and children the property rights they deserve and which every other Canadian takes for granted.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lack of leadership from the government has Canada's auto industry stalled, and it is time we saw action. The restructuring plans that were tabled on Friday present a very bleak picture. Jobs are at risk. Pensions are at risk as well.

Why will the government not take action to protect auto workers' pensions and ensure the long-term viability of the industry, in fact, to make our industry the centrepiece of a green economic recovery for Canada? That is what should be going on.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, even though he keeps voting against our government's agenda for the economic action plan, we are working with the Ontario government and with the Obama administration to bring our auto sector into the 21st century, a greener auto sector and a sector that is more efficient, more effective.

Of course, we cannot do this alone. It means that the executives in the auto sector have to be part of the solution. It means that the workers and the unions have to be part of the solution as well. Together we can make a difference for this sector.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in Canada's auto sector is going deeper. Sales are down 23% over one year, 15% in December alone. Production is cut in half. Some 250 to 300 dealerships are at risk of closing their doors, all good jobs lost. Banks are not lending money to buy cars.

The government promised to step in months ago. We need action now. It cannot wait. When is the government going to deliver on its commitments for access to financing so people can buy or lease cars?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as soon as the opposition passes the budget implementation bill.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that answer is wrong. The minister was fed details of the plan submitted by the auto industry weeks before last Friday's formal submission. There was no new information given to the minister that would justify delaying his promise to provide guaranteed financing so people could buy or lease cars. The offer made last December is not and need not be part of the budget implementation bill. His delays are killing the industry.

I ask the minister again, when will he fulfill his promise to auto retailers and consumers?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member would know if he has reviewed the budget provisions, we are creating the extraordinary financing framework which would create a credit facility of up to \$200 billion. This is very important to address what is the number one issue not only in Canada but elsewhere in the G7 and the G20, which is access to credit. We need to get on with the job of creating the framework, and I encourage the member opposite to support that process.

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the first time since Confederation, the government is considering running a budget deficit without Parliament's approval. The government has obtained the power to borrow on behalf of crown corporations. This power should not be used to run up the national debt by \$34 billion without the approval of the House.

Will the minister restore the principle that Parliament must approve deficits?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): The rule has not changed, Mr. Speaker, that Parliament authorizes expenditures. What is important in the budget implementation act is that not only are there tax measures in the act but there are also expenditure measures to create various types of stimuli for our economy. This is vitally important. It is in the act. We need to have the act passed as quickly as possible to help Canadians while we are in the midst of a serious recession not only here but around the world.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister does not get the point at all. It is not about general budget authority. It is about the requirement to have parliamentary approval when a government goes into deficit. It is a borrowing bill. It is something that has been done in this Parliament since Confederation. It is something that has been done in the British Parliament since Cromwell.

It is obvious that the minister has so trivialized the indebtedness of future generations by \$34 billion that he no longer thinks it necessary to approach Parliament for approval. Why?

● (1435)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear with Canadians. Four weeks ago in budget 2009, Canada's economic action plan, we laid out clearly what is necessary to be done over the next several years.

Yes, we are going to run deficits out two, three and four years. Why are we doing that? To help Canadians who are losing their jobs. I wish that the members opposite would help expedite the bill so that we could help Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, no nation in the world would accept that a portion of the land on which its national assembly is built belongs to another nation. As stated by former Liberal minister Benoît Pelletier, in January 2006, the transfer of the federal lands is not symbolic; it is a question of exercising the rights and responsibilities of the National Assembly of Quebec.

Oral Questions

Does the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs now intend to address the request made by the Government of Quebec, which her government has not yet acknowledged?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with the new Quebec minister of intergovernmental affairs this morning. We discussed several matters, including this one, and we agreed to discuss it at a later date.

But we would like to have a real answer in this House. Will the Bloc follow the PQ lead and cut all ties with *Le Québécois*, whose owner made threats and incited violence against the City of Quebec?

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): It is unacceptable for the federal government to own such a large number of properties in the national capital and to use them, including the Plains of Abraham, to increase federal visibility.

If the government was sincere when it recognized the Quebec nation, would it not be right for it to return this land so that the visibility campaigns led by its apostles of Canadian visibility could cease?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, as in the case of breaking ties to *Le Québécois*, the Bloc is lagging behind.

René Lévesque's statue was installed on federal land by PQ premier Lucien Bouchard in 1999. Why did they not raise the issue then?

* * *

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles said the Conservatives are not buddy-buddy with artists.

It is obvious whom they are buddy-buddy with when we look at page 175 of the English version of the Conservative budget. The friendship between the government and the lobbyists for Luminato and the Canada Prize for the Arts and Creativity fairly leaps off the page. It is word for word.

How can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages claim that this is not his project when the wording in the budget is virtually an exact copy of the Luminato text?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. What we are going to establish are prizes for Canadian artists. That will be great victory for our own cultural community. The Bloc Québécois is against it because this project will meet the needs of Canada and our artists. This is a great project that will help unify our country.

The Bloc is against all these projects, and it is not surprising that this comes from the Bloc. Our government takes the needs of our artists to heart.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister said it is not true. But it is virtually an exact copy. I will read the Luminato wording in English:

[English]

These artists would be publicly adjudicated by a distinguished international panel of the best established artistic minds in each discipline.

[Translation]

That could not be more similar to the wording of the Conservative budget, which is as follows:

[English]

These artists will be publicly adjudicated by a distinguished panel of established artists in each discipline.

[Translation]

Will the minister admit that this is not just buddy-buddy with the lobbyists but an even more intimate, cut-and-paste relationship?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk a little about our government's budgets for artists. Last year we gave \$30,000 to Tumbuktu, Les Transarts africains and the previous year we gave \$15,000 to Tumbuktu, Les Transarts africains. We gave \$19,000 to this organization in her riding.

Why does it take a Conservative government to vote in favour of the electors and artists in her riding? We are the ones who take care of her electors while she always goes against her own electors and artists. We are the ones who are delivering the goods for Quebecers.

* * *

● (1440)

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER INDUSTRY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Southern Governors' Association has passed a motion attacking the already crippled Canadian softwood lumber industry. It calls on President Obama to take new extraordinary measures to punish a sector that has done nothing wrong and is hanging on by a thread.

Within hours our trade critic met with Governor Barbour and many of the other governors in order to defend Canada's forestry sector. But where were the Conservatives? Why are they not standing up for Canada and for its forestry workers?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, when it comes to any protectionist activity, it has been our Prime Minister among all world leaders who has been public and very strong on this overarching concern.

On the specific issue, if the member had taken the time to read the resolution, in fact, it is something that we would support. If there is someone who is part of the agreement who is perceived to be running afoul of the agreement, then there is a dispute mechanism in place that should be followed and we endorse that. We think it is a good motion.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government just does not get it. What the Southern Governors' Association is calling on President Obama to do is to take extraordinary measures to punish the softwood lumber industry, claiming that Canadians are engaging in unfair competition. Once again, we see the Conservatives giving consent by remaining silent and putting off stopping the attacks on another Canadian industry.

Will it take that industry's collapse to get the government's undivided attention?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion is clear. If someone runs afoul of the agreement, then there is a mechanism that should be followed, and we endorse that.

* * *

[English]

CHINA

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs about China. Just last week his predecessor, David Emerson, who is now in the private sector, was enormously critical of the government for its failure to engage on China, for its failure to pay attention to the importance of this relationship, and for allowing a few ideological enthusiasts to take over Canada's China policy. Why has the minister allowed this to happen on his watch?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am actually very pleased to be able to respond to that question. As a matter of fact, we have been extremely active on that file, contrary to what my colleague is saying. I personally had the opportunity of meeting with the foreign affairs minister. Colleagues of mine have travelled to China. My colleague, the Minister of International Trade, intends to go there very shortly. Not only will we be increasing our presence in China, but we also will be increasing our presence in Asia.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every prime minister since John Diefenbaker has taken—

Some hon. members: Dief, dief.

Hon. Bob Rae: I knew Mr. Diefenbaker, Mr. Speaker, and none of those members is John Diefenbaker.

Every prime minister since John Diefenbaker has engaged with China and has paid attention to this relationship. The present Prime Minister is the first prime minister we have had who is not engaged with China and who has not dealt with this relationship.

The president of China is going to be present at the conference of the G20 that is taking place in London. Does the Prime Minister and the minister not realize how serious a mistake this is with respect to building that relationship?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since I still have a little more time to talk about what we are doing with China, my colleague will be able to open up six new trade offices in China very shortly.

We all recall that in the House we were able to secure \$2 billion to ensure that the Asia-Pacific gateway opened up the doors to new trade with China and with Asia.

We are getting the job done.

* * *

● (1445)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ontario's largest public sector union recently passed a motion calling for a boycott of all Israeli academics. The Canadian Union of Public Employees' deliberate targeting of the Jewish people is not new. In fact, CUPE's president, Sid Ryan, recently compared the Israeli government with the Nazis.

Will the Minister of Immigration explain the government's reaction to the motion by CUPE?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians should be concerned about the growing wave on Canadian campuses by organizations such as CUPE that are singling out and targeting the Jewish democratic state of Israel for opprobrium in the most vile language possible.

Last week Jewish students at the Hillel Club at one of our universities faced an angry mob shouting anti-Jewish slogans. The resolution passed by CUPE is in the same spirit. All these people are rejecting the right alone of the Jewish people to a homeland.

On behalf of all Canadians, we denounce this kind of intolerance and extremism that is totally unacceptable.

* * *

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government never had any intention of introducing real proactive pay equity legislation and it made that obvious last November. It intends to deny more women the right to equal pay for work of equal value, and apparently the Liberals agree.

In committee this morning legal and women's rights experts made it clear that this law would be challenged. This will slow down women's rights to justice.

Will the minister finally admit that it is time to stop this pay equity charade and give women the justice they have earned?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to understand how the process could be any slower. At present, women have to wait 15 or 20 years in order to achieve equity in the workforce. That is simply not acceptable.

We are adopting proactive legislation, in the same way that the member for Toronto Centre did when he was in the Ontario legislature, to ensure that women have equity in the workplace on a timely basis.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only proactive thing in this legislation is the Conservatives' clear and determined intention to deprive Canadian women of the right to equal pay for work of equal value. They are raising the occupational concentration threshold for women from the current 55% to 70%. They are inventing a new exception for the market economy, even though the market is responsible for the discrimination.

Obviously, the minister thinks that women's right to work is a joke. He ought to be replaced.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are changing the system so that women will no longer have to wait for 15 years for compensation.

Under the old way of doing things, unions refused to deal with pay equity issues during negotiations. We believe that everyone is responsible for pay equity in the workforce, so unions and employers, both parties, must ensure that equity is achieved in a collective agreement. That is only fair to women. That is fair to society.

* * *

*[Translation]***JUSTICE**

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Groupe Polygone, which was involved in the sponsorship scandal, is trying to uncover the identity of the journalistic source who brought the whole affair to light. A process has been undertaken to force a journalist to reveal his source, the person known as "Ma chouette".

Will the Minister of Justice direct his lawyers to uphold freedom of the press and the protection of journalistic sources?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are certainly reviewing this matter and we will take all suggestions under consideration.

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*[Translation]***ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it sounds as though the Minister of Justice did not understand the question.

What a paradox. The government demands complete transparency from the media, but when it comes to access to information requests, it charges exorbitant fees and spews red tape, which is contrary to the spirit of the act.

If the government really wants improved access to information, how can it justify implementing a fee structure designed to get around the legislation, which is what is going on at Foreign Affairs?

● (1450)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, requests amounted to some 3,500 pages. There is nothing wrong with cost recovery in that context.

We are not against the idea. On the contrary, we agree that the Access to Information Act should enable people to get information, but we also think that it makes sense to try to recover the cost of handling access requests.

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*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, President Obama has earmarked \$400 million for climate change research.

In Canada the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, which has financed 160 projects and 24 research networks on climate change, has received nothing from the government over the last four budgets.

Why is the Conservative government shutting out Canada's best and brightest?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only the Liberal Party could find fault with what transpired in our country last week when the Prime Minister of Canada and the President of the United States struck a historic understanding relative to biofuel research, research relating to the smart grid, research relating to energy efficiency, clean engine research, carbon capture and storage, all the most advanced technologies in the world.

Only one party in our country has delayed progress on climate change, and that is the Liberal Party.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a new brain drain from Canada has begun.

Andrew Weaver, who shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore, notes his modelling team recently lost three researchers to Australia. James Drummond, who directs a remote polar lab and whose funding has all but dried up, says that he has already lost a post-doctoral student to the U.S. and fears more will follow.

Climate scientists are leaving Canada because of the government's decision to starve scientific research at odds with its ideology. When will this end?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what has begun is collaboration between our country and the largest economy in the world south of here in relation to research, research on all aspects of energy consumption, energy efficiency, smart grids.

These developments will benefit our country in every respect. It does not matter what form of energy we are speaking of, whether it is hydrocarbons, renewables, hydroelectricity, across the Canadian economy we will be the beneficiary of the remarkable work that happened here last week.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the recent gang violence on the streets of the Lower Mainland has shocked British Columbians and the entire country. Yet to date the government has presented no coherent strategy for crime prevention or diverting high-risk youth from gangs. In fact, it has spent more time playing politics than taking action.

New Democrats have supported and will continue to support strategies for getting gangs off the streets and putting criminals behind bars. When will the government present the House with an effective plan to combat gang violence in metro Vancouver and, indeed, across Canada?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the hon. member was not there in Vancouver a month ago when I announced five different projects aimed at diverting young people from activity involvement in gangs, vulnerable at-risk youth. We are providing the funding through our national crime prevention strategy, something I might add, numbers in the budget that party votes against all the time.

I do not know why those members are complaining about the lack of funding. When we are taking action to fight crime, they are standing and voting against it.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the mother of two police officers in Vancouver, I find the minister's answers rather insulting and very disappointing.

Our region has the lowest police to population ratio of any metro area in the country. People in B.C. do not want political games; they want effective action to combat criminal gangs. We need more police officers, stronger witness protection, investments for crime prevention that will keep our kids away from gangs. We must make drive-by shootings explicitly an indictable offence.

When will the government finally bring forward a comprehensive strategy—

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our party committed to deliver over 1,000 new RCMP officers. So far we have delivered over 1,500. We have provided money to the provinces to hire additional police officers. With that, a week and a half ago the province of British Columbia was able to announce that it was doing exactly that. We have delivered on tougher penalties for gun crimes and a range of other measures through our Tackling Violent Crime Act.

There were a bunch of bills in previous Parliaments that those parties across the way did not let pass. We will be bringing forward tougher penalties for drug crimes and other measures. We invite them this time, in this Parliament to support those measures so we can really get tough on crime for a change.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while past Liberal governments were content with the status quo, this government was not. In budgets 2007 and 2008, the government

committed to make our international assistance focused, effective and accountable.

Last April, the Minister of International Cooperation announced Canada would be untying food aid. In September she announced that all aid would be untied.

Could the minister update us on the next steps in the government's aid effectiveness agenda?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Canada is moving forward on another element of its aid effectiveness agenda. We will be increasing our effectiveness efforts in 20 countries, with increased resources focusing our bilateral country programs and improved coherence and coordination.

This does not mean we are abandoning those in need. We will continue to respond to humanitarian crisis around the world.

Today I am also pleased to announce an additional \$1.5 million for shelter and protection for Sri Lankan civilians who are victimized by the conflict.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when is the Prime Minister going to realize his office must obey the law? Following the listeriosis crisis, the Prime Minister, after months of delay, has appointed an investigator who has no power to subpoena witnesses or documents and reports to the very minister who is under question.

Now today, we have the spectacle of the PMO and the Privy Council Office refusing to release information concerning the activities of the government during the crisis.

What is the Prime Minister trying to hide? Will the Prime Minister commit today, right now, to release all notes related to the listeriosis crisis, as required by law?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is trying to create the impression that decisions about what information to release are driven at the political level. That is in fact absolutely false, and that member knows it.

ATIA requests are never handled by ministers or political staff. The work is done by individuals in the public service. We assume and we expect them to obey the law in every respect.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a British national detained in Guantanamo for four years was released from the prison and repatriated by his government.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is scheduled to meet with the American secretary of state soon. Why not use that visit to ask that child soldier Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen still detained in Guantanamo, be returned to Canada?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position remains exactly the same as that already taken by previous governments. We all know that the individual in question has been charged with serious crimes against Americans. In that respect, President Obama has established a procedure. We intend to follow that procedure through to the end.

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[English]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last summer's listeriosis outbreak killed 20 Canadians and made many more sick. During the election, the government promised to get to the bottom of it. However, not only is its their own closed door investigation a sham, we are now learning that the Conservatives are denying Canadians the full scope of the situation by blocking information about the outbreak from being released.

Will the government tell us when the agricultural subcommittee hearings on listeriosis will start, and when will the government tell Canadian families everything it knows about the crisis in order to restore Canadians' confidence in the food supply?

• (1500)

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I answered that question which was asked by the member for Malpeque. I gave a fulsome answer to that member. However, I will repeat it.

The member is trying to create the impression that decisions regarding the information being released are driven at the political level. That is absolutely false. These requests are never handled by ministers or their political staff. That work is done by professional public servants in the public service.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month Canada's transport, and infrastructure minister and his Ontario provincial counterpart announced more than \$1 billion in infrastructure investment to Ontario communities with fewer than 100,000 people. Communities in the great Kenora riding were elated with these investments.

Could the minister inform the House how this funding will affect their communities and has affected the communities in the Kenora riding?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in these uncertain economic times, Canadians want us to work together to get things going, to create jobs right across the province.

The Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Liberal MPP Leona Dombrowsky calls the funding that the government announced the most significant infrastructure investment that has been made in rural Ontario probably in the history of

the province. The mayor of Timmins said that he applauded the federal and provincial governments for their quick and decisive action.

This government is getting the job done for rural Ontario.

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INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last May, Bill C-293, calling for proper accountability for Canada's international aid dollars, was given royal assent after receiving full support from all parties in the House.

With the funds recently allocated to the conflict in Sri Lanka, I ask the Minister of International Cooperation, what is CIDA doing to ensure the provisions of this bill are in fact being met, and when can we expect the full integration of this legislation in all of CIDA's aid initiatives?

For those suffering in Sri Lanka and in countries all around the world, it is now time for this bill to be acted upon.

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, Bill C-293 falls in line with our priorities for focused, effective and accountable aid. It is based on poverty reduction. The department has been working on implementation, and I can assure the House that we will meet all of its requirements. I will keep the member informed. We are on track to meeting the obligations.

The Speaker: That will conclude question period for today. On a point of order, the hon. member for Saint Boniface.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is imperative for all of us to guard against any kind of unparliamentary commentary, in both official languages, here in the House. I would like to bring to your attention that a member from the Bloc Québécois today, the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, used unparliamentary language in addressing the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

I would ask that he apologize for that.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour have something to say on the matter?

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether you ever declared the word “niaiseuse” to be unparliamentary. I do not recall any ruling. I would just like to explain that this is a colloquial French word meaning ignorant. I will therefore replace the word “niaiseuse” with the word “ignorant”.

S.O. 52

The Speaker: Chair has heard from both hon. members on this matter. I will review today's Hansard and report to the House, if necessary. I have not heard the member use the word at issue, but it has now been mentioned. I will therefore review the whole matter and come back to the House with a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[English]

CANADA GRAIN ACT

Hon. Jay Hill (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act, chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998 and chapter 25 of the Statutes of Canada, 2004.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, your committee has considered the proposed appointment of Brian J. Saunders as the Director of Public Prosecutions pursuant to the order of reference of February 4, 2009, and subsection 4(4) of the Director of Public Prosecutions Act.

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I am pleased to report that the committee has considered the question of the proposed appointment of Brian J. Saunders to the position of Director of Public Prosecutions and has agreed to approve the appointment.

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NATIONAL HOCKEY DAY ACT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-320, An Act respecting a National Hockey Day.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth for seconding my bill.

This bill is being brought forward at this point in time when people are suffering across Canada, community to community, during the economic downturn. The intention of the bill is to honour Canada's historic sport, hockey. There is some controversy within my own party about what is the best sport in Canada. I stand proudly and say hockey is Canada's historic sport. It is enjoyed by all ages, all genders, all communities, and all cultural backgrounds across our country.

This past hockey weekend was celebrated. The CBC sponsors the competition in a community. There were regional challenges. There were outdoor hockey reunions. There are historic community run rinks. Every day after school my brother and his school friends would go out and play hockey in the local rink. We need to bring

back that historic community practice. We need to support our communities and get people out having fun.

In my own riding of Edmonton—Strathcona Vimy Ridge School sponsors a hockey school. Last Friday I was able to join the game which included a female goalie. The school is very supportive of the bill.

I am happy to bring this bill forward and look forward to receiving the support of the House for this initiative for Canadians.

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

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PETITIONS

SRI LANKA

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of a number of residents in my community, calling on the Government of Canada to pressure the government of Sri Lanka to lay down its arms, to bring about an immediate ceasefire, to allow human rights monitoring in the war zone, and to allow non-governmental agencies to begin distributing aid in the war zone.

I support the petition and I am happy to present it on their behalf today.

• (1510)

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions from people all across Canada, calling on the government to continue its work against the human trafficking issue in Canada. There are close to 500 names on one petition and 500 on another.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

The Speaker: The Chair has received an application for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Guelph. I will be happy to hear him on this point now.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being given this opportunity. I am certain that you are aware of the importance of the auto sector to Canada's economy. The auto industry has rightfully received a considerable amount of attention on the floor of the House, particularly in recent months.

General Motors and Chrysler presented plans to the government on Friday, requesting substantial funding and plans for reorganization that will touch the constituencies of many members in the House. The industry tells us that sales are down 23% over one year, 15% in December alone, and production is down 50%. In fact, 250 to 300 dealerships may be closing their doors. General Motors has indicated that it will be forced to reduce its Canadian workforce to 7,000 employees by 2010, a dramatic change from its 20,000 employees in 2005.

Today, Statistics Canada released figures indicating that the decline in the auto sector led to the significant decline in retail sales in December. Retail sales were down 5.4% in December to \$33 billion, the largest monthly decline in over 15 years. Clearly, this is an issue that requires the urgent consideration of the House. I think it is imperative that we have an opportunity to have that debate today. Thousands of jobs have already been lost.

My riding of Guelph is home to a significant auto parts industry and the crisis in the auto sector touches many jobs right across Guelph's local economy. People are frightened and they are looking to the government for action at this critical time. I believe that Canadians expect us to share their priorities. Emergency debates provide a venue for Parliament to discuss those issues that are of critical importance. Thousands of jobs are on the line right now and it is imperative that Parliament be engaged in that debate.

If ever there were facts that give definition to the word emergency, they would be these. I would ask that we have this debate immediately.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Guelph for his submissions on this point. I do not disagree that the matter is one of some urgency, but it has been an issue that has been canvassed, certainly in the media and indeed in the House in questions over the last several weeks.

I do note that there are two opposition days scheduled for this week, one tomorrow and one on Thursday. I have every reason to expect that the subject the hon. member has raised could be the subject of debate on one of the opposition days, one of which is available to the party he is a member of.

Accordingly I am going to refuse the request at this time and we will see what happens over the course of the week.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

HUMAN PATHOGENS AND TOXINS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

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

* * *

● (1515)

ARCTIC WATERS POLLUTION PREVENTION ACT

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved that Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand and speak to this very important legislation. I want to thank the House leader for recognizing just how important this bill is for the environment in the precious north.

The Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act is a small but important symbolic piece of legislation. Our vast Arctic region remains a Canadian icon known the world over. This government has taken unprecedented and historic steps toward keeping Canada's north safe. Bill C-3 is another example of this action.

Protecting Canada's Arctic waters from pollution is one of our government's key priorities. Our proposed amendment would double the geographic application of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act from 100 to 200 nautical miles midway between Greenland and the islands in the Canadian Arctic.

Presently, the discharge of waste is permitted at internationally agreed levels in the area between 100 and 200 nautical miles. Our proposed changes would disallow this practice and further strengthen the pollution protection regime in our Arctic region.

This was an important commitment that the Prime Minister made when he travelled, not just to Inuvik but also to Tuktoyaktuk on the Beaufort Sea to show his commitment to the Arctic and to environmental protection. This increased range would allow Canadian environmental laws and shipping regulations to be enforced to the fullest extent and give us greater control over the movement of ships through the Northwest Passage.

With this amendment, we are sending a message that Canada is tremendously serious about protecting our Arctic sovereignty and keeping northern waters clean. This complements other Arctic initiatives that this government has already put in place under the health of our oceans components of our national water strategy and initiatives, such as outfitting Arctic surveillance aircraft in order to help us track polluters.

In August 2008, the Prime Minister had the opportunity to travel to the Northwest Territories where he announced our intention to move in this important regard and today, once again, like the Prime Minister always does, he followed through with specific action.

Government Orders

Our Prime Minister reinforced that we believe in the “use it or lose it” policy when it comes to our Arctic regions. We made it clear that in Canada's Arctic we will play by Canada's rules.

The baselines around Canada's Arctic Archipelago were formalized in 1986 and are consistent with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and with the 1996 Oceans Act, which established an exclusive economic zone of up to 200 nautical miles off Canada's coasts, including around the Arctic Archipelago. Canada has jurisdiction regarding the protection and preservation of the marine environment, which is an incredible sensitive ecosystem, including the ice covered waters within the exclusive economic zone.

In 2003, Canada became a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Article 234 of the convention enables a coastal state to put in place special requirements for pollution protection in ice covered areas within its exclusive economic zone.

Extending the pollution protection from 100 to 200 nautical miles would enable Canada to exercise enhanced jurisdiction with regard to pollution control north of the 60th parallel. This extension will be consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea's article 234.

In addition, this government will act to ensure that new regulations under the Canada Shipping Act are in place for the 2010 season. These regulations will require the mandatory registration of vessels entering this expanded zone. There is nothing more fundamental than the protection of our nation's sovereignty and security and our government will continue to rigorously defend Canada's place in the world and our rightful territories, and the Arctic is no exception.

[*Translation*]

Canadians see in our North an expression of our deepest aspirations: our sense of exploration, the beauty and the bounty of our land, and our limitless potential. For too long, the federal government ignored the North. Its potential is still untapped.

[*English*]

One of our greatest prime ministers, John George Diefenbaker, made a tremendous priority of Canada's north. He, in fact, was one of the inspirations for the founding of Inuvik where the Prime Minister and I and a good number of members of the cabinet travelled this past August. The Arctic was also close to Prime Minister Chrétien, but the most leadership we have seen in this last century has been from this Prime Minister with respect to ensuring Canada's sovereignty is protected in the north.

• (1520)

To this end, our government has established a northern strategy that rests on four key pillars: northern economic development, protecting our fragile northern environment, asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and providing northerners with more control over their own destiny.

The expansion of coverage of the Arctic shipping legislation is directly linked to this strategy which commits our government to ensuring a sustainable and comprehensive approach to Arctic shipping.

[*Translation*]

The first pillar, northern economic development, is designed to encourage responsible development of the North's bountiful economic resources, ensure the health and good governance of Northern communities and provide jobs and opportunities to those living in these communities.

[*English*]

Strong worldwide demand for our natural resources increases the viability of resource exploration and extraction in Canada's Arctic. It is estimated that Canada's north possesses 33% of our remaining conventionally recoverable sources of natural gas and 25% of the remaining recoverable light crude oil. The discovered resource of the Arctic basin approaches 31 trillion cubic feet of gas and 1.6 billion barrels of oil. The potential for resource extraction in the area is thought to be approximately 14.7 billion barrels of oil and approximately 433 trillion cubic feet of gas.

The second pillar, environmental protection, aims to protect the unique and fragile Arctic ecosystem for future generations. We must remain vigilant, especially in our north. Our northern environment is fragile, something people living there have always known. Potentially longer operating seasons and the increase in northern resource development may mean maritime activity in Canada's Arctic will soon increase and the passage of this important legislation will have a part in that.

In 1970, we acknowledged the fragility and special circumstances of waters north of 60 and established stringent measures of 100 nautical miles from shore, further than any country at the time. The original application of the act has not kept pace with the international convention and, as a result, Canada has not been able to exercise the full authority under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea. The extension of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act would eliminate that gap.

The third pillar, sovereignty, asserts and defends Canada's sovereignty and security in the Arctic. Our government recognizes the challenges Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic could face in the future. In the coming years, sovereignty and security challenges will become more pressing as the impact of climate change leads to increased activity throughout this ecologically sensitive region. The defence of Canada's sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity in the Arctic remains a top priority for our government.

[*Translation*]

To support Canada's position whereby waters surrounding the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, including the various traffic lanes known as the Northwest Passage, are internal waters, Canada has to exercise, and be seen to exercise, effective control over foreign merchant shipping in the Canadian Arctic.

Government Orders

Such control means having the ability to deny passage or facilitate shipping in Arctic waters and, at the most elementary level, to enforce Canadian law in the Arctic Archipelago and within the territorial sea of Canada and the surrounding exclusive economic zone.

[*English*]

The waters of the Arctic Archipelago are internal waters of Canada by virtue of historic title. This means that Canada has sovereignty over these waters. Canada must therefore move quickly to affirm and protect its sovereignty over this archipelago, including the navigable waters in it. We are working to strengthen our Arctic maritime security in the future. After all, maritime activity is critical to our Arctic communities. Getting fuel, food, medical and other supplies all depends on reliable and effective maritime shipping.

Arctic security is also key to Canada's security as a whole. All of these will assist in detecting and preventing criminal and terrorist activities that may pose a serious threat to national and international security. It also allows us to find those who pollute our waters and harm our northern environment. To that extent, our government has introduced new Arctic patrol ships and expanded aerial surveillance that will guard Canada's far north and the Northwest Passage.

Funding has also been committed for a new polar class icebreaker for the Canadian Coast Guard. Most important, Mr. Speaker, and I know you will be very pleased to be reminded of this, it will be named after former Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and for the Arctic seabed mapping. Amendments to the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act would expand for an additional 100 nautical miles control over pollution and shipping compliance.

The last pillar looks at providing northerners with more control over their own destiny.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

The 19,000 Inuit residing in the 15 communities along the coast of Ungava Bay and the eastern shore of Hudson Bay inhabit a territory with an enormous potential. With its wealth of resources and abundant fish and wildlife, Nunavut offers a world of possibilities to its inhabitants in terms of mining, outfitting, tourism, fishing and much more.

Our government is determined to ensure that those who live, work and raise children there can fully benefit from these significant opportunities.

[*English*]

With this amendment our government will help address concerns from Inuit communities regarding pollution in waters surrounding their homes and workplaces. Expanding the application of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act to 200 miles improves Canada's ability to prevent ship source pollution from happening, helping to keep the Arctic waters clean.

Northern communities support clean and sustainable economic development in the north, as do all Canadians who want to protect the integrity of Canada's Arctic waters.

When I talk to constituents in my constituency of Ottawa West—Nepean, far away from the Arctic, there is a real sense of the value, that this is an important part of our great country, a precious part of our world. They believe we have a collective responsibility to ensure this important part of our country is kept clean and is kept free from the mistakes that we have made far too often over the last 200 years in southern Canada.

The north is relevant and important to all Canadians. Obviously, it is particularly relevant and important to northerners. The Minister of Health has brought this view to the cabinet table. I have had good discussions as well with the member for Western Arctic and the member for Yukon.

We have important responsibilities in this place to ensure we do everything we can to promote sound environmental practices and to ensure that we assert our sovereignty. That is more than just in a military sense, it is more than just in a natural resource sense, it is more than just in a fisheries sense, it is also very much in an environmental sense. That is why this piece of legislation was presented in the first session of this Parliament and has been reintroduced in the second session.

I want to thank members from all parties. There have been good briefings and discussions. I think Canadians would be very pleased if they looked at the work done by the transport committee in the last session of this Parliament and the constructive work that it has already begun to undertake in this Parliament.

I look forward to hearing from all members of the House and to advancing this important piece of legislation so that we can put this important law on the statute books.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the speech on Bill C-3 by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities sounded like an economic development speech. That may be the weakness in this bill. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was also the environment minister for a few years. Something here is very troubling. It is true there may be major reserves of oil and gas in the ocean's depths. On the other hand, though, we are talking about the last reserves in the world.

I did not get the sense in his speech that we need ultimately to be continuing the fight against greenhouse gases, both for the people living in the Arctic and for the rest of the world's population, so that there will be more ice in the Arctic—not less—and we do not make it disappear in order to have a shipping channel.

I certainly want this to happen, but the reality is that we are in one of the most sensitive areas in the world, and there was no sense in the minister's speech that the Conservative government wants to attack greenhouse gases and try to restore a balanced climate to the Arctic. I would appreciate it if he could expand on what he thinks about this.

Government Orders

•(1530)

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Bloc for his comments. I am on the same page as he is. It is true that the fight against climate change is very important to the people living in the North and to all Canadians.

[*English*]

I totally agree with the member opposite. One of the concerns is that we must take mitigation measures. More natural gas is a key part, for example, in many strategies to reduce the reliance on coal-fired electricity. My province is looking to phase out all of the coal and is turning to renewables, to more nuclear, but also some high efficiency, cleaner natural gas, which is an important part.

We do have to look at adaptation to climate change. There will be more ships in our far north in the years to come. Let us not wait for a problem to arise for us to respond to it. Let us be proactive. There are ships. I talked to representatives in Manitoba. The first ship from Russia came into the port of Churchill. Let us not wait for this to be a problem. Let us be proactive in ensuring that the full extent of Canadian law and enforcement is in place to prevent any mistakes from happening so that we do not have to deal with them afterward.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me compliment the minister in making his case. I do not know whether it is completely made, but I do not think he is going to find many people disagreeing with the extension of Canadian sovereignty over its own territory and over its own waters.

I noted that he took special pains to explain in his presentation and again in answers to my colleague from the Bloc that a focus of his would be not only environmental, but essentially economic and developmental in nature.

Given the areas under question and the difficulties in accessing them, is he already preparing an agenda for building infrastructure in order to extract the natural gas and the light crude that he and others expect would be there?

Has he already developed a plan with interested capitalists who would be prepared to engage in a partnership with the government in developing these potentials?

I focused only on natural gas and light crude because those are the ones that he took particular delight in bringing forward, especially in the context of his former portfolio as environment minister.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, we are looking, with respect to infrastructure and in my capacity as Minister of Infrastructure, at public infrastructure, whether they be things like schools, highways or transmission lines so that we can get communities onto the grid and not using diesel-powered electricity. Economic development is something that has been highlighted as being of particular importance from all three premiers in the far north.

My colleague, the Minister of the Environment, has responsibility for issues such as pipelines and environmental approvals of this nature in the Mackenzie Valley. This has been something which has been pursued for many years. It has gone through a very lengthy environmental assessment.

Obviously we signalled in previous government statements that it is something we certainly support, but we should protect the

environment first. That is why, particularly up in the Northwest Territories, we have done a significant amount on land conservation, including the work that hopefully soon will lead to the successful conclusion of the expansion of Nahanni National Park. We looked at the work done in the Ramparts in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake. We looked at work around the community of Fort Hope, which has fought for special designations to ensure that those sensitive ecosystems are protected long before any new natural resource extraction proceeds.

In the years 2007 and 2008, particularly in the Northwest Territories, we made great strides on that environmental protection. We did a whale sanctuary in Nunavut, which is another important example of conservation.

This is a natural extension of that, so that we can have the capacity to legally enforce and send a message that we will not tolerate ships polluting our waters.

•(1535)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his invitation to ask him a few questions.

This bill certainly supports the NDP position on Arctic sovereignty by increasing the level of environmental protection in the Arctic. It increases Canada's claim to the Arctic waters through peaceful means. Further, Canadian law will protect the Arctic more than international law will and what is allowed now under UNCLOS.

Is the minister prepared to ensure that the appropriate funding is in place for increased enforcement?

Some nations, I am assuming, will dispute this bill and the subsequent Canadian action to enforce it. Is there a plan to deal with this on an international scale?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, those are all good questions. Let me address them one at a time.

Obviously, we are making additional investments in our Coast Guard with respect to capital and supports to ensure that we are in a position to do that. With respect to environmental enforcement, the government has included substantial increases in the number of environmental enforcement officers in the last two budgets, so we have more boots on the ground. Some 110 new environmental enforcement officers are being trained over two or three years. Coincidentally, they are trained at Algonquin College in the great riding of Ottawa West—Nepean and then they fan out right across the country. They do a great job. That started a good number of years ago before I arrived in this place. There is also a significant desire to work with northerners to ensure that we promote that sovereignty. The Prime Minister regularly uses meetings to talk about Canada's sovereignty.

Government Orders

However, we need to do more than talk. We need to act, and this is one more step in that act. I do agree that it does not all have to be; I think that the military is an important presence in Canada's Arctic. Weather stations, climate change research and scientific work are all important, but so are environmental protections, of which this is a small part.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will make my question very brief. The minister has done a great job and we are so thankful for the work he has done. Could he tell us what the proposed changes would mean for the overall northern strategy of the government and this country?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, we think it fundamentally will mean two things. It will strengthen our ability to enforce Canadian environmental laws off our coasts. That is tremendously important whether one is looking at the eastern Arctic or western Arctic or throughout the Northwest Passage. It is also another example of our efforts to assert sovereignty over Canadian Arctic waters.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my questioning just a moment ago, and I now want to reiterate, on balance this does not look like legislation that we would have any difficulty in at least studying further at committee and perhaps supporting.

Why would I say that? I do not think there is a Canadian in the country who would not agree that we should extend our sovereignty over waters that we have traditionally considered to be our own. As the minister says, these are part of waters that we have thought to be our internal waters. They are part of the Arctic Archipelago and therefore they are Canadian territory.

As for the part that goes beyond that, and think about this for a moment, we are, with a stroke of the pen, reasserting what we have already agreed with all our partners in the United Nations, and that is this is our territory, it is our right to extend our jurisdiction to the full 200 kilometres. That is great. We want to do that. It is good for us. We expect that as part of Canadian sovereignty we would give notice to the entire world that these waters are now our waters.

Just so you know, Mr. Speaker, because I know you come from that province, this is equal to the entire land mass of Saskatchewan that we are, with this bill, advertising to the world is now territory water, aquatic territory, over which the Canadian government, the state of Canada, will now exercise its jurisdiction.

I know members have read the bill in great detail. It is about 10 lines long, yet it generated from the minister a speech of about 15 minutes. My compliments to him. I listened through it all, hoping to hear something more than "looking at". I think the minister, perhaps to his credit but certainly to the advantage of his party, indicated that the government was looking at a whole stream of things that would be made possible with the passage of the legislation.

We would be delighted to help him along. In the process, however, we would want to ask a few questions. He talked about four pillars upon which the legislation would be based. I was looking, for example, at the mechanisms, the processes, the moneys, the resources that he and the government would be putting in place in order to, first, effectively exercise the jurisdiction which we are claiming as is our right under the Conventions of the UN over this entire territory.

For example, how many more ships are we prepared to buy, to lease, to engage in protecting the territory that, as I said a moment ago, is the size of the province of Saskatchewan, which is bigger than almost every other country in the world, save maybe the top 10?

If we are not to have more ships in aquatic territory, how does the minister expect Canadians to feel assured that they will exercise greater sovereignty over this great expanse of further territory? It is not that Canadians do not want to, because we do. We have already established that we feel it is our right, it is part of our territory, and we do want to protect it. We want to exercise sovereignty over it.

We want to, as well, as the minister suggested, ensure that there is greater security. For that, aside from the satellite beams that we will be engaging to help us track where ships might be, because I think we are talking about ships in aquatic territory, we are not really talking about tanks, we are not talking about land rovers, we are not talking about boots on the ground, as he mentioned, we are also talking about ocean-going vessels, whether they are below surface or above surface. However, there is no indication that resources will be put at the disposal of the Canadian government and its enforcement agencies to ensure they can do the job that the bill would have them do. Otherwise it is meaningless.

● (1540)

To say that we are now extending our sovereignty over additional waters, the equivalent size of Saskatchewan, without being able to put resources to effect that sovereignty is empty rhetoric. It is a looking at rather than doing.

In my question for the minister, who is courteous enough to listen to debate in the House, I mentioned a second thing I was looking for, and perhaps he might want to address this.

We must remember that we are extending sovereignty over an aquatic territory. If this is going to be an economic development exercise in economic development, we are not only going to claim our sovereignty over this vast expanse of water, but we are going to take claim an authority over whatever is underneath the ocean bed.

The minister has suggested that an additional 33% of all the natural gas deposits in the northern part of the western hemisphere are resident in this area. I guess some of the science has speculated that is where it would be. The minister has made a similar observation about light crude and its availability for the energy requirements of tomorrow. I want to accept this.

That is all the more reason why I ask this. Where are the resources in the bill to ensure that Canadian businesses and Canadian residents in the three Arctic territories and beyond have the right of first development of those natural resources? Where is the plan? Can we look at, speculate and plan? Yes, we can do all of these three things, but where is the plan? Where is the how to that tells us that we would, through the bill, be engaging in the development of the future interests of Canadians not only in the north, but everywhere? I do not see that. I do not see the resources.

Government Orders

It is a bit disconcerting because here we are in the midst of a debate about the budget implementation bill. I know Bill C-3 is not a part of that, but we are still seized in the House with ensuring that the budget implementation bill and all of the tens of billions of dollars that this Parliament would authorize the government to expend for the purpose of stimulating the Canadian economy and for developing the future assets of Canada's potential resources are spent. There is not a penny, not a dollar, not an indication of a specific agenda item.

There is though, if I might digress, some value in rhetoric, but there is a lot of rhetoric. I am not sure rhetoric is going to buy the credibility that Canadians so desperately want when it comes to engaging in particular actions.

A third pillar the minister says is an environmental one. The environment that he has talked about up until this point has to do with ocean-going vessels polluting the waters they traverse. By that pollution, I am not sure if he is talking about greenhouse gas-type emissions. I suspect he is talking in greater detail about hard pollution that goes from the ship into the water and affects the marine life and anybody who is dependent on that marine life. The minister has talked about that at great length and he has talked about how we will protect that.

Canadians, or at least the ones who had the good fortune to exercise their vote for me, did not see from the government in the last Parliament any substantive action on pollution abatement, on pollution restriction, or on going after polluters in our backyard.

• (1545)

Will we now believe the Conservatives when they say that they will get those people who pollute waters, which are about the size of the entire province of Saskatchewan, but that they will not spend a dime to do it? They will stand in the House of Commons on Bill C-3 when everybody is watching them. Because they say that they will do that and because they say that the environment is one of the concerns they will try to address with Bill C-3, everybody will believe them and will back off. I find that difficult to believe.

One reason why I find it difficult to believe is that even the casual reader will know that over the course of the last summer and fall, various other countries have taken a special interest in the Arctic waters, waters which we claim as our own. In fact, we have always said they have been our own. However, they extend to countries like Norway, Russia, Denmark, Greenland and the United States. They all have competing claims, competing interests and overlapping concerns about the environment and about pollution. The environment and pollution appear to be the umbrella under which everybody operates when they want to talk about interests and development.

I have not seen anything anywhere in the bill that says that we have engaged any of those countries in any bilateral discussions about how we will enforce our sovereignty, especially with respect to environmental and pollution type issues in the Arctic and in these waters in particular. I do not see that anywhere and there has not been any indication that the government has actually engaged in those kinds of discussions. Not only that, there is no indication that the government has raised these in the United Nations forum.

I understand the Prime Minister is at the United Nations today. During question period, one of my colleagues asked the government

side a question about an agenda. In response none of those items were on that agenda, but it was asked during question period, not during answer period. Perhaps the minister would care to elaborate on specifically which items related to the bill and, more specific, to the environment and pollution will be raised by the Prime Minister with counterparts in the United Nations so we can get the compliance of the countries that have a more immediate interest in the geography in question under the legislation.

If we do not have a forum in which to raise these issues with a receptive series of countries, and it is important that they be receptive, then we go back to one of my very first items of concern, which is: where are the resources to ensure that we have the military capacity to protect the sovereignty that we claim with the bill?

Are we spending more money in defence? Are we buying more vessels? I heard only one for Coast Guard increased capacity. One Coast Guard vessel, or turning it to a land example for our purposes, would be about three 18 wheelers, maybe four. If we dropped four 18 wheelers, one after the other, in the middle of Saskatchewan, who would notice? Not very many. It would take a while for those four 18 wheelers, one right behind the other, to patrol a territory the size of Saskatchewan.

We do not even have an indication that is what we will do. In a time when we are asking jurisdictions to spend tens of billions of dollars, along comes legislation that says the government will take care of this. It will be its territory. It will take care of the environment, catch all polluters and develop the economy in the area.

We could probably build infrastructures for three months of the year, so it would take a substantial amount of time to do infrastructure that might, in other places, take three or four years. However, there is no indication of resources. How seriously can we take the government on this?

• (1550)

We hear the usual story about trying to help people locally. Yes, we want to help people locally and we want to give them greater authority over all of this but we need to remember that this is a bill about aquatic territory. The minister explained how this would do great things for people in the north, especially in those areas where they are resident about 1,000 kilometres from the shore. We, too, have great interest in ensuring that the economies and the sovereignty of people indigenous to the area are protected and enhanced.

However, we do not want to blow smoke in their eyes when we are talking about something else. We would like to have a bit of direct honesty about what it is we are going to do with them specifically that will enhance their sovereignty, give them greater autonomy and make them full partners in the development of that economic exercise that he says is one of the four pillars of this particular bill.

He says that Bill C-3 would give us control over those commercial shipping lanes, not that they are already available. They do not go through 12 months of the year. The depth of the ice is still such that it prevents that from happening. However, has the government given us an indication of how many ships use these shipping lanes? How will we monitor them?

For example, members may recall just recently the great activity by pirates just off the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is in the papers every day. The first thing that all countries, which have merchant marines operating in the area, tell us is that the ocean is so vast that it is impossible for anybody to monitor or keep track of all these pirates. In Canada we would say polluters because that is what the minister focused his attention on.

Where are the resources to ensure that an aquatic territory that is vastly larger than the seas off Somalia and Saudi Arabia will be any safer for all of us? He said that we need to protect the security of Canadians from terrorists and from criminal organizations. Does he have an indication of which ones? Has he given us an indication of how much of that activity is currently going on and what means we need to engage in order to put an end to it?

I am shocked. If the minister could indicate to us that all of this is actually taking place, why have we not done anything so far? Is a piece of legislation that is some eight lines long, which gives us the authority to exercise jurisdiction that is already ours by UN convention, going to solve that problem? I would think not.

I would think that the minister would probably say that we need to do this, that we need to expend this amount of money, these hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, to ensure that Canadian sovereignty is firmly established, that security for all Canadians is protected in this area, and he would show us how. He would show us the vessels that we would engage, the satellites in which we would invest and the additional marines, RCMP or soldiers that we would engage in the area. He would show us the plan that is already in place to develop the economy with the hope that it will produce X number of jobs and X number of activities that will generate the economy in the area.

After all, the object of the day, in passing the action plan in this House, is to ensure that the tens of billions of dollars that Canadians are willing to invest go for the benefit of Canadians, not just today but down the road, and that they do it in an environment that gives them security and addresses the concerns for the environment and pollution, which are also very much on everyone's minds, and finally, that they provide the indigenous populations that are resident in the territories adjacent to this vast aquatic area with the future that we want them to take for granted.

• (1555)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did mention in my remarks the new icebreaker named after Prime Minister Diefenbaker, the new vessels for the Coast Guard, the resources going to the Department of the Environment for environmental enforcement and the new folks being trained to provide additional support.

There are significant investments in infrastructure. The Northwest Territories is one out of two or three of the provinces and territories that is moving the most aggressively with respect to infrastructure.

Government Orders

The premier presented me with his list of infrastructure projects, which was approved within two or three hours. Premier Floyd Roland is moving very aggressively on infrastructure. We are there as a partner, providing more money for northern infrastructure than any government in our history. We recognize that the circumstances in northern Canada are different and are providing up to 75% funding.

The new government in Nunavut was recently elected and it is having a cabinet retreat this month. It will be moving forward aggressively with infrastructure and we are standing ready, willing and able to support it in that.

With respect to other northern infrastructure, we need to provide support for the men and women who live there and who will do this important work, whether it is in housing, schools, in my department or in the department of northern development. A new northern development economic agency is also important.

We have seen significant economic growth in the Northwest Territories. Some years its economic growth rate, on a percentage level, has rivalled that of China. The work done in the Yukon by Premier Fentie has also been important and very focused on economic development. The Minister of Health is also doing good work in Nunavut. I could go on and on but I just wanted to put those comments on the record.

I have been a minister in many different portfolios, federally and provincially, for many years and that member was the first member to ever ask me an actual question about the supplementary estimates when I appeared before committee. I was stunned, not only that he was asking questions on the matter before the committee but that they were very well researched ones. I congratulate the member.

• (1600)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I will try to answer that with a straight face. I thank him for his observations, especially in my own personal regard. Let it not be said that we are excessively humble.

The minister has taken great pains to recite a series of very general initiatives that are resident in the area by the governments in each of the three territories.

I might have said the same thing. In fact, the reason that I could is, as he pointed out in his speech, that the government, which preceded his, actually began all of this activity, a lot of it in mining and in petroleum extraction, but a lot of it also in construction. We have some of the finest airports and airport runways in the north capable of handling some very heavy duty haulage.

All of that is activity that preceded Bill C-3. What I am asking the minister, which I know he will not be able to answer because his time is up, and to repeat what I said a few minutes ago, is to have a how to plan. We want the specifics, the resources that had to be associated with this bill, in order to give those of us on this side of the House the comfort level that the objectives enunciated in the four pillars are actually ones that, number one, are workable, but, number two, to which we can also put a timeline on the full-time equivalent jobs over a long period of time. However, that has not happened.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I just asked the minister a question about climate change. The bill is supposed to prevent pollution in Arctic waters. One of the reasons why we are talking about this, though, is that shipping is possible now because the climate is changing, it is getting warmer and the ice is melting.

In the last election campaign, the Liberals and their leader, the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, had a green plan. Now that the Liberals have changed leaders, they are looking more and more like the Conservatives. It was no accident that they supported the budget.

I would like to hear from the Liberal member who sits with me on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. What is his position on the importance of fighting climate change and on the fact that we do not want less and less ice in the Arctic but more and more?

• (1605)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for his comment. In the spirit of friendship we are seeing today, with ministers complimenting members of the official opposition, I would like to follow suit and compliment my hon. colleague, who has been sitting at the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for many years. He does an outstanding and commendable job. I know that he will appreciate my comment as well. I am one of those generals who never fight a battle that has already been fought.

Regarding the environment and the platform in the last election, we always agree on the principles that should guide the policy of this party, and perhaps that of the government. I have never changed my mind, and I see no reason to do so today.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about the establishment of northern airports and the role of the federal government. He is correct but they were devolved to the territories a number of years ago and have struggled since. The conditions of climate change have changed the nature of our ability to provide air services throughout the north. At the same time, the federal government under the Chrétien Liberals cut back on many of the weather services that were essential to keeping these airports safe and reliable for the transport of goods and people.

Does my hon. colleague not agree that the situation with Arctic airports is changing and they need attention as they are part of the overall development of a reliable transportation system in the north? They need to adjust to the changing conditions that we have in the north.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague also sits on the committee and we work together relatively well, although this is a new committee.

He pointed out something that reinforces what I said a few moments ago. Given the infrastructure that we already have and given the identified needs of the communities that are resident in the north and live in areas adjacent to the aquatic territory in question, it

would behoove the government's credibility on the issue if it took those into consideration and calculated the number of hundreds of millions or billions of dollars that are required in order to ensure that the infrastructure is maintained and is enhanced. Otherwise, what we are doing, to use the minister's words, is we are looking at and engaging in rhetoric without the facts.

I want to thank the member for having noted and confirmed that the government, of which I was a part, and the official opposition that used to form those governments, actually did do the good work that he so kindly reaffirms.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to Bill C-3, an act to amend the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act.

First of all, our party is going to support this legislation, but it feels like a bad movie. We are talking about the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, which means that if there is a risk of polluting arctic waters it is because there are marine transportation activities going on. And if there are such activities going on, it is because the ice has disappeared. And if the ice has disappeared, it is of course because the temperature is rising.

I want the record to show this, because I would not want our children and grandchildren, some day, to blame me for having addressed this legislation. We must adopt these measures, at last, because the current Conservative government and the previous Liberal and Conservative governments did not do what they had to do. That is why we are now facing global warming and a totally new situation in the Arctic. We must bring in regulations and we must protect that territory, because an increasing number of ships will navigate these waters and there will be development potential.

It makes me shudder to hear this, because they want to develop, they want to get that gas and that oil, but we are talking about the world's last reserves. Given the way the Conservatives are managing, some day our planet will disappear, and the reason for that will be obvious.

But in the meantime, given that the retreating polar ice is creating new waterways, we must consider that Canada has a legitimate right to establish its sovereignty over arctic waters. Considering that this will be a new development channel and that a number of countries share the territory around the North Pole, discussions are indeed to be expected.

By extending the limit of its internal waters from 100 to 200 nautical miles, Canada will have better control over marine traffic in its waters and over the management of the natural resources in those waters. So, the fact that the ice is melting creates a whole new potential for development. Consequently, it is only normal that neighbouring countries want to look after their geographic protection and, of course, their nationality and their sovereignty. A sovereignist party cannot be opposed to the idea that Canada would protect its sovereignty. On the contrary, we are hoping to achieve our own sovereignty in Quebec and, therefore, we cannot object to Canada wanting to do the same.

Government Orders

Obviously, in terms of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, we are saying that any future action in this region must reflect certain basic principles, which I will outline.

First of all, any exploitation of northern resources must be closely monitored and regulated so that the region will not be exposed to uncontrolled exploitation of its resources. Obviously, it would be ineffective to only deal with the prevention of pollution in Arctic waters.

The Bloc Québécois members are proud to rise every day in this House to defend the interests of Quebecers. Given that a part of Quebec is in the north, we feel it is important that any exploitation respect ecological development because, once again, if we trigger one disaster after another, we will not fix anything. We must make sure that development is done in such a way that the environment is respected.

The second basic principle is that any border disputes must be resolved peacefully, diplomatically and by respecting international law. Expanding Canada's rights from 100 to 200 nautical miles is obviously consistent with international law. We hope that these issues will be peacefully and diplomatically respected so that we can negotiate with other countries, since this is not a given in this geopolitical situation. The question of the north pole and the entire Arctic territory is not a given either.

The third basic principle is that we must fight climate change, which is a huge source of the Arctic's problems. We must also adequately protect our extremely fragile ecosystems. Yet, that is not what the Conservatives have been saying. Obviously, I have been told that it is a bill to prevent pollution. It is true, we cannot fix everything that has already happened.

● (1610)

I asked the minister about this. Everyone in this House should be determined to fight climate change.

The climate should be restored, and there should be more ice in the Arctic. Quite simply, we need to work very hard to restore the ice that used to be there. If we want to extract oil, then we need to find ways to transport it other than by ship. There are other ways. We need to do everything we can to make sure the north pole and the Arctic get colder again and the ice returns, especially so that the animal populations can survive. The people who live in the Arctic and have always lived in a cold climate are not happy about what is happening. I have seen a lot of reports, but I have not seen anyone who is glad the ice is melting. When a people has always lived with ice, it does not take any pleasure in seeing that ice disappear.

Even though the minister is saying today that there is going to be development and people are going to have work, I do not think that the goal of these communities is to work for oil companies, even though that is where things are headed. I think they would rather live as they used to live.

The fourth basic principle is as follows: any action in the Arctic must take into account the people who live there. That is what we say. It is all well and good to try to turn people into oil people, but if that is not what they are interested in or what they want, then we need to do everything we can to put them at ease. They are the people who have lived in this area. If Canada is entitled to claim

international rights today, it is because communities have lived in this part of the world, which comes under our jurisdiction. It comes under Canada's jurisdiction now. We have to be able to live in harmony and choose to defend these people and consider what they want.

The Bloc Québécois denounces and will always denounce any militarization of the north and any military operation that could take place there, whether naval or otherwise. We would like to move away from that and instead chose another way to ensure sovereignty. It must serve as an example for the entire world. One cannot go all over the world trying to resolve conflicts and then turn around and start one in the north because of an interest in oil. There are enough wars in the world caused by oil, and I hope we do not create one here ourselves because we are trying to protect a certain area.

To patrol Arctic waters, we recommend that Canada invest more in the Canadian Coast Guard. Any other means of protecting the arctic would, in our view, incite war and violence, which we have always opposed.

As the ice melts, Canada's sovereignty in that region will come into question. That is one of main reasons why legislation is passed. As I said earlier, the ice is melting. The problem is that, instead of doubling its efforts to fight climate change, the government is doubling its efforts to encourage economic development in the Arctic. As I said at the beginning, everyone here in the House of Commons has a part in this bad movie. No one should be in this movie at all, but once again, the Conservatives are leading and this is how they lead.

Canada must therefore work with other Arctic states within the framework of the Arctic Council. There is a council of all the sovereign states that border on this area. The purpose of the council is to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development. Clearly, it needs to be more proactive when it comes to sustainable development and protecting the environment.

We believe that any solution in the Arctic must involve and make the most of Inuit populations living there. On one hand, they must be included in the negotiation process and on the other hand, they must have help developing their economy. If the people there decide to develop their economy through some means other than oil development, that decision must be respected.

● (1615)

I am going to take a few moments to summarize Bill C-3, which amends the definition of "arctic waters" in the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act to extend the limit of the Arctic waters protected area from 100 to 200 nautical miles. The original act, which was passed in 1970, defines "arctic waters" as follows:

"arctic waters" means the waters adjacent to the mainland and islands of the Canadian arctic within the area enclosed by the sixtieth parallel of north latitude, the one hundred and forty-first meridian of west longitude and a line measured seaward from the nearest Canadian land a distance of one hundred nautical miles...

Government Orders

Therefore, the objective is to increase the outer limit from 100 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles from the nearest Canadian land. Increasing this limit will ensure that the waters within that limit are recognized as internal waters, and not as international waters or as an exclusive economic zone. These 200 nautical miles are very much a reality, as is Canada's authority over that area. International waters used to be outside the 100 nautical mile limit. Now, international waters will be outside the 200 nautical mile limit.

For a long time, Arctic waters were considered to be an impenetrable ice barrier for human beings. That is why I said earlier that this is like being in a bad movie. It was a frozen desert where nothing happened. Of course, climate change has changed all that now. The Arctic is particularly affected by global warming.

It is expected that a rise of 1°C or 2°C along the Equator, could result in a rise of more than 6°C in the Arctic. I personally believe that if we do not do something about climate change, we will end up with a natural disaster, while others see an opportunity for major development in the north and in the Arctic.

But the fact remains that climate change will have a serious environmental impact on the Arctic. The climate in that region is warming up more rapidly, which triggers even more drastic changes, such as a change of vegetation zone and a change in the diversity, range and distribution of animal species. For example, we are seeing a rapidly increasing number of polar bears drowning, because the distance between ice floes is constantly increasing.

These are scientific facts but those listening to us have an opportunity to see it all regularly on television reports. A multitude of filmmakers have focused on this issue and filmed the havoc caused by global warming. Climate change will also cause the disruption and destabilization of transportation, buildings and infrastructure in the North. For the Inuit and other people living there, everything is changing. They used to travel by snowmobile but now they may have to add wheels. That may be the reality. We can laugh about it but it is enough to make you cry.

Climate change has a major impact on the lifestyle of aboriginal peoples. It has also led to increased ultraviolet radiation, which affects animals, people and vegetation. Since 1960, the surface area of the permanent ice pack has decreased by 14%, with a 6% reduction since 1978. The ice pack has thinned by 42% since 1958. These figures, with explanatory notes and references, may be found in our statement.

The dispute over Arctic sovereignty centres on the Northwest Passage and the navigable waters in the Arctic archipelago. The dispute between Canada and the United States is one of international law, namely, how to define the waters surrounding the Arctic archipelago. Canadian sovereignty over the islands is recognized and not contested. For Canada, the islands constitute an extension of its continental shelf. Thus, Canada considers the various straits between islands as "internal waters". Therefore, the 200 nautical mile limit applies to the contour of the islands.

The battle over jurisdiction is understandable. The United States has never recognized these waters as Canada's "internal waters" and deems that they constitute only an "exclusive economic zone". In January 2009, former U.S. President George W. Bush, in his

presidential directive on the Arctic region, stated it represented an exclusive economic zone and not "internal waters". I will spare you this text, but that was its objective.

Therefore, we can understand why Canada wants to clarify the situation. Whether or not this bill will succeed in doing that, I am not so sure.

● (1620)

That is why we have to focus on negotiation and diplomacy. There is no point sending navy ships to assert sovereignty over Arctic waters. The United States is not happy. I hope that the Conservatives have thought about this, because I do not think that our armed forces will ever be anything more than a tiny fraction of the size they would have to be to take on the U.S. military. Nevertheless, I do not think that anyone wants armed conflict. That is why we have to negotiate diplomatically.

Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines "internal waters" as follows: "—waters on the landward side of the baseline of the territorial sea form part of the internal waters of the State". According to the convention, a coastal state has the right to take the necessary steps "—to prevent any breach of the conditions to which admission of those ships to internal waters [...] is subject". In other words, coastal states have sole jurisdiction over their internal waters. They have every right to prevent foreign vessels from entering their waters.

The goal was to increase the boundary from 100 miles to 200, particularly around the Arctic islands, to give Canada complete control over all vessels navigating those waters. However, in article 55, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines the "exclusive economic zone" as "—an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea—", and that is how the United States interprets it. Article 58 reads as follows: "In the exclusive economic zone, all States, whether coastal or land-locked, enjoy [...] the freedoms [...] of navigation and overflight and of the laying of submarine cables and pipelines—".

Once again, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea included provisions for pipelines and that kind of thing. So it should come as no surprise that the United States prefers article 58 and thinks of these areas as economic zones rather than interior waters. States are entitled to restrict marine traffic in, to charge fees for access to, or to prevent entry into their interior waters. In respect of fossil fuel exploitation, I do not want to repeat what I have already said, but as we all know, transportation of fossil fuels is at the root of wars going on in many parts of the world. That is a snapshot of the legal challenge we are issuing to the Americans.

Government Orders

As a result, there could be an increase in commercial marine traffic, because the Northwest Passage is the shortest way from Asia to Europe. Here are some examples of routes in kilometres. From London to Yokohama is 23,300 km through the Panama Canal, 21,200 km through the Suez Canal, 32,289 km around Cape Horn—a major detour—but 15,930 km through the Northwest Passage. There are huge savings to be made. The distance from New York to Yokohama is 18,000 km through the Panama Canal, 25,000 km through the Suez Canal, 31,000 km around Cape Horn and 15,000 km through the Northwest Passage. From Hamburg to Vancouver is 17,000 km through the Panama Canal, 29,000 km through the Suez Canal, 27,000 around Cape Horn and 14,000 km through the Northwest Passage.

When the government talks about economic development, potential and job creation for residents or border communities, it is anticipating that this passage will be increasingly available, 12 months a year. The government is hoping that the passage can be navigated without icebreakers, and so on. Obviously, that would facilitate marine traffic. Because of the distance between Asia and Europe, this passage would be used more and more.

So it is important to understand that although the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-3, it does not do so happily. As I said, the Bloc Québécois members stand up every day in the House of Commons to defend the interests of Quebeckers. We are playing in a bad movie, I said. We need to stand up every day to fight climate change so that there is more and more ice in the Arctic and there are fewer and fewer ships going through there if we want to protect the global balance.

But today, the government is talking about obtaining rights to land and increasing Canadian sovereignty because more and more ships are plying the Arctic waters and there will be economic development, which is what the Conservatives want. Once again, this is being done at the expense of the environment and our future generations. I hope my children and grandchildren will forgive me.

• (1625)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to follow up on the speech of the Bloc Québécois critic.

Arctic waters do not include only three territories located in northern Canada. Of course, a part of Quebec is located along the same sea. I appreciated the hon. member's comments.

[*English*]

I will say, with respect to climate change, that we know from all the science that our capacity to respond through mitigation is immense. We must use lifestyle changes and technology to respond in a major way with respect to mitigation, but we also must deal aggressively with adaptation. In a small way, with respect to our Arctic waters, this is one of the important ways we seek to do that.

Whether we like it or not, there will be more shipping in this area, next year, in 10 years, in 25 years. We have to do our very best on the environment, not to wait for a problem to happen but to be anticipatory where we can put the full force of Canadian law as a prevention.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I know that the minister was listening to my comments, because at the beginning of my speech I said that mistakes had been made by his government and by the previous Liberal and Conservative governments. He is absolutely right: fighting climate change and global warming will probably take time—too much time in my opinion—precisely because we are waiting much too long before targeting this issue. Again, we should all be discussing a lowering of the temperature in the Arctic, so as to ensure a larger ice pack in that region, but instead we are talking about economic development and marine traffic. Again, despite what the minister may think, I deplore that situation.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly comment on the hon. member's speech. He wanted to stress the inaction of governments, namely the current one and those that preceded it. However, what really struck me is that he still believes—it almost looks like an act of faith—that diplomacy could work, while all the others are contradicting this view. We could also say that we threaten each other by resorting to anything but diplomacy.

Does the hon. member believe that this government is up to the challenge, that it has the ability and that it is prepared to do all that is necessary to ensure that we get the respect required to implement legislation such as Bill C-3, which merely expresses a notion or a will that the others must accept to achieve a positive result? Does he still have confidence in this government, or will he demand much more specific objectives, along with the necessary resources to ensure that the human and material infrastructure is there for governments in the future?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my Liberal colleague will have to excuse me because he sure left the door wide open for me. The Bloc Québécois certainly no longer trusts the government. What I find surprising is that the Liberals still do.

As we were saying, if we want to secure the Arctic, we should invest in the Canadian Coast Guard. The Conservative government's first reflex, though, is to parade paramilitary ships around the Arctic. It is hard to watch them buy nuclear submarines in order to have them sail around the Arctic to prevent the Americans from sailing around. That logic is hard to follow.

We have not had confidence in the government for a long time. The question is very simply how much longer the Liberals will continue to have confidence in the Conservatives.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with what my colleague said today about Bill C-3. We cannot be blind to the fact that what the government is trying to do is use the argument of environmental protection as a means for asserting Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. The second part of this is acceptable. I can understand that Canada would want to assert its sovereignty in the Arctic. The problem lies in the fact that they are using environmental issues as a front for Bill C-3.

Government Orders

Does my colleague agree that what the government really wants to do is assert control over the oil resources of the far north? That is the reality. Everyone knows there are lots of natural resources there. Is there not a danger of large-scale development of these resources even though this part of the north is a major source of biodiversity?

•(1635)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question. He is an excellent environment critic. The Bloc Québécois can only express its gratitude every time he rises to speak in the House.

He is quite right. That is why I said we are like actors in a bad movie. The government is disguising Canadian sovereignty concerns in a bill called the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act. If there is a danger of pollution, it is precisely because of all the shipping and other economic activities going on. My colleague is quite right and the Bloc Québécois will be there every day to make the government understand that we should be fighting climate change. We should not be working on the economic development of the Arctic, the last undeveloped area on earth.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech.

He has made it clear that all of the elements are there to make it possible to profit from pollution. For years greenhouse gases have been allowed to proliferate. And now the Conservatives want to take advantage of all that. My colleague gave some examples. All of the world's ships will want to take this route. Pollution will increase. Of course preventing pollution in the far north makes the government look good. On the other hand, the result will be an increase in economic activity with its polluting effect. It is a vicious circle. The more economic activity there is, the more greenhouse gases there are. The more greenhouse gases there are, the more room there is to navigate. And so on and so forth. There are also imminent dangers for nature and pollution. With warm water, it is even worse. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his question. He is absolutely right.

To continue his thought, the more economic activity there is, the less ice and the more traffic there is. That leads to an increase in temperature. It is a vicious circle. I said it earlier—we are in a bad movie. No member of this House should play a role, if only for our future generations. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, we should not be part of it. The minister said it earlier in a question that he asked me. He said that it would take years for things to get back to the way they were and that we should do something in the meantime. In the meantime, we are making decisions that will guarantee that things will never get back to the way they were. There will always be more pollution, more ice melting and that is obviously to everyone's detriment—

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

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 Edmonton—Strathcona, the

Environment; the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Employment insurance.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Western Arctic.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-3. It is one of many bills that I am sure will be in front of our transport committee, given the hard-working minister we have in charge, one who is perhaps more hard-working than hard-thinking on many issues. All opposition critics have a responsibility to ensure that ministers think about bills in front of them in a reasonable fashion. Hard work does not replace smart thinking.

Bill C-3 is an interesting bill. It has merit within it. It comes out of quite a bit of work directed toward the Arctic and the northern waters by the Conservative government.

For instance, I could talk about the cabinet's trip to Inuvik last August. The entire cabinet, the Prime Minister as well, took time to visit my riding. They certainly excited the population there with the thought that there were going to be announcements of some significance.

What we did see coming from that trip to Inuvik and the trip to Tuktoyaktuk by the Prime Minister was the announcement of the name of an icebreaker that was going to be built a number of years later.

People in Tuktoyaktuk live on the Arctic coast and are experiencing the ravages of climate change on their own community and the degradation of the community washing away into the sea. They were hoping for a little more. They were hoping to hear about a land connection to Inuvik, tying them into a highway system that would allow them some additional economic development and perhaps make life easier for them there on the coast. They did not get it. The Prime Minister made a very simple release that really had no content to it.

When he spoke in Inuvik, the Prime Minister announced that the government was going to make the registration of ships in Arctic waters mandatory, something that we in the New Democratic Party have been requesting for the last two years. It was a good thing to do that, but it certainly was not what the people in the north were looking for.

Is the bill in front of us now what the people of Canada are looking for in terms of Arctic waters protection? It does extend the boundaries, and that is a good thing, but does it create any more protection for the Arctic, or is it simply another gesture on the part of the Conservative Party toward our deepening interest in the Arctic?

Canadian Arctic waters are changing fast. The condition of the sea that is now not covered with ice in the Beaufort area up through the Arctic Islands is getting worse. Larger, more severe storms are hitting the area. There are more hazards to navigation now than in years past, when the Arctic ice was over the water for longer periods of time. The permanent ice pack was further south from the pole. These things have changed, and now massive weather disturbances in the area are causing extreme problems.

Government Orders

This legislation deals with Arctic transportation in difficult and changing times. We are allowed to do this under the United Nations law of the sea convention. It is part of a practice that I am sure the rest of the world would be happy to see us do. However, once again, in the bill we do not see any indication of where we are going with respect to our ability to protect the Arctic.

We are also currently having disputes about much of our Arctic waters. What is the impact of this legislation going to be on our current dispute with the United States over a large chunk of the Beaufort Sea? Who is going to be responsible for those waters? Where is the diplomatic effort to solve this issue, which has been in place since 1983? Where is the effort to come to a conclusion with the United States about the delineation of the line between Alaska and the Yukon?

• (1640)

Increasing the size of the area under protection in the Arctic is meaningless unless there is an increased effort on enforcement. However, enforcement is difficult in the Arctic. It is expensive. It requires an effort that I do not see our government ready to put in yet.

However, there is a pathway to protect the Arctic waters, and it is through international diplomacy. I had the chance to travel to Ilulissat last year, and to see the foreign ministers of the major Arctic nations agreeing to a treaty on the UN law of the sea applying to the boundaries between countries. The one foreign minister who was not at this gathering was the minister from Canada. He was replaced by the Minister of Natural Resources.

We are not taking an active role in diplomacy. We are not putting diplomacy up front. Our Prime Minister is putting an aggressive, confrontational attitude out front, rather than using international cooperation and diplomacy as the way to solve some of the issues facing us.

We need compliance on international treaties. We need a working relationship of the highest order between the Arctic nations to accomplish our goals in protecting our Arctic environment. There is no question of that. That should be the number one element in the Canadian strategy in dealing with the Arctic.

We need Arctic search and rescue. The other countries are talking about Arctic search and rescue. There are even agreements being formed between the U.S. and Russia to protect the Bering Strait so that they can work cooperatively to deal with the problems that are inherent in shipping in hazardous waters. We should be doing the same thing with the United States. In fact, at a lower level in our system, we have no choice but to do that. We need the effort at the top end, through the highest officials in this country, to stress the importance of international diplomacy.

When it comes to protecting the Arctic, mandatory registration of shipping is not all we need. We also need to accept the International Maritime Organization's regulations for shipping in Arctic waters. We need to make it an international fact that ships traversing the Arctic waters all have the same level of regulation relative to the kinds of hulls they use and the kinds of equipment they use to protect the environment and themselves. We need to ensure that the ships that are increasingly going to be entering the Arctic have the correct

and best technology available for this type of work. We need those types of international agreements as well.

The Arctic is not a place where defence and aggressive military action are going to solve our problems. We are not going to solve our problems with the United States over the Northwest Passage and the Beaufort Sea by getting into military confrontations. There is only one way to deal with these problems with the United States, and that is through diplomacy and the actions of our government in concert with the U.S. government in coming up with agreements. Those are the only directions in which there is any hope for getting ourselves solid on those issues.

An international report on shipping is coming out very shortly on the use of Arctic waters. It has been co-authored by a number of countries. We are expecting it in the next year.

• (1645)

This document can be the basis of building an understanding among Arctic nations about how to deal with Arctic waters, how to protect Arctic waters, and what to expect with the development of fishing, mineral exploration, oil and gas, and tourism. The increase in cruise ship passages in Arctic waters is astounding.

All these things are coming together, and the international community is working on them right now. What Canada has to do is take back the lead on international diplomacy and work with these countries to come up with solutions that can deliver us an Arctic policy that, in conjunction with the rest of the world, will protect the Arctic and will make our 200-mile environmental protection act a working document.

The government has many ideas about the Arctic. Unfortunately, some of them are simply ideas that come out of someone's head, rather than out of the consensus-building process that is needed for Arctic conditions. An example is Arctic research. Canada has just announced that a major research facility will be built in Nunavut, which is contrary to what Arctic researchers are after.

A group of Arctic researchers was commissioned by the federal government to make a report on where the research centre should be and what it should encompass. They came back and said that we do not need a report on that; we need a report on the Arctic research initiatives that are required. In other words, we do not need facilities; we need a plan for Arctic research that will allow our scientists to deliver the information we need to protect the Arctic and to understand the changes that are going on there, and that should be the first priority of the government, not building facilities.

Right now we have facilities for researchers in our territories. They are reasonably well used, but they are used in a different sense from what the government is looking for. These facilities are used by researchers as home bases to extend their research out into the Arctic region. The idea of a fixed centre for Arctic research is anathema to most researchers, who are looking for linkages throughout the Arctic for the type of research they do.

By missing consultations, by coming out with policies that set directions without examining what is actually required, and by putting forward ideas that are like building monuments to our sovereignty rather than by looking for the solutions we require for our sovereignty, we are failing Canadians.

Government Orders

I think of the Colossus at Rhodes. Perhaps the Conservatives would like to build a colossus on the Northwest Passage to indicate our ownership of that area. Perhaps it is in their minds that somehow the grandiose gesture is more important than the practical work of government, making international arrangements and directing scientists into research in the areas that are required, but those types of things have a greater potential future for our country.

There is another issue. Right now in the Arctic we are expanding the use of the Beaufort Sea. We have opened up some fairly major drilling areas offshore, and these are going ahead. Interestingly enough, probably the major catastrophic pollution issue that we are likely to encounter in the Arctic is the potential for large oil spills in our Arctic waters, and we do not have the capacity to deal with that. Probably one of the things that should be foremost on the government's agenda right now would be to come up with the technology required to deal with oil spills in Arctic waters.

● (1650)

Wherever there is more than 35% ice in the water, the science of cleaning up oil spills is very limited. We need to have a program that will allow this to happen. This is more likely to protect our environment than any bill we pass here, any Arctic research centre we set up in a single location. This is the sort of effort we need right now to protect our Arctic.

When the drilling sites were sold, when companies were given the opportunity to move into the Beaufort Sea, this lack was pointed out to the government. We have not seen a response yet on this item. We need to see that response.

Our capacity is limited. We do not have the human resource capacity and the technological capacity to protect the Arctic environment. We do not have the capacity to do the research to understand what is likely to happen in the Arctic. We are not going to get that with facilities. What we need is a clear plan for Arctic research, followed up by dollars invested in Canadian scientists across the country who want to perform the research there.

We also need to work with the international community so that we are not doubling up our research. We need to create the linkages between the countries that will allow the research to flourish and so that every Arctic country will understand how to deal with the Arctic conditions.

When it comes to defending Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, we need to stand up for the environment. That is a good direction to take. It is important that we protect the environment not only in the 100-mile area off our coast but in the 200-mile area off the coast. It is also very important, when we think of the Arctic ice melting all the way to the North Pole, to consider how we are going to protect the environment right up to the North Pole. We cannot do that without international agreements. We cannot do that without an international understanding of the issues. We need to see that kind of approach from the government. It is that simple.

Capacity is important, as well. It is not good enough simply to put this bill forward without some understanding as to how we are going to make people comply with it, how we are going to enforce the regulation that is in place, how we are going to ensure that we have

the answers to fix what happens to the environment when accidents occur, and most likely they will.

I hope that over the next while we will look at these issues. This bill has merit. It is important. However, the government needs to say more about this issue than it has already. The government needs to come forward with a more detailed plan for the protection of our Arctic waters. When it does that, we will have a solution that all Canadians will subscribe to and support.

I would say to our hard-working minister, let us put some hard-working thought into what we are doing here and we will come up with great answers for Canadians.

● (1655)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not have any questions, just a comment. I share the member's commitment to wanting to protect the environment in the far north. I have had the opportunity on a number of occasions to visit the far north, and many communities in his constituency, where there are some of the great environmental treasures of the world, whether it is Nahanni National Park, which this government is working very hard to expand, or whether it is the significant amount of environmental missions that have gone on there. I know that it is important, not just to his constituents but to all Canadians. I appreciate learning about the various issues, from airports, to the far Arctic, and the need to promote sovereignty abroad. The single biggest thing we can do, though, is not just talk the talk, but walk the walk and take significant and meaningful action, which we are doing.

I look forward to the day that we launch the Diefenbaker up in the far north, maybe in Tuktoyaktuk. I hope the hon. member will be there for what will be a great occasion.

● (1700)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I cannot guarantee that I will be there that long, but I do hope that we see progress on this.

I do not look at the Arctic issues as partisan issues at all. I look at them as areas where we can bring Canadians together. We can have the opportunity to do something right in a region of this country that has not had things done wrong to it yet. I am very strong on that, just as with the territory I represent, the Northwest Territories, I feel very strongly that what we do there has to be a model for the future. It cannot be the answers that we have seen in the past. It cannot be done less than wholeheartedly.

When it comes to devolution and the responsibility of northerners, I say to all Canadians that if they want to have a real stake in the development of the north, they should come up and live with northerners. That will give them the same right to say things about the north as northerners have.

I do not want us to be considered anything less than full citizens of this country. If the minister and the government want to decide what to do about the Arctic, they must take into account what the people of the north want and what the people of the north think about their land. That is the primary direction the government should be taking with northern policies, and if it is not, members will see me standing here over and over again. If it is, members will see a spirit of co-operation and a spirit of goodwill.

Government Orders

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a remarkable debate. Members of Parliament from different parties are actually complimenting each other. The member who just delivered his presentation actually complimented the minister on his intelligence and his work ethic.

At the same time, I noted that he is actually asking him to put substance behind his oratory. I saw the member wince when the minister referred to the port of Churchill being an important northern port. Although I am not a betting man, I will wager that the hon. member for Western Arctic probably thinks, and he would be right, that Churchill is a southern port. However, the minister is not yet as strong on geography as he is on work ethic, and I am sure that the member will agree with me.

The second thing the member might want to clarify for us is how this bill, which I said earlier was eight lines, but it is actually thirteen lines, is going to engage the committee in clause by clause, in that the bill contains only one clause. In that one clause, the Prime Minister of Canada, with one stroke of the pen, takes jurisdiction over an additional 500,000 square kilometres of territory, but says not a word on how he is going to effect Canadian jurisdiction over that territory.

I am wondering whether the member for Western Arctic will give us the wisdom of his insights on how that will happen, given that he is already put over to one side both the goodwill and the options that are non-diplomatic for that solution.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to talking about northerners, I like to think of all Canadians as northerners, because they are in a true sense. We all experience many of the same things that happen in a northern climate.

The port of Churchill is above the tree line. That is a very northern place. The people there represent northern tradition and history, which is remarkable. They are very good at working in an extremely inhospitable environment.

We are all northerners and that is a good thing, but when it comes to our ability to understand the Arctic and what is happening there, we have to recognize more and more that the northern territories are political entities. We do not do that enough here. We still have a paternalistic attitude toward the northern territories that we can solve these debates by ourselves, that we can tell them what a northern strategy is.

What is needed is full cooperation from the federal government with our territories in a positive fashion and with absolute respect for our rights as Canadians. Just as all Canadians are northerners, all northerners are Canadians. We are proud of it. We demand for our land the same rights as other Canadians have for theirs.

• (1705)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased to be in the House today to speak to this legislation.

Initially, I want to point out that I and the members of my party will be supporting this particular legislation. It is my view that it is good public policy and in the national interest. It certainly will be supported.

As the previous speaker indicated, it is a very short piece of legislation. I believe he mentioned there are only 13 lines and it basically extends our responsibility in the Arctic by close to 500 square kilometres, which we can see is an enormous body of land.

It is in line with international policy and with the parameters of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which this country ratified in 2003. It certainly will be supported by other countries, unless there is an absolute conflict in our continental sea bids.

We have heard in the debate that it is part of a so-called northern package or northern strategy, but as the member for Western Arctic has very eloquently described to the House, these initiatives are only talk from Ottawa. We really have not seen any action at all in the north and that is a big concern in this particular legislation. It is great, but there are no provisions for any resources, funding, plans, programs, initiatives or in what manner the government is going to do what it says it is going to do in the legislation.

It all sounds good. We all agree with it. All Canadians agree with it. Announcements have been made and re-made, some of them three or four times, but parliamentarians, Canadians and, most importantly, the people who live in the three northern territories would like to see a lot more or in some cases a little more concrete action than what has been done before. The most recent talk has been about ships, the military presence, fishing ports, and economic development but again, we have not really seen too much yet.

A sidebar on this issue goes back to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. That convention was ratified by Canada in 2003 and by 2013 Canada has to present a submission to the United Nations dealing with this whole boundary issue, which is a mapping of our entire continental shelf.

The year 2013 sounds like a long way in the future but, do not forget, there are only a few months to work on it. I hope that it is being done and we will be ready to make our submission come year 2013 because this is vitally important for Canada's sovereignty. That is a little sidebar in this debate.

Part of this package, for want of a better word, is the construction of an icebreaker. It has been named the Diefenbaker. There was a discussion in the House as to who would be in the House when the Diefenbaker was launched. We hear a lot of big announcements about ships but four months later we see a little story on page seven of one of the papers saying that they have been cancelled because of the cost or whatever reason.

There have been many announcements over the last two or three years about Coast Guard ships, icebreakers and military frigates, but I am not aware of any of them having been started or purchased. I do not have an awful lot of confidence in the Diefenbaker. I do not expect to be here, though you may be, Mr. Speaker, as you are a younger member of Parliament. I would like to see a lot more concrete action as to when this ship is going to be built and launched.

Government Orders

I am not from the north, but I try to follow these fisheries issues as closely as I can. There was an announcement that a deep water port was going to be built somewhere on Baffin Island and there were going to be some repairs and improvements. I will correct myself. It was not repairs and improvements but the actual construction of a port. A lot of the places like Pond Inlet do not have ports at all. The announcement was about a deep water port.

• (1710)

I believe there is a strong fisheries industry in the Arctic. Right now it is mainly being prosecuted by foreigners and other Canadian interests from the southern provinces, Newfoundland in particular. The catches I believe are landed in Greenland for packaging and processing for shipment to the southern markets. That all should be done on Canadian soil. I believe there is a strong argument for a deep water port. There was an announcement the officials were looking at Pangnirtung, but again that is another announcement I hope does come about. The area has tremendous potential and some of the methodologies used by the local ice fishermen are certainly very environmentally sensitive. I am hoping, as part of this northern strategy or development, that this will be looked at. Again, it is time to stop talking and let us get on and do something.

The area which is most effected by the climate change problem is the northern territory of Canada. With the visit last week of President Obama I become very cynical. The government was elected in January 2006 and going back in history we can say we have not done enough, that other countries and China are not doing enough, but that is not the point. We have an obligation to do what we can.

The government was elected over three years ago and in the first year and a half the Conservative minister of the time was saying that she would come forward with a made in Canada approach. Of course, as members know, there was really nothing done at all. There was no made in Canada approach. There is no approach. After a year and a half, that minister had to be replaced by another minister whose approach was that we are going to regulate against the biggest and largest emitters. But of course, that was not done either and nothing happened.

Last week the latest version is that we are going to commence a dialogue with our southern partner the United States of America to deal with this whole climate change issue. That is good. Americans have not done a lot, but they probably have done more than we have. The reason we have not done anything is because the government of the United States has not done anything. Excuse me, why was that not told to the House over the last three years? Why were we not informed of that fact? Here we are three or four years later and we are going to start a dialogue. We cannot fault President Obama because he has only been elected for a couple of weeks, but again the Canadian public is becoming cynical. I hope this is an area where the envelope has moved to a certain extent.

This part of Canada and the whole world really suffers because of climate change and the permafrost melting. It is something we are looking to and shaking our heads hoping that the government will do something in the not too distant future.

In conclusion, this is good legislation and good public policy. I hope it receives the support of the House. I do not think the committee will spend a lot of time on it. Again, it is pretty

meaningless if it is not accompanied by real concrete action, a plan as to how these environmental issues are going to be enforced. What are the resources being designated to this effort from a northern basis? What is the strategy? What departments are responsible for this initiative? How are the prosecutors going to prosecute?

These are very important issues. I hope in the days and months ahead we can move forward on this issue and some of the other issues that people in northern Canada are watching very closely, and I should add are very disappointed.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise here today to speak to Bill C-3, an act to amend the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, which would extend the protection of Arctic waters from 100 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles.

I think this is an important issue. The whole Arctic question is crucial. That is why we are debating it here today in the House. It is not simply a question of sovereignty, as some might believe. Of course, this part of the north is more and more important to many people, including the Russians, Danish, Canadians and, of course, Americans.

Basically, everyone wants to lay claim to it and is taking steps to do just that. It is not only a question of sovereignty. It is also a new door opening up, a door to the northwest that will have a considerable impact on a number of issues: environmental issues, international issues, economic issues linked to shipping, for example, and military issues. As we know, at the end of the cold war, various radars were installed in the north. We had to keep an eye out, much as we did for the Russian threat during the second world war. However, energy concerns are also becoming more and more important.

Why is that? The purpose of this bill is to amend the 1970 legislation. What does that act say and how does it define arctic waters? The arctic waters are “waters adjacent to the mainland and islands of the Canadian arctic...within the area enclosed by the sixtieth parallel—. In 2009, Bill C-3 seeks to clarify the definition of arctic waters and to define them as Canada's internal waters and the waters of the territorial sea of Canada and the exclusive economic zone of Canada. Therefore this part of the world would no longer be considered as international waters but rather internal waters.

Why are we being asked to redefine this part of the world? In part because of the effects of global warming. In recent years, mainly since 1960, the area of permanent pack ice has decreased by 14%. Since 1978, it has decreased by 6%. The pack ice has thinned by 42% since 1958. A study by the University of Alberta indicates that the thickness of the permanent pack ice has decreased by 50% over seven years.

Government Orders

This shows that the fight against climate change is going to require, as the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities said earlier, greater adaptation. This also shows that here, in Canada, we must adopt a real policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

• (1720)

Today's debate shows that climate change is, to a large extent, related to human activity. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has shown, this change in our behaviour, particularly during the post-industrial era when we went from a coal revolution to an oil revolution, has had the effect of significantly increasing greenhouse gas emissions on the planet, with the consequences that we are now witnessing in the north.

The government must understand that it cannot simply put in place a policy of adapting to climate change and give up the fight against this new scourge. Just recently, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, reminded us that we have to act to fight climate change and that we must absolutely have a real policy. In the meantime, it is obvious that the impact in the north will be very significant. This is why, for the first time as of August 2008, we have a new passage called the Northwest Passage, a broader opening of the Northwest Passage and of the Northeast Passage. It is anticipated that this shipping passage in the far north will become permanent in 2040. Shipping traffic will inevitably increase considerably in the coming years.

However, as Bill C-3 suggests, this new Northwest Passage will not involve only economic issues, but also energy issues. What does this mean? It means that access to natural resources in that region will be made increasingly easier. I am thinking for instance of the oil and gas resources located under the ice. According to a study by the U.S. Ecological Survey, it is estimated that the fifth largest undiscovered oil and gas reserve in the world is under the Arctic ice. No less than 90 billion barrels of oil may be hidden under the ice pack in the north. It could meet the world demand for oil over the next three years, at a rate of 86 million barrels per day. What we have under this melting ice pack is a natural resource, an important oil resource that is the equivalent of the total reserves of Nigeria, Kazakhstan and Mexico put together. Natural resources, and more specifically oil and gas resources, are synonymous with development and exploration. We are talking about 90 billion barrels of oil and 47,260 billion cubic metres of natural gas. One third of all known world reserves of gas are under the Arctic ice. What does this mean? It means that in the coming years we will see promoters interested in developing this natural resource. It is no surprise that the presence of natural resources always triggers development, exploration and economic development activities.

Thus, in recent months and particularly in 2007, this route between Europe and Asia has allowed companies like Exxon to successfully bid \$50 million to begin exploration in the Beaufort Sea and, in 2008, allowed BP to bid for an operating interest in the Beaufort Sea. For what purpose? To be able to explore for oil in that area and develop this resource.

• (1725)

Where there is oil, there is development, which means more marine traffic and therefore more tankers. The government has to realize that there are risks and an environmental threat directly

associated with this Northwest Passage which will see an increasing number of tankers in northern waters. I am not against Canada claiming greater sovereignty over the north. But let us not be blind to the reality that Canada seeks to retain ownership of these natural resources to maintain this oil dependency and continue exploiting resources and fossil fuels that pollute, instead of turning to renewable energy.

The government ought to be embarrassed to put forward this bill on the pretext of preventing Arctic waters from being polluted. It should be embarrassed because Canada's record with respect to environmental protection in the north is rather disappointing. As I said earlier, the north has always been a territory much used by military organizations in particular. We will recall that, during World War II, more than 60 radar installations were built at 27 sites north of the 69th parallel to assess the Soviet threat. These radar stations later changed hands. Those under U.S. authority were transferred to Canada in the mid-1950s, in exchange for \$100 million worth of military equipment and a commitment to decontaminate these northern sites.

What is the situation today? In 1995, the Liberal government of the day introduced a decontamination program that was supposed to ensure that the soil in these areas would be decontaminated. However, a few years later—and this is where we see that the Liberal's environment record is no better than the Conservative's record—the internal auditor at Canada's Department of National Defence released an evaluation of these sites. And what did the internal auditor say? He said that the overall cost of the decontamination program had increased significantly, from \$322 million to \$583 million. To quote the internal auditor: “Delayed application of government contracting policy...increased cost and raised questions regarding the openness and fairness of some contracting decisions—” That is an obvious lack of environmental responsibility on behalf of the Canadian government regarding territories north of the 69th parallel.

Today we have a government that would like more sovereignty in the north and that is introducing Bill C-3, an act to amend the Arctic waters pollution prevention Act, and saying that it is making pollution prevention in the north a priority. We do not believe it, and we are not the only ones who do not believe it. According to the Director of the UQAM research group on military industry, Yves Bélanger, the Department of National Defence should test the land as soon as possible to see if the work was as badly botched as the project management was. If so, he said, everything needs to be done again.

• (1730)

That is what the experts and the internal defence department auditor think of the management of these sites.

Government Orders

There is, therefore, an environmental issue here. There is an energy issue, as I said, because there are a lot of natural resources, one-third of the world's proven gas reserves. There is also an economic issue, related among other things to the sea passage. There is an opportunity here for the big shipowners of the world to save time and kilometres. Ultimately, that means a cost reduction for them. China increasingly wants to use marine transport and big containers to ship its goods. The distance between Tokyo and London by what is called the Arctic route that is expected to develop is 14,000 kilometres, while the southern route, that is the current route between Tokyo and London, is 21,000 kilometres. It will be shorter to use the new Northwest Passage than the present route. It will mean a reduction in costs.

Is there not an obvious danger, however, in having more and more ships going through this passage, which has a rich marine life and its own unique biodiversity and is an unknown, virgin stretch of water with priceless aquatic life that we still have no way of assessing? For us to push ahead today with economic development without knowing the repercussions on biodiversity is a direct contravention of two internationally acknowledged principles: the prudence principle and the precautionary principle.

We are in favour of Canada extending its sovereignty. I am not the only one, though, talking about the dangers and threats posed by an increase in marine traffic. The Arctic Council, consisting of the five member states, Iceland, Sweden and Finland, has also expressed its grave concern about the exploitation of the natural resources and the shipping traffic.

This discussion cannot be held without the participation of the Inuit populations that will be affected. I am thinking among other things of the fishing areas that could be disturbed over the next few years by the arrival of many more ships, whether tankers or container ships.

I was reading an article recently by the Nunavut environment minister, if I am not mistaken, who said that the various partners in this affair had behaved with the old-fashioned paternalism.

In conclusion, I believe that these discussions and debates should take into account the effects on the local area and the energy, military and environmental implications. It is essential that they include the collaboration of the first nations.

• (1735)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment about the speech by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. He spoke very well and has provided additional details and information about this bill we are discussing.

However, in light of his comments, I would like to point out that, once again, the government has not made plans for developing a passage in the Arctic. Usually, when we plan something—in this case, the opening of a passage, or as another example, the rebuilding of a bridge—there is a planning process. Planning takes place, that is to say that responsibilities are assigned. There are also performance indicators and timelines.

In terms of performance indicators, we could have looked at environmental impact and the impact on communities living in the far north. Unfortunately, that was not done. That is what is lacking in

this government. I sit on the Standing Committee on Public Works and Government Services, where officials from various departments come to see us without having done any planning and without examining the impact over the long term of the measures they will implement.

Having said that, and given that the government has us by the throat—we have no choice but to vote for the bill—I hope that it will do more than just pass this bill, and that it will also bring forward plans indicating the real impact of the bill.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. That is what is known as a lack of control. She talks about a lack of planning, but I would add that it is a lack of surveillance and control.

The ships that come into these new waters are not in any way required to notify the Canadian government. Of course, all ships notify Canada that they will soon be entering this area. Why? Quite simply because they want to know about the ice conditions.

But ships are not actually required to notify Canada that they are entering these waters. What has happened as a result? In 2007 and 2008, two ships entered the Arctic waters without notifying Canada. That is what is known as a lack of PODC: planning, organization, direction and control. No PODC, no planning, no control, no surveillance. All that counts is getting their hands on the land. There are no environmental indicators in place. It is shameful.

If the government wants to get its hands on that land, it has to show the international community that it is more serious. It has to show that it is putting in place stricter sustainable development and vessel traffic control indicators than it has before.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the member's views. I had an opportunity to spend approximately three years working with the member on the environment committee, which I found very interesting. He is very passionate about the environment.

I wonder what he means by no leadership. For over 100 years, there was no leadership on this file. No one did anything. We are extending it not just a little, but exactly double of what it is now. We are ensuring some of the boundaries will be on a use it or lose it basis, which has not been done until now.

The government has taken some real initiatives and some really hard stands on Arctic sovereignty, ensuring we protect what is ours. The resources are there and we want to ensure we do it in a manageable fashion.

Government Orders

For instance, this bill would establish a registry for ships coming into our waters. Currently there is no obligation for them to register at all. In fact, it has not been done. No government in history, except for this government, has taken a real stance on environmental integrity for our country, especially in doubling the limit to 200 nautical miles.

He talked about no investment and no leadership in the Coast Guard. We have invested \$175 million in this budget alone in the Coast Guard for the purchase of 98 new vessels and for repairs to 40 existing vessels. In 2008 we provided \$1.4 million on midshore and other vessels, icebreakers, including the Diefenbaker.

I do not understand what the member is talking about because we know the Bloc can never deliver anything for Quebec. Are the Bloc members doing nothing but complaining because that is all they really can do?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, I would rather be on this side of the House representing the interests of Quebec than on the other side lobbying for the oil companies. I am not ashamed to be on this side of the House. Quite the contrary, I would rather be on this side better than on the government side, behaving as they do.

As I said, there is a lack of leadership, because the government has never been interested in northern Quebec and the issue of the Arctic. They are starting to get interested because of the economic opportunity. When have we ever heard the Conservatives talk about the impact of climate change on the Arctic? Never. They are concerned about the Arctic only when the time comes to use a new seaway in the north. Then it is important.

There is also a lack of leadership in terms of maritime surveillance and control. As I mentioned earlier, in 2007-08, two ships were able to pass through our northern waters without notifying Canada. All the government wants to do is get its hands on land that holds a third of the world's oil resources, develop that oil and use an economical canal and an economical northwest gateway. But the government is completely ignoring the people who live in the north and the flora and fauna there. All that counts is the economy.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his speech.

For some time now, we have been hearing about a lack of planning. I believe, however, that there was planning. One only has to look at the figures given by my colleague regarding the oil reserves. One-third of the world's oil reserves are located there. One only has to look at the enormous savings ships will realize by using the Northeast Passage. I cannot help but wonder if this was planned. Besides, it is the same thing whether the government is Liberal or Conservative. The Conservative government has already said that it was a socialist scheme, that greenhouse gases do not exist and that it was simply to make others pay. I think it was deliberately planned to ensure that the ice melts as quickly as possible. There was never any sincere, voluntary involvement on the part of Liberal governments to reduce greenhouse gases. The government's motivation was to see the ice melt as soon as possible, so they could benefit from it as quickly as possible.

● (1745)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, I remember participating in a conference on climate change in Moscow in early 2000. I remember that, at that time, a Russian president rose and told the international community that climate change was a good thing. We could well be hearing that from the Conservatives, as my colleague pointed out. According to them, global warming is an economic opportunity for the world. Oil resources will now be available, which has not been the case for years. That is complete nonsense and goes against the international consensus.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of tradition, I would like to thank the people of my riding, Saint-Jean. This is my first speech in the House since Parliament resumed, and this is the sixth time they have sent me back here. I want to thank them most sincerely for putting their faith in me, and I promise that I will continue to be effective at defending their interests.

The people of Saint-Jean also want me to defend Quebec's interests. Whenever Conservative Party members sing the same old tune about how we are useless here, we have to have faith in the people's intelligence. They re-elected a majority of Bloc Québécois members because they are satisfied with the members' work and they think that having us in opposition is better than having a bunch of government members who do not dare open their mouths. Why should we not react somewhat aggressively when told that we are useless? But I digress. I just wanted to thank my voters.

When I was given the opportunity to talk about Bill C-3, I was pleased to take part in the debate. Let me tell you why. I have been my party's defence critic since 2000. Before that, I was Indian affairs and northern development critic. Naturally, I went to the far north a number of times. I would like to tell you a funny story. Before leaving for the far north, I was still in Saint-Jean, and I asked my assistants what I should wear up there. They told me to dress as I would in Montreal. So I headed off with a suit and a little raincoat.

When I got off the plane, the thermometer said it was -30°C. I had to find a store where I could buy some more appropriate clothing in a hurry. I did not look at all like a northerner. I looked like a southerner in the far north for the first time—which is what I was. So I went around the town of Iqaluit, where I met people and asked them what their lives were like, if things were still as tough as they used to be. I saw that there was a huge problem with the price of food. People there pay twice as much for their food and they earn half as much as people here. It is no wonder they have trouble making ends meet.

Government Orders

It was very important for me to discover the far north. I discovered it the hard way. We noted that there was a certain degree of solidarity in the Inuit villages. I also noticed that there was a municipal form of government. It was not like Indian Affairs or aboriginal nations that operate based on a tribal council. Inuit villages were governed like municipalities. I was invited by the mayor of Iqaluit to speak with the mayor and councillors. I learned a great deal about the dangers facing the far north.

Many dangers threaten the far north. People are just now becoming interested in it because, as usual, the financial aspect takes priority and people realize there are riches to be had there. No one cared about it before. There was, however, one circumpolar meeting held every year or two, at which "nordicity", that was the term used at the time, was explored. Now, we go even further than "nordicity". How is it that the passage continues to open up and that we will soon be able to go through it all year round? This has not only economic, but also environmental repercussions. My hon. colleagues have talked about this. As Canadians and Quebecers, we absolutely must try to regulate that.

I would also remind the House that there are now new territories in the far north. I had the opportunity to attend the creation of Nunavut in 2000. As part of the ceremony, there was a toast with a small glass of northern water. This gave me a new perspective on things because, normally, when we toast, it is not with water, but with something that looks similar but tastes much stronger. That ritual was intended to express the purity of the far north. Thus, I attended the creation of Nunavut.

I also became very involved in Nunavik, in Quebec. One must not think that today's debate is uniquely Canadian. It is also a Quebec debate. I would even say it is an international debate. In 2000, I began attending Canada-NATO meetings.

• (1750)

I have just come back from a meeting in Brussels where the far north was a hot topic. We are not the only ones who are realizing that commercial vessel traffic will be revolutionized by the opening of the Northwest Passage. The whole world knows it. In a minute I will talk about the different distances and tell you how many kilometres shipowners will save by sending their ships through the Northwest Passage. They can save tens of thousands of kilometres, which is huge.

As the national defence critic, I have visited the far north, mainly because many things in the far north have to do with the military. The Bloc has some concerns on that front. We do not want to see the Arctic militarized. We would like this to be negotiated, and we would like international legislation to be applied.

The answer is certainly not to build warships to stake our claim in the far north. I have a great deal of respect for the Canadian navy, but if we ever tangled with the American or Russian navy, it would not be long before Canada's navy was at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean. This is really not the answer. We have to find another way. We even think that the coast guard is likely better placed to patrol and assert Canada's sovereignty.

The issue of the military in the far north is still important. Now, for this government, it is clear that this is coming. The government is

making no effort to try to address this fundamental issue. It is all well and good for the far north to open to vessel traffic for economic reasons, but this affects not only the people, but the Arctic flora and fauna. For example, there is now a higher rate of drowning among polar bears. They were used to swimming from one island to another, but the islands are farther apart now because the water level has risen. That also has an impact on the whole Inuit food chain, which is something we must never forget.

What is the government doing to address this issue? It is facing facts, realizing that the passage is opening and wondering how to go about defending our national interests. Consequently, there is a problem, and in my opinion, this problem should be solved in another way. We need to think about what greenhouse gas restrictions we should be adopting so as to keep the Arctic intact and not despoil it.

We cannot let economic concerns override environmental concerns. More and more people admit this and understand that if we push the economic side of things and ignore the environmental aspect, future generations will inherit a tainted and squandered planet. Even if they were billionaires, they would not be happy living on this planet if we let things go.

We have to ask ourselves these questions. Why is the government not trying to fix the greenhouse gas issue? Why is it not trying to fix it with absolute measures instead of intensity measures? The government is saying that it will ensure that for every barrel of oil produced, there will be a 20% reduction in greenhouse gases. However, if oil companies are allowed to produce 10 times the barrels, we will not make any progress and things will be worse.

The Bloc Québécois is defending the issue of greenhouse gases and absolute measures. That is how the issue will be resolved and greenhouse gases will be reduced instead of increasing. Nothing will be fixed by simply saying that greenhouse gases will be reduced by 20% for each barrel of oil produced, when 10 times as many barrels will be produced. The problem will still be there. That is the environmental aspect.

Let us come back to the military aspect, which must also be considered. I have been to the DEW line. It is a line of radar stations that stretches from Labrador to Alaska, passing through the Yukon and the rest. There are perhaps 70 radar stations, established to study the far north and watch for a Russian bomber attack.

Government Orders

• (1755)

At one time, this line was extremely important. In the 1950s the Americans and the Canadians agreed to build that network. At the time only bomber planes could carry atomic weapons into the U.S. territory, or anywhere in America, Canada or Mexico. A network was needed to watch for these aircraft. Now, this line is somewhat obsolete, because there is no defence against intercontinental ballistic missiles. The Americans claim to have one, but that remains to be seen. There is no question that if they were the target of a massive attack, they could not stop them all. But at the time, it was important. I went to Hall Beach in the Arctic, on the DEW line. I chartered a plane and I visited about ten radar stations. I saw the environmental catastrophe that was created there in the 1950s and that has still not been dealt with. I think my colleague referred to it earlier, when he said that the federal government had increased its contribution for the cleanup from \$300 million to \$500 million, but it will have to increase it again, because at Hall Beach it is truly a catastrophe. I am not talking about a catastrophe merely because it is ugly, but because it is polluting and it is even contaminating the whole Inuit food chain. Whales are suffering and have many diseases. Birds, seals, all the Arctic flora and fauna are being contaminated, because there was a lack of control at the time.

Back then, they would use a barrel of contaminants and if that barrel was half empty, they would empty it on the spot and leave it there. We now realize it was a terrible mistake. There are health problems, not only affecting the flora and fauna, but also the Inuit themselves who traditionally feed on these animals, on this wildlife. So, there is a major problem with the DEW line and I think it is far from over. We will have to invest a lot more money to correct the situation. Sometimes I wonder if it is not too late.

I also travelled to Alert, which is the Canadian Forces' northernmost base. We can understand that there is a reasonable military presence. However, if the Conservative government's strategy is to arm ourselves even more heavily, I think we will have a problem, as I explained earlier.

From a military perspective, if one wants to take possession of a territory or establish sovereignty over that territory, human presence is always important. I think the far north is the subject of many studies. People want to know how to behave and affirm their presence. Many tactics are being considered right now.

Our Russian friends left a titanium case containing a Russian flag on the bottom of the ocean. That was kind of an old-fashioned approach. Long ago, nations planted flags to assert sovereignty over a territory. The Russians deposited a titanium case on the bottom of the ocean to lay their claim.

The debate is ongoing. Where do Canada's boundary waters lie? I think that when a country claims a given territory, as Canada has the Arctic, it has to implement a series of legislative measures or laws to secure that claim. That is what Bill C-3 does. It enlarges the protected area from 100 kilometres to 200. I think that is a good idea.

That being said, there is no doubt the Americans consider Arctic waters to be international waters. Along with the Americans and the Russians, the Danes also want in on the act. A lot of northern countries are looking closely at what they can claim. That is why I

am saying that we should rely on governance and diplomacy to resolve the fundamental issue. We need scientific studies, and we need international courts, such as the court in the Hague, to rule in case of dispute. As I said before, we cannot let this turn into a power struggle between nations or war in the far north. That would certainly be senseless.

• (1800)

That is why we have the Rangers, the Canadian Forces' arm in the far north. They patrol the region. I am planning to go on patrol with them. I might not cover as much ground as them because they are in great shape, and they are used to walking long distances and camping. I do not mind camping. I am sure they know how to make igloos, but I do not think they camp in them. I am looking forward to going with them because patrolling territory is a form of sovereignty assertion. That is why planes fly over the area. The Coast Guard has a presence in the far north. All of these elements support the government's claim to the Arctic. Our military presence is important, but it must not go too far. As I said, our military would not be able to hold off an American aircraft carrier or destroyer for long. Their military is much bigger than ours.

Why not look at other surveillance options as well? In terms of defence, satellites are being developed as an option. Thus, we could ensure accurate surveillance of vast areas in the far north. NORAD is using its satellites for that purpose. They now monitor shipping traffic and can guide their ships on their routes to some extent. They can communicate with them to say, "You are not on your planned route. You must stay on your planned sea route." Thus, satellites are gaining in importance.

Drones are another possibility. We do not need to use ships and we do not have to pay exorbitant amounts for fuel to patrol the far north. Some types of drones can patrol the area and provide appropriate surveillance.

I had promised earlier that I would talk about distances. I have seen some very impressive distances. The route that will be used will save thousands and thousands of kilometres. For example, travelling from London to Yokohama, via Panama, is a trip of 23,300 kilometres. Using the Northwest Passage, the distance is 15,930 kilometres. If the trip is 10,000 kilometres shorter, shipowners and all marine traffic will save a lot of money. I believe that is the main focus. There is not enough concern about the environment. We ask ourselves how to save money. That is humanity's downfall. Greed often wins over concern for the environment. This has to be regulated.

Government Orders

That is why, as other members have said, the Bloc Québécois will support the bill that is before us. As I mentioned earlier, it is a claim over a territory. If we can extend the protection zone to fight pollution, this legislation will show that we care about that region. Quebeckers also care about the north. Incidentally, the Inuits and the Quebec government have signed excellent agreements for the Nunavik. I think that, as Quebeckers, we too must monitor that part of the far north that is located on our territory. New intentions and interests are surfacing among the parties involved. There are people looking at the impact that this will have on their daily lives. Will all that is going on in the far north and all that has happened in the past have an impact on the food chain? How do we try to settle the issue once and for all?

Again, we will support Bill C-3. It is unfortunate that the government will not take the bull by the horns and say: "As for greenhouse gases, we will deal with this issue to save the far north." However, should this become inevitable, we will have provided the solutions that we can see. We must not militarize the region. We must reach agreements at international forums to ensure that the far north is accessible to all and that Canada gets its fair share in that region and in the circumpolar regions.

• (1805)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Jean for his speech and the quick world tour he gave us. "Happy he who, like Ulysses has travelled well." I have the impression that our friend has travelled a lot and has also learned a lot. I would like him to discuss an element that he did not really touch on during his speech—the idea of settlement of the land.

We do not, and could not, oppose the spirit of the bill that has been introduced. However, we cannot forget that we have a responsibility when we have a certain territory. I come from what is considered a remote area, and I understand relatively well what is happening in the north in terms of the lack of interest there has been, not only over the past few years and months, but over many years. This is the first time anyone has been this interested in the Canadian north. And they are interested for the wrong reasons.

Settling the territory is wonderful in principle, but at the same time, that means something for the people who live there. They do not want to feel looked down upon, but honoured and supported. I would like to hear my colleague talk about the elements that may have been left out of the bill.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Occupying the territory is important. However, those of us who live in urban areas often find it difficult to understand people who live in outlying areas. You have to have gone there. You have to go to Gaspé to know that you will travel 50 to 70 km to have a coffee at a restaurant. In Montreal, when I am lost and I ask someone where a certain place is because I cannot find it, they tell me it is very far and that I should take a taxi because it is three blocks away.

The basic concept of occupying an area varies. In regions such as the far north, you have to work with the people who live there. People from the south do not fly there. They do not go there. Sometimes the Canadian army goes there for training exercises. It is trying to have a presence in the air, the water and the land. However,

the exercise lasts two weeks and then the army returns to its base. We have to convince the inhabitants of the far north that occupying the area is important.

Over the years, the military have returned with better equipment. These people are very proud. My colleague is right. They are very proud of where they come from. There is no one better than they to defend this territory and to occupy it. They know what to do, they were born there and they know the landmarks. The area is vast.

It is vital that we occupy the territory and it is important that we continue to support the Inuit so that they occupy their territory.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question of my friend. I am from a northern resource community and, as he knows, I am passionate about the people there and how to best represent them. We have seen some dramatic changes over the past 10 to 20 years in that particular community. We, like many northern communities, sometimes need to travel up to 500 miles just to find something like a roller rink or an ice rink because we are so isolated.

I wanted to ask the member a couple of questions but, in particular, I wanted to correct the record.

In a question to the member's colleague, I said that this Conservative government had spent \$1.4 million in 2008 on vessels and an icebreaker. It was actually \$1.4 billion that we initiated for that investment. It is a great investment.

I would like to know what the member thinks about that \$1.4 billion investment because it is the first time that kind of significant investment in marine has been undertaken, as well as the \$175 million that we initiated and earmarked for 2009 for 98 new vessels, 40 new repair vessels.

I am really happy today. I have been in this place for five years and I now see that the Bloc is concerned about northern Canada and the future of Canada and our great united nation. I am happy to hear that from the member because I respect him a lot. It is great to see the Bloc coming forward on that.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my hon. colleague that the reason people care so much about the far north, as he said, is because they know that Canada will always be Quebec's neighbour. We also have a northern area in Quebec. Just on the other side, a few hundred kilometres away, another territory begins, the Canadian territory, and we will always be neighbours, whether we like it or not. I personally do not want Canada's north to become American or, even worse, Russian. I want it to remain Canadian. It is only normal for people to be worried about this, for we also have our concerns in Quebec regarding the nordicity I mentioned earlier.

As for the vessels he mentioned, I repeat: we have nothing against the ice breakers and we have nothing against the coast guard ships, but we want to prevent the militarization of the far north. I think the Canadian government would be making a serious mistake if it decided to arm big ships, for example, to patrol the far north.

As I said earlier, we do not have the capacity to stand up to the United States or Russia. Our argument before the international courts, if it ever came to that, would be to show that we are effectively occupying the territory, that we are effectively patrolling the waters and air space, and that we are effectively monitoring that vast, open space by satellite or drones. That is how we must prove our ownership of the territory.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate what my colleague from Saint-Jean, who is the national defence critic, had to say. He spoke about the militarization of the Arctic and the dangers associated with such militarization.

I am convinced that my colleague has followed all the bickering between Canada and Denmark about who was going to be the first one to plant a little flag on an island. There is also the fact that submarines are increasingly able to roam the Arctic waters.

He also talked about what the people want. They want inspections to be carried out, they want the coast guard to have much more responsibility for asserting our sovereignty, and they want Canada to use diplomacy rather than military force.

Because my colleague is the national defence critic, I am certain he has spent a great deal of time looking at this issue, and I would like to hear his comments on this.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and let him know that I agree with his point of view. Perhaps we should consider what happened on the other side of the planet at the south pole in Antarctica.

Antarctica is an international place that belongs to all of humanity. That might solve the problem, but the situation is more complicated at the north pole, in the Arctic, because of greed and people's financial needs. We have to avoid making that the crux of the debate. My colleague is right: to avoid having that happen, we need diplomacy along with territorial development and occupation. Canada's solution is not militarization, because Canada cannot stand up to other world powers that have laid claim.

I hope that things will not go beyond studies to figure out where the continent ends. Have people occupied the territory since time immemorial? Yes, the Inuit have been there for a long time. They

were there long before European civilization in America, and I think that argument bolsters our claim. We have to avoid militarizing the issue because we would lose in the end.

● (1815)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me some measure of pleasure to speak to Bill C-3, an act to amend the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act. The bill would increase the environmental protection of the Canadian Arctic, which is consistent with the New Democrats' position on Arctic sovereignty.

Specifically, the bill would extend the geographic application of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act to the outer limit of the exclusive economic zone of Canada north of the 60th parallel. The NDP's position has been and remains that Canada needs to increase its claim to the waters of the Arctic islands and beyond through the increased enforcement of environmental protection laws. This bill would expand the area covered by the Canadian environmental protection law, which is stronger than that afforded under international law.

Other nations may dispute the increase of this protection. However, support of Canada's position is expected to be strong in the international community. I would also note that Canada's action is consistent with article 234 of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea.

We also have had occasion to discuss the bill with notable Canadian experts in the field, in particular, Mr. Michael Byers, who is an internationally renowned expert in Arctic sovereignty issues. Dr. Byers has examined this bill and recommends that it be passed as is.

The bill specifically amends the definition of Arctic waters from 100 to 200 nautical miles to help ensure that ships do not pollute Canadian waters. That is an important step.

The bill raises the very critical issues in our country of the Arctic, our claim to sovereignty over the Arctic and the importance of that region to Canada's history, heritage and development. Also, and not tangentially in any respect, it raises the issue of the critical importance of the environment and the pressing need to get control of the greenhouse gas emissions in this country. I will be talking a little bit about that in a few moments.

I will read from the government's press release in which it announced this amendment. One thing that does concern me is a quote by Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities where he says:

Our government is taking action to promote economic development while demanding environmental responsibility in Canada's North.

What concerns me is the reference to promoting economic development. Canadians are concerned that the Arctic not be used and exploited for its natural resources. Rather, Canadians want this area protected in pristine condition and not to be used as just another area of exploitation by international oil and gas companies.

Government Orders

Global warming is nowhere more evident than in our Arctic. I think it is common knowledge among all members of the House, and certainly on the conscience of Canadians, that our polar bears are experiencing habitat threat of grave concern. If we talk to the indigenous peoples who populate all of the regions of the Arctic, they will tell us and have told us that there are serious climate change issues going on in the Arctic and that these are harbingers that ought to be of grave concern.

The fact that global warming is causing a retraction in the iceberg and ice floe levels in the Arctic does not give us an opportunity to rush in and start developing oil and gas deposits and exploit mineral deposits. Rather, this should cause us great pause. It should force us to look at the underlying cause of this problem, which is that greenhouse gas emissions are causing climate change that is of grave peril, not only to Canada and our people but to the entire world.

I am happy to hear that the government now speaks in terms of protecting the environment, which is a good thing and it should be applauded. However, intention is everything and if the intention to preserve our Arctic is simply to allow more economic exploitation as opposed to protecting the environment, then I believe the bill and the government will be misguided.

• (1820)

I want to speak a little about the environment and about other steps the government has either taken or failed to take, steps that are actually imperilling our climate and our environment in the Arctic region.

I noticed in the last budget that the government cancelled the eco-rebate for alternative clean energy production. This was a program that delivered one cent per kilowatt hour to producers of new green energy. What did the government do? It cancelled the program.

The government cancelled or failed to renew the ecoauto rebate program for hybrid and electric cars. This was an incredibly successful and very effective program whereby Canadian consumers could purchase hybrid cars and cars that are more energy-efficient, which has an incredibly positive effect on our environment. What did the government do? It failed to renew the program.

The New Democratic Party campaigned very hard on the environment in the last federal election. One of the major planks of our platform was the immediate implementation of a hard cap and trade system.

I know that in 2002 the Prime Minister was calling the Kyoto accord a socialist plot. I am happy to see that he is a recent convert to what scientists around the globe have been telling us for years, which is that we need to get control of greenhouse gas emissions now.

I am still not sure that the Prime Minister understands exactly how important this is, because he is still speaking in terms of intensity emissions as a substitute for hard caps. Those are two very different concepts, with very compelling and different results. It is only by having hard caps on the emissions of greenhouse gases in this world that we are actually going to have a hope of controlling rising temperatures and climate change.

I noticed in the budget that the government has defined “clean energy” to include coal-fired and nuclear facilities. I think that is why the government is investing so much money into carbon capture and storage, the so-called carbon sequestration programs. It is because it still believes we can use dirty oil and coal and can continue to burn these fossil fuels, if only we can find a way to take the carbon dioxide that is emitted and somehow control it. I think this is misguided.

I note that of the approximately \$2 billion allocated in the budget to so-called green programs, half of that, \$1 billion, is going to carbon capture and trade systems and experiments and to subsidies to the nuclear industry.

It is very telling that the budget allocates less than 1% of the total stimulus package to the investment in clean energy production. This is to be contrasted with the United States, where the American stimulus package is spending four times the per capita investment amount in clean energy production.

These things are important because one cannot speak about the Arctic, about the need to preserve and protect that vital piece of Canada, without talking inevitably about protecting the environment.

I also want to talk a little about sovereignty. I will applaud the government for any moves and measures it takes that will allow Canada to assert our national autonomy over this area. Of course other countries are rapaciously circling the area and have similar designs on getting their hands on minerals and oil and gas deposits in that region in order to exploit those resources instead of protecting this vital part of our planet.

I note that Denmark and Greenland have been reported to be intending to exploit certain islands in the area, specifically the vast icefields. Greenland intends to harvest these icebergs and sell them to a world that is as thirsty for water as it is for oil.

• (1825)

The Danish government for its part is pouring millions of dollars into a comprehensive map showing the geological features of the Arctic Ocean, and its map runs from a shelf that is underneath its country all the way along so that it can claim part of the North Pole itself.

I do not have to remind members of the House that both the United States and Russia are countries that seem to be holding similar designs on this area. Therefore, it is vitally important that our government take all the measures it can to assert and retain our sovereignty in the area.

We cannot get too bold on this because Canadian companies and Canadian politicians have similar designs. They view the Arctic as just another economic area to be exploited, as opposed to a national environmental treasure that plays a vital role in the globe's climate system.

I note that EnCana, a Canadian company, has a current strategy to sell off its holdings in dangerous parts of the world and focus instead on developing sources of natural gas in North America, primarily under the sea floor near Davis Strait. The first and biggest licensee of resources in this area is EnCana Corporation, a transnational company with a head office in Calgary, Alberta.

I do want to caution all members of the House to make sure that the intentions behind the bill match the reality.

There are other concerns we ought to keep in mind when we are talking about the Arctic, such as the cultural aspects of the people who live in the north. We must always remember that this is not a vast unpopulated area. Rather, the Arctic is populated by many people with thousands of years of ties to these lands. We must pay attention to ensure that their needs, their aspirations, their ways of life are protected and preserved. We cannot turn back the clock on the erosion of the indigenous people's way of life once we have altered it irremediably.

In terms of the historical importance of the Arctic, and my hon. colleague from the Arctic spoke to this earlier, it is important that we pay attention to economic development and the social welfare of the people of that region.

New Democrats believe that this area of our country is in urgent need of financial support, particularly from the federal government. These people require schools, community centres and assistance with health care. I am hopeful that the Minister of Health will see to it that the appalling treatment of indigenous people, particularly in the north, and the ignoring of their health needs that has gone on for decades, and arguably centuries, is addressed by the government.

I would be happy to see a bill introduced by the government that would spend money and invest funds in the protection and enhancement of the health of the people of the Arctic. This is not just about ensuring that ships can travel untrammelled in the Arctic, but it is important for us to take a moment and ensure that the people of the Arctic are able to travel with equal freedom. In order to do that—

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I need to interrupt the member at this time. When we resume debate on this matter the member will have six minutes remaining in his presentation.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of the Environment a question some time ago and this is my opportunity to seek further embellishment to the response provided. I note that the minister is absent from the House, and I am looking forward to hearing from his parliamentary secretary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I know that the member is new to the House, but it is not appropriate to refer to whether members are here or not.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I did not mean to suggest anything. I am looking forward to the answers to my questions from the government side.

Adjournment Proceedings

In my follow-up questions I had asked a question regarding the government's reaction to the report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. I have some questions on which I would like further elaboration, and I look forward to a reply.

The minister had replied that he is acting on the recommendations of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

I am wondering if the minister could please advise the House of the specific measures being taken in that regard, more specifically measures on reducing smog-producing air emissions, action long promised and overdue. Is the minister directing his department to expedite the new framework, in particular for coal-fired power plants?

Is the minister intent to again allow direct engagement of federal environment officials in provincial air emission reduction processes, and reverse the pull back by his predecessors? Previously there was very active participation by federal officials in provincial review processes in my jurisdiction.

Given that the minister has raised concerns about United States-based coal-fired power emissions, has the minister directed work on the promulgation of a CEPA regulation to regulate mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants, mirroring the Alberta law now in place?

The minister replied that the solution to reduce emissions of toxins in greenhouse gases is investment in technology. Does the minister support adherence to the polluter pays principle? Is the minister aware of the significance of regulation as the prime trigger for private investment and deployment of improved pollution control technologies? Does the minister intend to impose legally binding requirements on large final emitters to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and if so, when?

The federal government had an oversubscribed eco-energy program to incent the development and deployment of renewable technologies. If Canada intends to parallel American clean energy initiatives while the U.S. has increased its support for renewables, can the minister advise why the government cut funding?

My last two questions are in reply to the minister's reply to me. Is the minister planning to expedite federal action on the long overdue management plans required under SARA for species at risk?

Finally, the commissioner identified numerous instances of failure of his department to monitor and enforce compliance with federal laws, and in a number of instances laws regulating significant toxins. Can the parliamentary secretary advise what specific measures the minister intends to deploy to ensure that these laws are enforced?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to answer the member's questions to the minister regarding carbon capture and storage. I would be glad to answer her further questions in the appropriate venue, but I want to answer her first question about carbon capture and storage.

Adjournment Proceedings

Carbon capture and storage is a promising technology for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Canada has played a pioneering role in its development. The Weyburn carbon dioxide monitoring and storage project in Saskatchewan has shown this. More than seven million tonnes of carbon dioxide have been injected and stored. The first phase of the project completed in 2004 demonstrated that this natural geological setting is suitable for long-term carbon dioxide storage.

It is time to move beyond the research phase and apply this new technology widely. All the G8 members are headed in this direction and have committed to support the launching of 20 large-scale carbon capture and storage demonstration projects by 2010 with a view to begin broad technology deployment by 2020. This technology is key to large-scale decarbonization of fossil fuel-based sectors on the global stage.

The Government of Canada has a target to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions in Canada by an absolute 20% by 2020. Transformative technologies such as carbon capture and storage will be key to meeting that objective.

In light of the current economic downturn and the opportunities offered by other developments in the United States, such as the recent election of the new President Barack Obama, we are reviewing our previous regulatory approach and determining what the best path forward is on climate change. We need to ensure that actions we take do not further harm struggling industries.

In addition, the re-engagement of the United States on climate change provides an opportunity to put in place a North American cap and trade system that will benefit all parties. We believe that a cooperative bilateral approach to the environment and to energy will spur economic recovery and renewal.

Our budget commits to investments that allow us to protect our environment and for research into how to best conserve natural resources. Our investments include \$1 billion over five years to clean energy R and D and demonstration projects, including carbon capture and storage. This includes \$150 million over five years for research and \$850 million over five years for the development and demonstration of promising technologies. This support is expected to generate a total investment in clean technologies of \$2.5 billion over the next five years.

I want to thank the member for her question and look forward to her supporting our budget which includes green technologies.

• (1835)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his reply. In fact, my question had very clearly been for the minister on matters arising from the Commission on Sustainable Development report which dealt with greenhouse gases and toxins. I look forward to a reply in an early and timely manner to my questions on toxins.

Returning again to the issue of climate change, does the hon. member not support the principle of polluter pays? And does he not agree that the most effective trigger for private investment in technologies, including carbon capture and sequestration, would be to issue binding regulations on the sectors that are emitting the greenhouse gases?

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I have the member's question here and she is saying that carbon capture and storage is an unproven technology. The fact is that it is a very proven technology. It will help the world reduce greenhouse gas emissions dramatically. Canada is one of the world leaders in this technology. I count on the member's support for our budget which provides billions of green dollars for technology.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to again bring further focus to an issue about which I had posed a question for the Minister of Human Resources a number of weeks ago. It is with regard to EI premiums and Canadians who are finding themselves in a very difficult situation, having lost a job and having to look for some type of revenue to help support their family. In many cases, these people are the most vulnerable. These people are least apt to go a week or two without a paycheque, not that anybody can really go too long without a paycheque. When there is an interruption in household income over a period of time, it creates an incredible amount of stress on the family unit and we should do all we can to try to help these people who are in need.

There is a chance that this problem will even worsen as more and more Canadians find themselves, through no fault of their own, out of work. The January job statistics showed that 129,000 jobs were lost in this economy.

I came to this chamber eight years ago. At one time, it took four to five weeks to turn around an EI claim. It then drifted up to six weeks. Now it is even seven and eight weeks before somebody can receive benefits. That is very much of great concern.

The day I posed the question in the House 10 weeks had passed from the time my constituent lost her job, filed for EI and was notified that she would receive benefits. That is unacceptable. The employment insurance fund is one that Canadians pay into and it should be there when they need it.

I know Service Canada employees are a very caring and concerned group of employees who are doing all they can to help these Canadians, but they do not have the resources. They need additional resources and we have to put those in place so Canadians who find themselves out of work are helped.

Service Canada says that it can turn the processes around in 28 days. However, the reality is if there is any kind of glitch or if there is anything out of the norm at all, a case has to go to a level 2 agent for review. That is where the delay is because there are not enough agents, or the workload is too great, or there are not enough resources within the department to deal with these claims. However, no Canadian worker should have to wait eight, nine, ten weeks for some type of assistance from the government.

Adjournment Proceedings

Therefore, I call upon the government to make the necessary investments to help Canadians who need it now.

• (1840)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to respond to some of the questions posed by my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso.

In an economic downturn, EI is the first line of defence. We recognize that it is a challenging time for many Canadian families. We understand this and we sympathize with those who are feeling the negative effects of the current situation. There is no question about that.

We want to ensure that people who have the misfortune of losing their jobs get the benefits they need and deserve just as quickly as possible. This minister and the government have made, and are continuing to make, a number of significant efforts to ensure that this happens.

Through Service Canada we have a high standard for service delivery. Despite the increase of claims, owing to this unfortunate downturn in the economy, these standards have not changed. We continue to put resources toward ensuring that we meet or exceed these standards. Service Canada is doing what it can and we are applying the resources that are necessary to achieve that.

This is not simply an administrative issue. We are making these efforts because we know just how important it is for families to get their EI benefits just as quickly as they can. The time after individuals lose their job is indeed a stressful time and an uncertain time. We want to help ease the burden as much as we can.

Our government has taken a number of steps to deal with the influx of EI claims. For obvious reasons, and in the interests of privacy, I will not get into any specific cases. But as I have said, the government has taken a number of steps to ensure help for Canadians continues to flow quickly.

We have hired and trained additional employees at Service Canada to meet the demand in different parts of the country. Agents are working overtime to process claims. We have increased the capacity of our call centres significantly and hours of operations will be extended to 6 p.m., Monday to Friday. These extended hours start today and will help us ensure that more Canadians receive benefits more quickly.

Processing centres are working together to balance processing workloads, shifting claims from busy centres to less busy centres to help Canadians faster and to ensure all of our resources are working to help Canadians.

We are also working with companies to help employers and employees get the information they need so that we can process their claims faster. All employers are encouraged to register for ROE Web to create and submit ROEs, commonly referred to as records of

employment, online. We are improving and promoting self-service options in order to speed up processing even further.

Ensuring that applications contain all the required information goes a long way to avoiding delays in payment. Every delay is regrettable and painful for Canadian families. We understand that. Measures like these help minimize delays and we will continue our work in this regard.

Unfortunately, delays do occasionally occur. Sometimes this can happen because applications miss some important information from the employer, especially on the ROE I just mentioned. Once complete information is received a claim can be processed, a recalculation can be made and a cheque issued.

I can assure hon. members that our department is monitoring EI service very closely. We are taking and will continue to take the measures necessary to ensure that Canadians who have lost their jobs will get their benefits as quickly as possible. That is what Canadians expect, and that is what we will continue to do.

• (1845)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and respect the reply from the parliamentary secretary, but the measures that have been taken by the government are trying to address some of the backlog that has accrued over the last months. However, at the rapid rate at which Canadians are losing their jobs, I fear that the problem will worsen.

My supplementary question to the parliamentary secretary, if I might: Are there further resources? Is the government willing to take further steps to address this problem and to help Canadians if the problem worsens, as we very much suspect it will?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, we appreciate that Canadians are facing uncertain times. That is why we are taking a number of measures. Some take effect today, as I speak. I wonder if the member was listening to the various steps that we are taking to ensure this happens.

We understand that when Canadians lose their jobs through no fault of their own, there are worries about looking after their families, about making ends meet, about paying their mortgage, and putting food on the table. Those kinds of things are important to Canadians. That is why we are ensuring that people get the employment insurance benefits to which they are entitled as quickly as possible.

This is important to us and we understand that many Canadians are turning to the EI system. We will continue to make every effort to ensure we are serving Canadians in this time of uncertainty, as quickly and as reasonably as we can.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, February 23, 2009

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Human Pathogens and Toxins Act

Mr. Lunn (for the Minister of Health)	821
Bill C-11. Second reading	821
Mr. Carrie	821
Mrs. Smith	822
Mr. Van Kesteren	822
Mr. Rickford	822
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	822
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	823
Ms. Bennett	823
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	824
Mr. Malo	826
Mrs. Hughes	827
Mr. Carrie	828
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	828
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	831
Mr. Carrie	831
Mr. Miller	832
Mr. Lee	832
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	835
Mr. Malo	837
Mr. Dewar	837
Ms. Ratansi	838
Mr. Szabo	839
Mr. Szabo	839
Mr. Del Mastro	841

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Israel

Mr. Dykstra	842
-------------------	-----

Heart Month

Ms. Bennett	842
-------------------	-----

Quebec International Pee wee Hockey Tournament

Mr. Paillé	842
------------------	-----

Social Assistance

Mr. Atamanenko	843
----------------------	-----

Parliamentary Outdoors Caucus

Mr. Breitzkreuz	843
-----------------------	-----

Women's Executive Network Top 100 Award

Mrs. Crombie	843
--------------------	-----

Heart Month

Mr. Saxton	843
------------------	-----

Alexandre Mallette-Lafrenière

Ms. Gagnon	844
------------------	-----

Centenary of Powered Flight in Canada

Mr. Hawn	844
----------------	-----

Olympic Winter Games

Mr. Cuzner	844
------------------	-----

Le Québécois Newspaper

Mr. Gourde	844
------------------	-----

Aboriginal Affairs

Mr. Rafferty	844
--------------------	-----

Infrastructure

Mr. Calandra	845
--------------------	-----

Member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles

Mr. Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	845
--	-----

Bathurst Phantoms

Mr. LeBlanc	845
-------------------	-----

Bathurst Phantoms

Mrs. O'Neill-Gordon	845
---------------------------	-----

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Economy

Mr. Ignatieff	845
Mr. Flaherty	846
Mr. Ignatieff	846
Mr. Flaherty	846

Automotive Industry

Mr. Ignatieff	846
Mr. Clement	846

The Economy

Mrs. Jennings	846
Mr. Flaherty	846
Mrs. Jennings	846
Mr. Flaherty	846

The Environment

Mr. Duceppe	846
Mr. Prentice	846
Mr. Duceppe	847
Mr. Prentice	847
Mr. Bigras	847
Mr. Prentice	847
Mr. Bigras	847
Mr. Prentice	847

Poverty

Mr. Layton	847
Mr. Strahl	847
Mr. Layton	847
Mr. Strahl	847

Automotive Industry

Mr. Layton	848
Mr. Clement	848
Mr. Valeriote	848
Mr. Flaherty	848
Mr. Valeriote	848
Mr. Flaherty	848

The Economy	
Mr. McCallum	848
Mr. Flaherty	848
Mr. McCallum	848
Mr. Flaherty	848
Intergovernmental Affairs	
Mr. Dorion	848
Ms. Verner	849
Mr. Dorion	849
Ms. Verner	849
Arts and Culture	
Mrs. Lavallée	849
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	849
Mrs. Lavallée	849
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	849
Softwood Lumber Industry	
Ms. Murray	849
Mr. Day	849
Mrs. Mendes	850
Mr. Day	850
China	
Mr. Rae	850
Mr. Cannon	850
Mr. Rae	850
Mr. Cannon	850
Human Rights	
Mr. Tilson	850
Mr. Kenney	850
Pay Equity	
Ms. Mathysen	850
Mr. Toews	850
Mr. Mulcair	851
Mr. Toews	851
Justice	
Mrs. Freeman	851
Mr. Nicholson	851
Access to Information	
Mrs. Freeman	851
Mr. Cannon	851
The Environment	
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	851
Mr. Prentice	851
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	851
Mr. Prentice	851
Public Safety	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	852
Mr. Van Loan	852
Ms. Black	852
Mr. Van Loan	852
International Aid	
Mr. Goldring	852
Ms. Oda	852

Access to Information	
Mr. Easter	852
Mr. Toews	852
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Crête	852
Mr. Cannon	853
Access to Information	
Mr. Allen (Welland)	853
Mr. Toews	853
Infrastructure	
Mr. Rickford	853
Mr. Baird	853
International Aid	
Mr. Pearson	853
Ms. Oda	853
Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mrs. Glover	853
Mr. Plamondon	853

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Canada Grain Act	
Mr. Hill (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board)	854
Bill C-13. Introduction and first reading	854
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	854
Committees of the House	
Justice and Human Rights	
Mr. Fast	854
National Hockey Day Act	
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	854
Bill C-320. Introduction and first reading	854
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	854
Petitions	
Sri Lanka	
Mr. Calandra	854
Human Trafficking	
Mrs. Smith	854
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	854
Request for Emergency Debate	
Automotive Industry	
Mr. Valeriote	854
The Speaker	855

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Human Pathogens and Toxins Act	
Bill C-11. Second reading	855
The Speaker	855
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	855

Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act

Mr. Baird	855
Bill C-3. Second reading	855
Mr. Laframboise	857
Mr. Volpe	858
Mr. Rafferty	858
Mr. Van Kesteren	859
Mr. Volpe	859
Mr. Baird	861
Mr. Laframboise	862
Mr. Bevington	862
Mr. Laframboise	862
Mr. Baird	865
Mr. Volpe	865
Mr. Bigras	865
Mr. Cardin	866
Mr. Bevington	866
Mr. Baird	868
Mr. Volpe	869

Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	869
Mr. Bigras	870
Ms. Bourgeois	872
Mr. Jean	872
Mr. Cardin	873
Mr. Bachand	873
Mr. Blais	876
Mr. Jean	876
Mr. Bellavance	877
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	877

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**The Environment**

Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	879
Mr. Warawa	879

Employment Insurance

Mr. Cuzner	880
Mr. Komarnicki	881

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