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Monday, March 30, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 30, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 11 a.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ) moved that Bill C-288, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by giving credit where credit is due. I must thank my colleague, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, for all the work he did during the 39th Parliament.

Bill C-207, which he introduced on October 16, 2007, was supported by a majority of members of the House at all readings and even made it to the Senate.

Now we are back with Bill C-288, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions), and I promise my colleague and young people in the regions of Quebec that I am just as determined as he was to get this bill passed.

I would also like to mention the role played by the government members representing Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean—the members for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and Jonquière—Alma. During election campaigns, federalists like to go on and on about how the Bloc Québécois is useless and does not have any power. But in this case, my two Conservative colleagues proved to their voters that being on the side in power is always bad for the regions of Quebec.

When the Conservatives voted against the old Bill C-207, they denied young people access to a tax credit they could have used as of this year's tax return. Conservative members from Quebec proved that their party line is more important than their regions' needs.

Once again, these members have proven that those who are members of governing parties in Canada tend to close their eyes and forget about standing up for the people they represent. This time, I hope that Conservative members from Quebec, especially the members for Pontiac, Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and Jonquière—Alma, as well as the independent member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, will recognize that they must put their regions' interests before their party's interests. I hope that they will support Quebec regions and the young people who live there.

It will come as no surprise to anyone in this House that the regions of Quebec, like many regions in other Canadian provinces, are in the midst of an economic crisis, and they were already struggling long before the current financial crisis hit. Northern Ontario and British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island are all regions that have been struggling economically for a number of years.

The lumber crisis that has been affecting many places for over five years now, a crisis that the Conservative government has done virtually nothing to address apart from handing out a few scraps, was the first indication of the deteriorating economic situation. Meanwhile, the auto and oil and gas industries are rolling in billions of dollars. Our regions are going through a terrible crisis that the Conservative government is completely ignoring. I can only hope that my colleagues across the floor will show a little humility this time by listening to the cry for help from the regions and the young people who live there.

The regions are in a period of economic distress, which of course only increases the trend of out-migration from the regions. Indeed, the further we go from the main centres, the more the population is declining. It feels as though Quebec is shrinking. The central regions, where people live within 150 km of Montreal or Quebec City, are faring better than the outlying regions. Some places are beginning to feel the devitalization, with the exodus of young people and the aging of the population.

Youth out-migration and rural depopulation are not new phenomena, but for decades, they were counterbalanced by high birth rates. With the drastic drop in the birth rate, the challenge now is to keep our young people in the regions and encourage even more to settle there. Time is of the essence, because this trend has continued since 2002 and the situation is getting worse in some places.

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At present, the population is declining in six of the seventeen administrative regions in Quebec: Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Bas-Saint-Laurent, Côte-Nord, Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Mauricie (except for Trois-Rivières) and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean. For residents of the Saguenay, a yellow bus filled with young people leaving the region for Quebec City and Montreal every week is the symbol of this decline. Given the statistics, I ask myself how my Conservative colleagues from this region can justify opposing Bill C-288.

My area in particular—from Ferme-Neuve to Notre-Dame-du-Laus, Mont-Laurier, L'Annonciation and Labelle—has been hit hard by the forestry crisis over the past four years.

• (1110)

Every day young graduates leave before they start a family. A region that loses its young people is condemned to certain death, in the medium or the long term. To make matters worse, the departure of a young person often sets off a chain reaction and many more young people leave their regions.

Young people who leave the regions to study in Quebec City or Montreal will establish ties, friendships and a network. It is more likely that, at the end of their studies, they will be more inclined to settle in their new environment rather than returning to the regions where they grew up. That is even more likely because, depending on where they came from, it is very likely that a good number of their friends have also left the region and moved to a major centre. I personally know a number of families who have been affected. The parents have quickly decided to follow their children so they will not be too far from their grandchildren. I ask you, what is left when a region loses its youth and its baby boomers?

The regions need young people, especially skilled young people. With youth out-migration, the population ages faster and regions become less vital. The exodus of skilled individuals reduces the average education level of the people left behind, which undermines regions' ability to innovate. These factors affect the potential for development and could send the regions into a downward spiral that will ultimately destroy them.

Regional economies were traditionally based on the extraction and primary processing of natural resources such as wood and ore. These sectors require a large, but unskilled and uneducated workforce. Since outlying regions have few openings for skilled workers, young people with post-secondary education often leave the regions for the city and stay there, because they cannot find suitable work in their home region. Gone are the days when resource regions could prosper based solely on extracting natural resources for primary processing elsewhere. In order to grow, the regions will have to look to technology and develop their processing industry more.

It is often said that one reason for the problems outlying regions are facing is the fact that people there do not tend to start up businesses, but this is completely false. There are as many business start-ups per capita in outlying regions as in central regions. Today, a number of entrepreneurs are looking to lengthen the production chain by marketing products made from the resources they are already using. Others are using their expertise in raw material extraction to produce specialized equipment or are creating businesses in fields that have nothing to do with natural resources,

such as fibre optics in the Lower St. Lawrence, video lottery terminals in Gaspé, diamond cutting in Matane or plastic parts in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

In 25 years, outlying regions' dependence on the primary sector decreased by half. There were nearly four times more processing companies in outlying regions in 2001 than in 1975. In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, only 11% of jobs were in the primary sector in 2001, compared to 24% in 1975. In Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the rate declined from 10% to 6% over the same period. On the North Shore, it went from 19% to 9%.

The trend is certainly real but inadequate. In terms of jobs, these companies are still not managing to recoup the revenues lost in the resource sectors. Compared with those in the rest of Quebec, processing companies in the outlying regions are clearly growing less quickly and have lower survival rates. Even though companies in the regions have certain advantages—the lower cost of land, their proximity to resources—they also face difficulties that are peculiar to them.

One of these difficulties is the lack of skilled labour. There is less of it in the regions than in the big urban centres. This is a major hindrance to the development of secondary industry and high-tech. In all the studies that have been done, many companies said they would only be able to stay in their region if they did not grow very much. So long as the business stays small, they can do the work requiring professional or technical skills themselves. If the company grows, they have to hire skilled workers and the difficulty of finding them in their region might force the company to move.

The federal government is not responsible for education and workforce training. However, the shortage of skilled workers in the regions is not solely a matter of training. In fact, the young people from the regions are no less educated than those in the big cities.

• (1115)

The problem is rather that young people from the regions do not live there any more. There is an out-migration of young people and skilled workers. The federal government could help solve this problem without interfering in any of Quebec's jurisdictions. That is the purpose of Bill C-288.

I want to turn now to the purpose and effects of the bill. Its principal purpose is to attract young graduates to the regions in order to help solve two main problems: the exodus of young people and the serious shortage of skilled labour. The bill gives a tax credit to young graduates who settle in a resource region and take up a job there. According to the current wording, this credit would be 40% of an eligible graduate's salary in his or her first year in the region, up to a maximum of \$8,000.

As the Province of Quebec has shown, it is, once again, more in touch with the regions' needs and realities. In 2003, Pauline Marois, then-finance minister in the Landry cabinet, introduced a similar tax credit. Since then, the program has been very popular and has delivered excellent results. In 2003, the first year it was available, over 2,500 young people benefited. In 2004, that number rose to 10,000 young people per year and has remained at that level ever since. Over 1,200 young people have come back to Abitibi-Témiscamingue, over 1,600 to the lower St. Lawrence, over 800 to Gaspésie—Îles de la Madeleine, over 1,000 to the north shore, and over 4,000 to Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

The tremendous increase in the number of young people who benefited from the program during its first and second years suggests that some 7,000 young people would not otherwise be living in the regions of Quebec. That means that 7,000 young people would have taken their first jobs in Montreal or Quebec City instead of in the regions, and would have started their families in an urban centre instead of in the regions. One of the big reasons they decided to settle in the regions is Quebec's tax credit, a measure that cost the province only about \$30 million out of a \$60 billion budget, or about \$5,000 per young person.

My colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and I toured eastern Quebec during the week of March 16, 2009, to raise public awareness concerning Bill C-288. That tour has clearly shown that this tax credit is very necessary and very welcome to the local elected officials and all the groups we met. Whether in Chicoutimi, Escoumins, Forestville, Baie-Comeau, Matane, Trois-Pistoles, Rimouski or Rivière-du-Loup, not one regional stakeholder we met with indicated any objection to this Bloc Québécois initiative. Every single one of them talked about the advantages of the tax credit put in place by Quebec and they all fervently hope that Ottawa will bring in such a tax credit. Once again, the Bloc has shown that it is very much attuned to the reality of Quebec and the relevance of the Bloc cannot be disputed.

During our tour, we met with Carrefour jeunesse emploi representatives, leaders of student organizations, mayors and municipal councillors, MLAs and MPs, representatives of local development centres, regional conferences of elected officials, chambers of commerce, unions, the UPA, representatives from youth round tables, youth homes, youth employment centres and many others, and they all expressed their unwavering support for our initiative.

In closing, I would like to ask all members of this House to study Bill C-288 carefully, and to think about the future of the regions of Quebec and Canada. The estimated cost of this measure, \$270 million, is very minimal compared to the potential benefits for the future of our young people and our regions.

• (1120)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the member as she was indicating the basic objective of the bill. If I understood her correctly, she said it is to attract young people, graduates, to regions that are economically depressed. It proposes that there be tax credits to settle in an area that is exceptionally inadequate. It seems to me that the basic problem with the bill is that the list of regions that it labels as

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economically depressed is based on a nearly 30 year old piece of legislation that is called the Regional Development Incentives Act.

The bill actually labels an area like Saskatchewan, which currently has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada, as economically depressed, while an area like Windsor or even where I come from, the Waterloo region, where the unemployment rate has risen dramatically in the last number of months, is not considered to be in any condition of distress or in her words would be fine economically. To me, that seems rather bizarre. I wonder if the member would like to comment on that.

Finally, has she or will she submit the bill to the Parliamentary Budget Officer for costing and analysis, and then, will she share those findings with the House?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer my colleague's second question first. As I said in the preamble to my speech, this bill was introduced in the previous Parliament by my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. It went through all three stages and even reached the Senate. It was also submitted to the parliamentary budget officer for costing.

I will go back to his first question. This measure has been implemented in Quebec, and I see no reason why Canada could not implement this bill. The bill refers to “designated regions” mentioned in the act. In committee, the members will be able to discuss how this bill could apply to every province in Canada. In Quebec, we have already come up with the formula, and the legislation has been working very well there since it was passed in 2004.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want the member to know that I will be supporting the bill and will encourage my colleagues to do so as well.

We are in very difficult times. Although this is not a job creator, it is a job sustainer. I am sure members can pick lots of little holes in it, but the important thing is that it is moving in the right direction. We should be encouraging these kinds of initiatives that received parliamentary support in the last Parliament. It gives us an opportunity to fine-tune them and deal with some of the minor problems.

I want the member to comment further on the success the Quebec government experienced in terms of the 2,500 people who took advantage of that program. It is reflective of the potential benefits.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments, and I see that he is also very much in favour of the bill. I thank him and ask that he convince all his colleague. It is very important that this measure take effect.

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As I mentioned a bit earlier, we have been making a tour of Quebec, which will end next week. All the stakeholders we have met with in our regions have said that this measure is needed both to keep young people in the regions and to stop the hemorrhaging that is happening when they leave.

I come from a region that is being affected by youth out-migration, and I can tell you about the negative effects it is having. Towns and municipalities are closing. When young people leave the region, they probably leave as a family, and that means children leave. If our regions lose families and children, then their lifeblood is drained away, and schools, services and churches have to be closed. Eventually, the municipality closes its doors.

• (1125)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for a very quick question.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for her excellent speech. I would like her to tell me something.

I, too, am from a rural area. The youth employment centres have put in place some initiatives, such as Place aux jeunes, to combat the rural exodus by youth. We are finding it difficult. In fact, with regard to international productivity and globalization, our companies must be more productive, improve, incorporate more technologies, and have more specialists to help companies be more competitive globally.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this and how this bill can truly help rural regions to reverse their decline and especially to halt the exodus of young people.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle has less than 30 seconds to reply.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, that is not much time, but I can give an example.

In my RCM, which has felt the effects of the forestry crisis over the past few years, we are trying to establish secondary and tertiary processing. To that end, we need skilled young people and we must keep them by adopting measures such as this one. If we cannot retain our young people, then we will be unable to develop such secondary and tertiary processing.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on Bill C-288, concerning a proposed new income tax credit that would be restricted to a select number of graduates taking employment in a limited number of designated regions.

For background, it should be noted that this bill is nearly identical to private member's Bill C-207 from the previous Parliament. In that Parliament, the all-party finance committee had an opportunity to engage in the study of that bill. After concluding that study, which uncovered a number of serious flaws, the majority of the finance committee declined to support the bill.

Like its predecessor, Bill C-288 contains serious flaws and does not merit the support of this House. Among them, it is poorly

targeted. It creates unfairness in the tax system. It proposes a flawed, short-term band-aid for a long-term problem. There is a \$600 million per year cost. It represents a substantial loss of tax revenue at a time of significant economic uncertainty.

One of my first concerns is that this proposal haphazardly selects regions in which new graduates would be eligible for the credit. The proposed credit would be limited to new graduates who take up work in a designated region as defined in the Regional Development Incentives Act. This term is supposed to refer to a region in which, and I quote the act, "existing opportunities for productive employment in the region are exceptionally inadequate". The problem with using this act to define regions for this kind of tax measure is that the list of regions in it is seriously outdated. In fact, this list has not been amended or updated in nearly 30 years, October 1981 to be exact.

I think most rational people would agree that Canada's labour market has changed significantly since the early 1980s and that defining regions in this way would poorly target a proposal that is supposed to address current labour market conditions. To illustrate this point, I will draw the House's attention to the fact that the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, in their entirety, are included on that list. If we think about that for a moment, this proposal would enact legislation that would permanently label the economies of Saskatchewan and Manitoba as "exceptionally inadequate".

Even a brief study of the state of provincial economies in Canada would quickly reveal that such a statement is ludicrous. First, both Saskatchewan and Manitoba have unemployment rates well below the current national average, with employment opportunities much stronger compared to other parts of the country. Second, both Saskatchewan and Manitoba have been recognized as the strongest economies in Canada.

For example, a March 2009 Conference Board of Canada report declared:

No province is immune to the effects of the global recession, but the momentum in the domestic economies of Saskatchewan and Manitoba will cushion the blow from the downturn.... Saskatchewan will again post the strongest growth among the provinces.... Manitoba is also in a good position to ride out the global recession.

Clearly, this is a serious failing of this proposal.

Another deficiency of Bill C-288 is its complete failure to identify the specific skill sets it is trying to retain in these designated regions. In fact the credit does not target any particular skills or professions and it is available to all recent graduates. What is the rationale for a tax credit that provides incentives to work in select regions that have ample employment opportunities and that is totally disconnected from the actual skill requirements that each and every region faces?

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This leads me to yet another major concern about this proposal, namely, the unfairness that it would create in the tax system, unfairness manifested through very serious inequities in the tax system between new graduates who work in different regions. The proposed tax relief in Bill C-288 would give a select few an extremely generous tax break. Effectively, the select taxpayers qualifying for the proposed credit earning around \$33,400 would be completely exempt from federal tax. On the other hand, every single other graduate earning at least \$33,400 would have to pay almost \$2,700 per year in federal taxes. How is that fair?

• (1130)

Under this proposal, two people working at similar jobs making the same salary would face completely different tax burdens because they work a few kilometres apart. Canadians expect a tax system that treats them fairly. To the average Canadian, the inequity proposed in Bill C-288 would be completely unacceptable.

Another major concern with this proposal is that it fails to provide a long-term solution to the problem that it is actually trying to address. People choose where to settle and work based on a wide range of considerations. While special tax relief for a select group of graduates may temporarily influence choices regarding where to settle and work, it is only a band-aid. What happens when they are no longer eligible for the credit?

All of this points to a significant concern about the long- and short-term benefits and the impact of this proposal. Indeed, the only thing of which we can be certain is that this proposal would be restricted to a select group of taxpayers at a very significant cost.

This brings me to my final concern with this proposal, and that is the price tag. The proposed tax credit would result in \$600 million per year in lost tax revenue at a time of significant economic uncertainty. That is \$600 million for a tax cut that most likely would not result in any new jobs for new graduates.

We are facing very difficult and challenging economic times that have resulted in some difficult budgetary choices. One such choice was the deliberate choice to run a short-term temporary deficit in order to provide stimulus to the economy in order to protect and create Canadian jobs. However, we understand that many Canadians, recalling the legacies of deficits past, have reservations and concerns about deficits, as they should. That is why we initiated a plan to move back into surplus as the economy recovers. We also looked to ensure that all measures undertaken during this period would provide the greatest benefit possible for the overall Canadian economy.

The Bloc's prebudget submission included this proposal that we are discussing today. We reviewed it and determined, for the reasons mentioned previously in my remarks, that it did not meet this core objective.

Instead, we pursued an economic action plan that includes significant measures, one that will boost confidence, economic growth and create and maintain jobs. This includes up to \$200 billion to improve access to financing for consumers and businesses, \$20 billion in personal income tax relief, \$12 billion in infrastructure investments, \$7.8 billion to stimulate housing construction, and much more than that.

Bill C-288 undermines this effort by advocating a flawed and restrictive proposal that will do little to promote economic growth. It is highly unlikely that a single new job for new graduates would be created.

I encourage members to follow the example of the House of Commons finance committee in the last Parliament and reject this proposal.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, members are free to vote as they wish on this bill. As party critic, I plan to vote in favour. It does have some shortcomings, but it is, overall, a good bill.

First, the Liberal Party believes that strong regions make for a strong national economy. This bill will help those who want to go back to their region after completing their post-secondary studies. Even if the tax credit is offered for just one year, once people are settled in a region, chances are they will stay there.

[*English*]

On balance, this is a good law but there are a couple of weaknesses that might be addressed in committee. The definition of depressed region is perhaps too broad. Much of the county is included in that, other than the three, four or five largest cities. Maybe there is a way to more directly target regions that might genuinely be regarded as depressed. However, that is the kind of issue that can be taken up in committee.

Although the bill is essentially the same as Bill C-207 from a previous Parliament, there is a major difference in terms of the context in which we live, that is say that we now live in a time of economic crisis at a time when the government, through its budget, has provided inadequate support for the economy. We voted for it and pushed it through quickly because it was the only game in town but we saw many weaknesses in the budget.

On top of the overall positive virtues of this bill in general, the fact that it would inject more money into the economy at a time of economic crisis and at a time when the Prime Minister is now talking about totally withdrawing support for the economy in two years, it would, in an indirect way, have a positive effect.

I might take a little time on that topic because the timing of the withdrawal of the fiscal support by the government is an important issue. On page A-1 of the *Globe and Mail* today there is an article. It quotes at some length one of Canada's best economists, I would say, in the private sector, Derek Holt, the vice-president of Scotia Capital Inc. For the purpose of disclosure, 10 years ago, when I was at the Royal Bank, he worked for me and I came to know him to be a person of great abilities.

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Derek Holt is quoted as saying the following in the *Globe and Mail* today, “There are many reasons to believe Canada won't recover first”, and he gives a few reasons. First, we are more “exposed to the U.S. economy than most”. Second, “the collapsing auto sector is more important to Canada's economy than it is to the American economy”. Third, “a simple rebound in commodity prices is not enough to pull Canada out of the doldrums, as some in the government have...argued”.

He goes on to say:

That's because a rise in commodity prices will bulk up the profits of existing producers, but won't do anything to bring back cancelled investments unless they stay high for a long time.

You need a global recovery to get a Canadian recovery.

This is the critical point that relates to this bill. He says:

Until that happens, Ottawa is best to let deficits run their course and do their work in reviving demand, rather than try to fight them by curtailing spending before recovery is well in hand, he added.

he said.

The greater danger lies in removing fiscal stimulus prematurely in succumbing to pressure to rein in deficits. Japan is a lesson in that regard, as it prematurely removed fiscal stimulus on two occasions during its long-lived crisis, and their economy immediately deteriorated on both occasions.

Given the apparent determination of the Prime Minister to remove the fiscal stimulus very quickly, irrespective, it seems, of the state of the Canadian economy or based on what most would regard as his mistaken belief or unlikely belief that Canada will somehow snap back first all by itself, the additional reason to support this bill is that it would provide additional fiscal stimulus for the economy.

One would hope that the government will not be the government in two years' time when these matters may come to pass but one never knows for sure. For all those reasons I, personally, and I believe many of my colleagues, fully intend to support the bill.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Toronto for speaking in favour of the bill. I would like to comment on the parliamentary secretary's statements. Earlier, he said that the bill did not make sense and had some major shortcomings, such as the fact that it includes Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I have news for the parliamentary secretary: maybe he should check his facts, because rural regions in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are the ones that are really suffering. Their population is dropping faster than anywhere else in Canada.

Contrary to what the parliamentary secretary said, things are not as bad in Quebec as they are elsewhere in Canada. Take Newfoundland and Labrador, for example: right now, working people are fleeing the province, headed for Toronto and the western provinces.

Unfortunately, the same is true of New Brunswick: people are moving to the western provinces. The Government of New Brunswick has made an effort to bring workers back home and stem the flow of people toward large urban centres at the expense of the province's population, towns and regions.

Why introduce a bill like C-288? Why is the Bloc member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord introducing such a bill in Parliament?

First, as my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle said earlier, we introduced it before. And the bill was supported by the House and by all parties, except the party in government, which does not seem to understand the meaning of regional development. The whole model of regional development has to be re-examined. In a time of crisis, especially, it is vital to ask questions and to realize that the established economic model undergoes cycles of major crisis every 10, 20 or 30 years.

Perhaps the entire model must be re-examined. Bill C-288 gives us a fine opportunity to examine where we live in this country and the governments' desire to have us live throughout the country, including in the regions.

I have heard the government talking, for example, about wanting to ensure Canada's sovereignty in the far north and especially further north than at the moment, because we must defend our territory. In the meantime, the government is allowing the regions and areas communities to be drained of their inhabitants. Rural communities are almost being left on their own.

What is the effect of the exodus of young people to major centres or more populated regions?

First, this is an entirely unique phenomenon. The regions deemed to be losing inhabitants are significantly short of skilled labour. By skilled labour, I mean doctors, nurses, teachers and other skilled people. There is a desperate need for skilled labour in very specialized areas. Unfortunately, the regions do not manage to meet these needs. In Quebec, thanks to a program of tax credits for young graduates returning to the regions, we have managed, despite problems, not to stop the exodus, but to slow it.

I have seen another phenomenon. The parliamentary secretary was speaking earlier about unfairness to major centres in that it was totally unfair for a graduate to get a tax credit for going to live in a region when a graduate from the same university not moving to a region did not. I have news for him. In order to attract doctors, among others, to the regions there are programs all across the country to encourage doctors to settle in the regions. Some provinces have even gone so far as to lower the salaries of doctors who remain in the city compared to salaries for those who move to outlying regions.

I think this is an excellent example of an initiative that has allowed the regions to seek out the minimum level of services they needed. I said the minimum level, because the problem is still not completely solved, and it will take some time before that can be done. Perhaps more rigorous, draconian measures will be needed in order to fill the positions available in the regions.

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• (1145)

We must bear in mind that the regions also pay for training people and, like the rest of the population, people there are entitled to the same services under Quebec's health and social services legislation. That legislation clearly establishes that everyone is entitled to the same level of services to the extent possible and based on the ability of governments.

Over the past 30 or 40 years, the regions have seen an exodus to big cities. This exodus has devitalized rural communities and all the regions. Unfortunately, governments have not done enough to respond to this exodus. I would like to talk about the regional development model. We should think about what Scotland and the Nordic countries like Norway are doing to populate the land and encourage people to return to the regions. I am referring to deconcentration, but not decentralization. Decentralization has been used in the past to allow governments to offload the services they no longer wanted to provide. Although they offloaded services, they did not necessarily transfer any money to all the provinces. People are therefore a little skeptical when it comes to decentralization. Additional powers have been dumped on the regions, although they were not necessarily given the financial resources or money they needed to fulfill their new responsibilities.

The model used in the past was a model of concentration. Governments concentrated their administration in the capitals. Unfortunately, this model is still prevalent. Our review of cuts to the federal public service since 2004 indicates that 80% were made in the regions. While the number of public servants was increasing significantly in Ottawa, federal jobs in the regions were being eliminated. I am not saying that it is any different at the provincial level. I do not have any statistics, but I am convinced that, in the provinces, there is a strong tendency to concentrate power in each capital. Today, with the communication techniques at our disposal, it would be very easy to deconcentrate responsibilities to the regions. It is not just a question of decentralizing but also of deconcentrating the government administration so that public servants have as much contact as possible with the population of Canada and Quebec.

If we continue with our current approach to regional development, it is obvious that we will not be able to stem the regional exodus and to have people settle in the regions as they should. In some countries, the deconcentration of power has led to the economic revitalization of the regions. If a funding department is moved from the capital to a region, there is a strong possibility that companies will establish themselves near the department in question because it gives money to businesses.

To conclude, in my opinion, it is very important for this bill to pass. This could be a first step for the federal government. It does not run counter to what is happening in Quebec and could even be complementary. It is up to each of the provinces to identify the regions it wants to benefit from the bill when it is adopted.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to stand in the House and debate private member's Bill C-288. I want to make one comment before I begin. My discussion in the next 10 minutes will be focused on the bill in front

of us. It will not be all over the place, as was the discussion of the member from the Liberal Party a few minutes ago.

The proposal in Bill C-288 is to grant preferential treatment for a select group of new graduates in designated regions. If the bill becomes law, it would set out different regions that selected new graduates would work in and they would receive a benefit. As previous speakers have noted, this bill was originally introduced in the last Parliament as Bill C-207, where after an in-depth study that exposed the bill's numerous shortcomings it was soundly rejected by the House of Commons finance committee.

As a member of the finance committee in both the previous and the current Parliament, I can say that the bill was thoroughly discussed.

It was revealed in the last Parliament that there were a number of major problems with that bill. In fact, the Liberal Party members of that committee also felt the same way and had gutted the bill at that particular time.

Therefore, I was a little bit surprised when the member from the official opposition got up today and said that party was in favour of it. However, he did qualify it by saying that some people are in favour of it. Hopefully the information will get out to all their members and they will see the light of day and not support the bill going forward.

Nothing has changed in the interim. Essentially, this is exactly the same proposal as in the last Parliament, with exactly the same flaws. As a result, I and the rest of the Conservative members cannot support the bill.

As previous speakers have outlined, there are many problems with this proposal. They include the following.

While the proposal attempts to compel new graduates to settle in designated regions, it does nothing to create new employment opportunities or economic development in these regions.

On this point, all this bill does is say that an area is under-serviced or needs help. It does not create any jobs or provide any incentive for business to create jobs. It simply identifies the area. This bill would say to a new graduate that an area is underserved and it would ask the new graduate to stay there in exchange for an \$8,000 tax credit. In theory, the bill would try to attract back home those people who are leaving a region that is under-serviced.

This bill does not do any of that. It does not provide young people the opportunity they are looking for.

I have two young people of my own. One will be graduating from high school this May and will be entering university in the fall to do her four years. We are from Burlington, in southern Ontario. That region will not be identified, so my daughter will not get the same benefit as somebody else in her graduating class because that person happens to be from a designated region. There is also no guarantee that they will have a job to go to, yet the taxpayer of Canada would still give them a tax credit for living there. I do not think that is accurate.

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It is poorly targeted, and no particular skills or occupations are singled out. The list of designated regions is based on a list that is nearly 30 years old and outdated. For instance, it lists Saskatchewan and Manitoba as economically depressed regions.

Mr. Speaker, let us take your home province of Saskatchewan. In terms of any of the economic factors today, we are all suffering from the worldwide recession, of course, and our economic action plan is in place to address that. However, there are areas of this country that are doing better than others, and Saskatchewan is one of those areas. It is unbelievable that this bill would identify it as a designated area.

Let us take the skills and occupation aspect and consider, for example, a person who graduates with a degree in fine arts, maybe performing arts. I am a big fan of performing arts. Last Friday, we turned the sod on a new performing arts centre for Burlington, which this government has helped with \$4 million in support.

• (1155)

However, my point is this: If I have gone through school for performing arts and want to become an actor but my area is underserved, I can go home to that region whether there is a job in the performing arts or not and I would be entitled to an \$8,000 tax credit. It does not make any sense that the jobs are not identified. The skill sets are not identified or the occupations that they are looking for.

This is not fair to other regions. It is not fair to other graduates who are not able to attract this tax credit just because they are from a certain area or they move to a certain area.

This country was built on the mobility of labour. People moved to where jobs were available, where growth was happening. In my view, the government cannot have a law or policy that restricts the mobility of labour, that encourages a lack of mobility of labour.

I want to use my own family as an example. When I was very young, my father who was starting out in his career in his early twenties had to make a decision to move from an area of Ontario that was doing okay but was not seeing growth. There were job opportunities eight hours away, an eight-hour drive to the other side of Ontario.

My father made the decision, for the betterment of himself and his family, to make that move, to move to where the job was. That is what the country was built on. That is why people settled the western provinces. That is why there has been growth in Ontario. That is why there is growth in Newfoundland and Labrador; people are coming back to that province because there are opportunities there. People are coming to Saskatchewan these days because there are opportunities in Saskatchewan.

We cannot have the taxpayer of Canada supporting one region over another and trying to keep young people there just for the sake of saying we have young people in the area.

The member from the Bloc talked about every part of the country being deserving of the same level of service. Every graduate of a university, college or training program deserves the same level of treatment as every other graduate. That is why the bill is a flawed concept.

In the previous Parliament, this concept came forward through a private member's bill and made it to the finance committee. The finance committee, through its study of the issue, looked at all the implications of having regions, based on data that is outdated, data that is 30 years old, treating individuals differently from one province to another, from one region within a province to another, that it was just not fair, it was just not accurate, and it is just not the way that Canada has built itself up as the country we have here today.

Mobility of labour is very important to me. This approach does not look at the investments that we have been making into economic development. It is economic development that drives jobs. It is the money we have spent on organizations, whether it be on the east coast or the new southern Ontario development agency. That agency was announced in our economic action plan that was just passed in the House and we are hoping the spending has happened through the other place.

It is these organizations that help businesses and individuals create employment. It is the creation of employment and opportunity that will attract bright young people, the future for our country, the development of our country.

It is that type of investment by this government and by the provinces in their own economic development activities that will support businesses, support individuals by creating new jobs and creating wealth that will attract young folks.

It is not a tax credit. We will not get young people deciding to stay in one region or another because they get a tax credit. Of course they will use it because it is available, but it will not be in their decision-making aspect in terms of why they should go there.

• (1200)

Young people today, including the members of my own family, want an opportunity for growth. They want an opportunity to serve their family.

I cannot support this private member's bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to conclude this time for debate on Bill C-288, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions). During this hour, some of my colleagues and some members of the other parties have said some interesting things about the issues in rural areas. Unfortunately, I was listening to the Conservative member opposite, and I am very sorry to hear him talk that way about rural regions.

In Mauricie, the region of Quebec I represent, 80% of the people are rural dwellers. There are many economic activities in rural areas. Members are aware of the issues related to forestry, tourism—more and more people from urban areas are coming to rural areas to enjoy fishing and hunting and stay at resorts—farming, which is important to rural communities, and manufacturing, which has developed over the years.

We have to provide tools to help rural communities develop. Quebec has a number of organizations, such as our local development centres. There is also the CFDC, which is under federal jurisdiction and plays an important local development role in these communities. We have also set up youth employment centres, which are based in rural communities and responsible for stimulating the economy and making sure that young people can find work in the community. A lot has been done to make sure that our rural communities maintain their economic vitality. Lately, people have been moving to urban centres. A few years ago, rural communities were in decline and losing population. We had to deal with two problems: an aging population and the exodus of young people.

A lot is being done. People have been working hard together to achieve incredible results. In Berthier—Maskinongé, RCMs are working with socio-economic groups and regional development councils. All of these organizations are working together for local development. They are setting up socio-economic development projects that respond to regional needs, interests, resource potential and people. Development tools introduced by the Government of Quebec, such as the Pacte rural, have provided rural municipalities with a development budget.

The policies set out in this bill would encourage students to return to the regions—

• (1205)

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé will have six minutes when the House resumes consideration of this bill.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA-EFTA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the States of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland), the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Republic of Iceland, the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Kingdom of Norway and the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Swiss Confederation, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my friend and colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, on all the hard work he has done on this issue.

At first blush, when we talk about a free-trade agreement with countries like Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, many Canadians might be a bit confused and wonder how we could have a problem with it. In fact, the countries I just named are very close to us historically and in many other respects. My colleague said as

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much, and another colleague from Halifax was able to prove it: Bill C-2 will destroy Canada's shipbuilding industry. Although I congratulate my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster, I also want to thank the people across Canada, from British Columbia to Nova Scotia, including the people from the Lévis shipyards. In fact, these shipyards are still known as the Lauzon yards, even though the City of Lauzon amalgamated with Lévis quite some time ago.

It is sad to see how the Conservative government is incapable of paying attention to detail in its work. It is as though once something fits with its ideology, the government refuses to believe that there could be any problem. In fact, this bill poses a major problem, even though other members who will vote for it to support the Conservatives said there were good things in it. Obviously, every time we can look at expanding certain sectors, some good will come of it. But we are able to walk and chew gum at the same time and we are able to negotiate an agreement with these countries without compromising a vital Canadian industry. And that is what we must do.

The Americans have never had any qualms about this. In the United States, ships had to be built there in order to access domestic waters. Some would call this protectionism, but the Americans think it is only normal, and this is part of what is protected every time the Americans sign an agreement in this matter. How is that Canada is the only country incapable of including a similar provision to protect itself, in light of the evidence that Norway in particular will take the lion's share, while we lose thousands of jobs in a sector that could be strategically important in the very short term?

[*English*]

It is an honour for me to speak to Bill C-2. I congratulate my colleague, the member for Parliament for Burnaby—New Westminster, for the titanic job he has done on this, and there is no pun on the word "titanic" as we talk about shipbuilding.

As people hear us speak on this issue today, they will be as surprised as we were that the Conservatives were unable to listen to the voices of the men and women who work in shipbuilding across our great country. Canada is the only country in the world that people can talk about stretching from coast to coast to coast because it borders on three oceans, the Arctic, the Pacific and the Atlantic. Shipping and shipbuilding have been integral in building our country.

We realize that shipbuilding industry in Canada, from British Columbia all the way to Nova Scotia, passing by Lévis-Lauzon, where the Davie shipbuilding operation is located and recently bought by some Norwegians, is in a great deal of trouble. That is why it is so disappointing and surprising that the government would be selling out our industry in that regard.

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It is often heard, when we deal with trade issues, that some parts of the bill will be good, particular when one rhymes off the list of countries involved. In fact, it can raise eyebrows when we say that we find offence with the treaty with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. However, the government is throwing out a very important industry. It will be killing our shipbuilding industry if this agreement goes forward, notably to the profit of Norway, which has become a powerhouse in this field. This is most disturbing.

We know Conservative ideology. The argument of the Conservatives is any trade agreement is good in and of itself and we do not have to look at the details. However, that is precisely what we are called upon to do in the House. We are here to look at details, see how things will affect Canadians, go forward when they meet a certain number of criteria, including the fact that it will not take away Canadian jobs, and hold back when it will produce an undesired result such as the one I just described. However, they are not doing that. They are pushing it forward full throttle.

In this case, it is even more disappointing to hear that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this agreement. When we know how many jobs are involved with a shipbuilding concern like Davie in Lauzon, I have a great deal of difficulty understanding why the Bloc Québécois supports the bill.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

We know how many jobs are at risk and will be lost if we sign this agreement, including those at the Davie shipyards in Lauzon-Lévis. I simply cannot understand why the Bloc Québécois members are supporting this.

I listened carefully to their arguments. They claim that there are other areas of activity, particularly the pharmaceutical industry, that could benefit from a levelling of agreements with a country like Switzerland. I have no problem with that. It is probably true. However, when such an agreement is reached, we must look at the overall picture and judge accordingly. There is no overriding reason why we should destroy the shipbuilding industry and Quebec's shipyards. I just mentioned the Davie shipyard in Lauzon, but there is also the very active Ocean Group Inc., which is located just a little further downstream from Quebec City on the north shore. There is no reason we should destroy this industry in Quebec. Those who vote in favour of this agreement with the European Free Trade Association will have a lot of explaining to do later on.

It is not unusual that the Liberals would vote for it. Over the past three years—this is the Conservatives' fourth year in power—their bootlicking has defied imagination. There is not one subject on which the Liberal Party has taken a stand. It does not have principles. It does not believe in anything, except for its own opportunism.

Therefore, that the Liberals would sell out again and vote for the EFTA agreement does not surprise us in the least. They have supported the Conservative government at least 70 times. We are becoming increasingly used to their conduct. At present, they have a right-leaning leader. He is a man who used the prestige of his position at Harvard University to support the war in Iraq. In some of his writings, he attempts to justify the use of torture on human beings.

We will see what the Liberals do with the gun registry. Probably the same thing they did to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, an important Canadian law that had been around for about 100 years. They supported the Conservatives, who scrapped it, and they also voted with the Conservatives to eliminate the right of women to receive equal pay for work of equal value.

That is the sad reality of just a few months with their new leader, a rightist who has shifted to the right. He should at least be identified and named so that the public clearly knows that the party whose name sounds like the word liberty, the Liberal Party, has become a weak version of the Conservative Party with its right-leaning leader.

Therefore, we are not surprised to see the Liberals rising to vote with the Conservatives time after time. What is surprising and disappointing this time is that, despite the arguments they made, the Bloc Québécois is voting with the Conservatives to impose this new agreement on Quebec and Canada that will destroy our marine industry and crush workers across Canada in this crucial sector.

In closing, I would like to thank and acknowledge the courage of all the men and women who wrote to us asking that we keep our resolve and fight this bill. We will continue to support the workers, to condemn the shift to the right by the Liberals who systematically support the Conservatives, and to lament the fact that, this time, the Bloc Québécois is throwing in its lot with the Conservatives to the detriment of the workers in Quebec and Canada.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for adding to the speeches we have made in this corner of the House on this important international agreement. As he pointed out at the beginning of his speech, it is hard to imagine that we would not want to have a treaty with countries like Norway, Switzerland and Iceland and that there are many reasons why we share things in common. I think many Canadians celebrated the rise to power recently of the first openly lesbian prime minister in the world, the head of Iceland. This is an indication of the kinds of values we share with the people of Iceland when it comes to the full equality of gay and lesbian citizens.

These are the kinds of countries we want to do business. However, the carve-out for our shipbuilding industry is not part of this agreement. Other countries that have negotiated with these countries have managed to negotiate a carve-out. In my riding of Burnaby—Douglas, British Columbia, many people at one time made their living in the shipbuilding industry, which was largely based in North Vancouver. We have seen it dwindle away as Canadian ships and Canadian ferries are built overseas. This agreement will only lead to a further decline in the shipbuilding industry in British Columbia.

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Could the member comment further about the kinds of countries that we want to have agreements with and why, when there is a concern about a particular industry, Canada would not have sought a carve-out of the industry from this kind of agreement?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise to us that the Conservatives would continue to support every possible trade deal, no matter what is in it and no matter how much it hurts Canada. Part of their ideology is that trade, in and of itself, is a good thing so they can sign any deal.

To answer the question of my colleague, I would give the example of the Colombia trade deal that has been put in place now. When it caused a great deal of reaction among thinking people who looked at the human rights record of the current government there, it was changed so the current government, which has killed many trade unionists, would be obliged to pay a fine when a trade unionist was killed. That was the Conservatives' way of leavening the proposed agreement with Colombia.

It does not surprise members, I am sure, to learn that the New Democratic Party is strongly opposed to that agreement. I suspect that since the Conservatives are for it, it will mean the Liberals are for it. The Liberals are for whatever the Conservatives are for because they are cut from the same cloth. On this end, we will continue to look at issues that involve protecting Canadian jobs. That does not mean protectionism, but if Americans are capable of protecting their shipbuilding industry, if there can be carve-outs in these agreements, why is it not possible for Canada to do the same thing?

Why is it necessary for us to adopt an agreement with the European Free Trade Association that will undermine the Canadian shipbuilding industry, indeed will kill the Canadian shipbuilding industry, and will hurt workers from British Columbia to Nova Scotia, including an important shipbuilding operation in Lévis-Lauzon, Quebec?

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, contained in letters from workers in Lévis and other places across Canada are some heartfelt concerns. The thing that strikes me is they are appealing to us to appeal to the Liberals because they do not want to wind up on EI, which the Liberals gutted in 1995. The Liberals set in place the rules that have excluded people from EI today. This is a huge irony.

Has the member seen some of these heartbreaking letters?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that at the end of the day, every time we talk about a lost job, we talk about a family. We are talking about individuals who are having a tough time.

We are also forgetting that in killing the shipbuilding industry, the Conservative-Liberal alliance party, and people can work out the acronym, is ensuring that the steel industry, in places such as Hamilton in particular, will have few places to sell its steel. It is a connectedness in the economy that the Conservatives have never been able to understand.

Yes, I have looked at those moving letters from men and women who work in those jobs and who simply do not understand how their government, with the culpable complicity of the Liberals, is selling

them down the river. Why are we so incapable in the House of doing the same thing that has been done in other countries that have signed similar agreements, which is to carve out the section that will protect this key industry?

My colleagues from British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and I am from Quebec, have worked very hard to try and preserve the industry, to avoid the error of this trade agreement. We have stood and spoken to the issue any number of times.

Unfortunately the NDP, for the time being, does not have the plurality of votes in the House that it would require to block this mistake, and it will go to go through again. The Conservatives have an ideology and the Liberals believe nothing. The Liberals will vote with the Conservatives because they do not believe in anything.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can my colleague from Outremont give us a sense of how many jobs may be affected if this bill passes? Once the Conservative Party is history, as it surely will be one day, does the member think that it will be too late to revive shipbuilding in Canada?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, in terms of direct employment, shipyards across Canada still employ several thousand people. If we sign this agreement, all of those jobs will be in danger because Norway will be able to take over the lion's share of our market. Except for some minor repair work, this will be the end of Canada's shipbuilding industry. We have been building ships here for 400 years, but this agreement could ring the death knell of a major industry that provides direct employment to thousands of people.

Some people tend to forget what is going on for my colleague from Hamilton, where they make steel. One of the basic ingredients in stainless steel is nickel, which is produced in the region represented by the member who just spoke, the name of his riding being a clear indication.

Jobs in mines and the steel industry could be lost if this agreement is signed. That is why these tragic job losses will reach much farther than jobs in the marine sector. Job losses will also affect the resource sector—mines—the processing sector—manufacturing—and, of course, all related services.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. There being no further members rising, pursuant to the order made on Wednesday, March 25, 2009, it is my duty to put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-2, and of the amendment.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

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Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Wednesday, March 25, 2009, the division stands deferred until later this day at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

* * *

● (1225)

MARINE LIABILITY ACT

The House resumed from February 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-7. It is a subject which I have spoken on in the last Parliament. I do not think this bill is an easy read at all.

As a preamble to this, I would like to indicate to members that when bills like this come before us and they have consequential amendments to other acts, it takes a fair bit of work. I think the other acts to which this bill would make some changes are probably another 200 to 300 pages worth of legislative material.

Some of the changes here are referred to as “consequential” changes. To consider a consequential amendment to another act means that one has to have an understanding of the context in which the changes are being made. More often than not, it would be something that members would have to consult upon.

With that bit of preamble, the conclusion is that this bill has some fundamentals which I think members will understand and they will look to their critics for some explanations. There are some subtleties within the bill which have some important ramifications.

We have just heard the debate on Bill C-2 where we were talking about a free trade agreement and one of the industries being impacted was the shipbuilding industry. Of course, there are many other industries which would have some favourable or unfavourable impacts depending on the sector that one is looking at. It is difficult.

There is no perfect solution, no perfect trade deal, but certainly we are a trading nation. I hope that members will consider that in the same vein that I hope they will consider the provisions of Bill C-7, which is an act to amend the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

This particular bill clarifies the liability rules and regulations with respect to pollution damage from marine vessels and marine transport of passengers. It will provide greater protection for Canadians in the event of marine accidents.

Most of the changes in the act will codify commitments that we have made to international conventions, and there are many. For instance, in my years on the environment committee, in dealing with

the Great Lakes and marine liability with regard to alien invasive species, even that isolated issue turned out to be very complicated when dealing with the international joint agency that deals with matters which occur on waters that are shared with the United States.

Issues such as liability of adventure tourism and adequate coverage in the event of marine oil spills are issues that we believe will need to be examined further by the committee.

Members will know that this is a bill which requires listening to what the experts have to say to get the basis of the areas of concern, the interpretation of some of the consequential amendments, and to look at the precedence as well as some of the risk areas which Canada faces. Certainly, in our history there have been some very serious matters with regard to marine liability issues as they relate to the federal courts.

This bill proposes to clarify and update the liability responsibilities of marine transport with respect to the carriage of passengers and oil pollution damage. The changes proposed will make our marine laws consistent with the international protocols.

Specifically, as I fan through the bill, the critical area is changing the liability limits for commercial and public purpose vessels carrying passengers to a capital limit of \$350,000 per passenger. The amendments further invalidate waivers or any other contracts that might relieve operators of their liability to passengers. The bill also introduces regulations that may require operators of commercial and public purpose vessels to maintain insurance to cover liability to passengers.

● (1230)

As one can see, we can very briefly capsulize the significant changes that are being introduced in this piece of legislation and understand that once we have looked at the legislation in other jurisdictions and the protections referred to in various international covenants or protocols, we can understand why this is an important area for us to update our marine liability legislation.

The changes do make some exceptions for vehicles rescuing shipwrecked or distressed persons, inflatable vessels and vessels using paddles or oars, such as those used in adventure touring. These changes make our legislation consistent with the international convention of liability for maritime claims.

The bill also amends the Marine Liability Act to implement the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution. Compensation funds can compensate those damaged by oil spills up to \$545 million per incident. The damage from oil spills, however, can be much greater. Bill C-7 allows Canada to join the international supplementary fund protocol that increases the maximum compensation for oil spill damages to \$1.5 billion.

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This is obvious in today's world with some of the history that we have had with regard to the transport of cargo, which has environmental risks, such as oil spills. We have seen the implications not only to marine life but in fact to whole ecosystems. The cleanup required is tremendously expensive. This bill would provide the mechanism whereby there would be the so-called insurance to take care of the extraordinary costs that may be incurred.

The international funds derive their funding from levies placed on ports importing oil. Canada's levies would increase to approximately 28¢ per tonne of oil received. So there is a participatory cost, but it is effectively like paying insurance. I believe this is probably a very important element of the bill which I think members would understand should be supported.

Bill C-7 also includes changes such as including damage compensation for bunker oil pollution and amending provisions related to administrative and enforcement of offences.

In the bill the proposed amendment will result largely from a maritime law reform discussion paper that was released by Transport Canada in May 2005 and the subsequent consultations that took place with many stakeholders in all sectors of the marine community.

Just as a side note, I should indicate that we have a large number of pieces of legislation which have had some false starts in this place, not being able to get through all the necessary stages of the legislative process. It is unfortunate because we do have important legislation which in fact is way behind where it should be.

A couple that are very dear to my heart are from our own Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Both the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act are 25 years old and have not been updated. With regard to the Privacy Act, and knowing the problems with identity theft and other cyber crimes, it actually came in when the best computer we could get at the time was the Commodore 64.

We need to be very vigilant about allowing legislation to languish because of Parliament having difficulty in keeping itself focused. We must ensure that essential changes that come before Parliament are dealt with expeditiously, as necessary, and get to committee in order to deal with some of the substantive questions that members will have and should have.

• (1235)

However, when it gets down to it, we cannot afford to delay legislation in this place, particularly when it has had false starts in the past.

With regard to the importance to Canada, Canada does have some of the busiest waterways in the world. For example, each year our waterways pass through 365 million tonnes of international cargo, 7 million tonnes of oil, 7 million tonnes of domestic cargo, 40 million passengers, 16 million automobiles on ferries and 1.5 million people on cruise ships. The liability provisions and the insurance provisions are extremely important to have in place for the protection of all stakeholders, individuals and businesses alike.

The intent of the legislation, according to Transport Canada officials, is to set limits on liability and establish uniformity by balancing the interests of shipowners and other parties. This is

something that we come across all the time. It is very rarely that there is a linear approach to any bill. There are usually other stakeholders who have different forces on them. We saw that in the debate earlier on Bill C-2 with regard to the trade bill. There may be some benefits to one industry, like pharmaceuticals, but the shipbuilding industry would be at a disadvantage.

Balancing the interests of the stakeholders is always very difficult and it takes some time to understand the basic principles. However, in this regard, it is fairly straightforward. I know we will hear from other members about the importance of securing and protecting our transportation obligations with regard to safety, security and protection for all all stakeholders involved.

The government has presented this bill as an environmental protection act. In fact, it is not exactly that. In the event of an oil pollution spill, civil liability of the owner of the vessel, combined with Canada's participation in the international oil pollution compensation funds, can compensate those damages by oil spills by up to \$545 million per incidence, as I said. Damage from the oil spills, however, can be greater and, of course, the supplementary protocol fund can provide that protection up to \$1.5 billion. However, this may not be adequate for oil spills. The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, for example, cost an estimated \$2.5 billion to clean up. It was an extraordinary amount of money but in a very sensitive area. We can understand why there are still other considerations for us with regard to even the coverages that are available. Are they reasonable and does it make for good government?

The government seems to feel that this bill would better protect Canadians from oil spills and assure polluters actually pay for what they do. However, in the real world, whenever there are costs, like the levies for the international protocol and the supplementary coverage, those costs of a business are ultimately passed on to the users of the service and therefore passed on to Canadians. We cannot isolate this and somehow consider, as we often have, that all of a sudden the owners of vessels who transport people or goods and materials are somehow the bad guys and we can dump all the problems off on them. In the real world they exist because they are providing goods and services in the best interests of Canada, which includes in the best interests of its people.

I am not really buying in very strongly about how this would protect Canadians from oil spills, et cetera. It is not an environment bill but it would help to, I guess indirectly, provide the coverage to ensure there is a mitigating factor in terms of being able to remediate any of the damage that may be caused by some of the incidents referred to in the bill.

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•(1240)

The last section has to do with amendments that provide for some exceptions to vessels using paddles and oars, such as those used in adventure touring. It is an interesting area and something that is somewhat frivolous but these kinds of vessels are a thriving industry in many regions of Canada. To impact them when the risks associated with high liability impacts by some accidents is out of line with the kinds of things that are contemplated by the bill and what motivated the bill itself.

Those are just a few of the issues on which I am sure members will be commenting. I hope members will be supporting the bill to go to committee where we should look at some of the issues related to the coverages and the consequential amendments to other acts. This is something, admittedly, that is very difficult for a member at this stage, at second reading, to have been able to do the kind of work that is necessary. Bills come flying through the House to us and to access those bills and look at the consequential amendments in the context in which they are meant makes it very difficult for an individual member.

We have good critics who take the time to do this work and have addressed the legislation and the number of schedules and annexes. I notice that there are some areas within the bill that would be enforced immediately on royal assent, but there are other sections that would be deferred or delayed until order in council comes up, which means there will be some regulations made that will need to be dealt with.

It is an interesting issue. I have often thought that members of Parliament are asked to vote on bills that require extensive regulations and yet those regulations are not even prepared or exposed to the members until after the legislation passes at all stages in both chambers. That is why there is a scrutiny of regulations committee. Every regulation that is made must be pursuant to an enabling provision within the legislation and it should not be a case of backdoor legislation, as it were, changing the intent or adding new elements to the bill that would constitute making law through regulations. Some refer to it as cabinet made law.

The scrutiny of regulations committee's job is to ensure that, as regulations come through, they are checked to ensure the regulations are properly enabled within the legislation. Therefore, members should not be overly concerned about that.

However, I would make one recommendation to hon. members with regard to regulations generally. In an area where it is unclear in the legislation as to the scope or the intent of the amendment to the legislation, members must have the opportunity to make either the recommendation or an amendment to say that such amendment must go to the appropriate standing committee for its comment or perhaps its approval if it is serious enough. It is something that has happened in the past with regard to the reproductive technologies act that we spent a lot of time on pursuant to the royal commission on reproductive technologies. It was going to take two years to do the regulations and all those regulations had to go through the health committee before they could be gazetted and promulgated.

We can see that if there are areas in which there are potentially serious consequences to regulations, members should make every

effort to seek from officials clarification as to the timeline, the importance, the significance and whether there is other information that may impact our assessment of the effectiveness of the proposed legislation.

•(1245)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite impressed by my colleague for Mississauga South who, in all humility, said that it was unreasonable to expect members of Parliament to be absolutely expert and thorough on legislation when it comes before them at second reading. I thought that his rendition of the analysis of the bill indicated quite thorough research. I compliment him for that because it speaks to the capacity of members of Parliament to do thorough work.

On the basis of the thorough work concept, I wonder if the member would go over one of the issues that he struck for me. I have already indicated that I will support the bill going to committee but he pointed out that the bill would not protect the environment and that it has very few measures that are actually proactive. However, it is a bill that would penalize polluters in the shipping business. He took pains to point out, not only the volume of shipping of product but also the number of people currently participating in the tourism business and therefore causing shippers to extend themselves much further.

From a commercial point of view, that is all well and dandy. However, he did point out that one particular industry, the oil tanker business, poses a serious threat. I hope I did not mishear him but I heard him say that an environmental disaster, such as the one represented by the *Exxon Valdez* many years ago, cost \$2.5 billion to clean up and yet the liabilities listed here are for a maximum of \$1.5 billion from a fund and \$545 million per incident.

Since my colleague has great capacity in the accounting field, he would be able to tell us what that \$2.5 billion would be worth today. Would he suggest to all of us that we should amend the legislation to increase the liability amount or, perhaps more significantly, ask the government to put some very specific measures into the legislation that would be proactive from the point of view of protecting the environment from potential abusers and disaster creators?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member raises an important issue. The amendments to the Marine Liability Act would establish some protections and increase the levels. However, the other part of this is to ensure that the risks being taken by those who transport oil or other hazardous materials are also up to a standard where the probability of risk is reduced. It is not a matter of having enough insurance, because then all of a sudden our environmental hat has been thrown away for the sake of money. I think it is the same thing.

The environment is an integral part of the Canadian economy and we need to protect it by ensuring that we have appropriate liability coverage. The member may be right. Once the supplementary protocol is included, \$2.5 billion may not be enough in terms of a big disaster like the *Exxon Valdez*.

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However, what are the rules of the game with regard to those who transport? What about the other legislation that guides the owners of the vessels that are included under this act? Are we up to the international standards in terms of marine safety? Is our record of marine safety out of line in terms of incidents on a per tonne basis or based on the volume of activity done?

This is the balance that we need to seek as legislators, which is what it really gets down to. It will be important to hear from the officials and the important stakeholders to advise hon. members on the committee about where we stand in terms of that balance between protecting Canadians and our environment and protecting the economy from extraordinary financial obligations.

• (1250)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in what my hon. colleague had to say when he talked about the balance between the environment and the economy.

I continue to receive emails from constituents in the northwest, throughout Skeena and across British Columbia, who are concerned about the Navigable Waters Protection Act that was stripped away in the previous budget. I see my hon. colleague is nodding.

Under the guise of a budget bill, the Conservatives chose to insert a provision that would actually weaken some of the environmental protections for our rivers and waterways. Communities that use those rivers and waterways, and I would particularly note some of the fishing and hunting communities, are absolutely outraged that there was no public debate about this and that the process that was followed in the House of Commons was fundamentally undemocratic.

My colleague from Yukon has been hearing about this as well. His constituents and mine do not think that this is what is required in an economic upheaval. The government was going to allow a whole series of projects to go ahead with no environmental assessment at all because the immediacy of the moment trumped the environmental concerns. In the future we will be cleaning up messes and mistakes that are made now.

I cannot imagine a government proposing this as a survival plan for the Canadian economy. Why would it go back in time and repeat the errors of the past? It will only find that in the distant future it will be cursed by the generation to come. They will ask why in this moment of uncertainty the government of the day hit the panic button and removed environmental conditions.

The government is scraping away more environmental regulations and protections. Why, for heaven's sake, did my hon. colleague support this? It seems so counterintuitive to raise issues about this particular bill or others when he so recently supported the stripping away of the protection of Canada's rivers and lakes.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, we have been having this debate in the House for some time.

I agree with the member that the budget bill was not a budget bill; it was an omnibus bill. It included the essential elements of a plan to help Canadians at a very difficult time, yet the government, just as it did with its November economic update, piggybacked on that legislation, the Navigable Waters Protection Act, attacked pay equity

and the Competition Act, and I think there was another one. At the same time it said the bill had to pass in order to get the stimulus package. All of a sudden there were these other items. It took time to do that and it detracted from the discussion about the budget by putting in items that had nothing to do with the budget. That type of political gamesmanship is unacceptable at a time when we should be focused on the key issues.

With regard to the Navigable Waters Protection Act and the weakening of environmental laws, I believe the member will find that there is nothing that has happened that cannot be fixed. However, what we could not fix is if we defeated the government, stopped the process, stopped the money, went to an election, and came back some time in October only to be at the same place and all of a sudden found out that Parliament and the government had abandoned Canadians at their time of greatest need when an economic stimulus was needed in order to help them retain jobs, create jobs or help the most vulnerable in our society.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the officials who worked on this bill for making sure they did not treat canoes, kayaks and rafts the same as ocean liners. That would have put an immense burden on the outdoor industry and that was not the purpose of it. This is very good for that industry and I appreciate the officials' work.

Does the member see any incongruity with what the government says and does? It announced a couple of years ago that it would allow dumping in the Arctic. Now it has a bill that would apparently stop damage. It was the same with income trusts. It said it was against increasing taxes and then it added taxes on income trusts.

• (1255)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga South has 15 seconds.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member has given some good examples.

It is not going to be good enough to keep kicking the government in the pants. We need to come forward with the appropriate changes and proposals. We need to put where we are—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

As we have heard, this is a fairly extensive bill and some would say it is complicated. I am not sure it is completely complicated, but it is a rather extensive bill and it deals with issues of marine liability. I want to read from the summary in the bill to talk about some of the key things that are part of it. There is a section dealing with adventure tourism activities which is an important piece of this legislation, but it is not the part that I wanted to talk about specifically this afternoon.

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The bill also amends part 6 of the act to implement the protocol of 2003 to the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage, 1992, as well as the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001. It also deals with the ship source oil pollution fund and modernizes the governance of that fund. It also includes general provisions relating to the administration and enforcement of offences under that act and creates a maritime lien for Canadian ship suppliers against foreign vessels and establishes a general limitation period for proceedings not covered by other limitation periods.

I do not purport to be an expert on marine law or marine liability law, but I know that this is an area that is very crucial to Canadians and very crucial to how we protect our environment, how we protect our coastlines, how we protect animals and people who live near those coastlines who might be subjected to the ravages of an oil spill. Some say that this is a housekeeping bill, that it maintains currency with our international obligations and brings Canada's laws up to speed with the international treaties that we have signed and that it makes the language of our Marine Liability Act more up to date. These are important things that we do to keep on top of that, especially given the huge costs involved when there is an oil spill.

The ship source oil pollution fund is also something that is very important. It often applies when there is a mystery spill, when we do not know the source of an oil spill on our coastline or in our harbours in the waters of Canada. It is important that we have that fund, that it operate appropriately, that it meet the needs of our communities, of our coastlines, of our industries when there is that kind of oil spill.

This legislation increases the liability from an amount of \$500 million to \$1.5 million and that is a very important step. We have to make sure that the companies that cause pollution, that are responsible parties for oil spills and for bunker oil spills are held liable for their actions and that the principle of polluter pay is enforced in these important instances.

We know of the horrific damage that a significant spill can engender. We saw that with the *Exxon Valdez*, and on the east coast of Canada with the *Arrow*. We are lucky that we have not seen on significant tanker accidents on our shores as those were in recent years. We have seen many other spills along our coast and they do require our attention and laws to ensure that liability is properly assessed and that the responsible parties are made to pay the cost of cleanup. We must ensure that the responsible parties are made to face appropriate fines for activities where they are found to be liable for those accidents.

We know about the big oil spills, but a few years back after a smaller spill in Vancouver harbour, in Burrard Inlet, I asked for information about spills that happen on the coast of British Columbia. I received a document that indicated that through all of 2002 to mid-2007 there had been 4,130 oil spills on the coast of British Columbia. Some of them were very small, only a litre or so of oil, but some of them were much larger than that; in fact, 151 of them involved spills of greater than 1,000 litres.

• (1300)

Those are significant spills. Any spill of hundreds of litres at least is a significant activity. These kinds of spills happen all the time on

the British Columbia coast. They are significant incidents, each and every one of them. They can affect industry on the coast. They can affect recreation. They can affect birds and mammals and other animals on the coastline of British Columbia. They can affect our enjoyment of the coastline and the environment. I am very concerned about the number of those spills.

It says something good about our reporting system that we know how many happened, where they happened and now much oil was involved in those incidents, but we have to work to ensure that they do not take place. However, if and when they do take place, we have to ensure that the system that is in place for dealing with them, the system for dealing with the liability caused in them, is the best it can possibly be. Proper consideration of this legislation will go some way to improving that system and improving the mechanisms that are in place.

Specifically, I want to talk about what happened off the coast of my riding of Burnaby—Douglas in July 2006. There was a significant spill into Burrard Inlet from a ship that was in Vancouver harbour. I got involved in this incident mainly because of concerns around some of the effects of what had happened.

I want to read a description of the actual occurrence that is taken from notes prepared from a meeting of the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spills Task Force in October 2006. A representative of the British Columbia ministry of the environment, Graham Knox, reported on this July 4, 2006 spill in Burrard Inlet in Vancouver harbour off the coast of Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Knox reported:

The MV André had spilled bunker fuel in Burrard Inlet on July 4, 2006. The spill volume turned out to be larger than first reported, and the [B.C.] Ministry [of the environment] was not notified promptly by the Canadian Coast Guard. Some birds were oiled, which raised an issue of Provincial vis-à-vis federal authorities. In addition, the wildlife organization hired to rehabilitate the birds was not paid for their efforts because the Responsible Party (RP) refused to cover all of the costs.

This report of the oil spill in Burrard Inlet on July 4, 2006 notes that there were some problems in the response to that oil spill, around establishing liability and around establishing the role of the responsible party in the cleanup. It is very important that we examine that and make sure that when these kinds of oil spills happen, the response is thorough and complete. This legislation we are debating today has a piece of that puzzle.

I want to talk about what the outcome of that was with regard to liability and the responsibility of the company that owned the ship. I am going to quote from a report on the InterShip Navigation Training Center website. It reports on marine incidents. It is used for training people in the shipping industry on how to appropriately respond to various kinds of incidents that shipping companies and their employees face.

This site's report on the incident in July 2006 states:

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M/V ANDRE (Hong Kong, 17000gt)'s company pleaded guilty and was ordered to pay \$80,000 for spilling 7.5 tons of fuel oil in the harbor while bunkering in Vancouver BC in July 2006. Of the fine, \$5,000 will go to the Canadian Wildlife Service for research and conservation at a migratory bird habitat. The HK owner is also responsible for cleanup costs estimated at \$700,000. The reason for the spill is an open valve that should have been closed, — a mistake by a crewmember.

This report is dated the 30th of November, 2007.

• (1305)

We can see the result of this oil spill in Vancouver harbour. First, the extent of the spill was not properly assessed by the Coast Guard and reported to the B.C. Ministry of the Environment. There were problems in establishing jurisdiction over some of the bird and wildlife victims of the oil spill. A court case resulted from this. A fine was paid and some of that money went to wildlife, migratory bird habitat conservation. There were also significant cleanup costs of \$700,000 for what was a relatively small spill, but not an insignificant spill. It is good that the bill would raise the liability limits from \$500,000 to \$1.5 billion, particularly when we see the cost of this relatively small spill.

I want to talk about what happened with the wildlife in the case of the spill in Burrard Inlet. The problem arose when local Wildlife Rescue Association and Burrard Clean, the organization that comes into play immediately when there is an oil spill in Vancouver Harbour, came in. Burrard Clean would also contact organizations to take care of any birds or animals affected by the spill. It contacted an organization called Focus Wildlife, which began the rescue and rehabilitation of the birds and animals affected. The local Burnaby based Wildlife Rescue Association was involved in assisting Focus Wildlife in this operation.

The concern was that the responsible party, the shipping company, was unwilling to pay for the full extent of the cleanup related to the animals and birds affected. There was confusion and a lot of bickering back and forth about how much would be paid for, how extensive and when the responsibility for the rehabilitation of the animals and birds affected would end. It took a lot of pressure from the community, the local member of Parliament, myself, and from others to ensure that this cleanup and the animals affected were not abandoned completely.

It put Focus Wildlife in a very difficult position. The responsible party, the shipping company, was refusing to continue payment for the rehabilitation of the birds and animals affected to the point that international standards would require. It wanted out long before that stage was reached and before it was ensured that the animals had been fully rehabilitated and were ready for release back into the environment.

It was a serious issue and there was not a good resolution to it. It took a lot of energy of local people, the folks who were concerned about that, to continue the rehabilitation and rescue efforts for the birds and wildlife affected.

The fact that Focus Wildlife was not paid fully for its efforts was very significant. However, we appreciate the fact that it continued its efforts despite the confusion about how payment would be made,

At the time, I wrote to the minister of the environment to say that I thought the Canadian Wildlife Service and Environment Canada should cover the costs of Focus Wildlife, including any shortfall

between the cost of its services and what the responsible party was willing to pay, including any charges after July 14, which was when the company wanted to pull out. That was ten days after the spill occurred. I said it was necessary that they cover those costs until the conclusion of treatment and rehabilitation of all the affected birds. International standards should be governed by that. We have to ensure that international standard is the full policy of the Canadian Wildlife Service with regard to such oil spills. The birds and other wildlife affected by this kind of environmental accident, environmental disaster, must be treated as the innocent victims.

The other thing is, in this kind of spill, it became a curious federal-provincial jurisdictional dispute where the province was responsible for non-migratory birds and the federal government was responsible for migratory birds.

• (1310)

In this circumstance Canada geese and cormorants were largely affected. However, the Canada geese in Vancouver harbour really do not migrate anywhere any more, yet somehow they were the responsibility of the federal government. Cormorants tend to get around a bit more even though they are considered non-migratory. They were considered the provincial birds. Therefore, there was confusion on that angle.

There was also confusion about what to do with the Canada geese. Some folks believed they were a nuisance in B.C. and it would be all right to let a few of them die off as a result of this accident, which I found to be a completely unacceptable approach. I would urge, and have urged, that all animals affected by such oil spills be treated as the victims and rehabilitated to the best of our ability.

We also need to have a clear policy on the euthanization of affected birds and mammals, as well, to ensure that every effort is put into their rescue and rehabilitation and that euthanization is used only when it is shown by veterinarians to be impossible to rehabilitate. It should not be used for other reasons in this kind of disaster.

That whole incident led me to propose a motion in the House, and it is still on the order. It states:

That...the government should immediately strengthen the National Policy on Oiled Birds and Oiled Species at Risk, and all Oil Spill Response Plans by ensuring that: (a) the Canadian Wildlife Service has the mandate and authority to ensure that all migratory birds, species at risk and other wildlife affected by an oil spill are captured, cleaned and rehabilitated; (b) euthanasia be used only when medically necessary; and (c) the responsible party for an oil spill be assessed the full cost of the capture, cleaning and rehabilitation process.

This is an important aspect of marine liability and we need to be very clear about it in our policies and legislation. I hope, when this important bill, Bill C-7, gets to committee, these implications of marine liability will also be part of the discussion there.

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We need the most up-to-date, modern and comprehensive marine liability laws that we can possibly have. I believe, and many people in my constituency would also agree, that birds and animals must also be part of the provisions of our marine liability legislation and any of the legislation or policies that flows from it. That is why it is important to also consider the question of the policies of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Environment Canada surrounding oiled birds and mammals.

While this is complex legislation, I do not think that complexity should be debilitating to members of the House or members of the committee. It is important that we understand the implications of the legislation. We need to update the legislation in light of our international obligations, and that is clearly something we should be obligated to do.

The increase of liability amounts is also very important when we consider the costs of oil spill cleanups, both major incidents and minor incidents. The example of the Burnaby oil spill and the Burrard Inlet oil spill in July 2006, being a relatively small one, also shows the huge expense involved even with a spill of that size.

We also need to ensure we enforce the whole notion of polluter pay, that responsible parties must be required to take responsibility for their actions and accidents they cause, that there be no way out of it and that they be required to follow through on this responsibility.

The universal declaration on animal welfare, in which Canada is not yet participating in its development, would be another place where Canada could follow through on some of the implications of this kind of policy.

As I said, it is important to get this legislation to the committee where it can be thoroughly discussed and reviewed. I hope the situation of the oil spills in Burrard Inlet is instructive for our folks on the committee. I hope we can ensure the legislation addresses all oil spills, large and small, that occur on our coastlines and ensure we have the best possible liability provisions in place should those kinds of accidents happen.

• (1315)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has made a very thoughtful intervention and I thank him for it. In second reading we all want to take a look at those issues to be raised in committee, with the purpose of enhancing the bill.

He has made a variety of suggestions about what needs to happen and what needs not to happen, but I noted that in his presentation he was focused on something we mentioned earlier through the intervention of my colleague from Mississauga South. If we are to make the bill effective, rather than focus simply on the penalties for transgressions, accidents and incidents, which are an improvement, we would take a look at something proactive. One of the issues he raised was the lack of a protocol for training, checks and balances for people who operate carriers, especially in the petroleum industry and other industries that have a tendency to find themselves in environmental disasters of one type or another.

Has he in mind a particular set of protocols or a particular protocol that he would like the committee to consider, as it deliberates on this bill, with a purpose to enhance the environmental protection as

opposed to the liabilities for environmental degradation? Could he speak to that?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure this legislation covers the kinds of issues the member has raised, although I hasten to add that I think he is right. We do need to pay attention to those other issues that would ensure prevention of these kinds of accidents and incidents. Training the folks who are involved in the transportation of oil in tankers along our coast is absolutely crucial. However, training people who operate ships and deal with the fuelling requirements of those ships operating along the coast is also clearly an issue. The incident I talked about in Burnaby was the result of an employee failing to close a valve, which led to a significant incident in Burrard Inlet in the Vancouver harbour.

One wonders what training the employees of that ship received and whether they would meet standards that Canadians are comfortable with to ensure the appropriate operation of ships in our waters. We should consider those important. Prevention is always better than needing to have in place policies for liability and policies for cleanup. It would serve us far better in the long run if we had excellent policies to prevent this kind of accident.

All the issues around transportation of oil along the coast of British Columbia come into play here. The possibility of offshore oil exploration and production, which we continue to oppose in this corner of the House, issues of on-land accidents that end up affecting our waterways and our coastline, all those come into play.

In the summer of July 2007, exactly a year after the incident in the harbour as a result of the ship, a construction accident ended up rupturing the crude oil pipeline in Burnaby. There was a huge spill of oil from the land into Vancouver harbour, into Burrard Inlet. Therefore, issues are raised by that kind of accident, as well.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague's comments. It is unfortunate that the reason he has so much familiarity with this is the number of spills that have happened in and around his constituency and in the waters around Vancouver.

I represent one of the longest coastlines on the west coast of any constituency in Canada. It is under constant push and agitation by the current government and the previous government. My hon. colleague mentioned the notions of drilling in the near shore between Haida Gwaii and the mainland, which the government seems very determined to have happen in conjunction with Gordon Campbell's government and Victoria.

Recently I attended a talk by some of the folks who were involved in the cleanup operations from the *Exxon Valdez*. Unfortunately we have just marked the 20-year anniversary of that disaster. That is still along Alaska's coast. The penalties against Exxon have been reduced almost to nothing. The courts initially awarded some \$2.5 billion and that recently was reduced down to some 20% of the original award. However, on those coastlines that are marked clean by the company, if we dig less than a foot down, the water that fills that hole is still filled with oil. It continues to linger year after year.

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Around these regulations, how secure must Canadians feel about the type of efforts coming from a pro-oil government in terms of the environmental components and the protection that is afforded to communities that rely on these waterways and oceans for their very survival?

• (1320)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. It is a very crucial issue. I have often heard that even in the cleanup on the shoreline of Burrard Inlet after these oil spills, today we can pick up a rock on the beach and find oil underneath that rock. Even though all efforts were taken to appropriately clean up that coastline, there have been difficulties and it is never quite complete. There is always more to be done.

It shows the limitation of efforts to clean up. It shows the limitation of establishing liability for these accidents, because no matter how far we go to try to undo the effects of these oil spills, those cause permanent and ongoing damage to our environment and to our coastline.

We may be upping the liability amounts, but that still does not make it any better in terms of dealing with the consequences of these accidents. Therefore, preventing them is very crucial. At the same time, we have to make sure that, in covering the cost of cleanup, ensuring the protection of communities and animals is seen as part of the cost of doing that kind of business and is calculated into the costs of those industries.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member referred a couple of times to making the user pay.

Businesses carry insurance. I guess one of the issues really is that when the insurance premiums get so high, all of a sudden those businesses have to decide whether they are going to be in the business or whether they are going to introduce other safeguards.

I wonder whether the member would agree that another consequential area, not particularly for this bill, may very well be to look at the kinds of investments that we should be promoting and supporting with regard to the technology of cleanup and how to deal with mitigating the obviously horrific damage that can be caused to wildlife and to the ecoculture of areas of spills.

That to me seems to be a compatible area of concern that the government has not brought forward but perhaps should.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, the member has raised a good question. The technology of cleanup is something that we need to be constantly working at and improving.

We know that sometimes the actual cleanup is not always the greatest for the environment either. Some of the detergents used have their own effects on the environment as well, but given the kinds of circumstances that exist when these accidents happen, this is a measure that has to be taken and is not yet perfected in terms of other causes and damages that may result from that.

However, I think it goes to the importance of making sure that we have the best possible technologies for this. It goes to the importance of supporting those organizations that are working on that kind of operation. It goes to supporting the kinds of research that go into those sorts of technologies.

There are times when we know what it would take to do that and we back away because of the economic cost. I think we have to have a different measure. We have to set the bar in a different place that values the environmental costs of transporting oil, of using bunker oil to fuel our ships, of locating pipelines near our shorelines, to make sure that we have taken every precaution and that we have worked for the best interest of the environment.

• (1325)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that I will be supporting this legislation. It establishes limits and guidelines for liability for marine and domestic travel of people and cargo. It also puts our country in line with some of the other international protocol and codes dealing with liability at sea, including the civil liability fund, the bunkers convention fund, and the ship-source oil pollution fund.

Make no mistake about it: This is a major industry here in Canada. It is vital to our way of life. We are an extremely large country. We border three oceans. In terms of some statistics, 365 million tonnes of international cargo move within Canadian waters; 70 million tonnes of oil, 70 million tonnes of domestic cargo, 40 million passengers, and 16 million automobiles move within our ferries along the coasts. We also have the movement of 1.5 million cruise-ship passengers. It can easily be seen how large an industry this is for a country the size of Canada, with its many waterways and coastlines.

The bill tries to create a balance, and I believe it does to a certain extent. The country needs a very good, functioning, efficient, economical marine industry. We need a competitive industry. We cannot in any way, shape or form discourage new industry entrants that meet all the applicable legislation and guidelines. Probably most importantly when we are dealing with the carriage of people and cargo by sea, we have to protect the public and its environment—the wildlife, coastal sea properties, people's lives, the loss of cargo, et cetera.

I have first-hand knowledge of these issues. I come from an island. Until 1997, except for a few people moving by air, everything and everybody that arrived in the province came by ferry. It is very similar now for Newfoundland and for Vancouver Island.

A very important issue that is debated in the House and to which the bill is very applicable is the projected increase of marine traffic along our northern coast through the Arctic. Again that leads to a whole host of other issues, problems and challenges that this country will have to deal with, especially the potential for environmental problems.

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There was some attempt to sell this bill as environmental protection legislation. I have read the legislation and I do not believe it is. It is basically to codify some of the systems that presently exist internationally and also to create a balance as to civic liability for damages to people or cargo.

Dealing with the environment, I want to point out that movement by sea is probably the most environmentally friendly way to move people and goods. It is an industry that is growing technologically. It is an industry that I see has a great future and it is one that we have to be careful about legislatively.

I am going to digress here for a minute. I have indicated how important this industry is, how big it is and how vital it is to our economy. However, for those people who look at the cruise ships going up the west coast, the cargo vessels going up the St. Lawrence River, and the many vessels going up and down the Atlantic seaboard, the unfortunate part of this equation is that the vast majority of those boats and ships are not built in Canada.

● (1330)

We have strategies for the automobile, forestry, agriculture and fishery industries. Shipbuilding, for different reasons, just has not received the focus or attention of this House, from the federal government, or perhaps in some instances the provincial government, that it ought to have. I am pleading with my colleagues here in the House of Commons to, please, let us get together and develop a national shipbuilding strategy so that this industry can become vibrant once again, as it was 100 years ago.

This act tries to create a balance between the civic liability imposed upon the owner and operator of the cargo vessel and what the public expects. If we did not have some sort of limited liability, I could see a situation where it would be extremely difficult for new entrants to get into the industry because liability is basically unlimited.

For a small ferry transporting 30 people across a small body of water, if some incident did happen, the liability would be in the millions and could extend to the billions of dollars. In carrying even a small quantity of bunker oil or petroleum products, the liability could reach the billions of dollars, as in the case of the *Exxon Valdez*, for which I understand the total tally was \$2.4 billion. We are talking about horrendous situations that could go right off the map, which a private insurance carrier would not cover for a small operator.

The bill tries to balance that. It does limit the liability per passenger to a certain level so that the smaller company, the new company, and even the larger companies can then go to a private carrier and get insurance coverage for their activities.

It also codifies it. There is a lot of provision right now, but it provides for a fund for anyone transporting oil within Canadian waters. If there are incidents that occur as we have seen with the *Exxon Valdez*, or the tanker that ran aground on the Atlantic coast, the *Irving Whale*, there is a fund out there administered by the Government of Canada for these incidents. I believe the total liability under the legislation is \$565 million per incident, to fund the liability. Of course, this is paid for by those companies that transport oil. Basically that is the fund and this codifies that situation.

It brings us in line with some of the other foreign conventions and protocol. Most of the ships that enter our waters are not Canadian made or Canadian owned, so there has to be an international protocol.

Of course, with any of the problems that do exist, even the situation in the Bay of Fundy now where vessels go through there with liquified natural gas, there could be jurisdictional issues between the United States and Canada. According to all the projections, there will be vessels in the Far North, and that could have jurisdictional implications between Canada and Russia and between Canada and other countries. These all have to be set according to international conventions and international protocol. That is dealt with in this particular act.

This legislation has been kicking around for a while. I believe it started as a white paper issued by the Department of Transport five or six years ago. The legislation was actually before the previous Parliament.

It is a difficulty we are seeing quite often in this situation where we have had three minority governments and a lot of prorogations. Legislation comes to the House and is debated and approved, but when an election is called or prorogation is issued, everything dies on the order paper and we are back here again. So I am hoping with this particular legislation that it will go to the committee.

It is not a perfect piece of legislation, but the committee will deal with it. They will try to correct any deficiencies they find and bring it back to the House and it will become legislation for this country. I am hoping that happens as soon as possible.

I should point out also that I believe when it started four or five years ago with the white paper there was extensive consultation with all the industry stakeholders, and it was brought to the previous Parliament.

● (1335)

It is something that the House should move on. It has to go to committee to be studied, but I would like to see it back in the House within the next couple of months.

It is not perfect. There are a number of issues that previous speakers have raised. I agree with the whole issue of the adventure tourism exemptions and whether they should or should not be included in the legislation. It should be reviewed again by the committee, allow it to hear from experts and come back with a final draft of this particular legislation.

As I said before, it is really not an environmental protection act. It is an act that creates a balance as between the legitimate interests of businesses in the marine industry and the protection of the public, which is the mandate of the Government of Canada.

In conclusion, this issue has been around for three, four, perhaps five years. We have gone through this before. I am hoping that this matter goes to committee, comes back and becomes the law of this country within the next short period of time.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, who comes from the east coast, and we are bookends in our country, has a deep interest in fisheries. I would like to ask him a simple question.

Government Orders

We know that the oceans are dying, that a third of all mammal species are dying, and that overfishing has taken 17 of the major fisheries in the world. They have all been fished to overcapacity.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, does he not think that this situation is so urgent and pressing that the federal government needs to bring together provincial counterparts to develop an integrated fisheries strategy that would deal with fisheries on the west coast, in the Arctic and on the east coast, so we will arrest the death of our fisheries, which has a huge impact upon foodstuffs, the environment, and all the other species that feed other fish? One example is the Arctic cod. They are small fish essential to the health of the Arctic Ocean.

The Finns are going to fish this particular species with no restriction, no barriers, no guidelines, and no oversight whatsoever. If this bill goes through, it would have a profound impact upon the health of the species in the north and the Inuit who live there.

Would my hon. colleague suggest that the government needs to be urgently seized with this issue and start to take responsibility for its role as the federal Government of Canada in dealing with this pressing problem?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid I will not have enough time to answer this question. This is a very important and complex question.

The member is quite correct. There are real problems going on in our oceans. He talked about the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans convening a meeting with the provincial ministers. Yes, definitely, that is a good idea. She should do it as soon as possible but equally important is need for a stronger mandate in the international fora dealing with all the countries that go into these areas that are outside the 200 mile zone, rape the seabeds and catch everything in their midst. That is causing a negative cycle in the whole ecosystem.

As the member has indicated, many of the species that previously existed in the seabeds are gone. Once they are gone, they are not coming back. This is an important issue that requires national attention, the state of the fishery, the methodology used by the fishery and the environmental degradation, but it also requires extensive international co-operation and legislation dealing with the overfishing that is taking place in every ocean of the world.

• (1340)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my compliments to my colleague from Prince Edward Island on raising matters relative to the Marine Liabilities Act. He raised two issues that I would like him to address in greater detail.

One of them is of course the economic impact on the shipping industry, not only as a carrier of cargo and people but in fact as an economic stimulus for those maritime provinces, in particular not only his own but Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

In addition to that, he did raise the economic viability of these carriers and the issue of ensuring both cargo and the protocols associated with being able to protect the environment against the failure of the carriers themselves to deliver their cargo safely and efficiently to a port without damaging the environment.

Because of his background as a lawyer, who has dealt a great deal both with insurance and with the commerce of transporting product that can have a deleterious effect to the environment, I wonder whether he has thought through the possibility of the insurance as a component of the cost of doing business and weighing that against the needs of society for an environment and an ecosystem that needs to be protected.

I noted he made reference to both in his speech, but I wonder if he would elaborate on that for us, because he did indicate that he wanted the committee to focus much more attention on it and to fine-tune this bill.

Being a member of that committee, I wonder if he would share with this House, and with me in particular, the ideas that he would like us to proceed with and to follow, so that the legislation does fit with the intent of what I think is a very thoughtful presentation on his part.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, on the first point, my friend, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, talked about the economic impact. In one word, it is a mess.

He talked about the maritime regions and of course it is important for Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, as well as British Columbia, but I would suggest it is equally important for Quebec, Ontario and the prairie provinces because a lot of what we produce, whether it is lumber, minerals or grain, moves by sea. That is the most economic and environmental way to move product. A lot of it that comes into the country too comes by sea.

We are a large country. We are a country surrounded by three oceans so it is extremely important and vital. That is why we need a very vibrant marine industry, one that is competitive and one that does not discourage new entrants.

On his second issue, again I come back to the issue of balance. We have to balance the interests of the company and the interests of society to have a vibrant marine industry, but also the interest to protect the public.

If we did not have legislation like this, I believe it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a new entrant ever to get into the market. There would be all kinds of problems just legislating or dealing with this situation. With vessels from other countries and flags of convenience that come into our ports, what insurance do they have? Can they withstand a cull if there is an environmental problem?

This act seeks to create a balance so that there are international conventions that are respected, that there are both domestic and international funds, and so that things can move by sea. There is a similar process in the airline industry. It works well in that industry and certainly it has served us well in the marine industry.

As to the amendments, as previous speakers have already indicated, there is an issue around some of the tourist products that are exempt, and the committee may want to have another look at that particular issue.

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Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, in Bill C-10, the government made a change. It attached changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act to that bill which had nothing to do with the budget whatsoever.

The right of Canadians and indeed all people to have access to navigable waters has really been protected in law at the federal level. It goes way back to the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, but these changes are going to severely compromise the ability of Canadians to have access to navigable waters.

These changes that the government has put forward are potentially going to allow the government, by the minister's fiat, to remove whole sections of navigable waters and put them into private hands without any proper environmental assessment or any proper consultation whatsoever.

I would like to ask my friend this. Does he not think that the right thing for the government to do would be to go back, take those elements of Bill C-10 that dealt with the Navigable Waters Protection Act, send it to committee and address the Navigable Waters Protection Act in an open and transparent fashion to ensure that all Canadians from coast to coast can have access to the tributaries that we have always had access to up until now?

•(1345)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the premise of that question, that the elimination of the Navigable Waters Protection Act provisions that were included in the budget had nothing to do with the finances of Canada. It was not a budgetary matter. Why was it in that particular legislation? Canadians are just shaking their heads. They do not agree with that at all. It is the wrong way to go.

I understand that improvements perhaps should have been made. There are jurisdictional issues sometimes between the provincial legislation dealing with waterways and the federal legislation, but that could have been improved upon instead of just eliminating it altogether.

What should be done? Nothing has been done. As the previous speaker, the member for Mississauga South indicated, this is an issue of whether or not we just throw the whole thing out then suspend the House for six months and let it go through. There is nothing that has been done that cannot be redone by a new government. That is perhaps what Canada needs at this point in time, a new government.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this bill. Three areas of my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca are surrounded by the beautiful Pacific Ocean. The Straits of Juan de Fuca curve around the southwestern part of my riding. It is truly a gorgeous part of the world and I invite everybody to come down and visit.

This bill is particularly important, not only to my riding but also to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. It does have some good parts to it but I will outline some of the flaws, the neglect and the disinterest that the government has applied to our oceans and waterways since it came into power. I also will provide the government with solutions that will enable it to do the right thing and make changes that are reflective of the public interest with

respect to the management of our oceans and of our navigable waters.

We know that our oceans provide life. Ninety-seven percent of the world's water is in our oceans, made up of 3% of salt, and 1.35 billion cubic kilometers of water exists in our oceans. From the phytoplankton that provides the cornerstone and the basis of the food pyramid to the larger mammal species, it is truly a remarkable thing to behold.

The oceans are also critically important to our lives. I will go through a number of things that will outline the problems and solutions that affect our oceans that only urgent action will address.

Before I go on, I want to deal with the changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act because they are extremely important to all Canadians. As I said before, navigable waters are designed, if one can navigate through it, it is determined to be a Crown property and therefore subject to federal regulation. To arrest that, the government, in parts of Bill C-10 that it put forward, eliminated environmental assessments with few exceptions for development projects on Canadian waterways. Second, it allowed Canadian rivers to be separated into those that were deemed to be worthy of being protected from those that were not deemed to be worthy of being protected. These classifications would be made not in a public forum, but in cabinet, in-House with no public assessment and no public input, in secret. Fourth, these decisions could be made on political expediency without any effort to apply science, research and environmental protection.

In my view we need to, first, restore the existing environmental assessment requirements; second, remove the minister's discretion on major construction projects as listed in the legislation, specifically dams, causeways, bridges and booms; and third, remove the power of government to arbitrarily divide Canada's rivers into those it considers worthy versus those it somehow considers less valuable.

The free passage of Canadians on our waterways goes as far back in history to the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215. However, in Bill C-10, the government ripped up that arrangement between the people of our country and their rights to the navigable waters of our nation. This will be a big issue in the next election. The government is now put on notice that it must make the changes or it will pay the price in the next election.

I want to speak to the issue of boats. In many of our ridings, people dump their boats into the ocean and walk away. There is no repercussion whatsoever for individuals who dump their boats into the ocean. These boats are an environmental hazard and a human hazard. In fact, a person in my riding was climbing into one of these boats and died as a result of it.

What the municipalities are finding is that the federal government will not take responsibility for the boats, nor will the individuals, and the province washes its hands. The municipalities now have an environmental problem with no ability to deal with it.

I call upon the government to deal with this issue and develop a process whereby the owners of these boats will be held responsible for removing them and, if they are not removed, the owners will be prosecuted. In my riding of Sooke, British Columbia, we have more than 20 boats that need to be removed because they are a hazard.

•(1350)

The largest boondoggle in Canadian history is about to take place in Victoria. It is a \$2 billion sewage treatment plant that is not necessary at all and the science does not support it.

In British Columbia right now we have what is equivalent to secondary sewage treatment. The secondary sewage treatment happens as a result of the natural ebb and flow that exists within the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Contrary to the knowledge of some, sewage goes through, ends in an outfall and is sieved all the way through. Nothing larger than something that is six millimetres in diameter is actually released.

The problem that Victoria has, from an environmental perspective, is that its storm drainage system is fractured and it has become the source of the environmental hazards that we have now. It is a \$2 billion infrastructure project of which the public will not get the gains that governments believe they will have. It will not remove the persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, toxins, pathogens and pharmaceuticals that we want to get out.

How do we deal with that? We invest in a storm drainage system and have better source control than what we have, and, for heaven's sake, do not pursue this \$2 billion boondoggle that is about to happen in Victoria.

It is not by accident that I have on our side of those who are against this, six chief medical officers in the greater Victoria area who think this is a boondoggle. Eight of the top ocean scientists at the University of Victoria think this is a boondoggle. The responsible sewage treatment group is made up of six chief medical officers and more than ten top ocean scientists.

The government should listen to the science and to listen to the chief medical officers. They are the ones who know. They have the science. This current project is not following the science. I warn the government that it will run into a very serious problem of a \$2 billion boondoggle that it will wear unless it deals with the science, listen to the facts and work together with the groups that can put forth the effective infrastructure projects that will deal with the problems that the government and those of us who live in Victoria are deeply concerned about. However, this is not the way to go.

On the issue of the Coast Guard, the government put forth a Coast Guard assessment for Victoria. I must say that the Straits of Juan de Fuca is one of the busiest shipping zones in the entire world. However, what is shocking is that Victoria has no close-by ability to respond with its Coast Guard to a crisis that will occur in and around Victoria. This is a problem that needs to be rectified.

The Coast Guard did an assessment. There are solutions that have been sitting there for years. A 40-plus foot boat is sitting in Sidney doing absolutely nothing. I urge the government to move that boat to Victoria to provide the rapid response that is needed for crises that can and will occur in the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

Ocean traffic is a very big concern for those of us who live on Vancouver Island. All of us know that if a tanker runs aground in the area we will have a catastrophic oil spill. We have had some misinformation and a lack of clarity on this particular issue. I strongly recommend that the government provide clarity on the use

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of double hulled ships in the straits and to provide an effective conduit for tankers so they will not go through areas that are narrow and where the threat of a tanker to run aground is very high.

That route needs to be established, clarified and communicated to the people of British Columbia. and it should be done as soon as possible.

The Arctic is a serious challenge. We know the government, justifiably, has a new interest in this, which we commend and applaud. However, there are aspects in the Arctic that need to be addressed. One of the central keystone species in the Arctic is a small Arctic cod. That Arctic cod is going to be fished by countries like Finland and that will have catastrophic impacts upon the other species that live in the region.

•(1355)

I will put this into context. This means that one-third of all sea mammal species are threatened or on the brink of extinction. This needs to be addressed because as these species are tied into the web of biodiversity that we have in our world, they are part of the chain of life. If we take out a part of that chain, then the rest of the chain can be negatively affected. We are a part of that food chain. I strongly recommend that the government deal with this.

The next point I want to make is on the issue of forestry practices. People in my province are cutting down trees right to the edge of salmon bearing streams. There is a severe lack of oversight and accountability and the impact is what we are seeing right now and one of the contributing factors of the collapse of our salmon species on the west coast. We do not want to see our fishermen in British Columbia fall to the same fate that happened on the east coast with the collapse of the cod fishery. We need to do things today to prevent the collapse of the salmon fishery on the west coast from happening so we can have a sustainable fishery within Canada on the west coast. I strongly urge the federal government to work with the provincial government to establish enforced forestry practices codes that do not allow companies to deforest right down to the water's edge.

In official development, we have an opportunity to deal with taking the forests of the world and indulge in something called REDD. REDD is a program that pays for critical habitats and forests to not be cut down. This could be part of Copenhagen, part of Kyoto 2. The minister could link up human development with environmental protection. There are solutions to that missing link and we will get to that, I am sure, after question period.

The Speaker: I regret cutting the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca off but he will be able to proceed with his speech after question period. There will be almost eight minutes left in the time allotted for his remarks when this debate resumes.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***VISA REQUIREMENT**

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was proud to join the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to deliver some long-awaited good news to the Croatian Canadian community. The minister announced that our Conservative government was lifting the visa requirement on Croatia. This new change means that Croatians wanting to visit their family in Canada for birthdays and weddings, for business meetings, or as tourists will be able to do so without needing to apply for a visa. This will facilitate travel for Croatian citizens to Canada and will help improve ties between our two great countries.

Yesterday's announcement is another example of how, after years of Liberal neglect, our Conservative government is delivering real results for Canada's cultural communities. In fact, at yesterday's event, a Croatian community leader summed things up well when he said, "The Liberals never delivered for us and always expected us to deliver for them".

Because of the actions of our Conservative government and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Croatian Canadian community and all of Canada's cultural communities now know which party they can count on to deliver results. It is the Conservative Party.

* * *

● (1400)

ALISON YOUNGMAN

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Alison Youngman died peacefully at home on the morning of International Women's Day after a short but brutal battle with cancer.

Ms. Youngman was an award-winning senior partner at national law firm Stikeman Elliott, a strong advocate for Canadian women, and a champion of women's leadership.

A tireless contributor to her community, Alison served as chair of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, was an active volunteer at Out of the Cold, and was Canadian president of the International Women's Forum.

Alison was also a trailblazer and a champion of women in Canada's corporate community. She headed her firm's internationally recognized technology law group and spearheaded one of Bay Street's first maternity policies.

Sandra Martin of the *The Globe and Mail* described Alison as follows:

Adopted as a baby and raised as an only child, Alison Youngman created a family out of friends and colleagues. Known as the maestro of multitasking, she was a high-profile lawyer, an indefatigable volunteer for breast cancer research, a director of the International Women's Foundation, a mentor for other women and a devoted mother. In naming her a woman of distinction in 2004, the YWCA of Toronto lauded her for breaking "new ground for women in the legal profession" and for being "an influential and inspiring role model".

Ms. Youngman is survived by her two sons, Chris and Phil, two brothers, a sister, and many, many friends.

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*[Translation]***FRENCH AT THE 2010 WINTER GAMES**

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a number of recent incidents involving this government are reinforcing our concerns about the future of the French language in this country. First there were the cuts to international cooperation in five francophone African countries. Then the government's refusal to support the CBC forced the crown corporation to sacrifice some of the high quality services it provides for francophones. And now, before the Vancouver 2010 Winter Games have even begun, the Olympic committee has made a serious blunder at the expense of the Canadian francophone population. There were no francophone artists at an official event to begin the countdown in February 2009.

How is it that in this supposedly bilingual country we have to remind the Canadian Olympic Committee that Rule 24.1 of the Olympic Charter stipulates that, "The official languages of the IOC are French and English"?

The Bloc Québécois is calling on the Vancouver Olympic Committee, and by the same token, we also call on this government, to do whatever it takes to ensure that French is given the respect it deserves.

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*[English]***MANITOBA FLOOD PREPARATIONS**

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the many volunteers who are helping out with sandbagging in various communities and properties in Manitoba and my riding of Elmwood—Transcona.

The anticipated high water levels present challenges to all Manitobans, but especially in the communities along the Red River and other major rivers and streams throughout the province.

While the city of Winnipeg has the protection of the Winnipeg floodway, for which significant upgrading has just been completed, there are still some properties within the city limits that require additional protection.

While at home this weekend, I dropped by one such sandbagging effort behind the historic La Salle Hotel in my riding. The efforts of all the volunteers were obvious, but significant work is still needed to protect against the anticipated flood crest.

While I am on my feet, I would like to offer congratulations to Bill Blaikie, who won a byelection last Tuesday to become the new member of the legislature for Elmwood in Winnipeg. Bill was a member of this House for 29 years and Deputy Speaker in the last Parliament.

On behalf of all members, I would like to wish Bill well in his new career.

WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, London, Ontario has produced many notable Canadians over time and the tradition continues.

This year the YMCA of Western Ontario is honouring several remarkable Londoners with Women of Excellence Awards. Each of these women has given of herself for the betterment of others in our London community in specific fields.

They include: Joy Warkentin for education, training and development; Karen Pincombe for arts, culture and heritage; Marlene McGrath for business professions and trades; Jean Wright for community, volunteerism and humanity; Sandra Cooper-Ryder for sport, fitness and recreation; and Dr. Sugantha Ganapathy for health, science and technology. Nicole Seymour was recognized as a young woman of excellence and Joan Francolini was awarded a lifetime achievement award.

These women make a positive difference in the lives of thousands of Londoners every day. To these women, on behalf of all Londoners whose lives they have touched and from the House of Commons, I sincerely thank them and congratulate them on their achievements. I thank them for caring.

* * *

• (1405)

MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMENDATION

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the hon. House of an award received by a remarkable woman in my riding. Joyce Samms of Port aux Basques has been presented with the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation award.

Mrs. Samms served in the women's Royal naval service in England during the second world war. She moved with her family to Newfoundland in 1952 and a few years later became a member of the Royal Canadian Legion. She was the only female member at Branch 11 at the time.

Mrs. Samms served in a variety of roles for many years, including president, secretary, chair of the poppy campaign, and honours and awards chair. She is currently membership chair. Mrs. Samms was the first woman to be elected as district commander and 10 years later became the first woman in Canada to be elected provincial president.

Mrs. Samms has received the Meritorious Service Medal and the Palm Leaf, the legion's highest honour. She is a life member of the legion and a recipient of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to tell you about such an outstanding woman from the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

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TOP CADET MUSICIAN

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Army Cadet League of Canada has named the top cadet musician in Canada to be Cadet Master Warrant Officer Blythe Heywood of the 1705 British Columbia Dragoons Royal Canadian Army Cadet

Statements by Members

Corps of Vernon for her accomplishments on the violin and the French horn.

Originally a member of the Enderby Cadets, Heywood later joined the Vernon squadron where she has performed in numerous band competitions. She was 1 out of 1,600 cadet musicians from cadet bands in 70 B.C. communities to join the 50-member group.

Heywood trained at the Vernon army camp for three summers and has spent two years in Quebec playing in the advanced band at the Eastern Region Cadet School of Music. She will be presented the Lieutenant General J.W. Quinn award at a later date. In addition to the trophy, there is a \$250 cash award and a \$500 award toward her cadet corps' music program.

On behalf of the constituents of Okanagan—Shuswap and my colleagues in the House, I congratulate Cadet Master Warrant Officer Heywood.

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[Translation]

JOANNIE ROCHETTE

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Quebecker Joannie Rochette, who won the silver medal in the women's singles event at the world figure skating championships in Los Angeles. This is a great achievement by this young woman from Île Dupas, a municipality in the riding of Berthier—Maskinongé.

Her prowess and success are an inspiration and an example. Thank you to her parents, her family, her friends and the local businesses that have always supported and encouraged her in her career.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues join me in congratulating Ms. Rochette on doing Quebec proud on the international sports scene with her determination, her discipline and her great talent.

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[English]

DALITS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently the issue of the treatment of the Dalit people of India was raised in the House. Untouchability has been a social evil for centuries in India. However, since independence, India has seen its leaders make great progress in fighting this evil.

Last week on Parliament Hill, there was a celebration of the 632nd birth anniversary of Shri Guru Ravidas, the religious leader who fought for Dalit rights.

Today, India has taken affirmative action that reserves seats for Dalits in all government institutions, including parliament. A Dalit has occupied the highest office of the president of India. The present chief justice of India is a Dalit. Finally, it is a criminal offence to discriminate against Dalits.

Although great progress has been made worldwide in confronting discrimination, still there is much to be accomplished.

Statements by Members

•(1410)

[*Translation*]

CARSON MARCOUX

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the honour of participating in a fundraising activity for an Olympic hopeful in my riding. Carson Marcoux, 17 years old, of Balmoral, is attempting to qualify as a member of the national fencing team for the 2012 London Olympic Games.

A resident of a town with a population of approximately 1,800 located in northern New Brunswick, Carson has decided to live with his family in his region while competing around the world.

Carson is also a pianist and devoted to his community. He has proven to everyone that although he lives in a rural area where fencing is not the sport of choice, it is possible to be one of the best.

Carson was one of two young Canadians who participated in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Youth Camp. Madawaska—Restigouche supports he has in himself his Olympic dream and we are proud of the faith you have in yourself.

We thank you to the village of Balmoral, the volunteer firefighters and especially to his family, who is behind him all the way in his search for an Olympic dream.

* * *

MARCEL AUBUT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Quebec Conservative caucus and on behalf of my colleagues, I would like to congratulate Marcel Aubut on being named president of the Canadian Olympic Committee. He is the first Quebecker to hold that position, and we are very proud of him.

Mr. Aubut, a lawyer and skilled businessman, dedicated much of his time and energy to supporting and developing sport at both professional and amateur levels. Who could forget the extraordinary saga of the Quebec Nordiques, with which he was closely associated? His work and dedication breathed new life into amateur sport and enabled athletes to benefit from the resources they need to succeed.

We believe that he will continue to dedicate himself passionately to athletes. It is therefore my great pleasure today to wish Mr. Aubut the best of luck in his new role as president of the Canadian Olympic Committee.

* * *

[*English*]

CARMELITA SIDEKO

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to pay a heartfelt personal tribute to a dear friend of many years, Mrs. Carmelita Sideco, or Tita Lita to the community. The wife of Dr. Edgardo Sideco and mother of four exceptional sons, Eric, Ian, Neil and Arne, she will be sadly missed by all of her friends and family, and those of us who have had the privilege to work with her over the years.

The many notices and articles that have been written in both the press of the Philippine community, of which she was such a beloved leader, and in the national media speak of her role as teacher, volunteer, patron of the arts and activist, but that would not in and of itself explain the overflowing crowd at the Annunciation of Our Lady Church who were there to say goodbye.

There was a unique quality about Carmelita. She never got angry no matter how difficult the issue. She always used her skill and experience to bring people together, not to divide. She was a true peacemaker and she will be truly missed.

Salamat po, Tita Lita.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's auto industry directly employs over 150,000 Canadians and another 340,000 indirectly. It is our largest industry within the manufacturing sector. It represents 14% of our manufacturing output and 23% of our manufactured exports. In fact, half a million Canadians and their families depend on the health and viability of this industry and are looking to their leaders to ensure that Canada remains a strong part of the North American automotive industry through these economic times.

That is why it is absolutely shameful the Leader of the Opposition has turned up his nose to auto sector workers by saying, "No voter in B.C. wants to throw money into the auto sector and neither do I". I wonder if he would repeat the same sentiment at a town hall meeting in Ontario. I am sure he has more savvy than that. He has shown time and time again that he is more than willing to flip-flop on the content of his message to suit whatever audience he is speaking to, whether it be in Saanich, St. Catharines or at his home in Harvard.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUTRA AWARDS

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 11th Jutra awards ceremony, a celebration of Quebec cinema, was held yesterday.

The winners included *Borderline*, a film by Lyne Charlebois, which won for best production. Benoît Pilon's *The Necessities of Life* won for best screenplay and film of the year. I would also like to congratulate Isabelle Blais and Natar Ungalaaq, chosen the year's best actors.

I would mention in passing the remarks by Patricio Henriquez, who won the award for best documentary for *Under the Hood, a Voyage into the World of Torture*. He criticized Ottawa's obscurantism, saying that Quebec culture was threatened and that a sort of war had been declared on it. He said the federal government today opposes everything that Quebec represents as a progressive society.

It is hard to ignore such statements in the present context of this government's attempt to gag cultural workers by making cuts to culture and, now, denying the CBC an advance on funding.

Oral Questions

•(1415)

JUTRA AND JUNO AWARDS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last evening, the Jutra awards gala celebrated the incredible diversity and boundless talent of our creative craftspeople in Quebec. In Vancouver, music was in the spotlight at the Juno awards. The harvest in both was abundant, celebrating the beauty and diversity of Quebec cinema and Canadian song.

One of the evening's most honoured films, *The Necessities of Life*, was recognized for its powerful illustration of the cultural differences between the Inuit of Nunavik and the rest of Quebec society. In addition, Luc Picard has delighted Quebeckers by taking the tales of Fred Pellerin to the big screen.

[English]

At the other end of the country, it was Nickelback's night, as the rockers from Alberta stole the show at the Juno awards, while Ariane Moffatt took the honours for francophone album of the year.

Congratulations to all the artists honoured yesterday.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the government's announcement today that we are putting further pressure on GM and Chrysler to effectively restructure while providing conditional interim loans and working effectively with our provincial and American counterparts, it is clearer than ever that we are getting the job done for Canada's manufacturing sector.

On January 24 the *Guelph Mercury* reported that according to the Liberal leader, his party cut the auto critic position because "the goal of the auto critic position had essentially been completed with [the] industry minister's announcement of loans to automakers".

The Liberals fired their auto critic because we are getting the job done. The only remaining question is, how long will it take the Liberal leader to fire his justice, finance, trade, industry, foreign affairs and environment critics?

The Liberal leader is realizing what Canadians know, that strong leadership and decisive vision mean that we are better off with this Prime Minister. Even the Liberal leader cannot deny that we are getting the job done.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, President Obama's announcement about the U.S. auto sector leaves Canadians wondering who is defending the Canadian industry.

The minister says he supports the American plan, but where is the coordinated strategy to save the North American industry as a whole? This crisis has been gathering for years.

Why has the government waited for three years, so that Washington can decide the fate of our workers and our industry?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are coordinated with the Americans because this is an integrated auto sector. We have been working with American officials and the Prime Minister has been working with the U.S. President to make sure that the Americans are aware this is integrated and that is why our response today was indeed integrated.

The hon. member stands in his place and talks about failed Liberal policies of previous governments and then in British Columbia on the weekend says he does not want to support the auto sector. So which is the real Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's capacity for misquotation never fails to astonish me.

Last week, GM testified to the auto subcommittee that it had committed all of its worldwide assets, including its assets in Canada, as collateral for U.S. loans to keep its American operations alive. That may mean that this government's loans to GM Canada are going to be unsecured and Canadian taxpayers are going to be on the hook.

The government was not at the table. It did not stand up for taxpayers. It did not stand up for Canadian workers. Why not?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the logical extension of the Leader of the Opposition's remarks is that he does not want to be there, he wants to have an unstructured bankruptcy where hundreds of thousands of jobs are lost, not only at GM or Chrysler but with the auto parts sector and the dealerships across this country. If that is the hon. member's solution, it is a solution that Canadians do not want.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take this to be no, the loans are unsecured and I await contradiction.

[Translation]

The auto industry is not an Ontario industry; it is a Canadian industry. In Quebec, 125 auto parts manufacturers are in jeopardy and 11,000 jobs are at risk. In Quebec, a \$3 billion a year industry could be lost.

Why did this government leave it up to Washington to save a Canadian industry?

•(1420)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. Of course, in partnership with the Americans, we are trying to find a North American solution. It is important to have the same action plan throughout the continent. It is a North American problem, not just a Canadian problem. It is a problem involving American buyers.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has failed Canada's auto industry. The minister failed to provide leadership for a real plan for the auto crisis when it began long before November 2008.

Today, President Obama announced that auto warranties in the United States will be backed by the United States government to avoid a crash in new car sales. If the government were at the table every step of the way as it claims, why is it only beginning to look at backing General Motors and Chrysler warranties now?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member, the ex-auto critic's intervention on this file, but the fact of the matter is these plans are progressing.

Obviously, the U.S. President has some new ideas and we are willing to take a look at those. Here in Canada we have been, as a result of this budget, on the side of the Canadian consumer, on the side of increasing credit and financing, and on the side of our auto sector. That is our record and we are proud of it.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would have been nice if he were at the table with them.

The Canada secured credit facility was announced by the government in December 2008, something necessary to make credit available to consumers through loans and leases. Conservatives keep referring to it but it will not be available until May.

Today the Minister of Industry said that we are very close to the fork in the road. We have been at this fork in the road since December. Why is the credit facility not available now? They have had four months.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the credit facility is part of the extraordinary financing framework that was announced in the budget on January 27. It is very important in terms of acquiring the commercial paper that is supported by loans with respect to vehicles and equipment. Unlike the opposition, we have actually consulted to create a plan that will work for Canadians and the plan will be implemented shortly.

* * *

*[Translation]***GOODS AND SERVICES TAX**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 1991, Quebec was the first province to harmonize its sales tax with the GST. Ontario, which just harmonized its own sales tax, will receive \$4.3 billion in compensation over the next two years. The maritime provinces got more than \$1 billion in 1997. To date, Quebec has still received nothing, despite repeated requests.

How can the Minister of Finance agree to compensate all the provinces that have harmonized their sales tax with the GST, except Quebec? He should give us one good reason.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situations in Quebec and Ontario are completely different. Ontario is going to adopt a federal harmonization act. Quebec did not. Quebec chose to keep two separate taxes, the TVQ and the GST.

Yes, an agreement was signed in the 1990s by two other governments about this situation. Quebec has full control over administering its tax and also administers its own sales tax system and the federal GST system. And that is why Quebec has received \$1.77 billion in compensation to date.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it takes a token Quebecker to distort reality. Quebec receives \$130 million a year to administer the GST because it does so for the federal government. The other provinces pay the federal government to administer their tax. That has nothing to do with harmonization.

I therefore call on the Minister of Finance or the token minister from Quebec to justify that to Quebec.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at a given point, unlike Ontario, Quebec did not pass the federal harmonized sales tax legislation. That is the point. We need to stop clouding the issue. Quebec also did not sign a comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement. That is a fact.

Quebec's sales tax and the GST are still separate, and Quebec has chosen to administer them. That is why there are compensation payments. The member should stop deliberately muddying the waters to create division.

● (1425)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what the minister just said is totally false. There are just as many exceptions in Ontario.

The federal government has always refused to compensate Quebec on the pretext that provinces would only be compensated when harmonization cost them more than 5% of their sales tax revenues. According to Ontario's budget, the change to a harmonized tax will actually increase Ontario's revenues by 3.5% annually.

Can the minister tell us why he unilaterally changed the compensation formula if not for strictly partisan electoral reasons?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing partisan about it. We are talking about two different agreements. There are two distinct taxes in Quebec, the QST and the GST, which the province administers with reimbursement from the federal government.

Things will be different in Ontario. It has decided to harmonize and the federal government will collect the tax. That is something else entirely.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was the government's tame Quebecker speaking. We want to ask him another question. Once again, the federal government is trampling the interests of Quebec. The Liberal government compensated the Maritime provinces with Quebeckers' money in 1997. Twelve years later, the Conservatives are digging into our pockets to compensate Ontario. In all, Quebeckers will have spent more than \$1.3 billion to finance tax reform in the rest of Canada.

Oral Questions

Does the minister realize that, regardless of the party in power, there is a double standard toward Quebec?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec made a political choice, which was to keep two distinct taxes, the QST and the GST. My colleagues are trying to compare that to harmonization with the federal tax, but it is not the same thing. What will be done in Ontario is not at all like the situation in Quebec. Quebec decided to administer both the QST and the GST and so far has been paid \$1.77 billion to do so.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in the auto industry persists. Once again today, the Conservative government is piggybacking on American initiatives. The federal government is showing no leadership. For instance, two weeks ago, I proposed that the Prime Minister hold a Canadian automotive summit, to bring together all the major players, the unions and governments, in one place at the same time, in order to come up with some solutions.

Has the government had time to consider that proposal? Will it hold a summit on the crisis in the auto industry, yes or no?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our current challenge is to take action with the Americans for a North American industry. So far, there has been no viable, long-term action plan, but such a plan is possible in the future. That announcement was made today. We have not had the opportunity to hold a summit, but an action plan is needed.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the failed policies of the government are aggravating the problems in the auto sector in Canada. That is why more investment of the Detroit three now goes to Michigan rather than to Canada. Where are the made in Canada solutions that we should have? Where is the green car strategy for Canada so we can start building the vehicles that Canadians want, that pollute less and cost less?

Will the government at least name a director of recovery for the automobile sector to work with the person named by the Obama administration, so we do not have to rely on the minister to get the job done? He is not doing it.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are working in concert with American officials. This is a North American auto sector. That is why our announcements in both Washington and Ottawa occurred today.

The hon. member has a track record, as well. When we was a Toronto city councillor, his plan for the auto sector was to ban automobiles from the city of Toronto. I guess we would all be riding bicycles or taking other forms of transportation. How does he explain that to the Canadian auto workers?

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday on Fox News, Sunday, the Prime Minister was asked whether Canada was open to renegotiating the environmental and labour elements of the NAFTA agreement. To that, the Prime Minister said, “We're not closed to that”.

Could the government inform the House as to why the Prime Minister would make such a significant policy announcement and reversal on Fox News and not in the Parliament of Canada? What steps will the government take to make this needed change happen? Will it move on this idea finally?

• (1430)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been encouraged by a number of things that have been said. Coming out of the United States. President Obama, following our Prime Minister's lead, has made a clear statement, for instance, with the buy American act to ensure that everything done on that act complies with its trade obligations.

When it comes to NAFTA, the indication has been very clear that there is not an intention to have serious changes made to it. President Obama has indicated his interest in the labour and the environmental accords that are associated with that. The Prime Minister has indicated those accords are strong. We intend to talk to him about that.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us try this again. My question for the Minister of Industry is very simple and I trust crystal clear. Could he tell us whether any loans that may be made to GM Canada by the federal government will be backed by any GM assets? In other words, will the Conservatives require GM Canada to put up any collateral for any loans made to it? If so, what is that collateral?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this chamber would like to know that we have not made any loans to GM Canada to date. We have some strict criteria worked out with the Government of Ontario as well to ensure that Canada's interests are protected as much as possible. This includes the conduct of the executives. It includes ensuring there is a viable long-term plan. We continue to work with GM on those matters.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try another question.

Can the Minister of Industry tell us if the Conservatives are establishing the same loan conditions for our auto industry as our American neighbours? More specifically, has Canada established the same interest rate and loan repayment schedule as the United States?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are some differences. Indeed, two or three months ago, the United States decided to accelerate loans to GM and Chrysler. However, I repeat, it is important to have strict conditions in these cases, and GM and Chrysler must be accountable if any money is to be transferred to those companies.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about a \$1.3 billion matter. The former Minister of Defence had this to say on April 12, 2007: "Equipping Canada's soldiers with the best protection is my top priority. By immediately acquiring stronger and more heavily protected tanks, our soldiers in Afghanistan have the best equipment possible..."

That was two years ago. Are the views of the current Minister of National Defence on protection and immediate procurement the reason why, of the 100 tanks purchased two years ago, 60 are presently in Europe and 40 are sitting idle at the Longue-Pointe base in Montreal?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government and I are on the same page. Our government and the department always look for the best way to protect equipment and, above all, soldiers in their important day-to-day work. We are continuing to do so. The same goes for the tanks and other equipment. That position is very clear.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if he wants to protect the equipment, he had better get out the anti-rust paint because 40 tanks have been sitting at Longue-Pointe for two years. Our armed forces cannot use these tanks or train with them because they do not have the equipment.

We have learned that one of the reasons the 60 tanks remain in Europe is that the Conservatives, through a bureaucratic trick, plan on tinkering with the existing budget and ensuring that Germany or Switzerland will obtain the contract for upgrading the tanks.

However, on April 12, 2007, his colleague announced:

• (1435)

[*English*]

"All of the work will be done in Canada".

[*Translation*]

Why has the current defence minister changed his mind?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand by the decision that was made by the previous national defence minister to purchase this important equipment. As a result of that decision, we have been able to deploy into Afghanistan, 20 of these Leopard II tanks, some of the best tanks and best equipment available in the world. We will be able to put in 20 more reconditioned tanks in the future.

The important thing to remember from the member opposite is the incredible, skyrocketing hypocrisy coming from him. He said just a short time ago that Canada did not need tanks.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that he does not plan to do anything more to tackle the economic crisis. Economists tell us that the cash flow

crisis is paralyzing the system. Eliminating the waiting period is one way to put cash directly into people's hands so they can pay their bills and boost consumption.

When will the government finally realize that eliminating the waiting period would kill two birds with one stone by providing immediate cash to the unemployed and stimulating the economy?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have added a number of benefits to the EI program, including extending the benefits by five weeks, which puts more money in the hands of those who need it most. In addition to that, we have invested \$60 million to ensure we have the resources to process those claims as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, can the minister put herself in the shoes of an unemployed worker in a region where the unemployment rate is sky-high and there are no jobs? Denying her income for two weeks is just plain cruel.

Does the minister not agree that it is her duty to help that unemployed worker and thousands more by eliminating the waiting period?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely concerned with those who have lost their jobs or are about to lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

That is why, through the economic action plan, we have added a number of benefits, including the five additional weeks, longer training for those who need training, new training programs for those who do not qualify for EI, targeted initiatives for older workers and work-sharing agreements to ensure they can be at work longer.

These are a series of initiatives that will help between 400,000 and 590,000 Canadians to face their circumstances due to the economy.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what a paradox. On the one hand, this government is refusing to abolish the waiting period for unemployed workers, and on the other, it is letting the rich use a tax loophole. Approving that loophole means sending money out of the country. In the midst of an economic crisis, we should be doing the opposite.

Oral Questions

Can the Prime Minister explain why he is refusing to give to those who are most in need and why he is giving to those who already have so much?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have done is frozen EI rates to ensure that workers and employers do not have to pay any more, while at the same time extending benefits.

For example, the five extra weeks of EI will cost \$1.15 billion; longer-term training for long tenured workers, \$500 million; training for those who do not qualify for EI, \$500 million; strategic training and transition fund and extended EI training programs, \$1 billion, a record additional investment to ensure that provisions are made for those who need it most.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has chosen his Bay Street buddies over the unemployed.

How will he explain that to the G20 countries, which plan to tighten the rules on tax evasion?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to comment briefly on the question on employment insurance that the member asked previously. When countries are in an economic downturn and there is talk of recession, it is important for people who lose their jobs to be able to receive employment insurance for a longer period. We are giving unemployed workers an extra five weeks of benefits instead of two weeks up front.

The waiting period has existed for 38 years, since 1971. Why reconsider such things when it is far more important to give people additional weeks of benefits?

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the plight of the unemployed is getting worse.

Jodi was let go from her job in January. She is also pregnant. She is the key income earner because her husband suffers from multiple sclerosis. This past Friday she had to borrow money to pay her mortgage because she had heard nothing about her EI application. Jodi is facing bureaucratic red tape at every turn. She cannot get answers or help.

When will the Conservatives give help to people like Jodi who need it the most?

• (1440)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are obviously concerned about every Canadian worker who needs to enjoy, work and make a living for their family. We are ensuring that we have the resources to meet them.

There are specific cases, and I will not get into any specific case. There may be reasons why that is so. However, we are putting the resources in to ensure that claims can be processed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians applying for EI in northern Ontario continue to face obstacles and delays in receiving their cheques. Meanwhile Service Canada officials are deprived of the resources they need to help.

The Conservative government continues to fail rural Canadians. With tens of thousands of Canadians losing their jobs, when is the government going to wake up and make EI more responsive in order to get the money where it belongs, which is in the hands of unemployed Canadians?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance program is so designed that it responds to regional interests. As the unemployment rate rises in a particular region, the benefits are longer and the qualifying hours are less. We are ensuring that it is responsive to the needs of the particular regions. Those that have the highest rate of unemployment have the greatest needs. That is where the funds flow more quickly.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Abdelrazik is a Sudanese Canadian who has been stranded in Khartoum for six years. The government now says that Mr. Abdelrazik needs to be removed from a UN watch list before he can come home, even though the watch list expressly allows for a citizen to return to his home country, even though CSIS and the RCMP have cleared Mr. Abdelrazik, and even though the government has a constitutional obligation to allow Mr. Abdelrazik to come home.

Will the Canadian government protect a Canadian citizen, respect its obligations under the charter and international law, and allow Mr. Abdelrazik to come home to Canada and be reunited with his family?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the hon. member that we continue to provide Mr. Abdelrazik with consular assistance.

Of course, as the minister has alluded to, he is on the no-fly list of the United Nations Security Council committee established pursuant to resolution 1267. Therefore, he is subject to a travel ban and asset freeze.

As the matter is before the courts and under litigation, we cannot comment further on this matter.

Oral Questions

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact that this case is being litigated does not absolve the government of its responsibility to follow the law. There is no closed hearing on this case, and Canadians have a right to know.

How does the government purport to justify its action when international law allows Mr. Abdelrazik's return and our own Constitution compels it?

[*Translation*]

Will the government respect the rule of law? Yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated before, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that Mr. Abdelrazik has been on the UN Security Council's resolution 1267 list and is therefore subject to a travel ban and an asset freeze. That is the situation as it stands right now. As the minister has said, it is up to Mr. Abdelrazik to take his name off that list.

Again, I must remind my hon. colleague that I cannot make any further comment due to litigation.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, half a million Canadians are employed directly or indirectly in the auto industry, an industry that accounts for almost one-quarter of Canada's total manufactured exports.

Earlier today the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Finance, along with the Ontario Minister of Economic Development, announced the next steps this government will take to ensure the long-term viability of this important Canadian industry.

Can the Minister of Industry please inform the House of some of the details of this announcement?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in fact we did announce that we have completed our review of the restructuring plans submitted by GM and Chrysler. It is clear that both need to do more to fundamentally restructure. They will not be getting any long-term loans or long-term support until they can demonstrate a viable plan to maintain Canada's 20% production share.

Two days ago the Liberal leader, in British Columbia, said he did not want to support the auto sector. I wonder what his solution is for the 500,000 Canadian families affected by his decision.

* * *

•(1445)

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, moments ago, the minister responsible for Quebec told the leader of the Bloc Québécois to stop muddying the waters, and that this happened because there is no harmonized sales tax. Does he know what he is talking about? Documents that have gone back and forth between the federal government and Quebec for a decade prove that

his theory is totally false. The minister should realize that nobody has ever said that that is the real reason. What people do talk about is the percentage difference. He made up that nonsense about two laws to support his case.

How are we supposed to live harmoniously in this country if harmonization gives other provinces billions of dollars while Quebec gets nothing?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not at all true. The point is that Quebec administers its own tax. This is not about federal harmonization, such as Ontario plans to adopt, period. That is the difference. Nobody made up any new laws or anything like that. Currently, Quebec administers its own tax, but Ontario will not, as per the agreement it plans to sign. I think that is clear.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will table Paul Martin's letters later.

[*English*]

Ian Brodie, the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, just gave a speech at McGill where he detailed an example of Orwellian Newspeak. He said that as far as Conservatives are concerned, bad tax policy is in fact good when "Despite economic evidence to the contrary...it helped us to win".

Is that what is behind the new Liberal-Conservative higher tax on everything for Ontario: Make an announcement with a grinning Dalton McGuinty, but stick it to families at this time of crisis with 8% more for home heating, electricity and gasoline?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is up to those provinces in Canada that have not harmonized their PST and GST to decide whether they wish to harmonize or not. The Government of Ontario has made that decision.

The Governments of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador some 10 years or so ago made the same decision. At that time they received some compensation from the federal Liberal government. The precedent was set then.

Harmonization, the creation of a VAT, is in the best interests of growth of the economy in Canada. Quebec chose not to sign a harmonization agreement. It chose to collect its own sales tax, which is not harmonized.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the predecessor of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs asked that Mr. Abdelrazik's name be removed from the no-fly list after the RCMP and CSIS cleared him of all criminal or terrorist activity. Yet today, he is being denied an emergency passport, which would allow him to enter Canada.

Can the minister explain why Canadian authorities have changed their position?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position has not changed. I would like to remind the hon. member that Mr. Abdelrazik has been on the UN Security Council no-fly list and is therefore subject to a travel ban and asset freeze.

Again I would like to remind my hon. colleague that since this matter is before the courts, we cannot comment on it further.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact is, the department is creating obstacles to block Mr. Abdelrazik's repatriation. We are calling on the department to remove his name from the no-fly list—United Nations resolution 1267—before he will be authorized to enter Canada. However, despite that list, United Nations Security Council resolution 1390 stipulates that no state shall deny its own nationals entry into its territories.

Why is the government denying Mr. Abdelrazik's entry into Canada? Why is the government reversing its position?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would again like to remind my hon. colleague that our position has not changed. Again, Mr. Abdelrazik is on the UN Security Council no-fly list and is therefore subject to a travel ban and asset freeze.

I would like to remind the hon. member again that since this matter is before the courts, I cannot comment any further.

* * *

• (1450)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ministers from British Columbia came to Ottawa, looking for changes to wiretap and electronic monitoring and surveillance provisions to make them more effective.

The governments of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba have asked for the same thing.

Last week, the Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP, Mike Cabana, who appeared before the justice committee, asked for the same thing.

Why is the government not listening? Why is the government not assisting the police so that they can actually apprehend and disrupt the gangs in British Columbia and bring about peace and order on the streets of British Columbia?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the hon. member has noticed, but we have done a lot of things that were never done under the previous government to try to help the police to combat those gangs in British Columbia, including mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, which their party dragged on and on. We had to threaten elections three times, I think, to get that through in the last Parliament.

With our new legislation on drug crimes and our new legislation on organized crime, those are all things that we are doing.

Oral Questions

In terms of the matter of the searches, the important thing is to ensure we strike the right balance between privacy rights and assisting the police. I know he would not want to violate people's privacy rights and charter rights either.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for three years now, the governments of at least five provinces have been asking the Conservatives to give them the legal means to obtain the information they need to fight criminal gangs. My bill, Bill C-285, introduced two years ago and introduced again a few weeks ago, addresses their concerns. It would limit criminals' ability to use sophisticated technology to operate secretly.

Will the minister finally wake up and do something, as called for by the provinces?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe it is important to give police all the tools they need to achieve justice and tackle crime. We intend to provide them with that.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks the second anniversary of the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, yet the government refuses to ratify this convention despite the support of Canadians and a unanimous motion passed by the House.

What is the Conservative government doing instead? It is spending a quarter of a million dollars on an online poll asking whether or not this convention should be ratified.

Since when do we use polls to determine whether human rights should be upheld? Will the government support people with disabilities and ratify the convention now?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government stands for human rights. This is one of its key foreign affairs policies. Therefore, she can rest assured that this government will fight for the rights of the disabled or anyone.

However, I would like to remind her that when we sign international treaties, we also require the assistance of the provinces. We are working with the provinces to address the issue she is talking about.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that does not explain why the government is prepared to spend a quarter of a million dollars determining whether the rights of persons with disabilities ought to be defended. How in the world can it justify that?

Then it turns around and underfunds by \$1.8 million per year a program to help people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is a program that is already shortchanged at only \$3.3 million a year.

Oral Questions

The Minister of Health should be ashamed of trying to cover up for that kind of cutback. She knows better.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance if he is prepared to stand up today to show that the money is put back and that people with disabilities are supported.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in my answer, this government supports human rights, whether it be the rights of the disabled, of visible minorities, or of anyone. We will continue doing that, but it is critically important to know that we work with provinces and everyone else so that we can fight for those rights.

I would like to remind her that a cabinet minister of this government is a person of disability at the forefront of support for the rights of the disabled.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources was in Toronto this morning announcing an extension to the already successful ecoEnergy home retrofit program. I know many of my constituents are interested in this program that helps Canadians make smart improvements to their homes while saving money.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board please inform the House and my constituents of Northumberland—Quinte West of the new opportunities in today's announcement?

• (1455)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Northumberland—Quinte West for his question and for his hard work on this file. Today, as part of Canada's economic action plan, the Minister of Natural Resources announced an additional \$300 million for homeowner grants through the popular ecoEnergy home retrofit program.

This is a great chance for Canadians to save money on home renovations. It is a great chance for Canadians to cut their energy bill for years to come. It is a great chance to make an impact in terms of the environment.

We have also introduced the home renovation tax credit. This government is getting things done for Canadian homeowners.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had the weekend to reconsider the obstructionist tactics of his parliamentary secretary blocking the Subcommittee on Food Safety from doing its work. One of hundreds of emails directed to the Prime Minister states: "I hope you agree that playing politics with food safety - as your MPs have done - is despicable. I urge you to order the Conservative MPs to allow the committee to do its work, and quickly."

Has the Prime Minister reconsidered and will he now allow the committee to do its work as was intended, looking into food safety and listeriosis?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are of course prepared to do just that. We have rolled up our sleeves and we are ready to go to work. I cannot for the life of me understand why the opposition parties want to delay the report until next December. We have a number of other reports coming in, late this spring and early this summer. We would hope that this one will be done in that same timeframe.

If they want to extend meetings, if they want to extend the hours and stay and do the work, we are happy to do that, but let us roll up our sleeves and get this done long before December.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government claims it is providing its troops in Afghanistan with top-notch equipment. Yet General Leslie says that 80 Leopard tanks have been sitting unused in warehouses in the Netherlands and Montreal for nearly two years because the government is delaying in upgrading them. Companies in Quebec such as Rheinmetall have the ability to do this work.

What is the government waiting for to refurbish these tanks, which are considered a priority for protecting the troops? What is it waiting for to award the contracts? What is it waiting for to recognize that Quebec has the skills? It must act now.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our decision to purchase new tanks. They are needed for the troops on the ground in Afghanistan. It is a good decision.

[English]

I would point out for the member opposite that it was this government's decision to buy these tanks, against the wishes of many at the time. These are now saving lives in Afghanistan. We are moving forward with a contract to up-armour those tanks and have them available to those troops for both their work in Afghanistan and the training required.

The reality is that we would not have those tanks today were it not for this government.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 11, this House unanimously mandated the government to make poverty reduction a top priority at upcoming G8 and G20 meetings. In direct violation of this motion, the Conservatives have relegated this issue to a secondary concern at the G8 social summit.

Oral Questions

Other world leaders recognize that this economic recession will quickly turn into a bottomless social recession if the middle class and most vulnerable are ignored.

Why does the government not understand that fighting poverty and the recession are one and the same, and why is it ignoring the will of the House?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will be attending the G20 conference in London next week and he will be working with the world leaders to fight on many issues that the Prime Minister has said are important for everyone.

It is important to recognize that this is a collective effort with all G20 countries and those that are coming to London to fight against poverty and stimulate the economy. We are looking forward to some positive results out of that conference.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London, tobacco farmers were not only ignored by the former Liberal government but their businesses were actually undermined. We saw those years of neglect.

Farmers asked for assistance and this Conservative government delivered. Our Conservative government put forth a plan and funding to help transition these tobacco farmers into new opportunities.

Could the Minister of Agriculture tell the House how this program has helped tobacco farmers while ensuring taxpayer dollars are well taken care of?

• (1500)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the great work that he and his colleagues in southwestern Ontario have done on behalf of tobacco farmers.

We have allocated some \$286 million to start to move them out of the tobacco industry and transition into other great crops.

We are concerned that we are hearing reports of some farmers trying to bend the rules a little. To that end, we have allocated auditors to go down and have a look at this transition process. We will be working with the tobacco board down there to ensure the program is delivered in the spirit and the letter of the law by which it was created. We will continue to work with them.

* * *

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the Mulroney Conservatives, places like Goose Bay lost their local CBC television stations. This year we see dramatic cutbacks to the CBC in Labrador and in regions across Canada. Labrador has taken a 40% cut.

Just like 19 years ago, a Conservative government has failed to support the public broadcaster and recognize the important work of

CBC in rural and northern communities and it has failed to support regions that need this mirror to themselves and to other Canadians.

Why is the Conservative government letting the CBC die from a thousand cuts?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member has elected to go back in time, so let us do that. Let us take a walk back through time.

Let us go back to 1993 and the Liberal red book where the Liberals promised they would make no cuts to the CBC and that they would commit to stable funding. Now let us look at what they did over the next four years: \$414 million in cuts made by the Liberal Party to the CBC and 4,000 jobs lost.

Remarkably, it was during a similar period of time that they were running the sponsorship program. Almost the same amount of money that was cut from the CBC they took for themselves, a remarkable strategy.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade has completely ignored the strictest recommendations found in the report on the national roundtables on corporate social responsibility in the extractive sector, namely, the establishment of mandatory standards and an ombudsman office to deal with complaints against offending firms.

How can the minister believe that he will be taken seriously when he has announced that he will introduce very strict measures but that their implementation will be voluntary?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take this matter seriously. That is why I announced concrete measures for companies in the foreign extractive sector last week. We have created the office of extractive sector corporate social responsibility counsellor. We will support a centre of excellence as well as provide assistance to countries deciding on the future of their mining sector.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Transportation Safety Board has reported on the pipeline accident that occurred in Burnaby in July 2007. A construction project severed a pipeline releasing hundreds of cubic metres of crude oil over homes and into Burrard Inlet. The TSB found that the key causes of this accident were that 52-year-old pipeline location maps were inaccurate and that project communications were inadequate.

How will public safety be ensured? Will a new survey of the pipeline location in Burnaby be required and then updated regularly?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know all members of the House were very concerned with the rupture of the pipeline. I had the opportunity to tour with the member the devastation that was caused to a small part of Burnaby and into Burrard Inlet. We will take a look at everything in the TSB's report to ensure we can act in the public interest, whether that involves any number of departments within our government.

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have been noticing a new trend from the Conservatives and that is when they do not have the answer to a question that is put to them in the House they launch into a personal attack.

Today, in question period, the Minister of Industry, in reply to a question from the leader of the NDP, the member for Toronto—Danforth, stated that the member had somehow in the past called for the banning of cars in Toronto. This is not true. The member for Toronto—Danforth has never advocated that position. Moreover, that minister has, on previous occasions, raised the same issue and brought forward information in the House that was completely not true.

I would ask the Minister of Industry to acknowledge that this was not based on any information but that it was a personal attack. I would ask him to withdraw his comment and apologize to the member for Toronto—Danforth for bringing forward completely erroneous information.

The Speaker: I have no doubt that the hon. member for Vancouver East is raising a point of debate. Sometimes it does happen that members misrepresent the statements of other hon. members in this House. Today would not have been the first time that happened. It does sometimes happen.

Sometimes it is genuine misquoting because somebody has printed something that is inaccurate and the member who is stating the other member's position is relying on this document which is inaccurate. There are all kinds of explanations that could be tendered.

I am sure the Minister of Industry will look at the statement the hon. member for Vancouver East has raised but in my view it is a matter of debate rather than a point of order.

As hon. members are aware, the Speaker does not really adjudicate on whether statements are accurate or not. We try to ensure statements are parliamentary and arguments about facts are not normally unparliamentary unless the language that is used is personally offensive to the other hon. member. I am not sure anything I heard today on that point was offensive. There may have been some other comments but I will not go into those now.

We will see if hear from the Minister of Industry but otherwise I think this is a matter of debate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2) I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled, the “Proposed Amendment of the Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund to Enhance Voice and Participation in the International Monetary Fund”, and the “Proposed Amendment of the Articles of the Agreement of the International Monetary Fund to Expand the Investment Authority of the International Monetary Fund”. An explanatory memorandum is included with the treaties.

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NUCLEAR ENERGY TREATY

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2) I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled, the “Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for Co-operation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy”, done at Amman on February 17, 2009. An explanatory memorandum is included with the treaty.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36.8 I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to one petition.

• (1510)

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canadian section of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, FIPA, respecting its participation to the congress towards a gender sensitive legislative agenda for development in the Americas held in Bogota, Colombia from November 19 to 22, 2008, and to the 18th meeting of the executive committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas held in Miami, United States of America from December 17 to 19, 2008.

* * *

TERMINATOR SEEDS BAN ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-353, An Act to prohibit the release, sale, importation and use of seeds incorporating or altered by variety-genetic use restriction technologies (V-GURTs), also called “terminator technologies”, and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill is an act to prohibit the release, sale, importation and use of seeds incorporating what we call “terminator technology”. It is designed to protect the rights of Canadian farmers to save seeds by banning the release, sale, importation, and use of this variety-genetic use restriction technology.

It is time to make a commitment to our farmers and the international community that terminator seeds will not be allowed to take root in Canada.

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

* * *

NOWRUZ DAY

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in the opinion of the House, each year, the vernal equinox (first day of spring) shall be designated as “Nowruz Day”.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, simply a point of clarification to the government. With respect to the special debate that has been scheduled this evening having to do with a

Routine Proceedings

motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development with respect to the situation of the Baha'i in Iran, the motion that was adopted on Friday afternoon says that there will be no quorum calls, dilatory motions and request for unanimous consent during the course of that debate, which we all agree with, but for the sake of clarity, I take it that the motion would not preclude any member participating in the discussion in splitting their time with another member as long as they stay within the same overall time allotment.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. opposition House leader is quite correct. That was not clarified at the time, but we have no difficulty with any member splitting their time within the allotted 20 minute time period for each speech.

The Speaker: I read the *Journals* this morning. I was not here when this happened on Friday, but I believe that at the very end of the motion adopted, at least the one in the *Journals* on Friday, it says something about members being able to split their time. That is my recollection of it, but I only read it an hour ago, I might have forgotten it.

Presentation of petitions, the hon. member for Mississauga South.

* * *

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present another petition on income trusts. The petitioners remember the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept. The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners call upon the government: first, to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and third, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

• (1515)

ANIMAL WELFARE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition today on behalf of the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals. The petitioners feel that the regulations for animal transportation are outdated and they call on the government to strengthen animal transportation regulations contained in the Health of Animals Act.

Routine Proceedings

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions today on behalf of my constituents. Both have been certified by the clerk of petitions. They are both on the same subject and they propose to introduce a new volunteer service medal to be known as the “Governor General's Volunteer Medal” to acknowledge and recognize volunteerism by Canadian troops.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first one is from citizens who are concerned about the danger of pollution. They are saying that Al Gore's film summarizes the life-threatening global danger from atmospheric pollution.

The petitioners request that the Government of Canada legislate programs consistent with meteorological reality and immediately reduce the climate change crisis by diminishing fossil fuel dependency while sponsoring initiatives and incentives to promote less harmful technology.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a second petition from folks who are calling upon the government to immediately develop legal mechanisms to require Canadian companies operating internationally to meet clearly defined corporate accountability standards including existing international human rights and environmental standards, and to ensure that these standards are met.

The petitioners also request that Parliament develops effective monitoring verification and compliance mechanisms to ensure that Canadian companies operating internationally meet these clearly defined standards.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the upsetting responsibility to present a petition signed by over 800 disappointed constituents, and counting, who are disillusioned by the decision of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to deport Liubomir and Olha Nalesnik .

Since fleeing Ukraine in 1994 for security reasons Mr. and Mrs. Nalesnik have contributed positively to Canadian society by working continuously through this period, paying their taxes and volunteering in our local community, exactly the type of new Canadians our country needs.

Consequently the petitioners urge the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to reverse his decision to deport Mr. and Mrs. Nalesnik. They have established roots, built new lives in Canada, and made a positive contribution to society during their 15 years here.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to the House a petition calling on Parliament to reject a Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out. That the agreement be renegotiated along the principles of fair trade which would take

environmental and social impacts fully into account while genuinely respecting labour rights and the rights of all affected parties.

They are deeply concerned with the violence against workers and members of civil society by paramilitaries in Colombia, and the more than 2,200 trade unionists that have been murdered since 1991.

All Canadian trade agreements should be built upon principles of fair trade which fundamentally respect social justice, human justice, labour rights and environmental stewardship.

SRI LANKA

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the House will recall, a few weeks back we had an emergency debate in terms of the unfolding tragedy in Sri Lanka. Since that time nothing further has occurred from the Canadian government.

On behalf of concerned citizens, I am reading the following petition which states that: “We, the undersigned, call upon the Government of Canada to: intervene immediately to stop the war and urge for resumption of peaceful negotiations, urge the Sri Lankan government to allow NGOs to the affected areas, urge the Sri Lankan government to allow access to independent media, and urge the Sri Lankan government to allow an independent human rights monitoring mechanism.

• (1520)

TAXATION

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by Canadians who support changing an existing tax loophole that provides and unfair advantage to large retail cooperatives and harms small to medium size retailers. At present, large retail cooperatives can avoid paying corporate income tax due to the way they are structured.

This petition was circulated at over 200 bicycle retailers across Canada including several in Vancouver Quadra. It calls on Parliament to change the tax laws to allow small and medium size businesses to compete on a level playing field with large retail co-ops.

Small and medium size businesses are often locally owned and integral to their communities. During a time of economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever to have fair tax treatment for small and medium size businesses so they can survive and ultimately thrive.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from thousands of Canadians who draw the attention of the House to the fact that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known and the fact that more people now die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined.

Yet, the petitioners point that Canada is still the world's second largest producer and exporter of this deadly carcinogen. They also point out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

These petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all of its forms, end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

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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, question No. 58 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 58—**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:**

With respect to the participation activity and limitation survey PALS, as part of the Canadian census: is the government planning on withdrawing support for the PALS being part of the upcoming census?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, HRSDC remains committed to ensuring that the data required to support disability-related policy development, program delivery and reporting are available. The feasibility of a 2011 PALS, as well as alternative options for disability data collection are being evaluated currently.

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MARINE LIABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: When the debate was interrupted for question period, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca had the floor. There are eight minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks and I therefore call upon the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will get to the last part of my speech. I was getting into the part about the fact that human activities are the biggest threat to our oceans. As I said before, 17 of the major fisheries in the world are depleted, overfished and becoming extinct. This is a catastrophic problem.

Government Orders

Global warming is causing sea levels to rise. Many pesticides and nutrients are getting into the ocean system. Factories and industrial pollutants are pouring into the oceans. Air pollution is responsible for one-third of the toxic contaminants and nutrients that enter our coastal waters. Invasive species are causing greater problems.

There are solutions out there and I am going to provide some of them. Number one is to establish marine protective parks. On the coast of British Columbia there are a number of areas that can and should be protected.

Dr. Sylvia Earle, who hails from Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and the Scripps Research Institute in California, one of the world's leading oceanographers, has repeatedly called for the protection of areas in the world where fish species go to become larger and reproduce. The failure to protect these areas, which are unregulated and unprotected, will result in the massive demise of major fish species that are the cornerstone species not only in the oceans but also critical to the lives of people across our globe.

We fish and the fish will not be available, a major source of protein. What are we going to do when that source dries up? We have a serious problem and we have to act now.

There needs to be an elimination of destructive fishing practices, like ocean dragging. Ocean dragging destroys ecosystems on the ocean floors. It must be banned. I expect that the government can work with us to provide leadership in that area.

We all know what climate change is. What does not receive enough attention is the impact of climate change on our oceans. Oceans act as a carbon dioxide sink. They also produce oxygen. As temperatures rise, the ability of oceans to absorb carbon dioxide and oxygen, quite frankly, diminishes. The decrease in carbon dioxide absorption results in a feedback loop that actually causes a worsening of climate change.

This is the horror story before us. Once these feedback loops begin, they cannot be stopped. The increase in ocean temperatures resulting in a decrease in oxygen results in the death of fisheries because these anoxic areas are created that do not have any oxygen. The absence of oxygen will kill fish. It is critically important that we start to address this issue.

On the issue of climate change, we are going to look at Copenhagen, which is really Kyoto 2. I am going to present a solution that I think can be quite innovative.

The forests of the world are actually giant utilities. These utilities provide us with an ability, through photosynthesis, to produce oxygen and reduce carbon dioxide. That is what photosynthesis is. As we slash, burn and cut these forests of the world, including our own, it results in a decrease in the carbon dioxide consumption or the carbon sink capabilities but it also reduces the production of oxygen. The great forests of the world are utilities but we do not pay for them. There is no value in them. The only value they have right now is, frankly, to cut them down.

Government Orders

What if we were to change the way we think about the forests of the world? What if we were to look at the forests of the world as giant utilities that provide a benefit, which they do? They produce oxygen and reduce carbon dioxide. What if we paid not to cut down the forests? What if we were able to provide a value for those forests? That can be done.

It is estimated that every forest can absorb about 200 tonnes of carbon every single year. At a price of \$10 per tonne of carbon, that is \$2,000 per hectare. In the case of Indonesia, for example, it would be mean over \$2 billion would go to Indonesia not to cut its forests down. Putting a value on carbon and a value, therefore, on the forests because of their ability to consume carbon produces a value for the forests and for the people who have them. They could then produce carbon credits which could then be sold to generate money for their communities.

• (1525)

This is particularly important in developing countries. Herein lies the opportunity for CIDA. CIDA deals with human development. The Department of Environment deals with environment. The two do not meet. There is a chasm between the two that has never been connected.

If we are to address the issue of climate change and the issue of human development, then environment and human development are two halves of the same whole. The way to connect them is through CIDA and the Department of the Environment working together so Kyoto 2, or the negotiations that will take place in Copenhagen, will produce a system where carbon has a price and forests have value.

Looking at forests as a giant public utility, moneys can accrue, so cutting down the forests would be unnecessary. That would arrest the horrible situation occurring around the world, which is the destruction of forests. The destruction is not only the cutting down of the forests, but in many cases they are being burned. In the burning of the forests, we see the release of greenhouse gases. It is a terrible situation.

Canada can provide leadership. Not many people are talking about the solution, but I firmly believe our ability to move forward, putting a price on carbon, putting a value on forests and paying for not cutting them down, will ensure that the people see value in keeping those forests, which would benefit the people surrounding them. In other words, when we benefit people, we also benefit our environment.

With respect to global warming, it is critically important that the government looks at best practices. It should be engaging, interacting and showing leadership rather than following. South of the border President Obama has chosen to take this with both hands and address the problem, as opposed to what happened in the eight years prior to that.

Our government, tragically, is cutting and choking off the funds for significant climate change groups in Canada, particularly those attached to universities. There is a network, partly at the University of Victoria, and Professor Weaver sits on the international panel for climate change, which won the Nobel prize. However, the government is choking off those funds. It is cutting the funds to this network, which has been built over the last several years to deal

with climate change. Tragically, this will remove the very solutions we want.

I have provided a number of solutions for the government to improve our oceans, our navigable waters and our environment. We, in the Liberal Party, strongly want to work with the government to improve the bill to ensure that it addresses the concerns of Canadians.

• (1530)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the hon. member's comments on Bill C-7. How will passing Bill C-7 help to promote marine protected parks and ocean dragging and stop climate change, about which he spoke so eloquently?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, the fact is it will not, but we provide this opportunity for the government. We, in the opposition, can work together. All political parties, all members are offering the government solutions.

The government can put forth solutions to eliminate dragging and have a comprehensive strategy to deal with our oceans. It can take a leadership role rather than a subservient role on the issue of protecting marine areas in Canada and throughout the world, critical marine areas for the protection of species, many of which we consume as foodstuffs. The government also needs to work with first nations groups, which are willing partners to make this happen.

We need to do many things on climate change, on species protections and on reducing pollution. The solutions are out there. It requires leadership. It requires focus. It requires the Conservatives to do their job, rather than sitting back and thinking that other countries and other groups will do it for them. They will not.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not catch the intervention of my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca prior to question period, but I fully appreciate the fact that his comments are in an overall context. He talks about the impact of dragging and bottom dragging on the entire ecosystem. We would hope that we work toward trying to reduce the impact on the overall ecosystem.

However, part of the bill is troubling. I know we want to send this to committee so we can find out whether enough is enough or just what is enough. I know just prior to the start of the last year's offshore lobster fishing season, a vessel, the *Shovel Master*, went down just off the coast of Yarmouth. It contained 70,000 litres of diesel oil. It sank on one of the most fertile lobster grounds just off the coast of Nova Scotia, so there is a great concern there.

I know the legislation addresses a number of different elements. I know it implements rules to make Canada's laws consistent with international protocols. There is one aspect on which I would like the member to comment, and maybe we will find this out in committee. I would appreciate his insight on the supplementary fund protocol that increases the amount of compensation to \$1.5 billion. I know my colleague is very well aware of issues like the *Exxon Valdez* and so forth. Where does the \$1.5 billion compensation fit in the whole scheme of things? Will that be enough? We understand the costs involved in these cleanups somewhat, but could I get his take on the limit of \$1.5 billion in the legislation?

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• (1535)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Cape Breton—Canso has always worked extremely hard for his constituents on the east coast. Again, we are two bookends from the east and west coasts who have some similar problems.

The fact is we need know from the government how the fund will be managed, what the accountability will be and how the government will use it. Frankly, there are a lot of new technologies out there to deal with spills and to protect the environment and cleanups. We have not heard from the government how it will attract, identify and utilize those new technologies. It would be wise for the government to do this so we can ensure we get the best bang for the buck.

My colleague comes from the east coast. We do not want to see on the west coast a repeat of the cod fishery's disaster that occurred on the east coast. It speaks to a failure of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, a failure of management, to listen to the scientists, to look at the science and to do the right thing for a sustainable fishery, whether it is on the east or the west coasts.

This is such an urgent problem for all those users of fisheries on the east and west coasts. We strongly recommend that the government listen to the people who are involved so we can adopt the best practices and do it now.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's intervention speaks, in large measure, to the importance of allowing members of Parliament to speak their mind during any debate. He has raised a series of issues that might have some relevance to the marine liability issue.

Would he spend a few moments reflecting on one issue he has raised, which is the significance of the environmental impact of the release of greenhouse gases when there is an environmental destruction of our forestry? The reason I would like him to do that is the bill will be examined in committee in the context of how to apply the liability issues to freighters, to cargo carriers of product that could potentially have a damaging effect on the environment.

Since he talked about the value to a pristine environment, if we transfer that value onto an insurance model, then we could impose upon those individuals or corporations that engage in activity detrimental to the environment an appropriate tariff for liability purposes.

Would he share his views and his thoughts in that vein for those of us who serve on the committee and would like to bring some of those issues to a more specific discussion of the bill when it does come to committee?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of marine liability, it is very important that user groups be brought in front of the committee. They need to be consulted to establish a mechanism and one they are fully aware of since they are the ones who will be responsible for moving those tankers and ships through various routes.

The other point I would like to make is the routes have to be established. They have to be out of the way of major marine mammal areas as they affect marine mammal reproduction. We need to deal with the issue of sonar and the use of sonar for our military.

We know military sonar has a significant and profound impact upon marine mammals.

Double-hulling is another issue that needs to be brought up. We need to discuss when to do that.

Overall, we need to consult with the private sector on how to prevent these things from happening. We talk about what we will do when they happen, but it is critically important that we do all that we can to prevent these marine disasters. We know they can have such a profound impact upon ecosystems and the people who live near them. We have seen that they can be devastating.

My hon. colleague asked about forests. The destruction of forests result in an increase in greenhouse gases and a decrease of the absorbent capacity of the oceans to remove greenhouse gases and to absorb oxygen. This results in a decrease of oxygen in the oceans, which kills all manner of fish.

Also, because the oceans have a decreased ability to absorb greenhouse gases, the temperature therefore will go up. This results in an increased melting of the glaciers of the world, most of which will in fact become extinct over the next century.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Marine Liability Act. This is not my riding's greatest concern, but it does show that I give thought to the bills that are important to this House.

[*English*]

I have reservations about the nature of this particular law as it brings out some of the dilatory nature of the government. This law is acting on a 2005 report.

It is important that the House and the government address some of the less glamorous sides of government. However, I think the laws that we have seen coming through the transportation and infrastructure committee of late are laws that could have been and should have been addressed some time ago and could have been and should have been part of some animated discussion in terms of setting standards.

I think they find themselves less subject to that because of the long time it has taken for the government of the day to actually address the business of the day. For people even lightly concerned with the affairs of the country, it has now become commonplace to recognize that the Conservative government has been very occupied with its own politics and its angling for power. The actual day-to-day running of government and moving forward with the business of government have lost out in very significant measure.

Government Orders

The bill before us today addresses some significant things in the sense of conventions to which Canada has made itself a signatory. It addresses a glaring gap in the liability coverage with respect to adventure tourism as it relates to the Maritimes, our various coasts and their ability to continue. People know that the whole move toward ecotourism in terms of employment and so on leaves those operators disadvantaged. The Conservative government has put a whole range of the public interest on a slow boat that will only come into harbour when it is in the political interest of the government, not the public interest. This is a hallmark of the government. It is not just the public interest, but some very specific parts of the country that suffer.

I predict that this is going to become increasingly recognized as a measure of some of the disappointment that people have with the government, because this is a signature. We can look at the relationship between laws like this one and others. Currently before committee is another law looking at Arctic waters and the extension of the 100-mile limit to a 200-mile limit. There was a consensus on that some time ago. There is also some work being done around changes to some of the remote airports.

A lot of these things could have been and should have been addressed by the House some time ago, but they did not fit the mode of the government. People may wonder is it not the job of the government to simply govern. That is not what the government of the day saw as its main reason for being here. Instead, led by the Prime Minister, it uses every opportunity and every ounce of its power and every aspect of privilege to introduce things that advance it in public opinion and give it a better chance to win government.

A year or two ago many reasonable Canadians would have called that something of an overemphasis, that that is not exactly how they understood the government and its particular brand of conservatism. I think it is now fairly well entrenched with the Canadian public that there is an opportunism that trumps the public interest.

We need to have some reasonable level of debate. For example, there are nuggets in this legislation that speak to levels of liability and adopting international conventions to establish them. Some of the ones that are fixed do increase, but this is a complex bill that addresses crafts of different sizes, from canoes or paddle-powered boats up to tankers weighing hundreds of tonnes and those that also carry bunker fuel for their propulsion.

This is a long overdue consideration of the pollution protections for our coastal waters and how well they conform. We can be fairly guaranteed that ships of a certain size will have registration and insurance once this law comes into effect and two of the international conventions that are waiting on this law come into effect in terms of guaranteed licensing and insurance. This is the result of a report in 2005 and we stand here in 2009 coming only to its first deliberation.

Again, it is important to consider that this is part of a pattern. To be reasonable and fair, we must take a look at the government's own accountability reports in areas like infrastructure. In 2007-08, according to the government's own report on infrastructure, there is a strong indication that only about 5% of the dollars budgeted for that year actually was distributed.

● (1545)

The government should have focused more on bills such as the one before us today, Bill C-7, on the actual running of government, actually getting dollars out, getting laws modified and passed, keeping up with the business of government, the unglamorous side, the non-political side. The ratio is what we have to fulfill if we are not going to end up gumming up the works, which is the situation I humbly submit the government of the day now finds itself in.

Not having been interested in running good government, it now finds itself with a backlog of public interest items that have to be reckoned with. Its agenda up to now has really been to sustain itself in power and hopefully propel itself into a majority, but now that agenda stands exposed. It stands somewhat weakened and instead of being able to play Whac-A-Mole with the various issues that pop up every day, there is a heck of a lot of governing that has to be reckoned with.

In not spending 95% of infrastructure dollars, in not bringing forward this bill sooner, Canadians have not been served well. That is the simple and clear matter of it. Canadians wonder why the government is not taking care of a variety of initiatives.

Canadians would be disturbed to know, for example, that some of the bills that have come forward to deal with some of the concerns, not just regionalized in places such as Vancouver but around community safety and so on, have been to this House before, have been offered consensus support by the parties before, but for its own agenda, incredibly for a government that would portray itself as having an abiding interest in some level of community safety, the government has actually held onto those bills. It has delayed them so that it could go to the polls and talk about them as not having been passed.

If we look at the various parliamentary manipulations around bills presented to this House, we will find that to be accurate and to be the case. It is a government again that has really broken new ground for the high ratio of incredibly intensive political considerations of its actions. There is no denying that every government that brings things forward needs to have a consideration for the well-being of the opinion of the public, but this is a whole different level that knocks out what many of the constituents who sent all of us here would see as reasonable or fair in the face of our overall obligations.

With respect to the Marine Liabilities Act and the Federal Courts Act that makes these consequential amendments, this says to the people who, for example, have been waiting for adventure tourism for these five years that we are going to get around to it, that this actually may be in the purview of the government to do some of the heavy lifting on some of the things that need to get done. We can also sense, as we have at committee, a certain lack of enthusiasm of the government for that job of finding where it is it can move things forward on behalf of Canadians.

Government Orders

The biggest illustration of this perhaps is in the recent business around the federal budget. The government, in its wisdom, thought it would bring in an agenda that would cut \$5 billion, but it turned into an \$18 billion agenda of deficit financing, of incentives and of stimulus. Whether it comes to that moment of the day or a bill like this one, I think all fair-minded Canadians are asking themselves whether the government really means it, if it is being compelled to do it, if it is not really part of how it has put itself at risk in terms of promises that it has made to Canadians, if it is really a sincere commitment on the part of the government to run the ordinary business.

Clearly Bill C-7 falls into the category of the ordinary running of government. This is the kind of thing we would like to think that parliamentarians out of the limelight would spend some of their time on, making sure that we get it right, making sure that Canada does not fall behind other countries, as apparently we have now, in ratifying the conventions, that we do not fall behind other jurisdictions, as we apparently have, in terms of promoting the ecotourism that comes with marine adventure tours and so on.

Quite frankly they have been unable, without our adherence to the convention, to find liability insurance to the same degree that would make that possible. It is actually a significant constraint on something that should be within a proper discussion of its impact. Every new industry has its ups and downs in terms of what it can do, but it is something that has been touted, quite rightly, as a way for some of the communities that previously depended upon resource exploitation, that have found that a less viable industry, to turn to that and to find themselves better supported in a way that is much more in keeping with the environment.

As the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca spoke about so eloquently earlier, there is an environmental tie-in here, but we can understand as well that there is a lack of enthusiasm on that particular front. This has not been a direction in which the government has tilted its hat. There has been minimal coverage of some of these things.

• (1550)

I want to say to the people who are keeping track of how Parliament is doing that this is a consistent feature of how we find the government. It is just covering the minimal bases and working every angle that it can to advance what its true agenda may still well be.

On this side of the House, we would like to believe there is a capacity in the government to hunker down to business, to look at things like Bill C-7, to look at its obligation to fund infrastructure projects, and to take some of the partisanship and political component out of it.

If one listens, for example, to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, one will know that is not the case. Of the times that the issue has been raised, whether it be here or in committee, it really is around a partisan element.

We hear a defence for the idea that most of the money should go, for example, to Conservative ridings. The government still, in its old-fashioned outlook, looks after its prerogatives even in this hour of need for Canadians. Last December 44,000 people lost their jobs

in the construction industry. I do not have a comparable number in terms of how significantly people are affected in the ecotourism industry that is referred to in this bill in terms of marine adventure, but no doubt they would find themselves compromised for a time simply because they did not fit the bulls-eye of the government. That bulls-eye has in it a very high quotient of political self-interest.

We would hope that with the encouragement of Canadians with some of the events of recent months there could actually be some kind of learning in place by the government. That is what Canadians require. They require that the government, for the time that it is there, actually exhibit the capacity to look after a broader range of interests.

Later on today the government will have a chance to express itself with respect to a particular group of immigrants who have the wide support of Canadians as resisters to the Iraq war. They have come from the United States. They have given up an entire lifestyle and connection to their home country out of an ethical and moral crisis that they have experienced. These are people who have spent, as an example of people who live in my riding, as much as 27 years serving their country and their military. Yet, members opposite, because they think that simplification serves their agenda, are prone instead to mischaracterize these people in the negative and look at them as something less than the special case considerations they are.

Having a Canadian sensibility is something that needs to be worked for by a government that is prepared to roll up its sleeves and be open to the new ideas and occurrences that come, not from the people who occupy the chairs in this chamber, but rather from the Canadian public. Instead, for members opposite, that too often has been found lacking.

It is our hope that this bill will find at least some time in committee and that we will look at purposefully and weigh the balance by consulting with some of the groups that are affected by some of the liability coverages put forward in terms of the risks that Canadians have.

It is interesting that there is a whole range of things that still need to be done in terms of international shipping. I think most Canadians would probably sleep a little less easily if they knew that the amount of liability available, for example, for an oil spill is much less than the damage it could cause to our coastline and to our environment. That would be concerning. Yet, as I spoke earlier, there is a conspicuous lack of urgency in terms of driving the government forward to bring us this bill after four years.

There does arise the possibility of hope for how the government may conduct itself in this regard and more broadly. It is in that tempered hope that the government has been put on an effective probation as it needs to be.

We know that left to its own devices it would simply reproduce the record that it had in recent years of being unable to fund infrastructure projects and unwilling to put out a whole range of government actions. We saw in the last budget report a whole range of projects that went underfunded, unspent and unattended to by a government that is simply too concerned and spends too much of its time on its political interests and not enough time on the public's interests.

Government Orders

This bill is only one example of several that have started to slowly come out of the bureaucracy that is a necessary part of government. One can almost hear that word in disdain from the members opposite, but there is a part of governance that is not about what gets into the headlines. I understand there has not been a lot of media coverage of this particular bill.

• (1555)

Therein lies some of the reasons the government has taken so long to bring this forward. Nowhere in the coda of the government, of the ethics, of the way it expresses itself is a commitment to do government better, to actually see government work as opposed to castigated, as opposed to put a whole host of imagined ills on what happens to government, but the very idea that government could be made to function better, frankly, even in an enterprise way, to try different ideas and better ideas of making government work better rather than handing it off to some blurry version of the private sector that it has in mind.

Some of the members opposite served in the Mike Harris government in Ontario, the Conservative government in Ontario, and we found, in case after case, what happens when a government is not focused on making government work fully in the public interest. Every day there are people driving on highway 407 that was given off, handed away completely, to the private sector without due valuation for the public interest. It was sold for \$3 billion and evaluated for \$11 billion not even 12 months later. A complete giveaway.

People do not talk publicly about the justice project, in which some of the members opposite were involved, in terms of current ministers, and yet the justice project ended up with hundreds of millions of dollars spent by a private sector firm on developing a case management system. It ended up in litigation and got exactly zero for the government of the day and governments to follow.

There are other cases of billions of dollars wasted by a particular brand of Conservative that holds government in disdain. I guess what I want to say in terms of the Marine Liability Act, in dealing with the needs that are brought forward here, is an element of vigilance is required, not just on this side of the House but on the public's part as well. In order to understand the government of the day, it is important to understand this predilection that it has towards its own interest.

Some of that has become part of the public characteristic that people have attributed to the Prime Minister, whether fairly or not, but I think it has started to stick as what they see. Most recently some of the public opinion polls say that he is not trusted in terms of the direction of the economy.

I would submit, humbly, to the members opposite that this is part of the problem, that their leadership as well as individual members do not speak in this House about things like how to get infrastructure money to their own communities. They do not say that the gas tax method would get the hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars in some cases directly to their municipalities, directly to their local needs, because maybe, and I do not wish to ascribe motive, but it seems on the surface of it that they subscribe to the old style of in the back room, slicing up the piece of pie and hoping that their riding will get that. Well, even though there is a propensity to see that

money go toward Conservative ridings, it does not necessarily mean that their riding will benefit.

I would submit that just as people want to see us address things, long overdue things like marine liability, they want us to reckon with how to get dollars out in stimulus, dollars that are being borrowed from their grandchildren. That is what happens when money is borrowed, that they would meet that higher standard, that in fact we would see those dollars land out there in products that are worthwhile.

We have yet to hear from a single member in the government party on that subject. In fact, they all voted against their local communities getting a fair share of those infrastructure dollars. Instead, they have submitted to an old fashioned application program that will allow somebody in the back rooms to put their fingerprints on it. They hope it will mean a bigger set of scissors and a bigger chance to actually cut the ribbons and so on, and take credit for it.

I would say to the members opposite, just as this bill should have been in this House some time ago, just as we should have been helping marine tourism previously, just as we should have been ensuring that our environmental protections are as strong as they needed to be in terms of moving us forward sooner, so, too, must there be a different look at how government operates.

There is an increasingly short period of time should the government not see, appreciate and understand that. I would look to the wisdom of the members opposite when it comes to the variety of votes and choices that are coming forward and the considerations they make in their own caucuses to tell the government, and its leadership, plainly, that it is time to look after the people of Canada and not to look after the Conservative Party of Canada over and over again in this place.

I look forward to the chance to dialogue further with members about this bill and obviously, even more important, about the priorities that this bill represents, not just the protection of our marine traffic into Canada, not just the modernization of what we are doing in terms of protecting the environment and advancing some of the newer types of industries, but having this House be effective on behalf of Canadians so that it does not take four years to get a functional bill in front of this House where members can put it in front of committee and bring in the groups that need to look at it.

• (1600)

It may trouble people who are observing us to know that we are not all tasked every day in terms of the government putting in front of us the important issues around the auto sector. We have seen nothing from the government about what it is doing in the auto sector, the forestry sector or infrastructure. It has simply does what it thinks is in its political interests and does not expose it to this House.

To give credit to the United States, it has shown the public what it is doing. The result is that we have no protection in terms of assets pledged for the dollars that we have offered to General Motors, for example, none whatsoever. It was all pledged to the Americans. We look forward—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Government Orders

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member's statements and I have a question for him.

Upon reading the bill, it seems to me that the current legislation gives equal liability treatment to passengers or customers whether they are riding a ferry or on a sightseeing trip. The same treatment is given to people who are involved in much more risky activities, such as whitewater rafting, kayaking, whale watching or Zodiacs. People involved in those sorts of activities are accepting a much higher risk than people riding ferries or on sightseeing cruises.

With Bill C-7, we are, in a way, giving preferential treatment. We are taking away the liability of the adventure tourism industry which, right now, are having to buy insurance policies to cover the liability.

If the member or his son and daughter were taking a trip on a ferry and there was an accident, they would be covered up to a certain level under the law and would be covered in the same way right now if they were riding in a Zodiac or whitewater rafting. This would exempt the whole group of adventure tourism companies and allow them to have waivers, which is not allowed under the current act, which means they would get away from buying insurance and protecting their passengers by having customers sign waivers saying that they are responsible if something happens to them.

I wonder whether this is something we should be taking a closer look at. We would be allowing a group to get out of the responsibilities it has right now. Insurance companies put tough requirements on industries, and maybe that is the way it should be. Should we be allowing an industry, which is riskier, to get out of providing liability, letting their customers sign waivers and putting the responsibility on children who may be hurt? The tourism operator will tell the tourists that it is their problem, that it will not pay out.

Does the member think we should be exempting operators and does he think that is fair?

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for his question. I understand his concern, but the bill contains a provision enabling the minister to exempt certain persons.

[*English*]

It is important to note that we are giving away regulatory power to the minister. What will need to be discussed in committee is the extent of the regulatory power, what exactly the government has in mind and what would be fair to groups. I gather that when the original bill was passed in 2001 it took away the ability to get liability waivers done and that has limited the business that taken place in adventure tourism.

As I say, not all of adventure tourism is as eco-compatible as we might like it but the thing is to give it a fair hearing in committee where we can look at this. It changes the class of boats, for example. It seems to me that the liability was for carrying oil and so on. Sorting out the idea of different classes of water vehicles, canoes,

paddle powered boats and so on will be useful, rather than painting everybody with the same brush.

I agree with the member for Elmwood—Transcona. There is a concern there that should be addressed in committee, which is where this bill needs to go. We need to understand well the trade-offs and liabilities that are happening. As my central point to this, if this had come forward sooner we would have done some of that work already, there would have been room for that. Hopefully, the government will get on with this without delay.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

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

* * *

ENERGY EFFICIENCY ACT

Hon. John Baird (for the Minister of Natural Resources) moved that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure rise today to speak to a bill that will help Canadian families from coast to coast reduce their energy consumption, and in the long run, reduce their energy bills.

The introduction of Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act, is just one more way our Conservative government is helping Canadian families get through these challenging economic times.

Not only would the bill affect the pocketbooks of Canadian families, it would also be good for the environment. We all know that a global recession has gripped the world at a time when people are already struggling with the challenges of climate change. The bill today took shape before the global economic downturn began. Our focus then, which was saving energy, using energy more efficiently and developing clean energy, was driven primarily by environmental concerns and the desire to reduce energy consumption and the cost of that.

Today circumstances have changed, but I believe Bill S-3 is relevant because of its potential economic benefits.

The legislation can help Canadians save money as they contribute to a better environment. For that reason, we in the House have a responsibility to give it our approval. I hope opposition members will join with our government as we help Canadian families reduce their energy consumption and energy costs.

Government Orders

As I pointed out, this is a time of extraordinary global economic uncertainty. In Canada, to this point, we have been comparatively lucky. We have fared far better than most other countries, but times are still very difficult for many Canadian businesses and for many people who have lost their jobs.

I am proud that our Conservative government is taking immediate action by taking the right steps to help revitalize local economies and to preserve and create jobs across the country. Canada's economic action plan will deliver roughly \$40 billion in economic stimulus across Canada over the next two years, supporting both job creation and economic activity.

All Canadians support these swift actions and this swift reaction by our government. These actions will stimulate our economy now and will also strengthen our nation's already strong economic fundamentals. They will ensure that Canada is positioned for even greater prosperity in the future.

I ask members of the House to complete the second reading of Bill S-3 expeditiously so Canadians can quickly receive and apply the benefits of this important legislation.

The bill is called An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act, and it deals with that. Energy efficiency is probably the easiest, most affordable and most effective way for families and businesses across the country alike to reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Whether it is installing a programmable thermostat to turn the heat down when we are not at home, or replacing an inefficient motor at a plant, we start saving right away. We start saving energy and money and we contribute toward saving the environment. These benefits would start right away and they would continue to grow month after month and year after year.

Energy efficiency also helps create and secure jobs for Canadians, and that is a vital consideration at this time of economic uncertainty. As soon as we decide to improve the insulation of our homes or to install new energy efficient windows or doors, we create and protect the jobs of thousands of Canadians who do that work and who manufacture those products.

Canadians understand energy efficiency. That can be seen from the remarkable public response to our Conservative government's eco-energy home retrofit program. That is why this morning, the minister announced an additional \$300 million to extend this popular and successful program for another two years.

I think we will see there will be universal acceptance and enthusiasm over the extension of that program. This continued support will allow an additional 200,000 homeowners to participate in the program and to reduce their energy costs. By doing that, it will also generate about \$2.4 billion in economic activity.

I will take a bit of time to talk about the act itself, first in general terms and then a bit more specifically.

The first Energy Efficiency Act was introduced in 1992. At that time, major appliances such as fridges, stoves, freezers and those kinds of things were a prime focus of the new legislation. The intent at that time was to ensure they were developed to be energy efficient.

Between 1990 and 2005, the use of major appliances in Canada went up by 38%. That seems like a big change, but during that same

period, the total energy consumed by those same appliances went down by almost 20%. This is a simple illustration of how well the right legislation at the right time can work.

• (1610)

Much has changed since the original Energy Efficiency Act was introduced 17 years ago. A lot of new technologies have been developed. Consumer electronics and other common uses of energy increasingly dominate our lives. As a result, we still need some guidance and careful regulation on the responsible use and conservation of energy.

Bill S-3 would give the Government of Canada the means to ensure the Energy Efficiency Act continues to meet its objectives, with standards, regulations and labelling requirements that are in tune with today's marketplace and technological realities.

In fact, these amendments would make the Energy Efficiency Act itself more efficient. For example, and I will go through this a little later, it will be made clear that standards can be prescribed and applied to classes of products rather than individual products.

This new, efficient and comprehensive approach will greatly reduce the time and effort that now must be spent on updating regulations for individual products as they enter the market one by one. This new approach will also be important with respect to Canada's efforts to reduce the amount of standby power consumption; that is the energy that is consumed by everyday products like televisions, microwaves, CD players, battery chargers, coffee makers and so many other appliances, even when they are not turned on.

These amendments would also provide the authority to regulate products that would affect or control energy consumption, including windows, doors and thermostats. Therefore, it not only to deal with the products that consume energy themselves, but also the products that affect or control energy consumption.

Bill S-3 would also enable improvements to the energy rating labels that would appear on products to ensure Canadians would have easy and comprehensible access to the information they need to make smart choices when shopping for products that consume energy.

I will quickly go through the bill. It is a short bill that comes from the Senate. It will do those things I mentioned before, such as clarifying the classes of energy using products that may be established based on their common characteristics. We see that in clause 1. Those kinds of common characteristics would be things like the intended use of the product, or the conditions under which the products are normally used. There is an attempt to try to put classes together rather than having to deal with each individual product and then having to regulate every individual product that comes into the country.

Another section of the bill will deal with dealers and their responsibilities. It will restrict them in being able to ship an energy-using product from one province to another unless the product itself complies with the energy efficiency standards and the product or packages labelled are in accordance with the regulations. There will be some control on where these products are sent and a certainty that they fit into the regulatory structure in place.

Government Orders

Dealers are required, and we would expect they would be obligated, to provide information. This bill lays out in one or two of its sections the information dealers would be required to provide on the products. It talks about the manner and the form of the information that needs to be provided. It talks also about the fact that dealers will have to retain these documents for a period of time and that those documents would be available to allow the minister and the government to verify the accuracy and completeness of the information provided through it.

The biggest change probably is in clause 5 where it says that the governor in council can prescribe as an energy-using product any manufactured product or class of manufactured products that is designed to operate using electricity, oil, natural gas, or any other form or source of energy, or that affects or controls energy consumption. This is fairly broad-reaching in its application.

There are sections that deal with prescribing standards and labelling and what types of labels are going to be required on these products. It broadens the ability of the government to direct labelling, to make the labels very specific.

Also at the end of the legislation are two sections that deal with the requirements to report. The minister will have two areas that he or she will be required to report.

First, once every three years a report will compare the standards we have established to the standards in the provinces, in Mexico, the United States or individual states throughout the United States so people can see exactly the level of the requirements.

● (1615)

Second, within four years after the day on which this section comes into force, the minister will be required to demonstrate the extent to which energy efficiency standards have been prescribed under this act for all energy-using products in our country.

It is a fairly broad bill but, again, it will reach across a number of areas.

When the Energy Efficiency Act was introduced in 1992, it broke new ground. It allowed Canada, at that time, to set some of the highest energy efficiency standards in the world.

Bill S-3 would ensure that our regulatory regime would continue to meet those high standards and it would help Canada lead the way for the world, all the while saving Canadians money.

Our efforts to make our homes and businesses more energy efficient will also make substantial contributions to our long-term energy security and to the environment.

I have no reason to doubt that hon.. members will join with me in agreeing that these reasons, both individually and together, are more than sufficient for all of us to support the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, indeed, the hon. member is quite right. Nothing in the bill should cause us to question the principles contained therein. Energy efficiency should be a fundamental issue not only in environmental terms but in economic terms as well. This, unfortunately, the government has failed to understand. It is fine to pass laws and

support principles, such as those in S-3. However, a look at the latest budget presented a few months ago by the Conservative government reveals that it completely misses the point on energy efficiency. We must remember the Obama plan invests six times more per capita in energy efficiency than does the federal government's recent budget.

Does the member not agree with the members on this side of the House? It is not simply a matter of passing laws and regulations. Tax measures must be put in place to support the proposed regulations. What does he think of the Obama plan proposed to the south, which invests six times more in energy efficiency per capita than this government's economic stimulus plan?

● (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to bring a reform to an act that was tabled almost 20 years ago. The member is talking about some things outside the act. It is important to understand that the objective in the bill is to eliminate the least efficient energy-using products from our marketplace and replace them with products that are more energy efficient, that will save Canadians money and that will improve the environment. That is the intent of the bill.

It begins a process and continues the process that the government has had in place in its commitment to the environment and energy efficiency.

We could talk about the \$1 billion clean energy fund that has been put in place by the government. This government does not have to apologize to anybody for its commitment to these issues.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate. I will ask the parliamentary secretary a few questions.

Why does he keep repeating that this is a series of modifications to over 20 years of statutory law when, in fact, these amendments were proposed under the government's own clean air act some short 8 to 12 months ago? Why is he not repeating that the modifications to the Energy Efficiency Act were censored? Why is he not telling Canadians that when these measures were incorporated in the government's clean air act under the previous minister, the government, not liking the end result of the complete reconfiguration of the clean air act, which was a climate change response for Canada, prorogued Parliament and killed the clean air act to avoid bringing these changes to bear? Why did it take a Liberal senator to reintroduce these measures in the Senate to strengthen Canada's Energy Efficiency Act?

Mr. David Anderson: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the member is right that these amendments were first proposed 18 months ago. Obviously, since then we have had an election and that means new legislation must be brought back. When it was brought in, there were very few objections to it. The government has taken a look at it, decided it is an important part of our mandate, so we have moved ahead with it as a bill, as something that we should support.

Government Orders

In the speech I gave a few minutes ago, we are encouraging the opposition members to join with us, in a spirit of collaboration, to get the bill passed as quickly as possible, to bring in these amendments, so that Canadians can benefit from energy efficiency. The environment could also benefit from the changes that would be made through the amendments in the act.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for introducing this exciting addition to our environmental initiative. Our former Minister of the Environment is in the House with us and we have had great success with our present environment minister, leading the way to practical results.

As we have indicated, one of the most efficient ways to reduce our energy consumption is by the small, incremental, cost-saving measures that we saw on Saturday across the world, with everybody shutting down their lights for an hour. People understand that everybody has a role to play.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, how can Canadians take advantage of this offer that is being extended through the Energy Efficiency Act amendments?

• (1625)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, maybe I should talk a little bit about how we got to this point.

There has been a strong effort by Natural Resources Canada to give priority through the legislation to products that are currently covered by similar legislation of other major trading partners, so we have strong coherence among the different partners involved in this activity, the provinces, the federal government, the United States, which of course is an important trading partner.

The changes being made are really good for Canadians. A study has shown that there will be no net cost to the producers in this country. They will be able, through the changes being made in the bill, to recover any costs that might be accrued because of the changes in regulation. That is a positive thing for Canadians. They can go ahead with it. They can support the legislation, and in the end, they are the ones who will save money.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-3 broadens the regulatory parameters of the Energy Efficiency Act. It remains to be seen how much they will be implemented. The amendments could, for example, make it possible to set high standards for vehicle emissions in order to improve their energy efficiency or establish eco-energy labelling for vehicles, as the Bloc has been requesting for years.

Apart from the updating of certain regulations, how much does the government want to do under this bill in order to really improve energy efficiency in Canada and Quebec?

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the bill is far reaching in its effect and its impact across our country for Canadians. I will just go over it quickly.

The amendments to the act would clarify that a standard can be established for classes of products, not just individual products. That

would improve the administration of the act. It would expand the scope of products that would be covered by authorizing the development of standards for those products, and that covers everything that affects energy use, not just those who use energy or produce it. It would more closely control interprovincial shipments once standards are enacted and it would certainly lay out energy efficiency labelling in a new way that has not been laid out in the past.

The bill is far-reaching. We think it would do the job in terms of bringing energy efficiency even more strongly to Canada than the original act did. I should maybe mention that the objective of the original Energy Efficiency Act was to try to eliminate the least efficient energy using products on the market, and it seems to have worked very well. It has had a direct impact on the reduction of atmospheric emissions and certainly we continue to move forward in that direction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know specifically whether the government is giving itself the regulatory means. Specifically, what programs does it intend to implement in order to have a real energy efficiency policy that looks promising when it comes to climate change and would generally help Canadians save energy? We need something concrete. If he wants to provide tools to do this, what specifically are the government's intentions today?

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are asking the opposition to join with us to pass this legislation so we can begin to put that framework in place. I think the best thing the member could do is to take a look back at what happened with the original Energy Efficiency Act. It was put in place in order to regulate the energy use in a number of areas. It particularly dealt with those appliances and those products that were not energy efficient.

Therefore, I would think that everyone here would probably agree that the act has worked very well in removing a lot of those products from the market, allowing new products to be developed and come to the market. However, the argument that I made earlier is that technology has changed, so we need to move ahead and that is what the bill does.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. 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 Nipissing—Timiskaming, Industry; the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Foreign Affairs; and the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre, Ukraine.

• (1630)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to this bill to amend the Energy Efficiency Act.

Government Orders

It is interesting to follow the parliamentary secretary after his remarks and his responses to questions with a couple of fundamental facts for Canadians to understand. First, this bill is actually being sponsored by the leader of the government in the Senate, but of course the critic there is hon. Grant Mitchell, a Liberal senator who has been driving this through the Senate for some time now.

It is a bill that will make, as the parliamentary secretary has said, a number of changes to the existing Energy Efficiency Act here in Canada. It will, in effect, broaden the scope of the government's ability to regulate consumer products that use energy, which in and of itself is a good thing.

The fundamental challenge, the theme I am going to come back to, about this bill and the amendments to the Energy Efficiency Act is that they are now being presented completely and utterly in isolation. They are presented in isolation of a climate change plan for the country. They are presented in isolation from fiscal structures in the country that may or may not be driving energy efficiency because we all know that energy efficiency and a carbon constrained future, with the reduction of greenhouse gases, is a major and massive competitive factor that Canada is now pursuing.

We are in a globally highly sought after race which many jurisdictions want to win, and that is the race to better and higher energy efficiency standards for our production processes, for the services we render, and for the way in which the government procures its goods and services.

There is yet another missing link in this package. How do these energy efficiency measures connect with a comprehensive innovative strategy for the future of Canada? How do they connect to the existing fiscal measures that are in place? How do they connect to the government's overall program expenditures? How do they connect to the government's own procurement system, having watched the green procurement regime of the previous government disappear under this government?

How is it connected to the government's own energy efficient audit system for Canadian homeowners which has been seriously undermined and weakened? How does it connect to the government's new short-term funding for the building of decks and patios to try to stimulate the economy? How does it connect to the standards by which stimulus money is being invested in Canadian society? What is the matrix here that the government is bringing to bear on billions of dollars of necessary stimulus spending? How do these connect?

It is all so passing strange that the government has been mounting for months, now a campaign, the publicity and communications campaign, to tell Canadians that it is a red tape buster or, in the case of energy efficiency and climate change, a green tape buster. The Minister of Transport, for example, regularly talks about being the accountability guy, the efficiency guy.

Why is it, surreptitiously, that just last Friday afternoon the Government of Canada, the Conservatives, tabled an outrageous document which lists hundreds of exceptions for environmental assessment provisions in this country claiming that these have to be removed, these standards for environmental assessment have to be

removed because, of course, they will impede, the government suggests, stimulus investment in the Canadian economy.

How do we square this? On the one hand, we have one document that says we have to do away with environmental assessment, and yet now we have a new series of amendments to the Energy Efficiency Act which say that businesses are going to have to abide by a whole new suite of energy efficiency standards.

● (1635)

Is not this suite of energy efficiency amendments yet more red tape being tabled by the Conservative Party, or really is the Conservative Party being disingenuous, being deliberately misleading with the Canadian people about whether environmental assessment is in fact an impediment to getting important stimulus investment out the door?

However, it is worse than that. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities told us there already exists over \$13 billion of so-called shovel-ready projects that have been environmentally assessed. So why is it that the government is speaking out of both sides of its mouth? Which story are Canadians supposed to believe?

I think what we are seeing here is the end result of three and a half years of non-stop lurching by the Conservative Party when it comes to energy efficiency and the climate change crisis. It is jumping literally from ice floe to ice floe as the Arctic thaws at breakneck speed.

There is no climate change plan in this country. There is no more Turning the Corner plan. Everything has evaporated into thin air. Instead of actually stopping the nonsense, stopping the lurching from one communications campaign to another over the past three and a half years on the climate change crisis, the government is introducing these minor but important changes to the Energy Efficiency Act and expecting Canadians to believe these amendments constitute a climate change plan. They do not.

There is absolutely no doubt now; it is conclusive. Canada has abandoned the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, although the government does not have the guts to stand up and say it.

It is the only international treaty in existence on the planet today to deal with atmospheric carrying capacity and the climate change crisis. There is no other. For any government that unilaterally changes the baseline year, for example, from 1990 to 2006, which is also part of the government's communications campaign, the universe only started in 2006. In terms of everything that came before, such as Prime Minister Mulroney's work, Mr. Stanfield's work, Mr. Trudeau's work, the work of successive governments, in the communications campaign none of that existed before.

Government Orders

Therefore, in 2006, the government came and unilaterally changed the terms of conditions of our climate change obligations, and instead of coming clean and telling the world, the international community and Canadians, that it was abandoning the only international agreement there is, it bobbed, weaved, lurched and did what it did best. It communicated with shock and awe. It tried to stop the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act by sending a minister into a committee of the other place, making a fool of himself by actually putting up fictitious numbers and then getting caught. Like the schoolchild who gets caught cheating on the exam, the minister was really reminiscent of a child who has an answer for everything except for the fact that he got cheating on the exam.

Therefore, we have a situation now where this is completely incoherent. It attaches to nothing. Eleven independent groups have examined the government's previous Turning the Corner environmental climate change plan. Each and every single group that has examined the government's plan has said it is not real. It cannot possibly achieve the targets that the government says it will achieve.

Is that why, for example, we have heard no talk of this Turning the Corner plan in months since the last election campaign?

• (1640)

Is that why the only thing the Government of Canada can put in the window on climate change is a so-called dialogue with the United States, a dialogue I described as a dialogue of the deaf?

Canada is now apparently entering dialogue and negotiation with the United States on an appropriate so-called continental climate change response, but we have no plan.

Who in their right mind, in any organization—and I defy the Conservatives to name one organization in any sector of Canadian society, business, non-governmental, civil society, government, anywhere—would purport to be entering into negotiations with a sovereign state like the United States that excels at negotiations, and have no plan?

I think the only group that is purporting to foist this on the Canadian people is the Conservative Party of Canada. How can one enter into negotiations without a plan? One cannot.

We now have a situation where these amendments to the Energy Efficiency Act are being put in the window as window dressing, just like the government's environmental enforcement provisions in another act, in order to masquerade or to cover the fact that there is no climate change plan for this country, over and over again. I do not know what it is going to take.

Even the government cloaking itself in the flag of Obama is not working, because Canadians know they should not be taking their climate change strategy and their plan out of Washington. We should not be taking the design for a cap and trade system out of Washington. We should not be taking the price of a tonne of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases in carbon dioxide equivalent measurement out of Washington.

We should not be abandoning the more than 174 countries of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and wait for Washington. We should not be waiting for 535 congressmen and congresswomen in Washington who have the extremely difficult task

of delivering up a cap and trade system and a renewable energy system to President Obama.

This bill to amend the Energy Efficiency Act does not a climate change plan make. It is a simple series of obvious amendments to deal with the fact that the government has no plan.

One of the important provisions of the bill, I will say, is this: It will require that the minister compare Canada's energy efficiency standards to those of the United States and Mexico and report to Parliament here every three years. That is important because of the preponderance of white goods that are now being manufactured in a continental perspective in Mexico.

That is important. It does increase the scope and flexibility of the authority the government can bring for more effective regulation to govern energy consumption. That is a good thing.

We have had this debate. It was at the Canada's Clean Air Act hearings, the hearings of the special legislative committee. We spent hours, for months, sitting until midnight, working and working harder yet again to achieve a proper outcome for the country.

What was the end result? The Prime Minister took his soccer ball and went home with it. He prorogued Parliament. He did not like the outcome of the work of parliamentarians. He was not prepared to abide by the majority wishes of this House and took his ball and went home with it.

We have now been set back at least three and a half years, probably five years, in dealing with the climate change crisis. Once again, Energy Efficiency Act amendments do not a climate change plan make.

Why is the government unable to tell us how the knee bone connects to the thigh bone, or the hip bone connects to the thigh bone? It is incapable of telling us because it has not done its homework.

When it came into power in 2006, it set loose a series of ministers who were two- and three-men wrecking crews. They disassembled the climate change programming that was in place. They cut over \$5 billion from climate change programming.

Here are some of the ironic aspects of those changes.

• (1645)

Just a month ago, the Prime Minister's own National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy said that we need a commercial energy efficiency investment program. In 2006, the government killed a program called the commercial building retrofit program because it was brought in by a former government. How could it possibly be good if it was not aligned to the speak-think of the Conservative Party?

The wind power production incentive, the WPPI, as it was called, brought in and providing good fiscal stimulus for our transition to a carbon-constrained future, is gone. The government did not like it. It did not belong to the Conservatives. It could not be Conservative speak-think. The Conservatives could not sell it as theirs. Everything that came before was bad.

Government Orders

The renewable power production incentive, important for solar panels, wave technology, tidal energy sources, biomass and other potentials, is effectively gone. It does not exist anymore.

There is yet another one. All Canadians can see the government's silly ads on television right now about tax credits and picking which one applies to oneself, as if that makes a climate change policy. Forewarned by the official opposition and its own officials at Environment Canada and Finance Canada, the government of tax credits brought in a tax-deductible transit pass.

Just a month ago, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development chided the government, or worse than chided, I think, took the government to serious task about the fact that it claimed it would reduce tens of thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. It cost \$637 million, and in the words of the commissioner, had no effect on reducing greenhouse gases. Worse, it had no effect on driving up ridership in our public transit systems. Instead of taking the \$637 million and investing it as it should have in the capital needs, the infrastructure needs of public transit systems across this country, it chose to use yet another tax credit to try to convince Canadians it was the right thing to do.

It is no wonder that our allies and countries with whom we have been doing business for 50 years on energy and environmental issues are scratching their heads and wondering in disbelief what has happened to the country of Canada when it comes to environment, energy and economic opportunities.

The government brought in a \$1.5 billion ecotrust. Canadians remember that one. It was during the last Parliament.

We had the Minister of the Environment at the committee and we asked him to tell us why the government put \$1.5 billion into a trust fund. He said provinces were drawing it down and it was being used for greenhouse gas emission reductions. We asked him if he could illustrate just one project where the money was spent. The minister could not. We then asked him how many tonnes of greenhouse gases have been reduced as a result of that fund, or what metrics were forced on the provinces, what standards he told the provinces they ought to abide by in spending the money. It turns out that there are no metrics or standards.

It is no surprise that this bill on amending the Energy Efficiency Act cannot be seen in isolation. It is being presented in isolation, but it cannot be seen in isolation. It is no surprise that it does not connect to programmatic spending or fiscal stimuli. It does not connect at all to our climate change plan because we do not have one.

Now we are drifting and waiting for Washington. I think it is a shameful thing for Canada to abandon its sovereignty in preparing a climate change strategy for this country such that we can be good international citizens and come to the negotiating table in Copenhagen with clean hands, something that will be very important as we seek the cooperation of the world to achieve an implementable climate change agreement for 2012 and beyond.

•(1650)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when my colleague mentioned homework, the question that came to mind was: What has the government been doing for the last three

years? All of the government's environmental efforts appear to boil down to a Senate bill on energy efficiency products.

If the government were a student, it would go to its teacher and say that the dog ate its homework. What has the government been doing for the last three years?

I remember that when the Liberals were in government and we spoke about regulation to help the environment, members of the Canadian Alliance and now the Conservative Party would say that regulation was a tax. How can the government say, on the one hand, that other parties want to raise taxes when they want to regulate and improve the environment and yet it brings in a bill that is aimed at regulating. Will it call that a tax?

What if a company were to say that this will hurt its bottom line and it will need to shut down a plant or two? What will the government say then? Will it reverse itself? It seems to lack direction on the environment. It says one thing on one issue and something completely opposite on another environment issue. Where is the government going?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to know where the government is going. My colleague is absolutely right. As I said earlier, it is lurching from ice floe to ice floe.

It portrays that the government does not understand, the Conservative Party does not understand, its Reform roots do not understand, its common sense revolutionaries do not understand that we can and must today integrate the environment, the economy and energy, and that we can give rise to tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of jobs. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are available to us. They are there for the taking.

Different jurisdictions and different provinces have stopped waiting for leadership from the federal government and have simply gone it alone. Quebec, Ontario, B.C. and Manitoba did what many states had to do in the United States under the government's sister republican party government in Washington for eight years.

I cannot figure it out. I have no divining rod but I think it is because fundamentally the Conservatives just do not get it. I am not surprised, given the Prime Minister's 20 years on record as denying the existence of climate change.

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened the entire time while he did his very best to mislead Canadians, if I may say that, or attempt to, by forgetting some of the key issues that this government has brought forward. I do not have time to mention them all. The member asked for just one.

Government Orders

I would like to remind the member that we brought back the eco-energy program because the one under the Liberals the vast majority of the money was going to administration. This Conservative government prefers to spend money on action.

We did tell the Liberals before that the \$12 billion in their plan to purchase clean air credits from foreign countries was not actually a plan that would help green up the Canadian environment.

I have already mentioned to the member before about the first tidal turbine put in the water off the coast of B.C. by the Conservative government. I guess the Liberals in 13 years could not get that done.

He asked for one example, so I will give him just one example of the hundreds of millions of dollars this government has given out to researchers in this country. It gave \$9.1 million, and the member is not listening but I guess that is typical, to a green chemistry commercialization and research program whereby chemists can actually begin the process of removing solvents, for instance, in our pharmaceutical industry, which will decrease the waste coming out of that industry tremendously. The plan of this government is to support basic research, which is, of course, ignored by the Liberals who are more interested in talk.

I wonder if the member would simply acknowledge at least that one project that he asked for.

• (1655)

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, of course I acknowledge the project. The problem is, however, that I asked whether the Conservative Party could name one project funded out of the \$1.3 billion ecotrust moneys, which the Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainable Development said just a month ago was untraceable and which the Auditor General said was untraceable.

No one is talking about some of the other investments that are going on. We are asking for accountability and transparency.

When it comes to the question of clean air credits, once again, the ideology trumps evidence. Is that member telling us today that when President Obama goes to Copenhagen and negotiates an international trading system with the European Union and brick economies that Canada will not participate? That is what two ministers said before in committee. The problem with that is that he does not understand what he is saying. It means that if a Canada has a purely domestic cap and trade system, a very small economy, a very small trading system, it will be liquid, which dries up the cost of carbon dioxide per tonne, which means that our Canadian companies will be penalized, it will be more expensive and we will be less competitive, not only vis-à-vis the United States and Mexico, in a NAFTA context, but internationally as well.

Here is the problem. There is no climate change plan, no carbon pricing, no cap and trade system and no regulatory system. We have been waiting for three and a half years and there is nothing but shock on all communications, and Canadians know it. The government has been dancing and lurching from one to another trying to make something look real but it is not.

I encourage the member to use his influence, go to the cabinet and to his colleagues and ask for a time out. We need a climate change plan for this country and we need to know what it looks like. There

is nothing here. We definitely need it and we need it as soon as possible.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member took part in the study in a previous Parliament of Bill C-30 which included some of the measures that are proposed in this bill on energy efficiency. However, what I would like to ask him about are the things that we do not see in this bill.

I know he worked with other opposition parties and members on the committee to make considerable improvements to what the Conservatives called the so-called clean air act, which it clearly was not when it started but by the time it had been amended and revised considerably by the committee, it was actually beginning to look not so bad.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on what has been left out here, what we do not see here.

He talked a bit about ecoENERGY which was gutted in the recent budget. Perhaps he would like to comment again on what is missing in the budget in relation to energy efficiency.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, the biggest and most glaring omission linked to these series of amendments is that the government, in throwing out the clean air act, which was rewritten and strengthened, actually threw out a very sophisticated cap and trade designed system for the country, which met with the approval of different provinces. It would have adjusted the reinvestment of resources, royalties and revenues coming from a cap and trade system in the appropriate provinces. It dealt with the question of allocation. It dealt with the question of carbon pricing. It dealt with all those things we know we will need to deal with. Why did the government do that? Why did it set us back five years at least and maybe a decade?

There is nothing here on cap and trade and yet the Conservatives keep talking about a dialogue with Washington. As I say, it is a dialogue of the deaf.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-3 is relatively simple. It is an act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act.

The bill's purpose is basically to update the Energy Efficiency Act by improving the effectiveness of the regulations. The nuance here is that I did not say by improving energy efficiency but rather the effectiveness of the regulations by allowing classes of products to be established instead of simple products. The bill's purpose is also to strengthen the labelling requirements and broaden the scope of the minister's report to the House of Commons.

Government Orders

In view of all this, the Bloc Québécois supports Bill S-3 in principle. However, we must still criticize the Conservatives' inaction on this file. It seems at first glance that the proposed changes are an improvement because they target unregulated products and toughen the standards for other products.

It is impossible to know, though, whether this is real progress or just the updating of standards already regularly done by the Agence de l'efficacité énergétique. In other words, does this bill imply a certain amount of political leadership or is it just one update among many to standards already covered by the mission of the Agence de l'efficacité énergétique.

Whatever the case may be, even if there is progress that goes beyond business as usual, the proposed changes are still pretty minor ultimately and hardly suffice to lend any credibility to the sum total of measures taken by the Conservative government, which still fails to realize how urgent it is to fight climate change.

Several changes are proposed in the bill. If we quickly go through the clauses one by one, there is the definition of a few terms: interprovincial trade and importation; information to be provided by dealers; retention of documents. Then we arrive at a point, though, that is a little more interesting, that is to say, the extension of the regulatory power.

One of the main changes that Bill S-3 makes to the Energy Efficiency Act is in this clause—clause 5—which changes the regulatory power of the Governor in Council. Thanks to these regulations, the Governor in Council will henceforth be able to target a certain class of products: products that affect or control energy consumption.

The labelling part might also be of interest depending on how far the minister wants to take it. In addition, there are reports to Parliament, reports on the establishment of standards, and the clauses on when it comes into force.

On the whole, there is not much in the bill in the way of measures to promote energy efficiency in everyday living. The bill focuses more on regulatory improvements that can give the government more power. But will this government use that power to make energy use more efficient?

• (1700)

Even though Bill S-3 broadens the regulatory parameters of the Energy Efficiency Act, it is not yet known to what extent that increased regulatory authority will be used. For example, the amendments could lead to the establishment of strict vehicle emissions standards to improve energy efficiency or the introduction of mandatory energy efficiency labelling on vehicles, something the Bloc Québécois has been calling for for a number of years.

In addition, if it is done properly, the standardization of labelling and energy efficiency criteria could make it easier in the long run to establish carbon markets. Unfortunately, given what the Conservative government has done since it came to power, we doubt its goodwill when it comes to the environment. However, even though in keeping with its exclusive authority over trade, the federal government is authorized to set energy efficiency standards, the Bloc Québécois will see to it that Quebec is not unfairly penalized.

One day, the government decided to turn the corner, but where was it headed? We still wonder. The Conservative government said in a press release that the proposed amendments to the Energy Efficiency Act were based on the Government of Canada's action plan to fight climate change. That strategy was introduced in October 2006, when the government released a notice of intent to regulate air emissions. The notice of intent was followed in April 2007 by the regulatory framework for air emissions, which indicated that work had started on a series of amendments to the energy efficiency regulations. Of course, the government has taken action on a number of products I could list, but they have fallen far short of expectations.

In fact, there were reactions to Bill S-3. The bill has not attracted a lot of media attention, and reactions reported tend to be low key. The industry welcomed the proposed regulations with a shrug. A spokesperson for Sony Canada stated that it would have little effect on the firm's electronic equipment for the general public. According to comments by Candace Haymen in an email, all Sony TVs consume less than one watt of energy in standby mode, and Sony is constantly developing new technologies to improve its products' energy efficiency. Reaction by environmental groups was equally reserved. According to Julia Langer of the World Wildlife Fund, Canada lags in matters of energy efficiency well behind most of the OECD countries. She said that the government must impose tighter restrictions rather than administrative measures on industry if it is determined to save energy. She said it was not bad, but that they were impatient to have real regulations banning products that were not energy efficient.

The global nature of the regulatory authority provided for in the bill also attracted our attention. The bill would amend the Energy Efficiency Act to allow for the regulation of products that affect or control energy consumption. That could, one day, lead to the establishment of regulations limiting the consumption of water by household appliances and plumbing fixtures such as dishwashers, shower heads and toilets by making reduced flow equipment mandatory, as its use affects energy consumption

Up to now, however, in its famous green plan, the Conservative government has shown that, even in the establishment of greenhouse gas reduction targets, it still prefers the oil companies to the environment, advocating an intensity reduction approach over absolute reduction targets, thus encouraging the industry, whose greenhouse gas emissions have grown by nearly 50% since 1990, to continue its polluting development.

• (1705)

Although strengthening energy efficiency legislation is a positive thing in itself, strong and integrated measures are needed to produce tangible results. Only real political will can achieve this, something sorely lacking among the Prime Minister's troops.

Government Orders

It must also be said that the government's plan is ineffective. The government released its greenhouse gas regulatory framework on April 26, 2007. The plan is based on reductions in emission intensity, in other words, emission reduction for each unit of goods produced regardless of the number of goods produced. The reductions planned in this regulatory framework are 6% of the intensity based on the 2006 level for the first three years of its application, that is, from 2008 to 2010. For the years following, the subsequent annual reduction would be 2% of the intensity.

According to Conservative government projections, which, in the opinion of the national round table on the environment and the economy, are probably exaggerated, this intensity reduction in connection with other measures, that is environmental programs, should make it possible to stabilize Canadian emissions between 2010 and 2012 and result in an absolute 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 2006 levels by 2020. As I said, it was probably exaggerated.

Although Canada has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions over the 2008-12 period by an average of 6% in comparison with 1990, it plans to limit the growth of its emissions and start reducing them only at the end of this period. In 2012, therefore, Canada will probably emit more than 180 metric tonnes over the target it set for itself in the Kyoto protocol. In plain English, even if the optimistic forecasts turn out to be right, the Conservative plan will not achieve the levels required under the Kyoto protocol until more than 10 years after its deadline.

I should say as well that this plan is very unfair to Quebec. Quebec has tried very hard. For example, a Quebec aluminum plant that has already reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 15% in comparison with 1990 will still have to accept the same intensity reductions as a tar sands plant in Alberta whose emissions have doubled since 1990. In addition, plans like this based on intensity targets will not utilize the full potential of a carbon exchange in Montreal. Companies will be allowed to reduce the intensity of their emissions without regard for their total emissions, and that reduces the attraction of the carbon credit market. This means that Quebec's manufacturing industry will be doubly penalized because it will not benefit as much from its efforts as it would have under a system with absolute targets.

We know now that the dinosaurs and the Conservatives co-existed—a certain secretary told us so last week—and knowing that oil is a fossil fuel, we might expect that there would be a bit of the Conservatives in oil. Sure enough, their program to reduce greenhouse gases still favours the oil companies. Climate change is one of the most important challenges facing humanity. The scientific evidence is mounting and the consequences are stunning. We must act without delay in a way that is both effective and fair.

• (1710)

The Bloc Québécois has long proposed a credible greenhouse gas reduction plan that is based on the polluter pays principle and that fully recognizes the efforts made since 1990. For years we have been demanding a plan to implement the Kyoto protocol, that is to say, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during the 2008-12 period by an average of 6% below the 1990 level. Unfortunately, the result of the Liberals' inaction and the ideologically driven stubbornness of the

Conservatives is that there is no chance now of fully achieving our targets under the Kyoto protocol. Far from being an excuse to give up, though, this should motivate us now to roll up our sleeves and do all we can to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible.

In addition to the measures that will reduce Quebec's dependency on oil, the Bloc Québécois is proposing a plan based on certain fundamental principles: respect for international commitments, application of the polluter-pay principle, fairness in effort required and full respect for Quebec's jurisdiction. The Bloc Québécois is therefore proposing a plan that will enable Canada to get back on track and to move as close as possible to the targets set by the Kyoto protocol by 2012. Furthermore, the plan will attempt to meet the reduction target recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to prevent climate change with irreversible consequences, that is a reduction of 25% to 40% in greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 1990 levels, by 2020.

The plan is based on: establishing reduction targets in the short and medium term, that is between 2012 and 2020, with 1990 as the reference year; the use of a territorial approach; establishing a carbon exchange in Montreal; and federal measures that the government can implement in its own areas of jurisdiction.

The territorial approach assigns, by province, targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases in Canada. Thus, every province must meet certain conditions, including agreeing to a reduction of emissions equivalent to or greater than the targets set by the government. In other words, we are talking about reduction targets based on a territorial approach and a carbon market with tradeable permits, which would benefit those who have already met their objectives.

We must have measures to reduce greenhouse gases such as stricter vehicle emission standards to improve their energy efficiency, manufacturing standards for vehicles and programs to encourage the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles. It is also important to have mandatory fuel efficiency labelling to increase awareness and to help citizens make informed choices when they must purchase appliances, vehicles or any energy consuming item. We must also improve programs for developing and converting to renewable energy.

I will close by stating that, in principle, we support this bill. However, we demand and continue to expect from this Conservative government energy measures that will decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

• (1715)

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there was a meeting of scientists in Europe recently. They have found that the oceans are rising at twice the rate of what had been expected just two short years ago.

The ice caps in Greenland and in the Antarctic are disappearing far quicker than anybody had ever anticipated. This will have a profound impact on communities in low-lying areas as well as the temperatures of our oceans and our planet.

Government Orders

The government must work with other countries and attend the meeting in Copenhagen at the end of the year. In terms of moving toward Kyoto two, we must develop a system of trading where carbon has a price. We need to develop a carbon-based system where there is a price on carbon and we can use the market to bring down the emission of greenhouse gases. Could my colleague comment on that?

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, although the member did not say so, I would nevertheless like to emphasize that I believe that time is of the essence. Many scientists have been speaking out on this for the past few months and have even gone as far as saying that it is irreversible at this time. However, I would like to be more optimistic and believe that every person of goodwill and every country of goodwill must immediately make an effort.

There have been some unwarranted deliberate delays when it comes to action that could be taken to fight greenhouse gases. Unfortunately, Canada is one of the countries guilty of this and we must now take real, rigorous action to reduce greenhouse gases as much as possible.

It is clear that if we do not take action immediately, the repercussions will be catastrophic, as we have already seen. The member mentioned rapidly melting polar ice. For all practical purposes, that ice was a source of water, but it was melting at a normal pace. Now it is melting much faster. We must act quickly and stop wasting time. The fight against greenhouse gases has become an economy in itself and is encouraging people to fight together.

A carbon exchange would really allow those who are incapable of reducing their emissions quickly to enable others to install systems to save the planet as quickly as possible.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, as always, I listened closely to the member from Sherbrooke's speech. Unfortunately, we often disagree on free trade issues, as we will this evening when we vote on the shipbuilding issue. It is unfortunate that the Bloc Québécois does not support what Quebec workers want.

However, when it comes to this particular environmental issue, we are in complete agreement. I listened closely to my colleague's speech, in which he said that the Conservative government's approach leaves much to be desired. They are doing so little, but we need so much more to really address the environmental challenges of climate change.

Given that Barack Obama's administration has done so much—it has addressed the issue of household appliances with a much broader program 10 times bigger than what this bill calls for—does the member for Sherbrooke think that both the Conservative government and this bill are basically a huge failure in light of everything we have to do, as he so rightly said, to address climate change?

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, as you know, the Prime Minister is in the United States today, giving interviews to American newspapers. We know that the Conservatives are only just starting to believe that environmental problems and greenhouse gases are harmful to life on this earth. They are only just starting to believe

that this might be true, since, as I said earlier, the Conservatives have said that humans coexisted with dinosaurs. The more things change, the more they stay the same. There is a huge lack of will on the Conservatives' part.

All the Prime Minister sees in what Mr. Obama is saying is the publicity it can get for him. He may be thinking he can win a majority in the next election. I am here to say he can forget about that. At present, the Prime Minister is not yet sure he can do anything, not because he does not have the capacity or the means. We can see this from what the NDP member said. Canada's investment is minimal compared to what the United States is investing. It shows that the government has an astounding lack of will to act on energy efficiency and, by the same token, greenhouse gases and climate change.

When we talked about how the Northwest Passage is opening up, we even wondered whether it did not suit the Conservatives to have a faster passage through the north, since they want to develop the natural resources there. In the final analysis, I wonder whether the Conservative government is letting things slide on greenhouse gases and energy efficiency for purely financial and economic reasons.

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The member for Terrebonne—Blainville for a quick question.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed the member for Sherbrooke's speech. He has a special ability to give excellent examples that help us understand what can happen. I would like to focus on what he said about the Conservatives keeping company with dinosaurs. We all know what happened to the dinosaurs: they were trapped in the ice and one day, they disappeared.

With that in mind, I have a question for my colleague. This bill is simple enough in and of itself, but to really understand it, one has to have a good grasp of the history of environmental policy. The provinces want a territorial approach. In this case, does the bill call for a territorial approach?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Sherbrooke has one minute to answer.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, the government's regulatory framework is based on reductions in intensity that have nothing to do with territorial reductions. In this case, that is not good for Quebec.

Government Orders

Over a period of time, Quebec made significant reductions, especially in some industries. During that same period, Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions increased by nearly 50%. That is bad for several provinces, particularly for Quebec, which has been making a sustained effort over several years to reduce greenhouse gases significantly. It is not good for Quebec and it is not fair. Intensity targets also do not get us any closer to setting up a carbon exchange. That is not good for Quebec either. We are still waiting for the Conservative government to change its ideology and come up with measures that are better for the situation as a whole.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising to speak to Bill S-3. It is a very important concept, but as hon. members will see from my remarks today, the bill does not go anywhere near far enough. A number of my colleagues in the House have said it is nice that we are taking some measures, but if we are to get serious about addressing pollution control and climate change, there is far more that needs to be done.

Why is energy efficiency important? Why would we even bother to bring forward amendments like this? We need to reduce our energy use. Why do we need to reduce energy use? Because most of our energy generation in Canada at this point in time, except for hydroelectricity, is fossil fuel based. Fossil fuel based power is the largest source of greenhouse gases that are emitted in Canada, and also the largest source of a number of pollutants.

Coal-fired power, which happens to be the largest source of greenhouse gases being emitted in Canada right now, is also the largest source of industrial mercury in Canada. It has been designated by the Government of Canada as being the priority substance for reduction. By getting more effective with energy use, we can reduce pollution and neurotoxins.

It provides cost savings. By reducing energy use, we save a lot of money not only to individual homeowners and business owners, but also to the Government of Canada. In this time of economic crisis when programs that should be supported are being cut left, right and centre, we could make a lot more revenue available to good programs if we cut energy use.

We can also save a lot of money, if people cut down their energy use, by building new generation facilities and transmission lines. The costs that individual homeowners, businesses and the government pay for electricity are based on the development of new generation and transmission lines, some of those transmission lines being built for export.

There is also the environmental impacts associated with the generation of electricity: the coal mines, the cooling ponds and so forth. Overall, it is a laudatory objective. The preamble of Bill S-3 states:

Whereas the Government of Canada is committed to ensuring sustained improvement in the efficient use of energy in all sectors of the Canadian economy;

I will speak to that in a minute and talk about the inadequacies of the bill in dealing with what the preamble states.

Now more than ever the federal government needs to assert its powers to trigger energy efficient measures. We can do that through environmental protection measures. By having strict environmental

controls, we encourage industry to be more efficient in how it generates power and to look for ways where it can actually encourage people to retrofit their homes.

One concrete example of that is in California where Pacific Gas and Electric Company determined it made more sense rather than build a new, big, expensive generation facility, to pay people to retrofit their homes and businesses. It has been a very successful program. The end result was that they got a higher rate, but people used less power.

The Government of Canada could also use its fiscal powers. It could impose fees, a higher cost on non-energy-efficient appliances and so forth. There is a lot of market measures we could use that we are simply not using. We could use our spending power. We could put conditions on the transfer of money.

For example, we are sending billions of dollars to provincial governments and to the private sector to test carbon sequestration. We could be putting conditions on that money by saying to industry that if it agreed to phase out some of its coal-fired power plants, we would help pay for its testing of technology.

This bill, as the Conservatives' plan to tackle climate change, is a pretty small baby step in the right direction, but it falls short. The amendments mirror the amendments to the Energy Efficiency Act in Bill C-30, the clean air and climate change bill, which was approved by the environment committee in the 39th Parliament but has not been acted upon. That bill would have added a preamble to the Energy Efficiency Act to support setting continuous economy-wide improvement targets in energy efficiency in Canada, with two sections added to the Energy Efficiency Act.

The first change that would have been made would require the governor in council to prescribe energy efficient standards for all energy-using products, not just a handful, this list of five, but all energy-using products that are responsible for significant or growing energy consumption in Canada.

● (1730)

Second, the cabinet would be required to review all energy efficient standards within three years after they were introduced or amended in after third year thereafter. Through this review, every energy efficiency standard would have had to meet or exceed the most stringent levels found in North America.

Regrettably the bill is not that far-reaching. It is extremely limited.

The bill would delete that second requirement. There is no guarantee that the standards made would be as good as any other North American jurisdiction. This could mean that, once again, Canada could be outstripped by the United States on energy efficiency and ultimately on climate change, including setting standards for the manufacture of equipment. If we do not set higher energy standards, there is a possibility that we could not even ship our goods or sell them to the United States if it has higher standards, which President Obama is moving toward.

Government Orders

President Obama has directed higher efficiency standards for everyday household appliances such as dishwashers, lamps and so forth. He has directed quick, clear progress on energy efficiency. The final rules are to be in place by this August, requiring energy efficiency standards for a very lengthy list of products, three times the list offered up in Bill S-3. I will not go through the entire review, but is a very comprehensive list.

His directive also asks for his department of energy to meet all deadlines in setting energy standards and evaluate them in priority order and finish some ahead of schedule if possible.

Bill S-3 will subject a limited list of products to new energy efficiency regulations for only commercial clothes washers, dishwashers, incandescent fluorescent lamps, battery chargers and satellite set top boxes. There is no indication whether the standards released will be as stringent as those in the United States and whether there will be any mechanism to ensure Canada is a leader in energy efficiency rather than a follower.

Instead of this minimalist approach, why are we not allowing Canadians to buy the best possible energy efficient appliances? Why are we continuing to allow the sale and the manufacturing in Canada of products that are not serving Canadians? Canadians will be best served by the most efficient possible appliance. Why do we not then only enable the sale of the most efficient energy appliances or ban the sale of outdated ones that burn energy and put up costs for all Canadians?

Why not pursue innovative approaches such as what the Pembina Institute has talked about and that some American states have adopted, for example, the innovative electricity conservation option called "virtual power". If any kind of mechanism, building or part of a building or appliance is not in use, the computer automatically shuts off that equipment. It is an incredibly innovative approach and it is time for our country to move ahead into these more innovative approaches.

Bill S-3 professes to ensure the sustained improvement in the efficient use of energy in all sectors. If we are serious about addressing energy efficiency and energy conservation in Canada, we need to tackle the single largest source of greenhouse gases. Incidentally it is also the single largest remaining source of industrial mercury emissions in Canada and across North America. That is coal-fired power plants.

Canada is criticizing the United States and China for their proposals for the expansion of the coal-fired power plants. The federal government is doing nothing in the exercise of its available powers and mandate to foster the closure of these plants at the end of their operating life. The federal government should take this action if we are really serious about energy efficiency in Canada.

The majority of coal-fired power plants have a 30% energy efficiency. Even the most efficient operate a 40% efficiency. That is a super critical plant. As far as I am aware, there is only one such plant in Canada, and that is in Alberta.

To run pollution control equipment, which we hope these plants will clean up their act and add on more pollution control equipment, they need to burn more coal. We get into this perverse cycle where in

order to have energy efficiency and cost savings for the coal-fired generators, we burn more coal.

I want to offer up to the House as well some information that has come to my attention. I sought information from the government on the energy efficiency of public buildings. That is a sector where President Obama is leading. In his new stimulus package he has directed a massive energy efficiency program for all public buildings across the United States of America. We do not have that kind of stimulus package in our budget.

• (1735)

The information provided to me is most invaluable to the House. I have discovered that of the more than 26,000 buildings held by the Government of Canada, only 10 buildings are in the process of doing any energy efficient work whatsoever toward a LEED standard. That is reprehensible. If we are to expect the private sector, or households, or small businesses to move in the direction of energy efficiency, to turn in their older appliances and recyclables and buy more energy efficient equipment, surely the government should set the stage by example.

Environment Canada, alone, owns more than 5,000 buildings, yet only one of those buildings is in the process of being retrofitted. If we retrofitted the public buildings and saved only 1% energy use in our public facilities, we would save \$3.5 million a year. If we improved the energy efficiency of our public buildings by 5%, we would save more than \$18 million a year. Think of the programs for child care, for education, for seniors, for affordable housing, for environmental protection that we could benefit with \$18 million a year. Essentially Canadian money is going out the stack in these government facilities.

I commend the government for bringing the bill forward. It is a nice tiny baby step forward. However, if we are to live up to what the bill says, which is improving energy efficiency in all sectors of the Canadian economy, then it is incumbent upon the government to table legislation forthwith to move us forward into this century and take real action on climate change, pollution reduction and protect Canadian health and save Canadians money.

• (1740)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed the member's speech. I will use this opportunity to bring up a point raised by one of my constituents and ask the member if she would be supportive of it. It is related to wind energy. Wind energy in the north costs a lot more because of the difficult conditions for putting it in, accessing it, repairing it, et cetera. We want any wind regime that the Government of Canada puts in place to reflect the higher cost, otherwise it does not make it effective. If we give \$5 off a Cadillac and \$5 off a bicycle, it has an effect on a bicycle, but not so much on a Cadillac.

Government Orders

Would the member be supportive, in any wind regime, to give us more of a break in the north to make it effective there?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, it is my understanding that other jurisdictions have come up with remarkably innovative mechanisms to foster the move toward renewable cleaner power. Some of those are to give a higher rate for the power sold from renewable sources. However, particularly for the areas of our far north, where there are many isolated communities, and this would also apply to the northern Prairie regions where there are isolated communities, many of them first nation and Métis, it is incumbent upon the federal government to put money in to initiate these smaller distributed power centres.

One of the biggest losses to electricity is the long distribution lines, which are being fed by oil, gas or coal. A lot of dirty pollution goes out and it burns a lot of waste. It makes more sense to have localized energy production. If we are to move in that direction in some of these communities, it is incumbent upon the federal government at least to partner with either the territorial governments or some of the provincial governments, or maybe some of the first nations or even private enterprise. To move in that direction is a laudable suggestion.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my hon. seatmate for her knowledge of Bill S-3. With regard to the fabrication of appliances that are not energy efficient, should they be left up to market forces, or should they be directed by the government to manufacture energy efficient appliances?

• (1745)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, as the House has probably surmised by now from my interventions, I believe very much in law and order for the environment. We are talking about serious issues such as pollution control and the health of children who are severely impacted. I know studies in southern Ontario show that we have a serious problem with the health of families from the coal-fired power plants and other pollution sources.

It is time for us, the elected people, to be asserting our powers and directing the kinds of products we are manufacturing, importing and selling in our country.

Generally, under federal jurisdiction, we are left with the power over the manufacturing and import. We would set a course for Canada if we put in place much higher binding standards for equipment that is sold in Canada, whether appliances or otherwise, or the bigger sources of pollution, including automobiles.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for my hon. colleague. Does she not think the government ought to do a much better job to engage the public in the use of the tax credit system for initiatives that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions? How we construct our buildings can massively reduce the consumption of greenhouse gases, 70% or more of what they found in Europe and in the Far East.

The government put in a credit system for changes to people's homes. Does she not think that a wise move would be for the government to apply that credit more specifically for initiatives that could involve the change of window panes, or insulation or the use

other alternative sources, such as solar, geothermal or wind to power their homes?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, the member's suggestion is a good one and it should be followed. We should revise our national building code to ensure that future buildings are built to the highest possible standards. Those amendments are long overdue and there should not be any choice. People should not be offered a so-called cheaper alternative.

In the jurisdiction I come from, when electricity generation was deregulated, all the costs were downloaded to the people. We think we are saving in the short run, but in the long run we are paying more.

I was very disappointed that the budget bill gave money to people so they could have the freedom to build decks or renovate their basements. Instead that stimulus package should have been directed solely at helping people to retrofit their homes. That way perhaps more money could be available to more people for energy savings.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, what would she do to mandate more energy efficiency in the automobile sector and in the airplane and other transportation sectors?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, similar to the fact that the building codes should be revised, it is regrettable that the government missed the deadline, which I understand was last December, to bring forward the new fuel efficiency standards for vehicles. Now is the time to set the stage so Canada has a bigger piece of the market. It is absolutely critical that we bring forward these standards not just for vehicles, but for rail, buses, airlines and so forth.

We absolutely need to be setting the course and directing, not just sitting back and waiting for the market forces. Clearly the market forces have not worked. There should be no further incentives to any of these industries unless they agree to comply with these standards. I know that was tried with the automobile sector under the voluntary agreement, but it does not seem to have succeeded in bringing more fuel efficient vehicles.

The only answer is we need the federal government to enact a law that will direct that new course.

• (1750)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when we look at the issues of energy efficiency and we recall Bill C-30 from the previous Parliament, the so-called clean air act which contained some of these provisions, we can also recall the government talked about how it wanted to have a made in Canada plan. That was its position when it took government. Now it seems it is no longer interested in that. It has dropped that kind of phrasing. Now what it looks like is it is waiting and we are going to have a made in the U.S.A. plan.

Could she comment on what the government is doing in this regard?

Government Orders

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. Unfortunately, we are no longer even looking at a made-in-USA/copied-by-Canada plan in response to greenhouse gas emissions. We are looking at even less than that when we look at the minimal energy efficient provisions that have come forward today in this bill. We are not even copying the United States of America any more. We are even taking a minimalist approach at the provisions that it is bringing forward.

I think it is absolutely incumbent upon the Government of Canada to set the stage. Right now, as I understand, in Bonn, the governments around the world are talking about what they are going to bring forward to Copenhagen at the end of the year. I would strongly recommend that the House consider approving Bill C-311 when it comes up for a vote on Wednesday. That would provide at least a made-in-Canada target for the next 40 years.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to Bill S-3. This bill would enable the government to regulate products that use energy, as we have heard before, and my party is going to support it in order to move it forward.

Elements of this bill came out of the former Bill C-30, which had the misnomer being called the clean air act, which did a little for the reduction of pollution but missed the central challenge of our times in terms of the environment, and that is how to deal with global warming. The government has essentially been missing in action on this global challenge, which is going to require all countries to move forward.

We heard from the previous speaker about what is happening this year. We are at a fork in the road because later on this year in Copenhagen world leaders will meet to wrestle with and develop a mechanism to effectively reduce greenhouse gases against the backdrop of some new scientific data which, at the very least, should be keeping those tasked with this challenge awake at night.

It should keep all of us awake at night because when we compare the evidence from two years ago, sea levels are rising at twice the speed of what was anticipated. That is shocking. We have seen how the Arctic ice cap, the Antarctic ice cap and glaciers are shrinking at a rate that is absolutely unprecedented. Part of the reason is that global warming is actually causing rifts and crevices within the glaciers, which is causing water to seep through and big chunks to fall off. These areas which reflect sun back into the atmosphere are being removed and it is contributing to the problem in terms of global warming.

It is part of a nasty feedback loop that ties into something I will talk about a little later with respect to the warming of the oceans, but it also has an impact upon how the currents work in the north Atlantic. If that current system changes, we are going to have a catastrophic feedback loop that we have no idea how to address. This is a much more serious problem than scientists even thought.

At the end of the day, we are going to have to put a price on carbon. There is no two ways about that. There is no better system. We are going to have to put a price on carbon. We will have to find a way to develop a carbon trading system so the private sector can trade credits. This will enable us to bring down emissions.

We also have to deal with supporting initiatives that work. We need to encourage the use of solar power, geothermal power and wind power. Many of the technological challenges that have existed around wave and tidal power have been overcome, and I might say proudly that many of those have been overcome by Canadian scientists who have been working very hard to do it. That is an inexhaustible source of energy.

We can also look at some new technologies in terms of rotating buildings. There are new initiatives in the UAE and other countries where buildings can rotate to follow the sun and absorb energy, thereby reducing the amount of energy that is required to heat buildings.

The other issue, which is a new change on an old idea, is electric cars. There have been some new discoveries in electric cars. Lithium phosphate batteries are able to store enough energy but also release the energy quickly. Previously, we never had an effective battery that was able to store energy as well as release it quickly, which is what electric cars require. I would suggest the government invest in and encourage scientists working in these areas. A full court press must be done to support these initiatives.

Unfortunately, what has happened, quite shockingly I might add, is that in the last budget the government actually cut moneys to some key monitoring areas for global warming. Canada was a leader in terms of building a network across the world to address climate change. Unfortunately, as a leader in this, these groups are going to have those moneys eviscerated by the government. That would be a tragedy for our country and for the world.

• (1755)

At the end of the day, we also have to look at how we can educate the public to use inputs that are going to dramatically reduce their use of fossil-based fuels. It is interesting that we can dramatically reduce our utilization of fossil fuels by how we build our buildings. We can reduce the use of fossil fuels by 70% or more if we change how we build our buildings. The member who spoke last gave the very good suggestion that we should work toward a national building code that will set standards on how buildings can be built. That is one of the most effective ways to reduce our consumption of greenhouse gases.

A couple of years ago, *Scientific American* really did a fabulous job. It devoted a month to climate change. In that, it showcased a number of very effective solutions that have been done around the world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and deal with climate change. One of the great articles in that journal was about how we can change the way we build our buildings.

Government Orders

In my last speech, I also spoke about the issue of forests. We know that deforestation is occurring at an unprecedented rate. As our population grows exponentially, our demand for products is also growing, so we are seeing an unprecedented level of deforestation. Madam Speaker, you and I know that our world cannot exist without forests. Forests have a value when they are cut down. Yet, suppose those forests had a value as they stand. In fact, they do because forests are, in effect, public utilities. They function as public utilities because they absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen through photosynthesis. That has a value.

If we put a price on carbon at \$10 a tonne and we know that a hectare of jungle in the Congo River Basin or Amazonia can absorb about 200 tonnes of carbon a year, that is \$2000 a year per hectare. Previously, when Kyoto was put together, countries with large tropical forests like Malaysia, Indonesia and Brazil were leery of this and did not want to pursue it because they thought it might mitigate and affect their development. However, they have come around because they recognize that those moneys can be used for the development of the country in a sustainable way. In the case of Indonesia, that could be a net benefit of about \$2 billion.

The catch in all this is that the people who live around and near these forests have to benefit. Where these programs have been tried, the failure, as it is in many development projects, is that the moneys do not get down to the people who need it the most. That is the central failure. The people who need to benefit, who are frequently the poorest people in the world, do not benefit from this. We need to enable ourselves to have a system with accountability to make sure that the people around those areas get a value for that forest and therefore do not cut it down.

If we do not do that, the system is doomed for failure. Putting a value on our forests, which are the lungs of the planet, is an intelligent way to preserve them. Our country has massive resources in terms of forests and we need to do a much better job of managing those forests. As I said earlier, we have rules and regulations that are governed by the provinces in terms of forestry code practices. However, speaking for my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca and from having worked up north in B.C., we have found that in many cases those forestry practices are simply not adhered to because the companies doing it know that there is no effective enforcement mechanism.

We are seeing forests cut down right to the edge of rivers and where salmon-bearing streams occur. As a result, we are seeing that it is partially responsible for a massive depletion of our salmon stocks on the west coast. This is not an inevitable situation. This does not have to occur. If we are smart about how we develop and enforce our forestry practices, it will go a long way to ensuring that we have stable fisheries on the west coast as well as a forest that will be there in the future.

• (1800)

Biofuels are the coal of the renewable energy sector. Biofuels, in particular corn ethanol, is a disaster. Corn ethanol is the coal of the biofuel industry. We are subsidizing land to be wiped out and reseeded with corn which has a downstream effect that has been opposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the World Food Programme and others. By taking land and planting

corn for biofuels, the energy that goes into processing that corn is much larger than what we get out of it. In other words, we are burning more fossil fuels to get a unit of energy out of corn. Also, we are removing areas that were previously acting as major carbon sinks and replanting with corn.

This is a lose-lose-lose proposition. I would strongly encourage the government to wrap its head around this. Corn biofuels are bad. It needs to stop subsidizing corn biofuels and start looking at alternative energies that actually work, such as solar, wind, tidal power, wave power with geo-thermal.

Some biofuels might work in terms of the detritus from forestry practices, and a few others, but, for heaven's sake, to take land and encourage the planting of corn to warp, twist and distort the system, that is actually causing incredible damage.

Another interesting thing that has happened concerns carbon scrubbers. We now know that there are proposals and developments that enable us to actually scrub the air of carbon dioxide, transferring that into a situation where the carbon is being pulled out of the atmosphere. I would submit that is something we need to consider and need to look at and I would encourage the government to do this.

Something the Liberal Party railed against in the previous budget was the government's failure to support research and development. We know that research and development will be the cornerstone of our country's ability to be competitive in the changing economy that will come out of the economic tsunami that has rolled across our planet and destroyed so many people's finances, so many countries' economies and has hurt so many people here in Canada and around the world.

The government must stop its antipathy toward science and research and understand clearly that research and development is one of the key cornerstones of the future of our country. The failure to invest in this will cause huge economic damage to our people and our country and it will result in the egress of a loss of some of our best and brightest minds.

Back in the late 1990s the then Liberal government saw this as a priority. After the deficits were slayed, the then government of Jean Chrétien put moneys into research and development dramatically. As a result of that, we were able to attract some of the best and brightest scientists from around the world. We have started to actually get to the forefront of science and research in many fields, whether it is medicine, physics, chemistry, proteomics or genomics.

In our neck of the woods, adaptive optics is being done at the Hertzberg Institute of Astrophysics. In fact, we are the third leader in the world in astronomy.

What is happening now, whether it is in the Hertzberg Institute of Astrophysics, in Genome Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Research or NSERC, the sudden cut of moneys by the government at a time when an economic stimulus demands that it invests in research and development, will negatively and profoundly affect the ability of our country to be economically competitive in the future.

What the government is doing is harming the future of our children and of our grandchildren and we cannot allow that to occur.

Government Orders

•(1805)

I know that my party, the Liberal Party, has told the government, loud and clear, to get smart and understand the importance of research and development and understand that it is a cornerstone of our economy. We cannot divorce publicly funded research and development from the future of our economy or our nation. It is critically important.

It also speaks to the critical importance of the government to invest in scientific research and climate change. We know there is a great deal of skepticism on the other side that this is even occurring. We know the government thinks this is simply a natural ebb and flow of temperature changes over time. However, that ignores 99% of the scientists who have made a clear, compelling and provocative argument to say that this is not simply the normal variance of temperature over time, that this is a fact. Unless the government deals with this now and works with other countries, the future of our nation and our world will be compromised. It is a very serious problem because we are dealing with the extinction of a lot of species. I do not want to be alarmist about it but we are one of those species. It is critically important that the government do this.

The government also needs to look at best practices. One of the singular failures that we have seen, for some strange reason, is the inability of the government to say that it does not need to necessarily reinvent the wheel, but as a first step we should look at best practices within our country and around the world. We should draw them together to ensure those best practices are moved out from the bench, from theory, from small practices and into a much larger acceptance and involvement by a greater number of people. This can and has to be done and it is simple to do.

Why not create a centre for best practices at the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and all of the different scientific areas, whether it is NSERC, CIHR or SSHRC? We can take best practices in all those areas and do a good job of trying to share them with others in our country and with those around the world.

When the world comes to Copenhagen at the end of this year, Canada will be sitting there but we cannot be a second rate player in this. We cannot sit on the sidelines and simply see where this goes. What is required, before the world comes to Copenhagen, is that we start to develop and begin to lead. We develop a coalition of the willing, and there is no reason the government cannot do that.

We know that President Obama is trying. I believe 10% of the \$783 billion stimulus package is devoted to climate change. The Americans are trying to find ways to bring down the utilization of fossil fuels and utilize new tools and new technologies to address that. The president also knows that there will be a global demand for this.

We all know that China and India are producing increasing amounts of greenhouse gases. We also know that as their demand increases, and it will increase geometrically, the impact upon our environment will be huge.

The previous president of the United States and our current Prime Minister have made the fallacious argument that these countries need to grasp onto this themselves and come to the table or we will not play ball. That is not leadership. What the government could do is sit

down and engage both of these countries. At the end of the day, they will be impacted by global change just like everybody else. That is not something any government wants to do.

With the diaspora that we have here and have come from Asia, why do we not utilize those folks here and engage both China and India in a way that few other countries can?

We have an opportunity to cease the day and engage other countries. We can use best practices and tackle this beast called climate change once and for all. Failure to do that is not an option.

•(1810)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of my colleague from the Liberal Party and I took notes on what he had to say about leading, about bringing together other parties, about showing best practices and about taking a major role in Copenhagen.

The first question that comes to mind is whether the Liberal Party will continue in that trend that it has already stated by voting, as it has in the past, for the important climate change bill being introduced by my colleague from Thunder Bay which provides for the most stringent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The Liberals have already voted for that bill once before and yet in the past couple of days we have had disquieting indications from some Liberal members that they have been looking for some way to duck from their responsibilities.

Hansard has what my colleague from the Liberal Party just said and Canadians who heard him have what he just said, but I would like to give him the opportunity to tell us that the Liberals will actually pass this litmus test, because when one of his colleagues, his young new colleague from Montreal, spoke recently in the Thunder Bay area he was less than clear that the Liberals' support for the bill would continue.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I will try to allay any kind of disquieting comments that my colleague thinks are coming from us. The last thing we want to be is disquieting.

I will be happy to look at the bill. I must confess that I have not read the bill but I will look at it and I will consult with my colleagues. I am confident that we will come up with the best position possible to ensure we are doing the right for our public and for our country.

Government Orders

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked about the cuts in scientists and research. I know he was not referring to the cutting of the scientists in the three major granting councils, which everyone knows has the hugest amount of money for research. However, because he talked about the effect on the north, I want to specify one area in particular where climate change is having a much bigger effect than anywhere else. It is with the elimination of the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences. This foundation funds, I think, 24 other research centres with hundreds of scientists. It is our only major centre to study droughts and their effects in western Canada, violent storms in the Arctic and the effects of weather in the Arctic. The government cancelled this major research and the violent results coming out of climate change is just totally nonsensical. I wonder if the member agrees.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I am glad my colleague from Yukon raised this because it does have a massive effect on where he is from. This is something the government needs to change right away. This has been a huge, unmitigated disaster for the government to cut moneys to this group, this global network that deals with climate change. It cannot be reconstructed overnight. It has taken a long time to put that together.

Professor Andrew Weaver from the University of Victoria, who is part of the Nobel prize winning international panel for climate change, has spoken out loudly and clearly about this, as have other scientists. This is a train wreck that the government can stop. It can stop it by investing and funding this group, which is doing an excellent job. The member for Yukon knows this, particularly coming from the north, where the melting of the permafrost is releasing methane into the air. Methane is 25 times a more powerful greenhouse gas agent than carbon dioxide. As that methane goes up in a powerful way, a feedback loop continues causing us to approach a critical time in the history of our planet, and that we cannot allow to happen.

•(1815)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, during the speech of my hon. colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, something was disquieting when he talked about Antarctica and what was happening there. My colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt spoke out and said that Antarctica was actually increasing in size, in other words, the ice was growing.

We have all seen the evidence on television, in movies and elsewhere about the Larsen ice shelf collapsing and so forth. It seems to me that all the evidence is that it has been shrinking and that the ice has been decreasing. We are talking here about ice that is created, not in a year but over thousands of years. The Larsen ice shelf would have been created by snow falling year after year for thousands of years and being compressed gradually into ice. How he could possibly think that this was the case is beyond me.

Second, it appears that he did not get the memo, because this kind of climate change denier language is the language the Conservatives are not supposed to use any more. He did not get the memo from the Prime Minister's Office telling him not to talk along these lines these days and not to keep being the kind of climate change deniers that they have been and that they obviously still are.

I would be interested in my colleague's comments on what we saw here.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, if the government believes for a second that the Antarctic ice shelf is growing, then that is along the lines of believing that dinosaurs roamed the earth 7,000 years ago, because it is not happening.

What is happening, as my colleague said, is that the Antarctic ice shelf has contracted considerably. Not only has the Larsen ice shelf hived off and disappeared, but in huge chunks. I would encourage anybody to look at satellite pictures of the Antarctic ice shelf. Look at the pictures of Greenland. Look at how it has shrunk, and look at the rate at which the shrinkage has occurred. In that shrinkage of the ice caps, the decrease of the white space is resulting in an exacerbation because reflective capacity has gone.

This is a disaster, and we are certainly willing to educate the government and work with it to deal with this issue in an intelligent way.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always appreciate the comments of the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca in the House, but he used the term disquieting, and according to the Oxford Dictionary, “disquieting” means to be troubled.

I am very troubled because despite the fact that we have had a number of Liberals intervene in the House, quite rightly condemning the Conservatives for their complete lack of action on the environmental file and a budget that attacked the very fundamentals of environmental protection in the country, Liberals rubber-stamped the budget. Liberals have been rubber-stamping every action that the government has taken for three years.

My question for the hon. member is this: Is it not disquieting for Canadians, is it not troubling for Canadians that Liberals rubber-stamp everything the Conservatives do, when quite frankly they admit that the Conservative plan for the environment is not good for the environment and not good for Canadians?

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, this comes from a member whose party leader said that he was not going to support the budget, before he even saw it. That is irresponsible.

We were faced with a very difficult decision. In Bill C-10 and in the budget there were some good things that the Liberals fought for. They fought for the credit through the EDC. They fought for a stimulus package. They fought for moneys through infrastructure. They fought for some changes to EI but not enough.

Then the government plugged in these other things that we found despicable. The government did not give us an option. It said we could change the bill but the bill would not pass and we would have an election.

We did not think that was in the best interest of our country. We did not think it was responsible for the nation to be deprived of the stimulus package and these other changes that we fought for. Therefore, we allowed the stimulus package to go through, but we will change the odious parts of this bill when we become government, which will be very soon.

Government Orders

•(1820)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie may begin his speech, but he will probably continue it when debate is resumed.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to take part in today's debate on Bill S-3 to modernize the Energy Efficiency Act. This bill was introduced in the Senate on January 29, 2009 by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

This bill represents and replicates, for all practical purposes, part 2 of Bill C-30.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. Can we have some silence, please?

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, this bill replicates for all practical purposes the now defunct Bill C-30 on air quality introduced by the government. It caused considerable debate, especially at the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. The second part of Bill C-30 aimed to modernize and improve the Energy Efficiency Act. Of course, that legislation needed to be renewed, updated and improved. For that reason, among others, we will support Bill S-3.

However, the fact remains that it is clearly not enough and more needs to be done. It is clear from many of the comments made by stakeholders in the industrial and business sectors, as well as the environmental community, that the industry proposed these regulations with a shrug of their shoulders. That says it all. It is a step in the right direction, since the amendments presented in these regulations were necessary, but it is not nearly enough to address the problem and improve energy efficiency. We simply must go even further on this issue, because it constitutes one of the most important pillars in a real policy to fight climate change.

A climate change policy must have two basic components. The first is the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions at their source and changing our industrial processes and lifestyles in order to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One way this can be accomplished is by changing how we produce energy. In the next few years, we must reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, whether coal, gas or oil. We must develop new sources of energy in order to reduce our dependency on oil, for instance, which strains the budgets of individuals as well as of businesses and government. When we reduce our dependency on oil, we create conditions conducive to protecting the environment and improving the economy of our society.

This bill amends regulations to reflect advances in energy efficiency, especially with respect to standby power. That is significant. We must encourage such changes, suited to each type of appliance, especially in our homes. For example, an energy-efficient television will use 1 watt compared to 12 watts for a conventional television set. That is the case for certain appliances. If we really want to eliminate consumption, we should just pull the plug. However, quite often we cannot because some devices have a memory and we would lose all the information.

It is important to update these technologies, to introduce regulations and to force businesses to change the manufacture of appliances especially when the technology is available. It is estimated that the implementation of new technologies for standby power alone could save families \$35 a year and result in electricity savings equivalent to consumption by 300,000 households.

•(1825)

That part of the bill is good for the economy and for people's budgets.

This bill would also give the minister more power when it comes to labelling products that consume energy, and it would standardize the process, broadening the range of products to which labelling applies. That is important, but we feel that the government should go much farther. This kind of energy use labelling should not be restricted to appliances, such as dishwashers and televisions, or to light bulbs. It should also bring in a vehicle energy use labelling system like the one in Switzerland and elsewhere. In 2002, the Swiss implemented mandatory energy use labelling for new vehicles. That is the kind of energy use labelling we need.

Our proposed measure would require those who make and sell cars to affix a label containing information about fuel consumption, CO₂ emissions and energy efficiency to all new and used vehicles for sale. We think that this information should also appear on brochures and all advertising material. Labelling would raise awareness among individuals and companies about vehicle efficiency by providing information about fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions. People need that information to make responsible, well-informed choices.

We think that the government should go further than this bill and implement mandatory energy use labelling for new vehicles offered for sale, something along the lines of the Swiss system. I really want to emphasize that because we believe that energy efficiency is about more than the environment and environmental protection. It is also about saving money and creating jobs. This is an opportunity for businesses, states, nations and countries to create jobs based on energy efficiency.

•(1830)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I apologize for interrupting the hon. member. He will have about 11 minutes left when debate resumes.

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The House resumed from March 26 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to adopt the second report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, standing in the name of the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Call in the members.

● (1855)

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

(Division No. 43)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Beaudin	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bigras
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crête	Crombie
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Foote
Gagnon	Garneau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guamieri	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Harris (St. John's East)
Holland	Hughes
Hyer	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kania	Kennedy
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lemay
Leslie	Malo
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mendes	Minna
Mourani	Mulcair
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Neville	Oliphant
Ouellet	Paillet

Paquette
Pearson
Pomerleau
Rae
Rota
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simson
Szabo
Tonks
Valeriote
Wasylcia-Leis
Zarac— 129

Patry
Plamondon
Proulx
Regan
Roy
Savoie
Sgro
Silva
St-Cyr
Thibeault
Trudeau
Vincent
Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Ashfield
Baird	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooie
Cadman	Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fast
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Glover	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hill
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis
Payne	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Sweet
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Wong	Woodworth
Young— 125	

Government Orders

PAIRED

Members

Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Asselin
Blais	Calkins
Freeman	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kerr	Kerr
Lalonde	Lessard
Lévesque	Thi Lac
Weston (Saint John)	Yelich— 14

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA-EFTA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the States of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland), the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Republic of Iceland, the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Kingdom of Norway and the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Swiss Confederation, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Wednesday, March 25, 2009, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion.

The question is on the amendment. All those in favour of the amendment will please rise.

The hon. chief government whip is rising on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with Conservatives voting no.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting no on this motion.

As well, I would like to add the names of the members for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Scarborough—Rouge River and Scarborough Centre.

• (1900)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: No, they abstained on the other vote.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois members will vote against this motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is voting in favour of this motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I would like to vote against this motion.

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

(*Division No. 44*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Dewar
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Godin
Gravelle	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Hyer
Julian	Layton
Leslie	Maloway
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse	Mathysen
Mulcair	Savoie
Siksay	Thibeault
Wasylycia-Leis— 31	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Arthur
Ashfield	Bachand
Bagnell	Baird
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Bernier
Bevilacqua	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blaney	Block
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Boughen
Bourgeois	Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunoogoe
Brunelle	Cadman
Calandra	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Coderre	Cotler
Crête	Crombie
Cummins	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Dechert	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Devolin
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dorion
Dosanjh	Dreeshen
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Fast
Flaherty	Fletcher
Folco	Foote
Gagnon	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Gaudet	Glover
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guarnieri
Guay	Guergis
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)

Government Orders

Hall Findlay	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hill	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Holland	Ignatieff
Jean	Jennings
Kania	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kennedy	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komaricki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lebel
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lemieux
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malo	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mendes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Minna	Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mourani	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Oliphant	Ouellet
Paillé	Paquette
Paradis	Patry
Payne	Pearson
Petit	Plamondon
Poilievre	Pomerleau
Prentice	Preston
Proulx	Rae
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Regan
Reid	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Rota	Roy
Russell	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schellenberger	Sgro
Shea	Shiplay
Shory	Silva
Simson	Sorenson
St-Cyr	Stanton
Storseth	Sweet
Szabo	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriote
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Wong	
Woodworth	Wrzesniewski
Young	Zarac — 226

PAIRED

Members

Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Asselin
Blais	Calkins
Freeman	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kent	Kerr
Lalonde	Lessard
Lévesque	Thi Lac
Weston (Saint John)	Yelich — 14

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee: I rise on a point of order. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Speaker, when the votes were being tallied up through the whips

of the parties, I believe I heard some extraneous remarks from the hon. whip of the Bloc Québécois with respect to abstention.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Not us.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: It was Marlene.

Mr. Derek Lee: In that case, I will stand down and withdraw that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I would remind my hon. colleague that it was a member of his own party who made the comment, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and Liberal Party deputy House leader.

The Speaker: Clearly, no one is arguing the point.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

The hon. chief government whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to this motion in reverse.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

(*Division No. 45*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Arthur
Ashfield	Bachand
Bagnell	Baird
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Bernier
Bevilacqua	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blaney	Block
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Boughen
Bourgeois	Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunooge
Brunelle	Cadman

Calandra
Cannis
Carrie
Casson
Clarke
Coderre
Crête
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Dechert
Demers
Desnoyers
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dosanjh
Dryden
Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Faille
Flaherty
Folco
Gagnon
Gallant
Gaudet
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
Hall Findlay
Hawn
Hill
Hoeppner
Holland
Jean
Kania
Kennedy
Komarnicki
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lobb
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malo
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Mendes
Merrifield
Minna
Mourani
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Oliphant
Paillé
Paradis
Payne
Petit
Poilievre
Prentice
Proulx
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Rickford
Rota
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Simson
St-Cyr
Storseth

Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cardin
Carrier
Chong
Clement
Cotler
Crombie
Cuzner
Davidson
DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Devolin
Dhalla
Dorion
Dreeshen
Duceppe
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Fast
Fletcher
Foote
Galipeau
Garneau
Glover
Goodale
Gourde
Guarnieri
Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Ignatieff
Jennings
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
Lebel
Lee
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Neville
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Ouellet
Paquette
Patry
Pearson
Plamondon
Pomerleau
Preston
Rae
Rajotte
Regan
Richards
Ritz
Roy
Saxton
Scheer
Sgro
Shipley
Silva
Sorenson
Stanton
Sweet

Routine Proceedings

Szabo
Tilson
Tonks
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Wong
Woodworth
Young

Thompson
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Valeriote
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Watson
Wrzesnewskij
Zarac — 226

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Atamanenko
Chow
Comartin
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver East)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Gravelle
Hughes
Julian
Leslie
Marston
Masse
Mulcair
Siksay
Wasylcyia-Leis — 31

Angus
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dewar
Godin
Harris (St. John's East)
Hyer
Layton
Maloway
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Mathysen
Savoie
Thibeault

PAIRED

Members

Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Blais
Freeman
Kent
Lalonde
Lévesque
Weston (Saint John)

Asselin
Calkins
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kerr
Lessard
Thi Lac
Yelich — 14

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1905)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Friday, March 27, 2009, the House will now proceed to the consideration of the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development presented on Thursday, March 5, 2009 be concurred in.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Mount Royal.

I would like to begin by thanking the members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for voting in support of my motion which we are debating in the House this evening.

Routine Proceedings

Canada is a nation that places a high premium on human rights. We as Canadians have a profound and enduring obligation to be a voice in the international community whenever we are witness to human rights violations around the world. This is the case with the persistent and targeted oppression of the Baha'i community and other minority communities in Iran. Simply put, this oppression in Iran is intolerable and unacceptable.

The reality is that this so-called republic is a theocracy ruled by Shia clerics who have imposed their own brand of religious interpretation that is heavy-handed, fundamentalist and intolerable. On paper, Iran is a signatory to five major human rights treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Iran's failure to abide by these treaties violates international law. Each of these treaties enshrines basic rights for the citizens of the signatory country, but also an obligation by that country to modify domestic law to ensure compliance with international treaty obligations. The reality in Iran, as confirmed by human rights groups, is that there are serious violations of human rights in that country. Reports place a number of persons executed since the Islamic revolution in 1979 at over 100,000 people, including those who were juveniles at the time of their convictions.

Basic civil liberties such as freedom of speech, expression, assembly, religion and privacy, all of which citizens in democratic states take for granted, are severely restricted and in many cases punished through any number of draconian means which are sanctioned and encouraged by the Iranian government. There have been arbitrary arrests, extended disappearances and the extrajudicial detention of those who are, in reality, only political prisoners.

We in Canada were appalled and justifiably outraged when we witnessed the detention and murder of Iranian Canadian journalist Zahra Kazemi. I have persistently spoken out over the years against human rights violations in Iran. The Iranian government has consistently demonstrated that it shares no commitment whatsoever to religious or political freedom, internationally as well as domestically. On more than one occasion, comments by Iran's supreme leader and also those by its president have called for the extermination of the Jewish people and the outright destruction of the state of Israel. They have repeatedly uttered the most disgraceful and hurtful denials of the Holocaust that have been heard from any government in living memory.

When taken together, the actions and the hate-mongering of the Iranian government makes the prospect of an Iran with nuclear capabilities all the more frightening. My hon. colleague, the member for Mount Royal illustrated this very well when in the last Parliament he stated:

The parading of a Shehab III missile in the streets of Tehran, draped in the emblem of "wipe Israel off the map", underpinned by a virulent anti-Semitism that calls for a new Holocaust, as it denies the old one, and threatens to burn Muslims who evince any support for Israel, constitutes a standing assault on international peace and security, and a clear and present danger to us all.

Failing to address these threats not only leaves our friends vulnerable but calls into question our own values. In Iran, the

disturbing international utterances are manifested in the daily conduct of the government there. Minority groups are essentially targets for untold human rights abuses. According to the United Nations, the Baha'i community, which numbers around 300,000, is the largest minority group out of Iran's 70 million people.

The Iranian government has reacted to the beliefs of the Baha'is by brutally cracking down on the leaders of the faith in Iran through persecution against its members and the spreading of blatant misinformation about the Baha'i faith to the population of Iran. In one prominent example, Muslims were encouraged to sign a poster outside a mosque before Friday prayers that accused the Baha'is of spreading lies against Islam and perpetrating cowardly attacks in hopes of "advancing the political, cultural and economic aims of global Zionism" and calling on Iran's attorney general to "confront all elements of this organization and dissolve its administration".

These so-called dissolution efforts have manifested themselves through targeted discrimination and have led to the imprisonment of adherents of the Baha'i faith.

• (1910)

In 2005 the United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of religion uncovered a confidential letter from the command headquarters of the armed forces of Iran ordering the identification of all Baha'is and monitoring their activities.

This particular motion calls to attention the wrongful arrest and detention of seven members of the group, Friends of Iran, who are being held in the political prison section of Evin prison in Tehran. These individuals are being held without charges, evidence or access to legal counsel.

A lawyer and Nobel laureate, Shirin Ebadi, found herself subjected to death threats and subsequent closure of her office when she announced her intention to represent the Baha'is in court.

There is a concern within the Baha'i community for the safety of these detained members. Given the realities portrayed by international agencies and the poor reputation the Iranian government has for basic human rights, all of us should be concerned with this present injustice in specific terms and the overall deteriorating situation for minority communities in Iran.

As parliamentarians and as leaders in the international community with a long commitment to promoting fundamental human rights, we must condemn this situation without reservation at every available opportunity.

Canada's government must send a message that is unmistakable in its tone that we view the conduct of the Government of Iran as reprehensible and intolerable. If nothing is done, we can be assured that countries like Iran will continue to oppress minority groups with impunity.

Routine Proceedings

I am calling on Parliament and the government first and foremost to condemn the ongoing violation of human rights taking place in Iran, especially as it pertains to the Baha'is. Moreover, I call on the Government of Canada to urge the Government of Iran in the strongest possible terms to release these captives, or at the very least, to conduct internationally recognized fair, open and legally legitimate trials for these members of the Friends of Iran.

We have an obligation to shine a light on these injustices. I thank those dedicated individuals who have brought them to our attention and who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that this issue is exposed and not forgotten.

I am reminded of the famous quote by Pastor Martin Niemöller who remarked, when referring to the Holocaust, "When the Nazis came for the communists, I remained silent; I was not a communist. When they locked up the social democrats, I remained silent; I was not a social democrat. When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I was not a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out".

We as Canadians who are recognized the world over for our commitment to human rights must be a voice that is heard across the world for dignity, respect and freedom for all persons. We must speak loudly and clearly and never hesitate to shine a light on violations of human rights everywhere.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to that moving address with great interest. I wonder if the member opposite would care to comment on a distinction that needs to be made between his condemnation of the Government of Iran and the respect he may have for the people in Canada of Persian and Iranian background and the contributions they have made to Canada?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for a very good question. Iran is a vast country with an incredible history of a people and civilization that goes back thousands of years. I have a great admiration for the people. Iran has a young population. I think over 50% are young people with an incredible will and belief that they want to leave that repressive regime.

My condemnation, as the hon. member has mentioned, is of the intolerable regime in Iran that in fact is suffocating and repressing its own people. It is an intolerable, appalling condition and a lack of respect for human rights.

Many of the people of Iran care deeply about human rights. I have a great admiration for them. There are many people in diasporas as well who have fled that very oppressive regime. I have known many of those people over the years. They are intelligent, sophisticated individuals with an incredible culture. Many of them are academics, engineers, people with great professions who have done extremely well in Canada. Canada is very proud. We are very pleased to have so many of them in Canada who are doing an incredible job.

My professor, when I was at Oxford, is also of Iranian background and is Baha'i as well. I know of the incredible wealth of people all over the world who had to flee that repressive regime.

My condemnation is of the government and not of the people. My hope is with the young people of Iran, that they will rise up against the government and get rid of it. It is not a government that is serving

anybody any good. It is certainly one of the most repressive regimes on earth.

Even though I am not allowed to do this, I want to recognize a group of Friends of Baha'i who are in the gallery.

● (1915)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is more of a comment than a question. As the chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, which is currently holding hearings on Iran's human rights policy, one thing that has struck me is the very inhumane regime that is presiding over a country which, in all of its multiplicity, is an extraordinarily civilized and humane society. That includes Baha'is, members of other minorities, and a wide variety of linguistic and ethnic minorities. It also includes some of the witnesses who are members of the Persian majority in the country. It includes individuals who have had the courage, because of their Muslim beliefs and as members of the majority and their participation in the culture to stand up for human rights on behalf of their fellow citizens.

I just wanted to make that comment as we proceed in the debate.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to thank my hon. colleague, the chair of the subcommittee, and the members of the committee who have supported the motion. I want to thank also the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. We are very much concerned about the situation and are monitoring what is happening in Iran. We thank them very much for their support.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the motion that itself arose initially from the witness testimony and documentary evidence both before the foreign affairs subcommittee on human rights and beyond, to which my colleague, the member for Davenport, referred, which demonstrated that since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Baha'is have faced a systematic and state-orchestrated campaign of religious persecution and prosecution in their Iranian homeland, indeed a persistent and pervasive assault on their fundamental rights protected under international covenants to which Iran is a state party, again referred to by my colleague.

In its early stages, more than 200 Baha'is were killed and at least 1,000 imprisoned, targeted solely because of their religious beliefs. In the early 1990s the government shifted its focus to the systematic deprivation of social, economic and cultural rights, impeding and obstructing the development of the Baha'i community, including measures to deprive the Baha'i of their livelihood and to destroy their cultural heritage—in a word, to disenfranchise the Baha'i from equal participation in all aspects of Iranian life.

Most important, in the last several years there has been a resurgence of more extreme forms of persecution directed at the 300,000 members of the Baha'i community in Iran, that country's largest minority.

Routine Proceedings

This upsurge has alarmed human rights scholars and monitors who fear not only for the Baha'i community affected by the government's renewed campaigns of hatred and incitement, but also that such attacks portend something worse, that they constitute a number of warning signs that often foreshadow widespread ethnic, racial or religious cleansing, including—and these are some of the warning signs—the exclusionary “classification” of minority groups into categories of “us versus them”; the singling out of the Baha'i for special opprobrium and repression; the use of the state media to dehumanize and demonize the Baha'i among their fellow Iranians; the orchestration of hate groups for targeted intimidation and fear; the proliferation of assaults on members of the Baha'i community, their homes and their properties; the ongoing denial of higher education to Baha'i youth; the manifold restrictions on their right to a livelihood; the ongoing attempts to destroy their religious, cultural and spiritual heritage; the arrest and imprisonment, as referred to by my colleague, the member for Davenport, of national-level Baha'i leaders in March and May 2008 in a manner that is eerily similar to the events of the 1980s when scores of Baha'i leaders were rounded up and killed; the whole reflected and foreshadowed in the public disclosure in March 2006, referred to in our motion, by a United Nations official of a governmental plan instructing state intelligence services, police units and the Revolutionary Guard to make “a comprehensive and complete report of all activities of the Baha'i sect for the purpose of identifying all individuals of this misguided sect”.

As Asma Jahangir, United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of religion, put it, “such monitoring constitutes an impermissible and unacceptable interference with the rights of members of religious minorities”, while others characterized these orders as reminiscent of the steps taken against the Jews in Europe and a dangerous step toward the institution of Nuremberg-type laws.

All this stereotyping, denigrating and demonizing is of a religious minority that itself has the highest respect for all religions.

As the Baha'i international community has put it in its own communication to the Iranian government:

Our Writings refer to Islam as “the blessed and luminous religion of God” and the Prophet Muhammad as “the refulgent lamp of supreme Prophethood,” “the Lord of creation” and “the Day-star of the world.” Who, “through the will of God, shone forth from the horizon of Hijaz.” The station of Imam Ali is described in terms such as “the moon of the heaven of knowledge and understanding” and “the sovereign of the court of knowledge and wisdom.”

I will close by reading into the record an excerpt from a heroic open letter by a group of Iranian academics, writers, artists, journalists and activists throughout the world to the Baha'i community, a letter signed by more than 300 of the most prominent Iranian intellectuals. It reads as follows, and I am only excerpting from it:

● (1920)

We are ashamed...

As Iranian human beings, we are ashamed for what has been perpetrated upon the Baha'is in the last century and a half in Iran...

According to historical documents and evidence, from the commencement of the Babi Movement followed by the appearance of the Baha'i Faith, thousands of our countrymen have been slain by the sword of bigotry and superstition only for their religious beliefs. Just in the first decades of its establishment, some twenty thousand of those who stood identified with this faith community were savagely killed throughout various regions of Iran.

We are ashamed that during that period, no voice of protest against these barbaric murders was registered...

We are ashamed that in addition to the intense suppression of Baha'is during its formative decades, the last century also witnessed periodic episodes of persecution of this group of our countrymen, in which their homes and businesses were set on fire, and their lives, property and families were subjected to brutal persecution—but all the while, the intellectual community of Iran remained silent;

We are ashamed that during the last thirty years, the killing of Baha'is solely on the basis of their religious beliefs has gained legal status and over two-hundred Baha'is have been slain on this account...

We are ashamed of our silence that after many decades of service to Iran, Baha'i retired persons have been deprived of their right to a pension...

We are ashamed of our silence over this painful reality that in our nation, Baha'is are systematically oppressed and maligned, a number of them are incarcerated because of their religious convictions, their homes and places of business are attacked and destroyed, and periodically their burial places are desecrated;

We are ashamed of our silence when confronted with the long, dark and atrocious record that our laws and legal system have marginalized and deprived Baha'is of their rights, and the injustice and harassment of both official and unofficial organs of the government towards this group of our countrymen;

We are ashamed for all these transgressions and injustices, and we are ashamed for our silence over these deeds.

They close with:

We, the undersigned, asked you, the Baha'is, to forgive us for the wrongs committed against the Baha'i community of Iran.

We will no longer be silent when injustice is visited upon you.

We stand by you in achieving all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.

And in a closing, heroic expression and clarion call:

Let us join hands in replacing hatred and ignorance with love and tolerance.

● (1925)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member and the members of the foreign affairs subcommittee for bringing the issue of the Baha'i persecution in Iran to the forefront of their report so that we are discussing this in concurrence.

I would like to go along the same line my colleagues did about the great Iranian people, but what I would like to dwell upon is that Iran, through its long history, has been one of the beacons in the Middle East.

Iranians, or Persians as they are properly known, have, over history, stood up for great culture, for great civilization, and that has had tremendous impact on the regions around that country, in South Asia and elsewhere.

However, in terms of what has happened there, I think my hon. colleague will agree that it was only after the arrival of the Islamic Republic of Iran under Khomeini that we started seeing this persecution. These regimes have actually forgotten the great Persian and Iranian traditions that have existed there for so many years.

So perhaps the member would clarify that this is the work of the new regime over there right now in Iran.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I wish to concur with the remarks of my colleague. Iran has been a great civilization. It has made an enormous contribution to humankind, and indeed, humankind internationally. We are all the beneficiaries of that great civilization. It was only as a result of the witness testimony and documentary evidence, to which I referred, that the foreign affairs committee's Subcommittee on International Human Rights, taking note, as I quote, and I will read this into the record:

on the persistent and pervasive assault on the human rights of the Baha'i community in Iran, alarmed by the escalation of the prosecution and persecution of the Baha'i leadership, alarmed further by the state-backed demonization of and incitement against the Baha'i community in Iran, resolves to take all necessary measures both domestically and internationally to address and redress this state-backed assault on the human rights of the Baha'i community.

We stand in solidarity with the Iranian people who are themselves the objects of mass targeted repression domestically by the Iranian government. We stand with them as we stand with the Baha'i. Our critique is solely of those who have assumed the leadership since the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Again, we hold no brief against Islam. On the contrary, we see Islam as a peaceful religion that has made contributions to humankind, as have the Iranian people and the Iranian civilization. We single out only those in the government who have embarked upon this state-backed policy of persecution and prosecution of a minority solely on the basis of their religious faith and heritage.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on the Baha'i community in Iran. This subject is very important to our government. The report does an excellent job in highlighting the persecution faced by the Baha'i in Iran.

We believe that religious liberty is fundamental to a civilized society. That is why we condemn such persecution in all its forms, including those who continue the long-standing persecution against the Baha'i and by others who quietly excuse them. We believe that targeting innocent lives to achieve political objectives is always and everywhere wrong.

In addition to the report done by the committee, I would like to add a little historical perspective to demonstrate the long-suffering nature of the persecution faced by the Iranian Baha'i and the long-standing support provided to them by the government and the people of Canada. Under this government, I am proud to represent a strong Canada on the world stage that not just believes but fights to ensure that every man and woman in the world has rights and dignity.

Canada has been a leading voice in speaking out on the persecution of and for the rights and dignity of the Baha'i community in Iran. The Baha'is have been a persecuted minority community in Iran since the inception of the Baha'i faith in Iran over 160 years ago. The persecution has been consistent irrespective of which ideology or political orientation has happened to be in power.

The Baha'i community in Iran poses no threat to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The principles of the Baha'i faith require its members to be obedient to their government, to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity and all forms of violence.

Unfortunately, a new and more violent wave of persecution against the Baha'i came in the way of the 1979 Iranian revolution. Since the revolution, 50 Baha'is have disappeared and more than 200 have been killed, two as recently as in 1997. The oppression of the Iranian Baha'i is not a matter of oversight or the thought of a few individuals acting in bad faith. It is planned and systematic.

In 1991 Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Reza Golpayegani, head of the office of the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, prepared a report, now known as the Golpayegani document, which outlined how the Islamic Republic of Iran would set out to undermine the well-being of the community.

The Golpayegani document was prepared on behalf of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. It was blessed by the president, the supreme leader Khomeini, who authorized the implementation of its recommendations.

The recommendations outlined in the document include the following elements. The government's dealing with the Baha'i must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked. They can be enrolled in schools, provided they have not identified themselves as Baha'is. They must be expelled from universities either in the admissions process or during the course of their studies once it becomes known that they are Baha'is. A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country. They will be denied employment if they identify themselves as Baha'is and will be denied any position of influence such as in the educational sector.

Unfortunately, these were not just words on paper. The subsequent history of the Baha'is' treatment at the hand of the government reads from this playbook.

I would like to talk about the education in a bit more detail to highlight the Golpayegani plan in action.

In 2006, the director general of the central security office of the Iranian ministry of science research and technology sent a message to 81 Iranian universities instructing them to expel any student who was discovered to be a Baha'i at the time of enrolment or in the course of his or her studies. The letter stated that the instructions were being promulgated under the provisions of decree 1327 of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution of February 1991. This is the Golpayegani document.

● (1930)

The letter came after Iranian officials had informed the Baha'i community that its students would enrol in university under something like a "Don't ask, don't tell" approach. The 800 Baha'i students took the entrance exam for the academic year 2006-07. Three thousand students were allowed to enrol, but one by one they were identified and expelled as per the instructions delivered by the director general.

Educational problems are not limited to the university level. Elementary-aged children are regularly insulted and have been threatened with expulsion and, in some cases, the dismissals have been carried out. The harassment and severe psychological pressure faced by the young students is all the more intolerable, as they routinely are committed by those who should rightfully hold their trust: their teachers and school administrators.

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While there are many examples of such behaviour, it is only fair to point out that there are many brave Iranian teachers who tried their best to ensure a healthy learning environment for all the students, including the Baha'i students, but the officially sanctioned policy of persecution means that too many Baha'i children face a hostile environment.

Canada has been a leading international defender of the Iranian Baha'i community. The Government of Canada was the first government in the world to draw attention to the severe persecution suffered by the Bahá'í community in Iran, when in June 1981 the House of Commons passed a strongly worded resolution condemning the post-revolutionary persecution of the Baha'is.

Canada led the world in admitting Baha'i families into our country as refugees during the first few years following the 1979 revolution. Several other countries followed our lead and together we welcomed 10,000 Baha'is from Iran into our countries.

Canada has championed the rights of the Iranian Baha'is in various United Nations fora and the representatives of the Baha'i community of Canada enjoy regular and substantive access to senior officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

As I noted in the House of Commons on February 12, Canada is deeply troubled by these charges of espionage levelled at the Baha'i leadership in Iran. The Canadian embassy in Iran has conveyed these concerns directly to the Iranian authorities. We believe that these charges are unacceptable and without foundation, and that these individuals are being persecuted solely on the basis of their faith.

The Baha'i leadership has been detained without access to legal counsel for more than 10 months. Six members were arrested last May and the seventh may have been detained since March of last year. If found guilty, the seven could face the death penalty. In addition to the seven members facing charges of espionage, there are 30 more Iranian Baha'is in prison for their beliefs.

We are further troubled by public statements of senior Iranian officials that threaten the Baha'i community as a whole. For example, last month Iran's prosecutor general stated:

The administration of the misguided Bahá'í sect at all levels is unlawful and banned, and their ties to Israel and their opposition to Islam and the Islamic regime are clear. The danger they pose to national security is documented and proven...

The prosecutor general went on to state, and I find these words to be particularly chilling, that "the administrative element [of the Bahá'í community] will be confronted decisively until its complete destruction". Such comments are deeply worrying.

There have been a movement to intimidate defenders of the Baha'i, including Shirin Ebadi, winner of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. In December 2008, the Iranian authorities closed the Defenders of Human Rights Center in Tehran, headed by Ms. Ebadi, and raided her private offices. As noted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a statement issued on December 22 and December 30 of last year, Canada was seriously concerned by the closure of the Defenders of Human Rights Center and the raid on Shirin Ebadi private office.

I regret that these are just the latest in a long line of incidents of harassment, intimidation and the human rights violations aimed at

the 300,000 Baha'is living in Iran. As I outlined earlier, this peaceful community has been targeted by the Iranian authorities and subjected to persecution, discrimination and detention for years.

• (1935)

This persecution has increased in recent years. Since 2005, there have been more than 200 arrests of Baha'is in Iran. On May 19, 2006, for example, Iranian authorities arrested 54 Baha'is in the city of Shiraz. Most of those arrested were youth and all were engaged in humanitarian service when they were arrested.

The humanitarian activities included tutoring children, offering art classes to young cancer patients at the hospital in Shiraz and visiting orphanages and facilities for physically and mentally challenged students. The Baha'is were later convicted of offences related to state security.

Other Baha'is have been arrested and convicted in recent years for such crimes as organizing the activities of the perverse Baha'i sect, being an active member of the Baha'i community and teaching Muslims secretly by providing them with Baha'i materials.

In the past year alone, more than 50 Baha'is have been arrested. Among those arbitrarily detained is Ms. Jinus Sobhani, who worked as an assistant at the Defenders of Human Rights Center headed by Ms. Shirin Ebadi.

In addition to the arbitrary arrests, Baha'is in Iran are also subjected to violence and intimidation. Death threats and vandalism are disturbingly common occurrences. One of the most disturbing trends is the increase in attacks on Baha'i cemeteries. The Baha'i cemetery in Darzikola, for example, has been repeatedly attacked, including with bulldozers and front-end loaders until being completely razed by municipal officers in January of this year.

Also in January, government workers entered a cemetery in Tehran and destroyed an entire section where Iranian authorities had buried many of the Baha'is executed in the years immediately following the Iranian revolution in 1979.

Iranian state media regularly publishes attacks on Baha'is and their faith. In November 2008, the Islamic Republic news agency announced the publication of a new anti-Baha'i book, which portrays Baha'is during the Shah era as spies holding key positions in media, government and the military.

Kayhan, the conservative state-sponsored newspaper, regularly publishes similar-themed articles slandering the Baha'is, including charges that the Baha'is are secretly linked to colonialism and Zionism. Others have gone so far as to link the Baha'i faith with satanic cults.

The government of Iran's treatment of the Baha'i community is in direct opposition to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party. The covenant protects the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It also states that no one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention.

We urge Iran to live up to its commitments and obligations under domestic and international law, which it knowingly entered into, and to begin to adopt meaningful change in its human rights practices.

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It is important to recognize that there are important voices in Iran who are calling for an end to the persecution of the Baha'is. The most prominent statement came from Grand Ayatollah Montazeri in May 2008.

Grand Ayatollah Montazeri had been the designated successor to Atayollah Khomeini, but fell out with him in 1989, shortly before Khomeini's death, over government policies that Montazeri claimed infringed on freedom and denied people's rights. Grand Atayollah Montazeri is under house arrest in Iran, but remains influential in religious circles. His May 2008 decree said:

The congregation of Baha'ism not having the heavenly book like those of Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians in the constitution...are not considered one of the religious minorities. However, since they are the citizens of this country, they have the rights of a citizen and to live in this country. Furthermore, they must benefit from the Islamic compassion which is stressed in Quran and by the religious authorities.

This simple statement defending the citizenship rights of the Baha'i community marked the most important defence of the rights of the Baha'is by a senior Islamic authority

It was an important step and one that demonstrates that there can be respect and dignity for the Baha'i people in Iran. There are other prominent voices in Iran calling for an end to the persecution of the Baha'is. The 2003 Nobel Peace Prize-winner, Shirin Ebadi, is one such brave voice. She has sought to defend Baha'is in the Iranian courts and has called for justice and respect for these citizens of Iran.

• (1940)

This government takes every opportunity to make it views on human rights and religious discrimination known to the authorities of Iran and to other countries. Support for freedom of religion is an integral part of our ongoing work in promoting human rights.

Canada continues to draw attention bilaterally and internationally to the persecution of the Baha'is and the overall human rights situation in Iran. As I noted, the Canadian embassy in Iran has raised this issue directly with the Government of Iran, and we will continue to express Canada's deep concern with the charges facing the Baha'i leadership.

Our government continues to urge Iran to fully respect all of its human rights obligations, both in law and in practice, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against religious, ethnic, linguistic or other minorities.

The situation of the Baha'is is a reflection of the troubling human rights situation in Iran.

As Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have noted that persecution of religious and ethnic minorities goes beyond the Baha'i and includes Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, Kurds, Christians, Jews, Sufis and Sunni Muslims.

Iran continues to execute more juvenile offenders than any other country. The rights of women and workers are suppressed and the Iranian authorities have gone to great lengths to limit freedom of expression and the media. There has also been a movement to intimidate academics and journalists as well as human rights defenders.

Addressing the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, such as the Baha'i in Iran, has been a consistent priority of our government.

The poor state of human rights in Iran prompted Canada and more than 40 other countries to again sponsor a UN General Assembly resolution on the human rights situation in Iran last December.

As a response to the report from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the resolution called attention to egregious human rights violations, including confirmed instances of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, multiple public executions, persecution of minorities, including the Baha'i, and arrests of human rights defenders. The adoption of this resolution was a clear signal of the international community's ongoing concern for the human rights of people in Iran.

The government will continue to raise our concerns about the human rights and the Baha'i directly to the Government of Iran. The report of the standing committee will assist in Canada's ongoing pursuit of justice and dignity for the Baha'is of Iran.

• (1945)

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that ringing declaration of freedom, something for which Canadians can stand up and be proud, and that is protecting voiceless people around the world. It is exciting to be in this chamber to hear that.

Could my colleague answer the following question? I see in the very large, robust and dynamic Persian-Iranian community in Canada, many of whose members I represent from the north shore of Vancouver, has similar concerns for these issues. I know, for instance, that on April 17, a great member of this community, Nazanin Afshin-Jam of Persian background, will speak in front of over a thousand people on human rights issues in Iran and around the world.

Could my colleague help me understand how we can uphold the Persian and Iranian people in Canada who are struggling to make known their condemnation of those abuses and ensuring that we, as parliamentarians, distinguish between our condemnation of the government of Iran and its abuses on the one hand from the wonderful contributions that the Persian-Iranian people are making in Canada on the other hand?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as in today's debate on this concurrence motion, every member who has already spoken and who will speak will talk about the great contribution the Iranian community has made to Canada, and will continue to make those contributions.

I had on many occasions the opportunity to meet with the Persian people of the Iranian community in our country. They have brought forward many issues of human rights and other issues. As my friend on the other side and I have stated, human rights abuses have become an issue since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

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I encourage the member and the community to keep in constant touch and to keep talking to us. As I stated in my speech, they have access to the officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and to us to ensure we keep bringing this issue up in Parliament and into the international domain.

I am sure tonight's concurrence debate, as well as the report of the subcommittee, will be seen right across the world. Canada will continue speaking on behalf of the Baha'is around the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to support the unanimous position of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, which is the same position taken previously by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. We need to recognize the exceptional sensitivity demonstrated by that committee, on which the Bloc is represented by the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. The committee report sheds light on an unacceptable situation that must be reported. It does not question Iran's history as a great society, with the highs and lows that every country experiences. But this is a particular situation that must be brought to light. It is the responsibility of this Parliament and every parliament on the planet. We have to be very sensitive to human rights abuses. History has taught us that ignoring human rights abuses has a snowball effect, so we have to make sure that we are sensitive and on the alert and that human rights are respected.

The Bloc Québécois is obviously in favour of adopting this report by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, because the Bloc Québécois, like the other parties in this House, condemns the persecution of people because of their religious affiliation, ethnicity, language or sexual orientation. In this case, it is a question of religious affiliation.

In all friendship, we call on the Iranian government to put a stop to its discrimination against the Baha'is. Iran has international obligations under international conventions it has signed. In recent weeks, we have seen that the new American President and others are open to dialogue with Iran. This issue must be addressed with that same openness, but it is important not to hide the facts and to speak the truth and say what needs to be changed.

In the case of the imprisonment of seven Baha'is, the Iranian government must ensure that they have a fair, balanced, prompt and transparent trial so that their situation may be resolved as quickly as possible. We know that, often, when light is shed on such matters by NGOs or parliaments, as we are doing this evening, issues are resolved because the specific sensibilities raised are reported internationally through diplomatic efforts or by the media. Awareness is heightened and this prevents situations from deteriorating. That is to some extent the objective of the committee.

The House of Commons recognized that, on May 14, 2008, six members of a group known as the Friends of Iran, which is responsible for the needs of the Baha'i community in Iran, were arrested and jailed as political prisoners in Evin prison in Tehran. The seventh member was already being detained there after being arrested in March 2008.

In October 2005, the United Nations human rights commission uncovered a confidential letter from the command headquarters of

the armed forces of Iran ordering that all Baha'is be identified and their activities monitored. Thus, the Baha'is were targeted. This is a dangerous practice and we must absolutely put a stop to it. The United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of religion stated, on March 20, 2006, that she "also expresses her concern that the information gathered as a result of such monitoring will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of and discrimination against, members of the Bahá'í Faith, in violation of international standards... The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is, in fact, deteriorating." It is with this in mind that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development adopted the report we are debating this evening.

Clearly, the Baha'i community in Canada is concerned about the safety of these seven Baha'i individuals being detained with no formal charges against them and without access to a lawyer or the evidence against them. They are being subject to harsh treatment and interrogations, with very restricted visitation rights, all for the past nine months. Tonight's debate is meant to tell those people, even though they cannot hear us directly, that we hope they will be treated fairly and equitably by the Iranian government.

In addition, Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi, who announced her intention to defend the Baha'is in court, has been subjected to harassment and has had to close her offices. Our vigilance is therefore justified and must be maintained. The deputy prosecutor general has announced that these prisoners will be tried by the Revolutionary court on charges of "espionage on behalf of Israel, insult to the sacredness (of Islam) and propaganda against the regime", all of which are capital offences.

• (1950)

It seems to us that these charges are frequently used by Iranian authorities to target human rights defenders and religious minorities and there is nothing in the history or teachings of the Baha'i community to lend any credence to such charges.

I do not wish to draw any unwarranted parallels, but 50 years ago in Quebec, we saw these kind of excesses in connection with Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses. The situation was later corrected, thanks to vigilance and the defence of human rights in Quebec and in Canada, in order to ensure that such situations never happen again. In this case, we hope that Iran will take a similar approach, and that our message will be clearly heard in parliament. It is not a question of trying to teach the Iranian government a lesson, but to show it once again that people are aware of this issue.

Therefore, be it resolved that this House condemns the ongoing persecution of the Bahá'í minority of Iran and calls upon the government of Iran to reconsider its charges against the members of the Friends in Iran, and release them immediately or failing this, that it proceed to trial without further delay, ensuring that the proceedings are open and fair and are conducted in the presence of international observers.

It is with these considerations in mind that the motion was passed, and we hope that it will be respected.

It is important that those who are watching us understand that the Baha'i religion has close to 6 million adherents in 235 countries. So, we are talking about a religion that is well recognized. It is one of the youngest religions among the world's major religions. It started in Iran, in 1844. It evolved from the Shia branch of Islam. I do not want to get into the details of the evolution of that religion but, for its members, God is a transcendental and unknowable entity. Prophets are successive and divine manifestations, not incarnations. The Baha'i religion recognizes the prophets of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the Baha'ullah begins the Baha'i cycle, when other prophets will come.

We can see the general spirit that is found in the major religions, and in other religions in general. That spirit is based on respect for others. No religion is exempt from excesses. Such excesses are found in all religions but, fortunately, history shows that we regularly go back to the essence of religions. We hope that tolerance will develop and that we will succeed in setting aside the excesses that lead to consequences that are more or less acceptable.

Baha'is have been persecuted almost since the emergence of that religion, during the 19th century. In 1933, the Baha'i literature was banned in Iran, and Baha'i marriages were not recognized. So, Baha'is had to put up with a degree of intolerance. After the Islamic Revolution, people lost their jobs and many even lost their lives because of their religious faith.

In light of this situation, we want the Iranian government to know that not only do the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development support the report that was tabled, but that the House of Commons also supports it. We want the House to transmit this report, because that would be an additional recognition. This report should also spur the Canadian government into making more specific representations regarding this issue.

It is important to remember that Iran has signed a number of international treaties that protect the rights of religious minorities, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. All these conventions protect religious minorities against discrimination and persecution. Iran is also a member of the UN, and as I said earlier, we have seen a change in attitude on the part of the UN in the wake of the new U.S. President's openness.

● (1955)

We hope this constructive approach will spread and that what we are doing today in this House about this situation will translate into a series of actions by other countries and will lead to a change in behaviour and a tolerance that is more befitting societies as we would like them to be in the 21st century. Tolerance is a truly important societal value in Quebec and Canada, and it is also valued around the world. Clearly, we must avoid thinking that we are white and the other side is black. We must also make sure that our own country practises tolerance.

In this case, we are not talking about a solution abroad. It is up to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to raise these sorts of issues when they come up. It

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is interesting to see the consensus and the unanimous positions of both the human rights committee and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on common values. In view of that consensus, we ask that this report be concurred in.

● (2000)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the NDP and as a member of the subcommittee. I stand in support for the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on the Baha'i community in Iran.

It is very important for the people at home who are watching the debate tonight to understand first of all that there was consensus, as the previous speaker just said, in our committee. We all understand the importance of this situation in Iran. I also believe it is important to read the motion that is contained in the report. The motion reads:

Whereas, the House of commons recognizes that on 14 May 2008, six members of an informal group known as the Friends in Iran that oversee the needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran were arrested and taken to the political prisoners section of Evin prison in Tehran, where the seventh member was already being held, following her arrest in Mashhad in March 2008.

And whereas, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in October 2005, uncovered a confidential letter from the Command headquarters of the Armed Forces of Iran ordering the identification and monitoring of all Bahá'ís and their activities.

And whereas, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief stated on March 20, 2006, that she "also expresses her concern that the information gathered as a result of such monitoring will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of and discrimination against, members of the Bahá'í Faith, in violation of international standards ... The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is, in fact, deteriorating".

And whereas, the Bahá'í community of Canada is gravely concerned for the safety of these seven Bahá'ís who have been held without formal charges or access to legal counsel or evidence brought against them and being subjected to harsh treatment and interrogation with very restricted visits from family members for more than nine months.

And whereas, Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi who announced her intention to defend the Bahá'ís in court has since been harassed and her offices have been closed.

And whereas, the Deputy Prosecutor General has announced that these prisoners will be tried by the Revolutionary court on charges of "espionage on behalf of Israel", "insult to the sacredness (of Islam)" and "propaganda against the regime" – all of which are capital offences.

And whereas, such charges are frequently used by Iranian authorities to target human rights defenders and religious minorities and there is nothing in the history or teachings of the Bahá'í community to lend any credence to such charges.

And whereas, these arrests have taken place in the context of an upsurge of arbitrary arrests, raids on home, expulsion of university students, harassment of school children, destruction of graveyards, virulent attacks in government controlled media.

Therefore, be it resolved that this House condemns the ongoing persecution of the Bahá'í minority of Iran and calls upon the government of Iran to reconsider its charges against the members of the Friends in Iran, and release them immediately or failing this, that it proceed to trial without further delay, ensuring that the proceedings are open and fair and are conducted in the presence of international observers.

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This not one of those debates where members try to score points at the expense of other parties in the House. No, Mr. Speaker, as you have listened, you will have heard unity in the House, unity in support of human rights and security for the Baha'i people in Iran.

Over the last few weeks, the human rights subcommittee has been studying the human rights situation in Iran. At each session, we heard compelling testimony raising grave concerns about the actions of the government of Iran against its own people.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other private individuals spoke of the situation in Iran, which all believe is worsening daily.

Canadians will remember with horror the case of the Canadian, Zahra Kazemi. I would like to share with the House the following letter written by Susanne Tamas following her testimony at the human rights subcommittee which was subsequently published March 9 in the *Ottawa Citizen*. She wrote:

We are fortunate to live in a country that enables elected representatives and citizens to work together to promote human rights and protect those suffering human rights violations.

● (2005)

Ms. Tamas went on to write about how she recently appeared as a witness before the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. She said:

The subject under discussion was the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation of the Baha'is of Iran. The parliamentary subcommittee recognized the threat to the lives of the entire leadership of the Baha'i community in Iran who, after nine months in Evin prison with no access to legal counsel, have been charged with "espionage on behalf of Israel", "insult to the sacredness (of Islam)," and "propaganda against the regime" and are to be tried before the revolutionary court.

She went on to say:

The baseless charges brought against these seven individuals are capital offences. The gravity of their situation is underlined by the context in which these trials are taking place: the recent upsurge in arrests, incitement to hatred and increasingly violent attacks on the Baha'is of Iran. The parliamentary subcommittee took immediate action and adopted a motion addressing this issue which it sent to the House of Commons standing committee on foreign affairs.

She went on to write:

There, the motion was adopted again and it will be reported to the House. I hope that the motion will be debated and adopted by the House, sending a clear signal to Iran that it must abide by its freely-given commitments to international human-rights standards. It will also send a message of hope to the Baha'i leadership in Iran, whose lives hang in the balance. Every state is sensitive to the court of public opinion. Governments, human rights organizations and concerned citizens in many countries are speaking out against the imminent threat to the lives of the Baha'i leadership and the intensifying persecution of Baha'i community in Iran. If we all add our voices to this appeal — we might be able to avert yet another tragedy.

That was signed by Susanne Tamas. In her letter, we heard words of hope. We heard hope that this Parliament would come together on this issue and we will see that tonight. The speakers who have preceded me are all saying very much the same thing. The voices in the House are rising together to send a strong message to the government of Iran.

I want to praise the members of the human rights subcommittee and the foreign affairs committee for adopting this resolution. I want to thank the House tonight for the unanimous support for this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to order made Friday, March 27, 2009, the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is deemed adopted.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

INDUSTRY

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 4 I asked a question of the Prime Minister regarding Vale Inco laying off 421 people across the country but more particular to my interest were the 261 people in Sudbury in northern Ontario. The response came from the Minister of Industry.

The minister spoke of what was going on in northern Ontario. He rattled off a list of programs and initiatives that were nothing new to northern Ontario. They sounded good, but there was no real substance nor were new initiatives discussed in light of what was happening to the economy and the job losses in northern Ontario.

He complained about the Senate holding up the budget and how the benefits were being held back by the Senate. We know that was not true. We know that was nothing more than Conservative propaganda. The Senate has long since passed the budget, yet the Conservatives continue to drag their feet regarding help for unemployed workers in northern Ontario.

Let us go back to my question of March 4 and the response or perhaps the lack of response to my question. In October 2008, we were told that the minister was reviewing an agreement with Vale Inco, key to the foreign takeover, and this was the agreement between the Conservative government and Vale guaranteeing that Canadian jobs would be protected when this foreign takeover took place. Was this for the people of Sudbury and Canada? I do not think so. This was more Conservative posturing.

When asked of this arrangement with the company, the minister replied on March 4 that he expected Vale Inco would live up to its agreement with the Government of Canada. There was nothing in force; there was nothing there. We need more than words from the government. We need actions.

Under the watch of the government and the minister, Inco was sold to a foreign company, a foreign multinational, and in true Conservative form there are no demands put on multinationals to protect Canadian jobs.

I have a few questions I would like answered. Was there in fact an agreement to protect Canadian jobs when Vale from Brazil bought Inco? What has the government done to uphold that agreement if in fact it did exist? When will the government stand up to protect the citizens of Canada and not continue to defend multinationals? What sanctions does Vale Inco face now that the agreement has been violated?

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Furthermore, what is the Conservative government doing to prevent future violations? My final question is, more importantly, what is the Conservative government doing to bring back the jobs that have been lost in northern Ontario and across Canada because of violations of this agreement?

• (2010)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for his question concerning what the Government of Canada is doing to save jobs and to ensure meaningful work for laid-off workers in northern Ontario.

Of course, we are disappointed by the layoffs in Sudbury and the impact they have had on the families in the region, but the member should know that these are challenging times for mining companies around the world due to the global economic crisis. The government is continuing to closely monitor the impact of unfolding economic conditions on Canadian industries, workers and their families across the country.

To deal directly with the current crisis, our government recently announced its economic action plan which will have a significant impact on the economy of northern Ontario and the lives of the region's residents over the next two years. Northern Ontario will benefit from this plan in a number of ways, including the strengthening of the Government of Canada's catalyst for economic development in the region, FedNor. As part of the plan, FedNor will be charged with delivering a number of initiatives designed to stimulate the region's economy.

Some of the measures in Canada's new economic action plan will be of great benefit to both of these sectors, resulting in real impacts for residents of the north. Of particular significance in northern Ontario, the government's action plan will provide \$170 million to help the forestry industry develop innovative products and promote these products globally. Promoting alternate uses for northern Ontario's wood supply is crucial to the region's economy, particularly for smaller forestry-dependent communities.

In addition, our government's economic action plan will also put northerners to work by supporting much needed construction and upgrades to community recreational facilities, as well as infrastructure projects, including the rehabilitation of bridges and roads. For example, our government will create jobs in the north by moving forward with the twinning of a number of segments of highways 11 and 17, as well as our \$225 million effort to extend broadband coverage to unserved communities.

Collectively, these measures will help stimulate job creation across northern Ontario. They will provide viable alternatives to workers who are feeling the effects of the global economic downturn, and will benefit the communities and residents of this great part of Canada

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear that the hon. member is concerned for northern Ontario and about job losses, of which we do have quite a number. I do not see the money coming through FedNor. It is very slow and very hard to picture. I know questions have been asked about what is being done for northern Ontario but it really is not a lot.

I want to get back to Vale Inco and the takeover. This is a foreign multinational taking over a Canadian company and there was an apparent agreement. The specific question I am asking the hon. member has to do with the sanctions that Vale Inco faces now that the agreement has been violated? Furthermore, what will the government do about future violations of agreements that are made with the government? Do we just let multinationals come in, walk all over us and take away the jobs or do we have a plan to stop that?

• (2015)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, these are tough economic times, which is why we have the Canada economic action plan.

I would like to assure the member that with the Canada economic action plan and through FedNor, we are working to ensure there is investment in northern Ontario that will provide the jobs that have been lost and will provide the necessary means for the families to find work.

The hon. member has asked how the money will be coming, I am glad to see that he finally got the Senate to pass the budget bill and now we can help the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 12, 2009, one week before U.S. President Obama's visit, I drew the government's attention to the fact that Omar Khadr, a child soldier, was still imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay. It is now the end of March, and nothing has changed.

Let us take a few moments to reflect on this situation. This young man, who was arrested, who is a child soldier and who has been detained for several years in Guantanamo Bay, which President Obama will close, continues to live a difficult and intolerable situation, a situation that was condemned by the three opposition parties, by Amnesty International and by the Canadian Bar Association.

We did not ask for his release. What we asked for, what we are asking for and what we will continue to ask for, even if the government seems inflexible, it that this young man be repatriated to Canada to face the relevant judicial proceedings, if authorities feel that he should be prosecuted. Some very constructive proposals were made by his lawyer and by families from the region where he was living, here in Canada. These people suggested that he be sent home, so that he can resume his life and be properly reintegrated into society. However, we see absolutely no will on the part of the Conservative government to go that route.

Yet, since I asked that question, European governments have agreed on a process to repatriate to Europe the European nationals who are incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay. They found a way. Mr. Khadr is the only citizen from a western country who has yet to be repatriated. This means that the government is still not respecting its international commitment under the convention on child soldiers.

Adjournment Proceedings

This evening, I am merely asking the Conservative government again if, after a careful review and after taking into consideration all the relevant factors, it might not be appropriate for it to finally take action so that Mr. Khadr can be repatriated to face the justice system and, eventually, to reintegrate our society. Is this not the way to operate in a case like that?

Moreover, we got confirmation that he was tortured. Should the change of attitude of the U.S. government not be reflected here? While it listens to President Obama regarding many other issues, the Conservative government remains unmoved when it comes to this matter. Will it finally do the right thing for Mr. Khadr and, more importantly, for Canada's international reputation?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked this question on numerous occasions during late shows in the House of Commons but our position remains the same.

Events have taken place. Mr. Omar Khadr has been accused of very serious crimes and, as such, he is supposed to go through a trial at Guantanamo Bay. However, events have changed. The government in the U.S.A. has changed and President Obama's party, for which we and everybody else has very high regards, has said that he will review every case there. Why will the member not wait for the review system to go through?

As for the factor that he is talking about regarding his defence lawyers, the Government of Canada's policies are not run by defence lawyers.

I ask the hon. member to wait. Based on the executive order, the administration in the U.S.A. is looking at each case and, if it has the evidence, it will charge Mr. Omar Khadr. If it does not and Mr. Khadr is let go, the Government of Canada at that time will decide what course of action it will take.

However, I want to assure the member that we are providing full consular service to Mr. Omar Khadr, as we do for all Canadians overseas. We also facilitated, as a matter of fact, so he could get his defence counsel. We also are in contact with the American authorities to ensure Mr. Omar Khadr's well-being.

I would again ask the hon. member to wait and see what comes out of the review that President Obama has ordered. It is my understanding that it will only take about six months.

● (2020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has asked why we would not wait for the American government's decision. The reply was given in this place by the three opposition parties. As a leader, Canada's role in this case is to ensure that Mr. Khadr is returned to Canada as soon as possible because he was a child soldier. Canada is not exercising leadership and this is harming its international reputation. This is not a matter of being partisan.

The majority of members in this House want Mr. Khadr to be returned to Canada to face our judicial process. The U.S. President has suspended the commissions that were to try these individuals because they were not considered to be objective enough.

Could the government not take this under advisement and exercise the leadership that it has refused to date?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member that it is the Conservative government that is still in power. Their attempt to become a coalition fizzled out due to opposition from Canadians.

However, again I want to point out that this government's position has not changed. We are waiting for the review that is taking place by the U.S. government. As soon as that review is done, we will then take the next step as appropriate based on that review.

UKRAINE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 4, I asked the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration why the Conservative government had cut staffing levels by one-third in the immigration section at the Kyiv Embassy in Ukraine in 2006. The minister, in typical fashion, did not answer the question. However, the following morning he put out a press release under the title, "MP Misleads Ukrainian Canadians About Immigration From Ukraine".

Further down, he writes the facts. I will quote the minister's press release. He says:

since mid-2006, there have been no reductions in staffing in the visa section of the Canadian Embassy in Ukraine.

Unfortunately for the minister, a search of the Internet shows that the cuts did in fact occur under the Conservative government's watch in 2006. They were confirmed by Canadian embassy program officer, Inna Tsarkova, who stated in an October 26, 2006 interview in the *Kyiv Post*:

In the immigration section of the Canadian Embassy in Kyiv, this review and adjustment resulted in the elimination of one immigration officer position and two clerical/support positions — a registry supervisor and a cashier. This was a one-third reduction of staff in the immigration section.

Under the title, "The Facts", in his press release, he goes on to state, "Under our Conservative government there has been an increase in emigration from Ukraine".

Once again, in a search on the Internet, on the minister's very own departmental website under "Statistics and Facts" is a table with the heading, "Permanent Residents From Ukraine By Year". It starts in 1998 and goes through to 2007. For the Liberal years, from 1998 to 2005, the average was 2,933. In 2006 and 2007, under the Conservatives and after the one-third cut that the minister denied in a press release having taken place, it was 2,025. That is a 44.8% decrease.

How could the minister have claimed that there were no cuts in staff and that there was an increase in immigration when the facts clearly demonstrate that the reverse is true?

Adjournment Proceedings

Even worse, as one goes through the Citizenship and Immigration website, one finds the following. In Kyiv, what is the waiting time for 80% of cases to be finalized for skilled workers to immigrate to Canada? The worst in the world. The waiting time has gone up from 34 months under the Liberals to 77 months, six and a half years. The processing time for spouses is the worst in Europe. This has gone from 10 months to 14 months under the Conservatives. Let us do another reality check. The waiting time for dependent children went from eight months to thirteen months and parental reunification went from 17 months to 22 months.

The minister's response in the House to my question and the subsequent press release should not only be taken with a great deal of skepticism, it was inaccurate in its wording. What the minister claims as fact was clearly false. The minister should spend less time attacking his parliamentary colleagues and expend his time and resources fixing the situation in the embassy in Kyiv.

● (2025)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly would like to push back on the member for Etobicoke Centre. I would like to thank him for giving me the opportunity to respond, but at the same time his last sentence speaks volumes to what I think he should consider doing himself, which is to spend a lot more time in the House and in Ottawa working positively in a very focused fashion on behalf of his constituents rather than spending this time criticizing each other.

However, I am pleased to rise to speak to the question of the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre regarding emigration from Ukraine. My hon. colleague is completely and totally mistaken in his statements about staffing at the Canadian embassy and the impact on emigration from that region, so I am glad to have this opportunity to enlighten him.

Contrary to the hon. member's claims, there have been no reductions in staffing in the visa section of the Canadian embassy in Ukraine, which has been delivering all permanent and temporary resident services since 2006.

All aspects of the hon. member's questions are full of factual errors. For instance, I refute the claim that as a result of the cut in "consular staffing levels" there has been a one-third decline in emigration from Ukraine to Canada.

On the contrary, I can assure the hon. member and the House that the total number of immigration visas issued by our office in Kyiv rose from 1,399 in 2004 to 1,527 in 2008. We are planning to issue a higher number of visas this year. Perhaps the member should take a few minutes before he officially speaks about an issue relating to Ukraine to speak to the government first to ensure that his facts are correct.

Furthermore, I deny in the strongest terms his statement that the Canadian embassy in Kyiv has the fourth slowest processing time for visitor visas in the world. I am very proud to point out that in 2008 alone, 85% of applications made in Kyiv for temporary resident visas were processed within two days of the time the application was made. This turnaround time is in fact well above the worldwide average. Our visa processing office in Kyiv has maintained these

processing times despite the increasing numbers of applicants from this area.

Our government has prioritized our relationship with our friends in Ukraine. Our government strongly supports the inclusion of Ukraine in NATO. Under a Conservative government, Canada was the first western nation to recognize a free Ukraine after the fall of Soviet tyranny.

We have also worked productively with the Ukrainian community in Canada. We are providing funding under the community historical recognition program to commemorate past mistreatment of Ukrainian Canadians during World War I. We were also the first Canadian government to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide. I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Selkirk—Interlake, for his work on this particular issue.

I also want to correct a misunderstanding on the part of my hon. colleague. If there were cuts to consular staffing anywhere in the world, these would have no bearing on any aspect of immigration, as consular staff do not deal with immigration issues.

My hon. colleague is mistaken in almost every respect. There have been no cuts to the number of visa officers in Kyiv over two years. There has been no drop in the number of immigration visas issued by our visa office in Kyiv and processing time for temporary resident visas in this office is in fact well above the worldwide average.

I am very glad to have been able to set the hon. member straight on these important points.

● (2030)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. It is clear on searching the websites that what I have stated in fact is correct. There have been cuts. They were referenced by staff at the embassy. The hon. member spoke of visitor visas. I have been talking about immigration and the time that it takes for immigration.

Ukrainians began arriving in Canada in the 1890s. They transformed the west into the golden wheat fields of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. They not only helped build this country, but they also built institutions such as schools and churches throughout our great country.

The minister often talks about the integration of new Canadians. This is a community that can seamlessly integrate new immigrants. The government should put resources into the immigration section so that we can get on with the job.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, there is one thing the member for Etobicoke Centre and I will agree on, and that is the commitment and contributions Ukrainians have made to this country once they have arrived here.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, let me say that it is under this government, and only this government, that we have moved forward in a positive partnership with Ukrainian Canadians. This government takes second place to no previous government in terms of the commitment made to Ukrainians across this country. The member spoke often while in government about the commitment that Ukrainians deserve in this country. The member opposite knows full well that it is this government that has delivered on every single one of those issues. We do not have to apologize for anything when it comes to our love for and our commitment to Ukrainians in this country.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 8:32 p.m.)

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