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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I am pleased to table, in both official languages, on behalf of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, Canada's outcome for the Universal Periodic Review exercise of the United Nations.

These documents consist of: Canada's national report of the United Nations working group on the Universal Periodic Review of Canada; Canada's response to the recommendations that we received during the review; and an excerpt from the report of the Human Rights Council on its 11th session, which includes the decision adopted by the council on the outcome of Canada's UPR.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three travel motions. I move:

That, in relation to its order of reference of March 3, 2010, 12 members of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan be authorized to travel to Kandahar and Kabul, Afghanistan, in the Spring of 2010, and that the necessary staff do accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study on young farmers and the future of farming, 8 members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food be authorized to travel to Quebec City and Portneuf, Quebec; Kentville, Nova Scotia; Sussex, New Brunswick and Stanley Bridge, Kensington and Borden-Carleton, Prince Edward Island, in the Spring of 2010, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study on high speed rail in Canada, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities be authorized to travel to La Pocatière, Quebec, in the Spring of 2010, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

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PETITIONS

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present this morning.

Business of Supply

Thousands of Canadians are calling on Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights, Bill C-310. This bill would compensate air passengers with all Canadian carriers, including charters, anywhere they fly in the world. The bill would provide compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. It deals with late and misplaced bags. It would require all-inclusive pricing by airlines in all of their advertising.

This type of legislation has been in effect in Europe since 1991 and in its current form for the last five years. Why should Canadian passengers or any passengers from Canada get better treatment in Europe than they do in Canada?

The airlines would have to inform passengers of flight changes, whether there are delays or cancellations. The rules would have to be posted at the airport. Airlines would have to inform passengers of their rights and the process to file for compensation. There would be no cost to the airlines if they follow the rules.

The petitioners call on the government to support Bill C-310, which would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

PRISON FARMS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the government to stop the closure of six Canadian prison farms. Dozens of Canadians have signed this petition.

The petitioners are demanding that the government reconsider its decision on all six prison farms, including Rockwood Institution in Manitoba. These have been functioning farms for many decades, providing food to the prisons and the community.

The farm operation provides rehabilitation and training for prisoners by having them work with and care for plants and animals. The work ethic and rehabilitation benefit of waking up at 6 a.m. to work outdoors is a discipline that Canadians can appreciate.

There are two of these farms in the Speaker's own riding of Kingston and the Islands.

Closing the farms would mean a loss of infrastructure and it would be very expensive to replace them in the future.

The petitioners call on the government to stop the closure of the six prison farms and also to produce a report on the work and rehabilitative benefits to prisoners of the farm operations, and on how the program could be adapted to meet the agriculture needs of the 21st century.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 148 could be made an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 148—**Hon. Shawn Murphy:**

With regard to the transfer payment contributions for the Gateways and Border Crossings Fund in the fiscal years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011: (a) what is the fiscal breakdown of the program objectives; (b) what is the explanation of the program objectives; (c) what are the results of the program objectives; (d) what are the performance indicators and targets used to audit the performance of the program objectives; (e) how much was originally budgeted for the fund; (f) how much was included in the estimates for the fund in the four aforementioned fiscal years; and (g) how much has been spent from this budget allocation, including a complete listing of the proposed projects?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—LOBBYING ACT

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.) moved:

That, given the apparent loophole in the Lobbying Act which excludes Parliamentary Secretaries from the list of "designated public office holders", the House calls on the government to take all necessary steps to immediately close this loophole and thus require Parliamentary Secretaries to comply fully with the Lobbying Act, in the same manner as Ministers are currently required to do.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Beauséjour.

I will begin this morning with a quote:

Some people feel that there is a privileged access to government that is reserved only for a chosen few. That is something this government intends to deal with head on when we introduce the federal accountability act next week.

Who said that? It was the current Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in April of 2006, when speaking of the Federal Accountability Act, which includes provisions for the Lobbying Act. I wanted to begin my remarks this morning by reminding colleagues of the commitments by the government.

I am pleased to speak today to this motion that would close a loophole in the Lobbying Act, which presently excludes parliamentary secretaries from the list of designated public office holders. The need to close this loophole has become quite apparent in recent weeks as we learn more about lobbying activities surrounding the renewable energy project funding.

Business of Supply

This renewable energy project funding has some \$2 billion from the economic stimulus plan: \$1 billion for the green infrastructure fund, which supports sustainable energy, generation and transmission, along with municipal waste water and solid waste management infrastructure; and a further \$1 billion in clean energy funds that invest in research, development and demonstration projects to advance Canadian leadership in clean energy technologies.

Responsibility for these funds rests with the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities as well as with the Minister of Natural Resources. Lobbying activities in these funds, now known as the Jaffer affair, have illustrated how the Lobbying Act does not extend responsibility under designated public office holders to parliamentary secretaries.

In at least one department, and perhaps in others, the parliamentary secretary has been delegated the responsibility for those funds, which circumvents the requirements under the Lobbying Act.

I began today with a quote from the current Minister of Transport. He also said at the time:

—we can ensure that the public business is done in the public interest and not for private gain.

That was then and this is now.

Back in 2006, Mr. Jaffer was a Conservative caucus chair and now, some four years later, he is at the centre of some serious challenges to accountability and to the Lobbying Act. Some seven ministers and departments, that we know of to this point, have given him privileged access. With the revelations of the privileged access, the robustness of the Lobbying Act has been called into question.

Although the Conservatives have toughened the rules governing lobbyists, a gaping loophole has become obvious. Lobbyists are required to submit monthly reports on their meetings with “designated office holders”, which include ministers and their staff, deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers; however, parliamentary secretaries are not included in this list. This means that lobbyists can meet with parliamentary secretaries without any public scrutiny.

A good example of this is with the Jaffer affair. In June of 2009, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities met with Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud. Within a month, the parliamentary secretary received three proposals from Green Power Generation Corporation. Two of these proposals were, in turn, submitted to the department for consideration under the green infrastructure fund. These proposals were then studied by the federal government to see whether they might be eligible for funding. These were submitted by the parliamentary secretary.

The parliamentary secretary's office continued to follow up with the public servants for updates on whether the projects were being considered. The parliamentary secretary and his office had regular interaction with the proponents throughout the fall, getting more details, and asking very specific questions for project-related funding. He was helping to determine whether projects fit under any of the criteria for funding.

In this entire situation, lack of public disclosure has caused challenges in the confidence that Canadians have that their government will be open and transparent. Rather than privileging their own, the Conservatives need to be more forthright in what was occurring. Adding parliamentary secretaries under the designated public office holder list would mean public disclosure would be required by lobbyists.

In this particular Jaffer affair, Mr. Jaffer felt he did not meet the criteria as a lobbyist, as no compensation was paid for his services. This matter is under investigation, as well other matters under investigation by the Commissioner of Lobbying.

● (1010)

I do point out, however, that in testimony at committee, it was clear that there was an intent for finder's fees as compensation. This was discussed in testimony as well as in contract evidence. Therefore, while we await the Lobbying Commissioner's decision, it does appear that compensation was considered, and therefore public disclosure should have been made.

The Lobbying Act defines activities that when carried out for compensation, are considered to be lobbying. Generally speaking, they include communicating with public office holders with respect to changing federal laws, regulations, policies or programs; obtaining a financial benefit, such as a grant or a contribution; and in certain cases, obtaining a government contract or arranging a meeting between public office holders and another person.

The act requires that individuals register themselves as lobbyists when they engage in lobbying for compensation. This involves providing certain details about themselves and their business, where applicable, the subject matter of what they are discussing and the name of any department and/or other governmental institution in which any public office holder with whom the individual communicates or expects to communicate. This information is made public on the registry of lobbyists.

The act provides exemptions for certain types of communications such as simple requests for information. Under the Conservative government, the Lobbying Act, formerly the Lobbyist Registration Act, was made more stringent. A new class of public office holder was defined, the “designated public office holder” as described.

One of the new rules aimed at increasing accountability was that any lobbyist who had oral or arranged communications with the designated public office holder must file a monthly report. Oral and arranged communications included telephone calls, meetings or any other communications that were arranged in advance.

The report must disclose, for each communication that took place in a given month, the date of the communication with a designated public office holder, the name and title of all designated public office holders who were the object of the communication, and the subject of the communication. The return must be submitted to the Commissioner of Lobbying no later than the 15th day of the end of the month covered by the report. This information is then made public on the registry.

No such report is required for meetings with parliamentary secretaries. This is from the government's own website. It states:

Business of Supply

—the Lobbying Act creates a new statutory category of “designated public office holder” to refer to officials responsible for high-level decision-making in government. This term is defined in the Act to include ministers, ministers of state, and ministerial staff, as well as deputy ministers and chief executives of departments and agencies and officials in those organizations at the ranks of associate deputy minister and assistant deputy minister.

For the purposes of the act, departments include those federal departments and agencies listed in the Financial Administration Act. The Lobbying Act further defines any person identified by the Prime Minister as having the task of providing advice and support to him during transition.

An additional 11 positions or classes of positions have been designated by way of regulation, including a list from National Defence and any positions of senior adviser to the Privy Council Office to which the office holder is appointed by the governor in council. Currently, parliamentary secretaries to ministers do not fall within the definition of a designated public office holder within the act.

The loophole has allowed meetings between Conservative lobbyists and parliamentary secretaries, who are essentially the eyes and ears of cabinet ministers, to take place without anyone’s knowledge or any record of the nature of these meetings.

We are calling on the government to close this loophole by including parliamentary secretaries in the definition of designated public office holder under the act. Clearly, ministers are delegating authority, but not the accountability that goes with it.

There may be other changes that are required and needed to meet not only the intent of the law but also the spirit of the law.

• (1015)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her motion today and her presentation on the motion. I noticed that she talked about how the motion deals with parliamentary secretaries and how they are not included within the purview of the act.

I think this is a very good motion and one that we will be supporting. However, I am just wondering whether, in her opinion, she thinks the government members know that this is a way around the rules and that they would deliberately, in that vein, give this responsibility to parliamentary secretaries as a convenient way around the rules so that the suspicion would not fall on ministers. Or, is this simply an omission from the rules that she is trying to deal with and fix now?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague made a very important point. Whether or not it is a deliberate omission, the Conservatives created the law and they spoke to the law. The minister who delegated the responsibility was the proponent of this particular change to the act in 2006. One has to question whether it was deliberate or simply without knowledge. However, at this point in time, we should close the loophole so that this situation neither continues nor happens again.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member figure she is going far enough in only including parliamentary secretaries? If she wants to do a thorough job, would she be open to something a little more

expansive, possibly including that lobbyists have to note the fact when they are meeting with any members of Parliament?

An observation I have made while sitting in this seat over 13 years now is that members of the opposition parties will often come and talk to ministers here right before me. They may be coming on behalf of somebody else. Who really knows?

Would the member be open to having it so that any lobbying of a member of Parliament by an individual has to be reported?

• (1020)

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, speaking to the change to the act in 2006, the Prime Minister thought there should be proactive disclosure on behalf of ministers and public office holders at the time. I certainly support proactive disclosure. The government is the one that has the handle on the purse strings of the government.

It is very important to have proactive disclosure. Whether or not we need to extend it to all members of Parliament is something that should be studied, but absolutely there should be proactive disclosure. That would be critical to ensure public trust when we are talking about these large sums of money.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from St. John’s South—Mount Pearl on her speech and her motion. She has discussed extensively a very appropriate suggestion to change the Lobbying Act to close a clearly designed loophole from the government.

In a related matter, because it all came out in the Jaffer affair, I am wondering if she has a view with respect to the Conflict of Interest Act, which requires public office holders to report contacts with their friends or benefits given to their friends. Again, in the Jaffer affair, it seemed to have been very absent. I am wondering if she finds that as worrisome as the loophole in the Lobbying Act.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, yes I do. I am very troubled that this conflict of interest exists. I think that we should recuse ourselves when we have those conflicts of interest. It is quite normal in regular business and in the House of Commons to do that.

The fact that it was not done when dealing with an associate, a friend that one was having dinner with and a friend one was having ongoing discussions and meetings with on a social basis is quite a challenge to that act as well.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. John’s South—Mount Pearl again for bringing up an issue in the House of Commons today that is very troubling. As you know, for several weeks now, the scandal surrounding the dismissal of the former status of women minister and the allegations regarding the activities of her husband, Rahim Jaffer, have made many Canadians, and especially the House of Commons, wonder about whether the government was serious in its last election campaign or even the previous 2005-06 campaign, when it claimed to want to strengthen legislation to prevent such ethics violations, and also to make significant improvements to transparency in the lobbying process.

Business of Supply

Within the government, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is one of the ones who fiercely maintains that the government has always taken measures to strengthen the Lobbying Act. He often talks about the Accountability Act, but he always fails to answer a very simple question my colleague has put to him many times. Several other members, as well as myself, have asked the government that same question. Why did they forget to include parliamentary secretaries in the definition of a public office holder? That is the basis of the motion that is before the House today.

Because it is so important, I am going to remind the members and you, Mr. Speaker, that there is an apparent loophole in the Lobbying Act that excludes parliamentary secretaries from the list of designated public office holders. This loophole likely exists for a very simple reason: because the government wanted to find a way for its friends, the Conservative lobbyists—even unregistered lobbyists like the former Conservative caucus chair, Mr. Jaffer—to have access to the government without coming under the Lobbying Act. So the government deliberately left parliamentary secretaries off the list.

It is a bit strange for a young assistant fresh out of university who is working in a minister's office. I know something about what it is like, because when I finished law school, I had the opportunity to work in the prime minister's office as a political staffer for former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. As a young assistant in the PMO, I had to comply with the Conflict of Interest Act. I had been designated by Mr. Chrétien to comply with the Ethics Act and the Conflict of Interest Act, the same measures that apply now with the Lobbying Act.

Now, suddenly, the government has decided to exclude parliamentary secretaries, who are members of Parliament. As we have seen, they often have authority delegated by their minister to make decisions, evaluate projects and make recommendations to senior departmental officials, who themselves may be subject to the Lobbying Act. We can see how this system has become corrupted. The parliamentary secretary who meets with lobbyists is not on the list of public office holders and therefore is not subject to the Lobbying Act. But the deputy minister to whom the parliamentary secretary will refer requests for grants or contributions, as in Mr. Jaffer's case, is subject to the act.

●(1025)

These people are subject to the code, unlike the parliamentary secretary the Prime Minister appoints by order in council to assist the minister. Moreover, as I said, the minister sometimes formally delegates authority to the parliamentary secretary, which is what happened to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport in the case of the famous green infrastructure fund.

[English]

The motion is designed to correct a very deliberate loophole that the Conservatives put in place allowing them to have a very secretive point of access into the government for Conservative lobbyists without being obliged to report as they would be under the Lobbying Act.

Otherwise, it is inexplicable that the government pretends to want to submit itself to greater transparency, pretends to want to strengthen measures like the Lobbying Act, pretends that its Federal

Accountability Act was this great moment for accountability in government. There is no other plausible explanation as to why it would exclude people who receive delegated authority from their ministers, who meet on many occasions with lobbyists seeking either contributions from the government, grants from the government, access to government programs, or to change policies, decisions, regulations or statutes.

The member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl is asking this House of Commons to say to the government that this loophole, deliberately designed and allowing such worrisome behaviour as we have seen with Mr. Jaffer, needs to be plugged. The Prime Minister actually has to walk the walk and not simply talk the talk, as he did four years ago with respect to accountability.

Another aspect which is worrisome around this question of secretive lobbying of parliamentary secretaries is the whole defence the government offers, that it is okay because no money changed hands. That argument makes no sense at all.

The member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl comes from the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and she will know a lot about the fishing industry. I am sure she will agree with me that unfortunately some people who are issued fishing licenses by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans are unsuccessful in actually catching fish. I know the idea that a professional fisher would go out fishing and not be able to catch fish would appear appalling, but we have seen examples of massive overfishing, for example, in the crab industry and the government's mismanagement of that. Certainly in my part of New Brunswick we have seen the effects of that.

When those people go out fishing, they are required to have a licence. The fact that they were bad fishermen, the fact that they were unsuccessful does not excuse them from the legal obligation of having a licence. The same minister who would issue fishing licences would also prosecute unsuccessful fishermen who were fishing without a licence.

Just because someone is a bad lobbyist and failed does not mean that he or she should not be subject to the lobbying legislation.

The other issue which really disturbs us is the lack of proactive disclosure. The government also says that ministers are not responsible, that all the obligation is in the hands of lobbyists. We need to go further. The government needs to actually respect the commitment it made in its election campaign platform to have those who are being lobbied proactively disclose in a public way those who are lobbying the public office holders. That would have eliminated a lot of Mr. Jaffer's ability to waltz around the government without anybody noticing or feeling an obligation to report.

I support the motion brought forward by my colleague, but I want to propose an amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by adding the following:

Business of Supply

And further calls on the government to immediately implement the 2006 Conservative Platform promise to require ministers and senior government officials, including parliamentary secretaries, to proactively record and report their contacts with lobbyists.

• (1030)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I presume the original mover is in agreement with the amendment.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: With pleasure, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. government House leader.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was an interesting speech by my colleague from the Liberal Party. I noticed during his remarks that he alluded to secretive lobbying of parliamentary secretaries and about the lack of proactive exposure.

First, I will start by stating the obvious. I have been in the House almost 17 years and have been privileged to represent the good people of Prince George—Peace River for that length of time. One of the observations I have made, both when I was in opposition and since becoming a member of the government, is that there seems to be a lot of lobbying of ministers by opposition members of Parliament and yet we do not hear—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jay Hill: Oh, now the heckling starts. I sat and listened to the hon. member's speech.

—any proactive exposure of who it is they are representing when they come across after question period, sit down beside a minister and actively lobby for a business in their riding.

I wonder if my hon. colleague, in the interest of having proactive exposure and secretive lobbying, would consider that opposition MPs and senators, all parliamentarians, should be encompassed in this same sense of being proactive and transparent.

• (1035)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my friend, the government House leader, has been in this House for 17 years. He served as a member of the opposition and is now a senior minister of the government. I am surprised that he would equate an opposition MP or even a government member of Parliament talking to a minister about an issue of importance to his or her constituency or riding with a private benefit derived from a lobbyist who is not elected and paid by the consolidated revenue fund to work for his or her constituents but who is paid by a private client.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: When the minister was asking his question he reacted negatively about some heckling and now he is actually heckling the answer to his own question, which is a bit worrisome.

The minister knows very well that a private lobbyist, in some cases working for a contingency fee, which may be illegal, talking to a parliamentary secretary or a minister has absolutely nothing to do with a member of Parliament representing his or her constituents in

the House and talking to ministers. We on this side of the House will never apologize for talking to ministers, who all too often are not interested in helping our constituents, and for doing our jobs.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his amendment.

In reality, the government, although it probably does not realize it at this point, has been saved from itself because who knows how long this affair would have gone on had Mr. Jaffer not been stopped that night for drunk driving. The government should be thankful that it did not approve any of the projects. However, that is only what we know at this point.

We do not know that there are not other situations out there where there are more violations. I think that is what the member making the motion is trying to deal with. We are trying to get on top of this right now. When the Conservative member talked about including all MPs in the rules, I do not think that would be a big problem because if we are lobbying on behalf of our constituents we do not mind who knows and we are quite willing that people should know.

Following up on what the Conservative member asked earlier, would the member agree that MPs generally could be included in this?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the member for Elmwood—Transcona is absolutely right. There has been a total lack of transparency from the Conservatives. In fact, any proactive reporting of this only took place when they were caught. As the member for Elmwood—Transcona noted, before Mr. Jaffer was arrested and charged with possession of cocaine and impaired driving and attention was turned to his activities in Ottawa, the government had not reported anything.

The government is seeking to muddy the waters. To pretend that opposition members of Parliament or government members of Parliament are the same as public office holders appointed by order in council and designated by the Prime Minister to undertake executive authority in the government is to completely blur the line. The minister knows that it makes no sense to equate a member of Parliament doing his or her job in the House for his or her constituents with a parliament secretary with authority over a designated fund meeting secretly with Conservative hacks and friends.

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address this initiative that has been brought to us today by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

I will put this in context. A wise person once told me that context is very important. If we take something in isolation it can be misinterpreted.

Business of Supply

The first part of the context would have to do with where this all came from in terms of things we have put in place as a government over the last few years. I know what it is like to sit on that side of the House as an opposition member. It is a very honourable role being in opposition but I dearly hope I never have to sit on that side of the House again. Of course, that is always left up to the voters to decide and we respect the voters' decision on that. However, I know what it is to sit on that side and to watch the results, not of partisan bickering but of inquiries into the whole area of scandals in government when, at the risk of sounding partisan, the federal Liberals were in government.

We were surprised to see time after time scandal after scandal. We expected that we would see some level of scandal discovered but we were shocked. In all sincerity, I really believe that some Liberal members were also surprised at what was going on. Some of them told me that and I take that at face value.

Therefore, we came through a period where for an extended period of time the public was exposed to official inquiries that showed, beyond lobbying, the discussions, the decisions that would be made in high priced restaurants over \$400 bottles of wine and the results being bags of cash being handed out. These were things that were reported not by us but by independent officers doing the research. Quite rightly, I think people were losing some confidence in the system.

We made some commitments to rectify some of that. We brought a number of things into play right away. We brought in whistleblower legislation to protect hard-working public servants who knew things were not right and wanted to report it but they were worried about losing their jobs.

We brought in the Office of the Ethics Commissioner, a separate agent of Parliament, where the broad subject of ethics would go from being something that would be just discussed in kind of a nebulous way to being an actual reality that certain elements and principles of ethics would have to be maintained.

We put an end to secret donations to political parties. That was something that was shocking to people and people did not want to see that go on. I think most people understand that political parties need finances and we should be able to appeal in a voluntary way to the public and people should be able to donate. We put an end to donations by big business and by big labour. We said that if individual Canadians wanted to step forward, that would be fine, but no more donations from big business and big labour. That does not even happen at the municipal level. We have really set the trend in that particular area.

We also brought in new guidelines for access to information and we gave the Access to Information Office more money which, incidentally, was resisted by the Liberals.

The Prime Minister was not entirely happy with the results of the last report from the Access to Information Officer in terms of speed of getting information out there. I am not particularly happy with it, as President of the Treasury Board. The office receives about 40,000 requests a year. A majority of those do get answered within 30 days but there is about 12% of that 40,000 that take over 120 days to get the information out to people who are asking for it. Some of that falls

under security clearance issues but we want to see an improvement on that. In a lot of cases that is just too long. We have already sent instructions to ministers and deputy ministers that we want to see that process speeded up.

• (1040)

As to the actual issue being discussed today, lobbying, we have made some very significant changes in that area. A lobby registrar was in place before but that registrar had very little mandate, was not independent and did not even have the resources to do the work in terms of follow-up or possible investigations that should be expected from a lobby registrar. That little office was very much under the thumb of the federal Liberals at the time. Therefore, since the registrar did not have the freedom to move that was necessary, we changed that in a very real way.

The act of lobbying, unfortunately, has kind of a negative taint to it.

I door-knocked when I was in provincial government and have door-knocked for years at the federal level. I door-knock year round and the demand for lobbying registration has never come up at one door in all my years of door-knocking. I am not saying that it is not an important issue. It is important. However, in terms of what is on the minds of Canadians, this has never come up. It is fascinating how these things do evolve. However, I am not diminishing the importance of this.

However, Canadians do want to know that their taxpayer dollars are being well spent and that they are not being ripped off by politicians or anybody in the process.

I do not see lobbying as a negative thing. When my constituents ask me what is being debated in Parliament these days, I say that the lobbying thing is coming up again. I tell my constituents that they are lobbyists because anybody who comes to an elected representative is lobbying. That is an appropriate and right thing to do in a democratic setting. How else do constituents make their views known or bring their interests forward if they do not talk to an elected representative?

However, we were looking at the problem of a weak lobbying registrar that was operated by the federal Liberals so we changed all that. We now have an independent Office of the Lobbying Commissioner. We finally gave that office the resources, \$4.6 million this year, to do the work, the mandate to pursue these issues and the ability to investigate. Actually, \$1 million of that \$4.6 million is just for investigations. The Liberals did not give the independence to that office, a clear mandate to the office nor the resources it needed to do the investigations. We have done all that.

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We have even put certain elements in place where, if one does not follow those items as a lobbyist, then the lobbyist could wind up not just paying a fine but could wind up going to jail. We have made it a criminal offence not to follow the lobbying rules and regulations. Before that, there was virtually no or a very low level of compliance under the federal Liberals. Now there is a high level of not only compliance but lobbyists must register as lobbyists, they are told the repercussions of not following the act and registered lobbyists must give a monthly report of their activities.

Let us try to strip away some of the partisan nature of the debate and at least agree, whether it is working perfectly or not, that we have put in a far more aggressive lobbying procedure than the Liberals ever had in place. I think, at a minimum, we can agree on that. I think there were federal Liberals who wanted to see this increased, and why their leadership did not do it is another question, but it is passed and I do not even want to get into it. However, our changes are very different and far more aggressive. Let that be a matter of record.

We are open to looking at improvements to it. We are saying that we can look at how that can be improved.

A suggestion came up today and the amendment needs to be addressed. Right now, under the definition the onus is on the lobbyists to register and they must register. We did that and we have made that very clear. However, what is being suggested now is that every time we are approached by a lobbyist, as a minister or a parliamentary secretary, the one being approached needs to do the registering. We have talked about that in the past and have looked at it in terms of some unanticipated consequences.

•(1045)

If that is going to be the approach, we need an answer to this question: What prevents a minister or a parliamentary secretary from being set up? We go to receptions and are out in public all the time.

Not that any opposition member would ever do this, but picture this: Someone who is registered as a lobbyist, and it could be in the hundreds or thousands of people, approaches a minister or parliamentary secretary, if that is the case, and says, "Hi, how are you? How is business? How are things going in the world of environmental improvements? It is great to see you. Bye, now". A minister or parliamentary secretary has just been approached and spoken to by a registered lobbyist but has no idea of that.

However, the opposition member who talked to the lobbyist beforehand had said, "Go have a little chit-chat at the football game or the concert. Just go have a little chit-chat with that particular minister about the environment. Just say hello and don't mention anything too specific". Then two weeks later, in a mischievous way, that MP stands up in the House of Commons and says, "This minister spoke to that lobbyist on that day and didn't report it".

I would ask how we prevent that kind of mischief-making. Far be it from me to say it would ever filter into the mind of an opposition member to do that, but just in case, how do we have the reassurance to deal with that particular problem? It is a fair question to be addressed.

This motion, in its original form, is asking that parliamentary secretaries also be considered in the same light as ministers under the

Lobbying Act, so if somebody lobbies them they have to register that. That is an interesting initiative.

The Prime Minister has rightly reflected, and we are asking why that would be limited to parliamentary secretaries. Why not all MPs, including opposition MPs? Why should opposition leaders not be subject to the same provisions? I am not saying this in a pejorative sense, but there was a case when an opposition member came to me representing a business in his or her constituency asking, "Could you adapt this or that" or "Could this be done to make life easier for this particular business?"

Inherently, I do not think there is anything wrong with that. There would be something wrong if that member were getting a fee to do that or being paid by that business. That would be wrong. However, in the cases I can think of, and there are many, where opposition members have come to me with bona fide concerns about things in their constituencies, I take them at face value. I think they are just doing good work. In fact, however, those cases are falling under some of the things they are suggesting should be under a revised Lobbying Act. Therefore, we need to think about these things.

I take them at good face value. I do not think they are receiving anything from a particular business or organization. I think they were just lobbying in good faith. However, these are the types of minefields we can start to wander into.

We are interested in opposition members' response to that. Why would this apply just to ministers and parliamentary secretaries? How about all MPs? How about senators? People in business talk with them all the time. They deal with legislation and things that affect our way of life. They deal with tax codes and everything else. Of course, why not leaders of the opposition? We are in a minority Parliament. These things become very pertinent questions.

This item that the Prime Minister has rightly raised as a sincere question, how about that? We have not seen a rush to the ramparts of excitement about that from opposition members, but what about the act applying to all MPs, senators and leaders of the opposition?

We thank the members opposite for their interest in this. I am taking it as genuine. I would ask everyone to reflect on the fact that the Lobbying Act has changed significantly under this Prime Minister. It has real attributes that it never had before under the Liberals. Taxpayers appreciate that. We look forward to the ongoing discussion.

•(1050)

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague's response. I could question him on a number of things, but time is limited. I think he understands that it is his government that carries the decision-making authority, so we are looking to ensure that it lives up to the decision-making authority.

Business of Supply

It is a failed defence when he talks about it being administratively awkward for him and his government to record and proactively report people who lobby him on a regular basis on projects. As we know with the Jaffer affair, as I said in my opening remarks, it was not a casual comment. It was repeated, repeated discussions.

I am going to ask my hon. colleague this. Why would he not live up to his campaign promise of 2006 and proactively record and report any dealings with lobbyists?

• (1055)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I thought I had already addressed that. The very first act of Parliament we brought in was the Federal Accountability Act. It is an act that has been regarded in this country and others as one of the foremost pieces of legislation demanding accountability from government.

My friend across the way who has introduced this particular initiative is trying to dismiss keeping track of the myriad contacts we have during the day, as some kind of minor administrative item. I cannot keep track of the number of people during a day who come up to me outside of this building, whether at the airport, at home in the constituency or at an event. The number of people could be in the hundreds, who shake our hands, get their pictures taken with us and tell us they hope things go well with legislation.

I have asked my hon. friend how to keep track of that. That is what we need to know. That is why the law requires that if people are lobbyists, defined as such in the act, they have to not only register but also report their monthly activity. I am not saying we would not do this other thing, but how would we handle it? I am not hearing from the opposition about how we could possibly manage that.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the President of the Treasury Board think there is a problem with the job descriptions for parliamentary secretaries? We know that different parliamentary secretaries are given different responsibilities according to the ministers with whom they work. Some of them seem to have a relatively little role in terms of the work of the government, but others seem to have very direct responsibilities, perhaps even going up to decisions about the awarding of government contracts.

Does he think that needs to be clarified? Does the document that the Prime Minister produced called “Accountable Government” need to be revised to clarify expressly what jobs and decision-making abilities a parliamentary secretary should have in our system?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair question. I can only answer from personal experience that in my ministerial duties, as I see the definition of parliamentary secretary, I have not had a problem in working with parliamentary secretaries and defining what they do.

I find it is a huge advantage for me and a huge help to have somebody so named who can assist in carrying the load. As my hon. friend knows, in any area of administration I have had, I have immediately contacted the critics from the opposition and offered them the opportunity to meet with me, with officials and with the parliamentary secretary to assist in the ongoing good operation of the democratic process.

I would suggest that if, in his time here in Parliament, he has seen some problem areas where a clearer definition would be helpful, he should bring those suggestions to us. I am not saying we would adopt every single one, because I do not know what they are, but if he has defined some areas that he thinks could be improved by a clearer definition, we would look forward to seeing them.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our colleague for his speech. Does he feel that anything would change if this motion were passed and parliamentary secretaries were included on the list of designated public office holders, thus forcing them to be accountable under the Lobbying Act?

The act currently includes public office holders. There is a whole list of them, including ministers and political staff, but the information is not shared. It is a constant, non-stop, never-ending culture of secrecy. This motion would add one more public office holder to the list. Realistically, what will this change?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I appreciate the question, but that I do not agree with the information put forward. I believe that our governmental deliberations and operations are very transparent. We have different opinions on that.

The member is asking what would change if we added parliamentary secretaries to the list. The people who are now registered would have to not only report the contracts they sign with ministers but also those they sign with parliamentary secretaries. That is the first difference. There may be others, but for now, that is one difference.

• (1100)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was intrigued by the suggestion the President of the Treasury Board made and the idea that all members of Parliament would then be responsible for keeping track or lobbyists would have to report when they had spoken to any member of Parliament.

Today, when I came into the House of Commons, there were some lobbyists who were prepared to go into the opposition lobby to meet with some of the members of the opposition and lead critics. We are in a minority Parliament. The numbers are about 143 in government and more than that in opposition. In every committee, the opposition outnumbers the government. Indeed at committee level, we see many new agendas being brought forward, ideas being brought forward. How are we to know, when the opposition outnumbers the government, that opposition members are not being lobbied by professional lobbyists who never have to report?

In this Parliament, I would suggest there is more lobbying done of lead critics in the opposition than of parliamentary secretaries or other members of Parliament.

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I am intrigued by that, and I ask the President of the Treasury Board if he would elaborate a little more. Would this mean that all lobbyists would have to report when they have met with any member of Parliament? What would be the role of members of Parliament in this?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, not only is it intriguing but it is a very insightful question that has come up, because let us be honest, that little room behind where members of the opposition now sit is called a lobby. We sat in that lobby as opposition members. Lobbyists go into that lobby. They talk to opposition members. They talk to the leaders of the opposition. They talk to the critics. They lobby for their business position.

As my colleague has mentioned, we are in a minority government. We have seen a number of things passed, which government members voted against but which passed because there are more opposition members than government members. That is how it works.

We have not seen one member of Parliament come forward in a voluntary way to demonstrate sincerity by saying, “I just want you to know; I was lobbied by such and such a business person”, or “I was lobbied by such and such an agriculture council”, or “I was lobbied by such and such a labour group”. Have they told us about the various labour representatives who have met with them to get them to push for changes in the Labour Code, for instance? How about certain business codes? Why have we not had one member of the opposition, in a voluntary way to show sincerity, come forward and say, “Here are all the lobbyists I have been meeting with”? I think that would be a wonderful demonstration of that sincerity and I appreciate the member's raising that question.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

As Bloc Québécois critic for ethics and access to information, I am pleased to speak today to this official opposition motion stating that there is a major loophole in the Lobbying Act currently in force in Canada, .

The motion states that parliamentary secretaries are simply not included in the list of “designated public office holders” who are subject to this Lobbying Act, unlike the ministers whom they assist.

A lobbyist must be registered in order to speak with a minister or a member of their staff, but not with a parliamentary secretary, who is in fact a member for the party in power appointed by the Prime Minister and responsible for helping a minister in the performance of their parliamentary functions and for liaising between ministers and other parliamentarians.

Do I need to tell you that parliamentary secretaries wield obvious power and undeniable influence in the offices of the ministers they assist? The individuals who consult them or seek their help are not subject to the present Lobbying Act? How can a loophole like this have gone unnoticed before today?

For the benefit of members of the public who are following this debate, I think we need to remind them of a few points of information concerning this legislation.

Until July 2008, lobbying at the federal level was governed by the Lobbyist Registration Act, which provided for a registration system designed to protect the public's right to know who was trying to influence government policy. It is a fundamental piece of legislation, if ever there was one, for any self-respecting democratic society. And yet the famous Federal Accountability Act instituted by this Conservative government, which was supposed to guarantee perfect transparency on the part of this Conservative government, made major amendments to the Lobbying Act in December 2006, amending its title and replacing the simple director of lobbying position with the position of Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, a senior independent official in the Canadian administrative structure.

Our Lobbying Act was apparently not improved sufficiently, from what we can see. The new Lobbying Act has been in force since July 2, 2008.

I would point out that Canada's Commissioner of Lobbying is responsible for publicizing and enforcing the rights and obligations set out in the Lobbying Act. In fact, that act quite simply requires that lobbyists register and report certain information each month to the commissioner, which information is then recorded in a public record that everyone can consult on the Internet.

The registry discloses information about lobbyists and their lobbying activities. The law requires lobbyists to produce returns if there has been oral arranged communication by mail, email or telephone with designated public office holders such as ministers or ministers of state, their political staff, assistant deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers. The commissioner also has the power to verify information provided by lobbyists.

However, there is a major loophole in the law because it does not consider the parliamentary secretaries attached to various government ministers to be designated public office holders. This loophole appears to have enabled certain well-informed individuals to get around the law and gain privileged access to some departments.

How did we discover that such a loophole exists in a law that is supposed to ensure transparency with respect to lobbying activities on Parliament Hill, with ministers' offices and with various elements of Canada's government?

I hardly need to remind anyone that on April 9, the media broke the story that the Minister of Status of Women resigned or had been directed to resign—which is how these things work—and had been expelled not only from the Prime Minister's cabinet, but also from the Conservative Party of Canada. The Prime Minister never revealed any information whatsoever about why she was expelled.

The Prime Minister abruptly fired the member for Simcoe—Grey from her cabinet position because of what he described as “serious allegations”, which he passed on to RCMP investigators.

Apparently, the RCMP was called in because of questionable meetings involving the former minister's husband and the inappropriate use of House of Commons resources.

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Mr. Jaffer contacted a number of ministers' offices using his wife's ministerial email address. Documents show that Mr. Jaffer also openly contacted people he knew in at least six different departments to discuss business proposals. During his testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, Mr. Jaffer, who is not a registered lobbyist, denied undertaking any illegal lobbying activity.

• (1105)

But at the end of April, following their former colleague's testimony, Conservative ministers, one after the other, contradicted him openly and mercilessly.

We now know that Mr. Jaffer and his associate increased their contacts with government members in recent months.

These documents provided evidence of contacts with the offices of ministers and officials from various federal departments and agencies, including the offices of the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of State for Seniors and the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification. Mr. Jaffer even lobbied departments and their ministers, particularly the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and his parliamentary secretary, the Minister of State for Science and Technology, the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Industry and of course, the former minister for the status of women. This is a great deal of lobbying for someone who is not a registered lobbyist.

Rahim Jaffer also communicated with these ministers' parliamentary secretaries, because he knew that parliamentary secretaries are not subject to the Lobbying Act. This also needs to be investigated.

One thing is certain: this whole mess surrounding the unregistered lobbying activities of Rahim Jaffer, a former Conservative member and former chair of the Conservative caucus, has given us the opportunity to speak to this Liberal motion. It also gives me a chance to remind the House that neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives have the political will to change anything when it comes to ethics.

The Liberal Party refuses to completely turn its back on the sponsorship legacy and the Conservative Party is sinking deeper and deeper into favouritism and secrecy. The Bloc Québécois can make such observations because it does not award any contracts, hand out any grants or make any appointments within the government. The Bloc Québécois has the leeway and credibility needed to keep an eye on how public money is spent and to denounce favouritism.

The Liberals and Conservatives have promised again and again to clean up politics in Ottawa, but they have not kept their promise. The Bloc Québécois has always maintained that the problem in Ottawa is not the lack of rules, but rather the lack of political will to follow the rules.

If we look at what the Liberals and Conservatives actually do, it is impossible to think there will be any real change in the political culture in Ottawa. The evidence is all around us. Just look at the entourage of the Leader of the Opposition, which still includes people tainted by ethical issues, such as the president of the Liberal Party of Canada, Alfred Apps, who took advantage of a loophole in the Elections Act to encourage Liberal supporters to contribute twice as much money to the Liberal Party as allowed.

Another example is the Quebec Liberal caucus. Ten of the 14 Liberals from Quebec were members and in some cases even ministers under Jean Chrétien, but not one of them managed to prevent the sponsorship scandal.

The Conservatives, for their part, can hardly cast any aspersions because their record also demonstrates a complete lack of political will and lack of respect for the existing rules, even though they claimed they would end the political culture of secrecy and lack of transparency. But it still continues to rule the roost in Ottawa.

The crooked sponsorship program lasted more than six years because of the culture of secrecy. Adequate access to information and an effective method of protecting whistleblowers are absolutely essential if we are to have a reasonably transparent system.

By breaking its electoral promises to reform the Access to Information Act and to protect whistleblowers, the Conservative government has perpetuated the culture of secrecy inherited from the Liberals. The Liberals and Conservatives are only interested in power. They have no interest in ending the culture of secrecy in Ottawa.

The Conservatives promised to implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations to reform the Access to Information Act but have never tabled a bill to do so.

The Minister of Justice just informed the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics that he would not implement most of its recommendations to improve the Access to Information Act, closing the door again.

The Bloc's demands regarding access to information are well-known. In June 2008 it tabled a bill that was similar to the one proposed by the Information Commissioner in 2005.

Governments of various hues have been consulting for 20 years now. It is time to act.

• (1110)

We will support the Liberal motion, but small changes like this will not do anything to change an entire culture. Action is needed to end the culture of secrecy and lack of transparency that still holds sway in Ottawa.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the President of the Treasury Board was just trying to confuse the issue and muddy the waters.

The fact of the matter is that government members have decision-making authority. Mr. Jaffer lobbied no fewer than seven ministers who had that decision-making authority. He lobbied people whom he knew and who knew him well. They should have known enough at least to do some investigating. They should have asked him whether he was registered as a lobbyist.

Mr. Jaffer did not lobby the member for Burnaby—Douglas. He did not lobby the member for Winnipeg Centre. He knows that members of the opposition have no decision-making power. They could not give him what he wanted. They could not give him the contracts he was looking for.

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The President of the Treasury Board was doing a disservice to this House by trying to confuse the issue and muddy the waters.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments. I must say that the minister's comments earlier were indeed inappropriate. I do not see why members of Parliament should be subject to the Lobbying Act, especially since, if we are referring to Bloc Québécois MPs, we have absolutely no contracts to award, absolutely no subsidies to grant and absolutely no monetary or financial influence. It is a ridiculous concern and a step in the wrong direction.

I respectfully submit to the minister that he instead ensure that greater effort is made to enhance transparency in various departments and in the way in which the Conservative Party manages information.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion presented by our Liberal colleagues. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant for her presentation and the very good work she does on behalf of the Bloc Québécois on all things related to ethics and on the Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics Committee.

As my colleague stated, the Bloc Québécois will support this motion for a number of reasons. Unfortunately, the time allotted to me is too short to speak in detail about each one. Therefore, I will outline the reasons and spend more time on certain points.

One of the Bloc's reasons for supporting this motion is that we condemn the fact that a program such as the green infrastructure fund, which has a \$1 billion budget—yes, that is the figure—is administered by a parliamentary secretary.

Furthermore, the Conservatives have not kept their promises to the people and democracy. I remember well that, in 2006, in the wake of the Liberal sponsorship scandal, the Conservatives played the transparency and ethics card. They boasted that their party would set things right, clean house, and champion ethics. They almost called themselves the Mr. Cleans of federal politics. They promised to wash everything cleaner than clean. That was the Conservative claim.

In 2006, when the current Prime Minister came to power, one of the first bills, Bill C-2, known as the Federal Accountability Act, sought to clean house in a number of areas.

Unfortunately, with time, we realize cannot see any difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives. They conduct themselves exactly the same way. Anyone who was not out of the country or cut off, for whatever reason, from modern communications such as the Internet, or traditional media such as newspapers, radio or television, will have seen how the Conservatives conducted themselves in the case of Mr. Jaffer and the member from Simcoe—Grey. The more witnesses who appear before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, the more we learn about the illegal lobbying activities of Rahim Jaffer.

Members will recall that Rahim Jaffer is the husband of the former status of women minister, who was kicked out of the Conservative

caucus for unknown reasons. When he was in opposition, the Prime Minister accused the Liberals of hiding things, but since he took power, he has done exactly the same.

The Conservatives' actions now make it clear that they have not kept their promises to the people and democracy. When opposition members demand answers in a parliamentary committee or ask questions during question period, they are not doing it for themselves; they are asking on behalf of the people who elected them democratically in each riding to represent them and their needs in Ottawa.

• (1120)

That is democracy. People trust Bloc Québécois members and our party because we defend their interests in Ottawa. That is surely why the Bloc Québécois has won a majority of the seats in Quebec since 1993, in the last six elections. The public realizes that the only party who can truly defend the interests of Quebec in Ottawa is the Bloc Québécois.

Unlike the members of the old, traditional parties, both the Liberals and the Conservatives, we have no majority to protect in the west, in Ontario or in the Maritimes. Our only loyalty lies with Quebec, all the regions of Quebec, and with Quebeckers.

The Conservatives have hardly made ethics and transparency a government priority. Instead, they have promoted the culture of secrecy and cronyism, expressed as “Tell me who you know, and I will tell you how I can help you.” That is exactly what Rahim Jaffer does when he makes contact with his former Conservative Party buddies, the people he sat here with.

Let us not forget that Rahim Jaffer is a former chair of the Conservative caucus. That is why the government cannot turn a blind eye and wash its hands of this situation like Pontius Pilate by saying that meeting with a parliamentary secretary is not the same as meeting with a minister. That is why I made it clear from the outset that this Conservative government has a parliamentary secretary that manages a fund worth about \$1 billion.

When Mr. Jaffer, an illegal lobbyist, has a meeting with this parliamentary secretary, there is no denying that some lobbying is going on. That is why the Liberal motion to include parliamentary secretaries makes sense and that is why the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the motion.

We are pleased to see the Liberals take this approach and we hope that if they return to power one day, they will remember that the wrongdoings in the sponsorship program went on for more than six years because of the culture of secrecy in Ottawa.

For that reason, we in the Bloc Québécois are calling for two things that go hand in hand: first, an appropriate access to information system, because the public has the right to know and to be informed; and second, effective whistleblower protection. These two conditions are indispensable for true transparency. We do not want superficial transparency nor transparency based on complacency just because the Federal Accountability Act has been passed. That is why the Conservatives are literally laughing in our faces. In the absence of those two things, the Federal Accountability Act is nothing but smoke and mirrors.

In closing, in supporting the motion, the Bloc Québécois is calling on the Conservatives to keep their election promises on ethics, and those on lobbying in particular. There are other loopholes in the act. I do not have enough time to go over them, but the different parties will be talking about this all day. For these reasons the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the motion.

• (1125)

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our colourful member and chief whip has taught us a lot about cleanliness. He talked about being cleaner than clean and he said that when it comes to the Liberals and the Conservatives, we cannot see the difference. He also said that the former minister of state for the status of women, for unknown reasons, was told to clean out her desk as a minister and caucus member, a caucus her husband once chaired. And we never know what parts of this story have been scrubbed clean, to keep the theme going.

We know that Mr. Jaffer, who was denied the clean sweep of contracts he was hoping for, got caught with some dirty white powder. I would like to ask my colleague and chief whip, this colourful man, a question. Is the fact that parliamentary secretaries are not on the list, which this motion wants to correct, something that needs to be cleaned up?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the mental agility of my colleague from Hochelaga, who listened closely to my speech, especially since I am only a few centimetres away from his poor ears. I tend to raise my voice when I get wound up.

Since we have used the theme of cleanliness, it would be good to reveal some other things along that line, and I am convinced that we will have the opportunity to do so during the next election campaign. However, I think that the Conservatives' hypocrisy about the Rahim Jaffer affair demonstrates that we need to actively work on the Conservatives' black book.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Liberal opposition day motion tabled by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. To remind us, the wording of the motion is:

That, given the apparent loophole in the Lobbying Act which excludes Parliamentary Secretaries from the list of "designated public office holders", the House calls on the government to take all necessary steps to immediately close this loophole and thus require Parliamentary Secretaries to comply fully with the Lobbying Act, in the same manner as Ministers are currently required to do.

The Liberals have also introduced an amendment to that. The member for Beauséjour added the following amendment:

And further calls on the government to immediately implement the 2006 Conservative platform promise to require ministers and senior government officials,

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including parliamentary secretaries, to proactively record and report their contacts with lobbyists.

It looks as if the Liberals did not quite get their communications strategy together and had to add something to their motion, but the NDP will support both the motion and the amendment.

It is really crucial in this debate that we understand the difference between civic engagement and paid lobbying. With the Lobbying Act, we are really focusing on the whole question of paid lobbying.

The Lobbying Act's preamble states:

Free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest;

Lobbying public office holders is a legitimate activity;

It is desirable that public office holders and the public be able to know who is engaged in lobbying activities; and,

A system for the registration of paid lobbyists should not impede free and open access to government.

Currently, a designated public office holder is defined in the Lobbying Act as a minister of the Crown, or a minister of state and any person employed in his or her office. It also includes senior executive position holders such as deputy ministers or chief executive officers, associate deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and those of comparable ranks.

The Lobbying Commissioner has issued an interpretation bulletin to further clarify the definition of a designated public office holder in the Lobbying Act.

Parliamentary secretaries are members of Parliament assigned by the Prime Minister to assist cabinet ministers, but who are not part of the ministry. They are not cabinet members. Parliamentary secretaries are not included in the definition of a designated public office holder in the Lobbying Act.

Parliamentary secretaries, however, are public office holders, as are members of Parliament, senators and their staff, Governor-in-Council appointees, officers, directors and employees of federal boards, commissioners or tribunals, members of the Canadian armed forces and the RCMP. Therefore, the definition of public office holder is much broader than designated public office holder.

The Lobbying Act sets down different requirements of lobbyists when it comes to designated public office holders and public office holders. The key difference is that when a lobbyist is communicating with a designated public office holder they must report those contacts to the Lobbying Commissioner on a monthly basis and within a stipulated time frame. This is not required when a lobbyist is communicating with a public office holder. Therefore, there are different provisions for ministers, cabinet ministers and ministers of state than there are for ordinary MPs, for instance.

However, in both cases the lobbying is considered a registerable activity; that is the lobbyist must be registered with the Lobbying Commissioner. Registration is required when the lobbyist is paid to communicate for the making, development or amendment of any proposal or legislation, bill or regulation, or the awarding of any federal grant or contribution. It also includes written and oral communication.

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All paid lobbyists must be registered. Paid lobbyists who approach ministers and ministers of state must file monthly reports on their activities. Paid lobbyists who approach parliamentary secretaries do not have to include those communications in their monthly reports. That is because parliamentary secretaries are not included in the definition of a designated public office holder.

In “Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Secretaries of State”, and that is the Prime Minister’s ethical guidelines essentially for members of the cabinet, the role of a parliamentary secretary is described and it includes the following. It talks about their responsibilities are carried out within the policy and program frameworks set out by their minister. It notes that there is a fundamental link between ministers and Parliament. It goes on to say that they play a liaison role within the caucus and throughout the House of Commons and its committees and between committees and the public service.

• (1130)

Parliamentary secretaries are expected to facilitate departmental appearances at committees by representing the views of the ministers and addressing political issues that may arise. Parliamentary secretaries may be called upon to answer policy questions during question period in a minister’s absence. It notes that, given that parliamentary secretaries work under the direction of a minister, they do not introduce their own private members’ bills or motions and a minister may delegate to parliamentary secretaries specific duties for parliamentary development issues.

It is very clear from the Prime Minister’s guidelines that parliamentary secretaries have a close relationship with their ministers. It is also clear that it was thought that some restrictions on the activities of parliamentary secretaries were necessary, the example being that they cannot introduce their own private members’ bills or motions.

The problem is parliamentary secretaries are perceived to be, and indeed can in reality be, people who have inside knowledge of the departments with which they work and special access to the ministers with whom they work. The role of parliamentary secretaries likely varies across governments. Some are given more responsibilities than others. Some will be closer to ministers than others.

The occasion for this opposition motion today, the case of Rahim Jaffer and his lobbying efforts, has raised the possibility that a parliamentary secretary was delegated a key role in the decision-making process, perhaps up to and including a role in the awarding of government contracts in a key government program. However, given the current status of the Lobbying Act, as it stands, contacts with a parliamentary secretary are outside the purview of the Lobbying Act and are therefore not subject to the reporting and scrutiny that is implied in the Lobbying Act.

The concern is it is therefore possible to delegate key responsibilities and possibly decision-making responsibilities to a parliamentary secretary to make him or her a direct point of entry for lobbyists to government. The concern is that where this is done, access to a key decision maker would take place outside the requirements of the Lobbying Act.

The Lobbying Act was designed to deal with decision makers, and this is an important point to make, especially given some of the debate this morning about who actually should be covered. The Lobbying Act was designed to deal with people who actually made the decisions. That is why it talks about ministers and ministers of state. The Lobbying Act was designed to deal with the decision makers. It appears from our recent experience that some parliamentary secretaries are exercising or coming very close to exercising some decision-making powers.

Given the discretion involved in establishing the duties of a parliamentary secretary, the best option would be to include them as designated public office holders under the terms of the Lobbying Act. The motion we are debating today calls on the government to do that without delay. It would also be incumbent on the government to review the job description for parliamentary secretaries in an accountable government and clarify whether they should have any decision-making powers at all.

It is really no stretch of the imagination that this is the only aspect of the Lobbying Act that requires attention. The Lobbying Act is just about due for its required five-year review. The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics has already made preliminary plans to begin that review this coming fall. There is no doubt that the Lobbying Act can be improved and there are many issues that should be considered in preparation for or as part of that review process.

A few years ago, at the end of his time as a member of Parliament, Ed Broadbent made proposals for democratic accountability, which included the need for tougher laws requiring disclosure of fees and expenditures of lobbyists and the need to make illegal the acceptance of profit-based fees or fees based on the outcome of the lobbying effort. He also called on the government to initiate reforms with tough sanctions applicable to wrongdoing in the public sector. At the time, Ed Broadbent said, “we need institutions that work against that culture of entitlement” and that rules were important to ensuring that this effort was successful.

• (1135)

We have often heard from the government that there was no problem in the current controversy because the unregistered lobbyists’ efforts did not result in the awarding of a contract, but it is pretty clear that this is really not the point. The point is access to the decision makers. It is not whether they are good at their job, but that they were undertaking the effort at all.

Ed Broadbent also said that political cronyism must end. The perception that some people have better access to government officials runs absolutely counter to our hopes for a democratic society.

Those were issues that were highlighted by Ed on behalf of the NDP just a few years ago. There are many other issues that should be considered when we look toward the reform of the Lobbying Act.

Business of Supply

The current Lobbying Act emphasizes the duties and responsibilities of lobbyists as opposed to those of designated public office holders. For example, while paid lobbyists who communicate with a designated public office holder must report those contacts monthly, there is no similar requirement for designated public office holders to file a similar report with the lobbying commissioner.

The only requirement for designated public office holders is that if the Lobbying Commissioner requests that they verify a communication entry made by a lobbyist, the designated public office holder must reply. In a sense, we have a system that monitors the lobbyists but does not keep track of what designated public office holders do when it comes to the efforts of lobbyists.

This is the issue that the Liberal amendment gets to. It is a very important amendment and that is why we will support it.

This two-way direction of keeping track of the lobbying efforts is very important. The Lobbying Commissioner has reported that, right now, there is over-reporting given the existing requirements of the Lobbying Act. Some lobbyists report their contacts with senators and MPs, which is not required presently. Changing the emphasis of the system to having designated public office holders report contacts might address this and should be considered as part of the review of the legislation.

There is also the very confusing aspect of dealing with definitions around public office holders and designated public office holders. It varies across different pieces of legislation. The Lobbying Act, the Conflict of Interest Act, the MPs' Conflict of Interest Code and the Prime Minister's "Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Secretaries of State" should all have a consistent definition so confusion is reduced and hopefully eliminated. Right now, it is very complicated to explain exactly who one is talking about and in what context. The language that talks about inquiries and investigations should also be standardized as much as possible to eliminate the kind of confusion that exists today.

There is no requirement for lobbyists to disclose the amount of money they spend on specific campaigns and no requirement for financial disclosure. In fact, there are no spending limits for lobbying campaigns. This issue has come up many times in the past and it should be discussed again when we have a review of the legislation.

We see the need for the ability of the Lobbying Commissioner to undertake speedy and fair investigations all the time. There is frustration when an issue arises and there is not a speedy conclusion. We need to ensure the commissioner has the resources needed to accomplish both an expeditious and fair investigation into any concerns with regard to the Lobbying Act.

One thing we might consider is administrative penalties as a tool for the Lobbying Commissioner to enforce the act. Right now, an infraction of the act is a criminal infraction, but there is nothing in terms of administrative penalties that might help in things like filing late reports, for example.

The current Lobbying Act deals only with people who were considered decision makers. Some believe, and we have heard it in the debate this morning, that it should be extended to include others, including party leaders, committee chairs, caucus chairs and people who have other specific responsibilities in Parliament. Some would

go even further and extend it to all MPs and senators. Again, this is idea merits discussion so we are clear on the intent and what the Lobbying Act is about.

● (1140)

The commissioner of lobbying must also have the resources to analyze the situation with regard to lobbying. For instance, the commissioner recently reported that the number of registered lobbyists has stabilized at around 3,500, which is a reduction of almost 30% since the Lobbying Act came into effect. The commissioner noted that there might be several explanations for this change. Some in-house lobbyists indicated that the additional reporting requirements of the Federal Accountability Act led some corporations and organizations to rationalize their approach and reduce the number of employees engaged in lobbying activities. The economic downturn might also have been a factor.

Contrary to this, the number of transactions in the registry has gone up, perhaps because of the monthly reporting requirements. However, this change in the number of registered lobbyists and the increase in lobbying activity have not been carefully analysed. It is important that the commissioner of lobbying has a clear mandate and the resources to fully research the situation, including contacting organizations and corporations that chose not to register.

The commissioner of lobbying also needs a clear education mandate. This is absolutely crucial. Educating designated public office holders and lobbyists about the Lobbying Act is a key to its success.

We also need to review the lobbyists code of conduct. This document dates from 1997 and it has not been significantly changed in the over 10 years since it was first promulgated. Rule number eight in the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct says:

Lobbyists shall not place public office holders in a conflict of interest by proposing or undertaking any action that would constitute an improper influence on a public office holder.

Back in 2002, Howard Wilson, who was then the ethics counsellor with responsibilities for the Lobbyists Registration Act, interpreted this to mean:

...it is not reasonable to believe that the lobbyist has exercised an improper influence on a Minister, placing him or her in a conflict of interest, merely because the lobbyist was assisting the Minister in a leadership campaign at the same time that the lobbyist was lobbying the Minister's department on behalf of a client.

He concluded:

More broadly, I conclude that the mere fact that these two legitimate activities are being pursued by a lobbyist does not, in and of itself, breach the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct.

Democracy Watch, which has done lots of excellent work with regard to accountability, democratic accountability and on the Lobbying Act, challenged this interpretation in the Federal Court of Appeal. That court ruled that the 2002 advice of Mr. Wilson was "unreasonable". As a result of that court decision, the current commissioner of lobbying released an interpretation bulletin on this rule. She stated:

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A lobbyist may be in breach of Rule 8 if: the lobbyist's actions create a real conflict of interest for a public office holder, or the lobbyist's actions create the appearance of a conflict of interest for a public office holder.

The commissioner also said that real or apparent conflict of interest includes the presence of a tension between the lobbyist and the designated office holder which could arise from the provision of a gift, an amount of money, a service or property without an obligation to repay, the use of property or money that is provided without charge, or at less than its commercial value, and political activities.

The whole question of political activities is something that some people have said needs to be further defined, but this is an example of the kind of clarification that should be considered when the Lobbying Act is reviewed.

The Lobbying Act is key to government accountability and ethical behaviour. It requires our attention and respect as parliamentarians. It also requires the attention and respect of those who seek to lobby decision makers.

The motion and amendment being debated today are timely and respond to an important emerging issue and they merit strong support, but the job is not done and there is much more to look at. The review of the Lobbying Act will also require diligence and attentiveness to ensure the best possible legislation in this crucial area.

This is a work in progress. No party corners the market on ethical behaviour in this place. We all have to take responsibility for how we behave as parliamentarians, and this debate is certainly part of how we hold ourselves accountable in that effort.

• (1145)

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that my hon. colleague supports both the original motion and the amendment to the motion. He spoke very eloquently on why he and his party are very supportive of the motion. It ensures there will be more accountability and transparency in government.

In my earlier remarks I used the example of the Jaffer affair and the use of this loophole. We know of one parliamentary secretary who met on numerous occasions with Mr. Jaffer to discuss three proposals that were put forward under the \$1 billion green fund.

We have not yet heard from either the current minister or the previous minister of natural resources. I wonder if the member is as equally concerned as I am that we do not know at this point of any possible lobbying or discussions that have gone on between Mr. Jaffer and the parliamentary secretary or the minister of that department.

• (1150)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I am indeed concerned about some of the issues that have been raised in recent months regarding lobbying.

I did not spend a lot of time talking about specific examples in my speech because I wanted to go to the issues that I think are at the heart of the concerns that have been raised.

The member is right. There are explanations that are owed to the House and to the Canadian people that have not been forthcoming.

We also need to take a step back and look at how we can improve the rules that we are all governed by in this place, the rules that are governing the government, ministers and ministers of state, the rules that may or may not apply to parliamentary secretaries. We need to consider those very carefully.

If we get into specific examples we could start throwing mud back and forth across the aisle. There have been mistakes in the past probably on the part of all in this place, but today might be a good time to start looking at how to improve the legislation, how to improve the guidelines, how to improve the codes of conduct, how to improve the rules that we use to make sure that we have accountable and responsible government.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member made a very well-balanced presentation on the motion.

I want to refer to his notes on page 4 where he refers to there being no requirement for lobbyists to disclose the amount of money spent on specific campaigns. There is no requirement for financial disclosure and no spending limits for lobbying campaigns.

In the last year the National Airlines Council of Canada has conducted a fairly large lobbying effort to kill the air passengers' bill of rights. We are talking about 10 to 15 paid lobbyists showing up for meetings.

I would be really interested to know how much this lobbying effort costs, especially since the council is representing so-called cash-strapped airlines on the verge of going out of business because they might have to follow some new rules that treat passengers fairly.

I would like to ask the member whether he would consider pushing this point in his review this fall. I guess I am lobbying the member now and asking him if he would do that.

I think it is a very important point. These private business organizations are getting away with murder being able to finance these aggressive campaigns to kill legislative efforts on the part of backbench MPs in the House. In fact, we do not have access to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, we have publicly disclosed our lobbying efforts right now. I am glad the member raised that.

It is a big issue. We know that ordinary Canadians in raising their issues often do not have the clout because they do not have the financial resources that many people in the corporate sector do to promote their ideas. It is a hugely significant issue.

When one has access to, sometimes, millions of dollars for campaigns in support of one's goals, it really can skew the kind of debate that takes place in our society. It really can skew the meaning of our democracy. It can really skew the meaning of what takes place in Parliament.

It is a very crucial thing that we consider when we review the Lobbying Act. I do not think it is a big deal to ask lobbyists to disclose what money they are spending on the lobbying campaigns in which they engage. Maybe we should consider spending limits on those kinds of campaigns. We do that for political campaigns and the activities of political parties, members of Parliament and candidates for Parliament. I do not see why we should not extend the same kind of consideration to lobbying campaigns that approach government for changes in legislation.

• (1155)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me preface my question by indicating that I agree with the overview the member has given.

I certainly agree, as I am sure the House does, that the terminology “improper influence” is what guides the issue with respect to the ethics of interventions.

I would like to ask the member if he has given consideration to the balance, the other side, with appropriate lobbying. Are we risking putting a cloud over the legitimate rights of individuals or collective representations of individuals? I would use the example of the auto industry or the AECL employees, where the government is looking at future policy changes that would influence those workers, that would affect their jobs. Is he concerned there might be a cloud placed over, not improper interventions or influence, but legitimate lobbying?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that disclosure, proactive disclosure or full disclosure should be described as a cloud. It is a healthy thing in our society to understand the discussion that goes on around government initiatives, for instance. I do not see that as an issue directly in this debate.

The member is right. Lobbying is not a bad thing. In fact, it is a good thing, to ensure that points of view are expressed. Interests have an opportunity to discuss things of importance to them. That is an important part of how we do the business of democracy in this country.

However, we need to be clear. We need to be disclosing the information of who is engaging in that and what resources they are bringing to it. I do not think that puts the enterprise of lobbying under a cloud. I think it shines light on it and that light benefits us all. It certainly would benefit us here in this place as we do our work.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to point out that at the end of the day, when we strip away the veils, the fact of the matter is that the lobbyists are looking to talk to the people with decision-making authority, and those people sit on the other side of the House. They do not sit on this side of the House.

In Mr. Jaffer's case, he was not lobbying the member for Burnaby—Douglas, because he knows the member for Burnaby—Douglas has no access to government contracts. The type of activities that Mr. Jaffer was involved in had exclusively to do with the government and people he knew within the government.

The question is, why were members of the government, cabinet ministers, not smart enough in that case to ask him if he was registered, and to recognize it for what it was, an attempt to influence them to actually get contracts?

Business of Supply

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why that did not happen and I do not want to speculate on it, particularly.

It is important that when we have important offices in this country it is made clear there are mechanisms in place to help the people who have those jobs understand the implications of their role and to understand the rules that surround that role, to ensure, for instance, that they understand the provisions of the Lobbying Act, the requirements that they face and that the people who approach them face. In that way, they can make informed decisions and do the job appropriately and do the right thing by the Canadian people.

Mistakes seem to have been made, and have been made, in this situation and other situations. I hope that in each of those controversies, there is an opportunity to do the job better down the road.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been here now close to six years and this is my first speech regarding accountability, openness and transparency in the system, and the need to inject a degree of fairness into it that is so badly needed.

I would also like to point out that in the past little while demands from taxpayers in general upon our public offices have been great because of the issue of fairness. Over the past two to three decades people have been crying out for more openness and transparency. They have been looking for ways to hold their public office holders accountable. Therefore, over the years, we have done many things in regard to lobbying and registration itself.

Recently, I was at the Council of Europe where we talked about lobbying, which has now become an international event. Many countries have been grappling with this issue of lobbying because there has been a revolving door of people in and out of government. We saw that in the United States of America where the lobbying industry is excessively large. We saw that in the debate regarding new health care reforms in the U.S. We also saw that through other measures in the United States over the past little while, such as pharmacare. We certainly saw that in Canada given the fact that we have become the subject of many U.S. critics because we have a more generous health care system. We have been accused of having cheap drugs, as it were.

I would like to point out to the House that over the past two to five months this issue has become part of the mainstream, and when I say mainstream I am talking about the mainstream media, certainly the news over the past little while. Former Conservative MPs have figured prominently in the news. Over the past little while we have been talking about a former minister, who has also figured prominently in the news.

Everyone is wondering who is a lobbyist and who is not. That is the grand question that everybody wants answered. They also want to know what is considered above board and what is considered to be undue influence.

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If a person leaves government, leaves Parliament, and then decides to get into the business of lobbying in this country, certainly in Ottawa, there are many ways that individual can interact, both socially and professionally. When a person comes to me as a member of Parliament, not a member of the executive, and certainly not a member of the Privy Council, I keep track of that. It is in my calendar. It is still there. I never erase that.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I have many meetings with artists groups, the cable industry, the television industry, broadcasters, and the like. Many of them come to me on several different issues. We just went through an issue on broadcasting regarding fee for carriage. I am sure many of these people have records of coming to me. I have no problem telling anybody about that because it is a transparency issue.

Soon we will be seeing copyright legislation. Copyright legislation is complex and deep. There are many issues from many groups that have so much money tied up in their own personal interests that naturally they want to be a part of this debate. Naturally, with so much money at stake, their livelihoods at stake, they want to be involved, so they lobby not only the minister or the parliamentary secretary but MPs as well.

But let us stick to this one and I will just carry my example even further into this debate.

• (1200)

Our motion says:

That, given the apparent loophole in the Lobbying Act which excludes Parliamentary Secretaries from the list of “designated public office holders”, the House calls on the government to take all necessary steps to immediately close this loophole and thus require Parliamentary Secretaries to comply fully with the Lobbying Act, in the same manner as Ministers are currently required to do.

Now I know for a fact, being on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, that the parliamentary secretary for heritage has requested many meetings, all above board, to present views on what a new copyright act should look like. It is part of the system that we work in.

What has to be done here is that the parliamentary secretary, in many cases, will act as a gatekeeper to the person who is within the department or at least the minister's office. We know this. History tells us, and from the responses that we see here in the House, we know that the parliamentary secretary must be receiving the information that a minister would get, save perhaps a few little details.

We have a parliamentary custom here where if I ask a question in question period, I can request that the minister appear at a later date, in the evening mostly, to go further into that question. The last time I did that, I did not hear from the minister of defence, I heard from the parliamentary secretary of defence.

Logic dictates that if the government feels that the parliamentary secretary should be the one to answer my question, as a member of Parliament, should that person not be under the same responsibility, rights and privileges as the actual minister?

Pardon me for using the obvious vernacular, but if it walks like a duck and sounds like a duck, we all know what it is. Not that I want

to talk derogatorily about my colleagues, but I think the analogy is an apt one.

In essence, the parliamentary secretary in this particular case does have that information which people can use. They can look to the parliamentary secretary and feel that they are actually getting their point across to the government. That is part of the reason why they should be included in this. That is the part of accountability and transparency, and a frame of mind, which is not to lobby a particular person using inside connections or knowing, in their mind, that if they talk to this person it will never become public.

That is what happens. We have to trace the frame of mind of particular individuals who want to make their case known to the government in a formal manner. If these people go to the parliamentary secretary knowing full well that they are not bound under the same responsibilities as the minister, that is a route of easier access. That is the loophole that effectively should be closed.

Transparency, accountability and responsibility are demanded by our taxpayers.

I heard the speech made by the President of the Treasury Board earlier. He talked about how on the doorstep nobody talks about this issue. That does not make it any less important. That does not make us any less responsible.

One of the issues I have dealt with both here and in Europe as part of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association is human trafficking. I know the government is also looking into this issue with a private member's bill. That does not necessarily exclude us from talking about it. Many people do not call my office about human trafficking, but that does not make it any less important. The fact is that at least 700,000 people are trafficked each year. Most of these people do not have the ability to call.

However, I do not want to talk about that issue. I want to talk about the one in hand here which is of course accountability. I hope that in this motion we elevate the debate for what is expected of us and what is expected of fairness.

These are funds that will dispense billions of dollars, and because the buzz words over the past year have been “let us get this money out the door” and “shovel-ready” as it were, we really have to be careful. The expediency by which these programs are approved is becoming much greater. Mistakes can be made. They may be innocent or they may be nefarious, but they are made.

• (1205)

What we need to do is to look at this and elevate the debate. I do believe that we can do that by saying that the very first step is to look at parliamentary secretaries. It may not be on paper. It may not be that official. It may not be sworn in, but essentially when people come to me, talk to me, and lobby me about issues of Canadian heritage, because I am on the committee, they do bring up the fact that they were talking to the parliamentary secretary. In their minds, by talking to that person, they feel that they are being heard directly by the ministry, so it is a frame of mind.

We have to put the rules in place so that the people who want to get around the system cannot and it should be much more difficult for them to do so. This is an important measure.

Business of Supply

Lobbyists are required to submit monthly reports on their meetings. We have designated public office holders that include ministers and their staff, deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers. That gives us an idea of just who we are talking about as the gatekeepers. Lobbyists submit monthly reports on their meetings with office holders such as the minister, the staff, the deputy minister and the associate deputy ministers. But each and every time in this House, if the minister is away, the parliamentary secretary is the one to stand and answer, so there has to be a process by which that person is briefed through meetings with associate deputy ministers and deputy ministers. They are all part of this.

It is that communication which has to be above board and it is not entirely above board. The sheer spirit of the Lobbying Act is a strong one and one that is virtuous, but we have to include all the right people, and this is what this motion sets out to do. In the opinion of the House, the specific office holders should be accountable and should have their meetings recorded and reported so that everything is above board because again, we are talking about incredibly large amounts of money on projects and we do not want this activity to be going on.

For instance, according to the media, the current Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport is in charge of the \$1 billion green infrastructure fund. I do not know if he is in charge or not, but obviously there is an acknowledgement here that the parliamentary secretary has that responsibility to be a gatekeeper, to be a person who will meet with people. We know that the concerns of the parliamentary secretary will be brought back to the respective minister, assistant minister, associate deputy minister, deputy minister, whatever it may be, but these are the office holders who know full well what is going on in the department. They know the plans and priorities in advance, without the general public knowing, so certainly there is a process by which these people are involved in that. We are saying to just acknowledge the fact that they are involved and therefore make the system that much better.

Not many people are calling to know about this. They may not be calling the President of the Treasury Board's office. They may not be on his doorstep about it or on their doorstep about it, but the point is a sound one, which is responsibility.

The act requires that individuals register themselves as lobbyists when they engage in lobbying for compensation. This involves providing certain details about themselves, their business, and where applicable, the subject matter of what they are discussing and the name of any department or other governmental institution for any public office holder with whom the individual communicates or expects to communicate. This information is public on the registry of lobbyists.

Therein lies the spirit of this, accountability and transparency, so that we know who is lobbying whom for a certain amount of interest and that there is no undue influence by one particular group simply because of who one knows.

● (1210)

That element of who one knows has become quite prevalent in our debates, because sometimes the public perception is that there are different rules for different people. Just because someone is a former MP does not mean he or she cannot follow the same rules by which

accountability and transparency, which is the sheer spirit of this Lobbying Act, is done. I am not including just one former MP; I am talking about all of them.

The current situation is in such a state right now that there is some confusion as to registration and how it operates to its fullest extent. That is why motions and debates like this are so important, because we allow things like the Federal Accountability Act to be fleshed out and include the right people and now include somebody who was excluded in the beginning, but not because it is politically expedient. If it were politically expedient, then we would be making policy in a haphazard way.

Therefore, we include the hole by which people come to government but have to be accountable for that. That is what this motion does, because it includes an essential part of the communication chain, which is the parliamentary secretary.

These people are good at what they do. Why not? Whether past or present, they work hard at what they do and they know their files very well. I have had many exchanges with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and with parliamentary secretaries in Canadian heritage. I never once thought they did not know their files well.

We may have had differing opinions over ideology or direction. That is obvious, given where we sit in the House. However, one thing is for certain. They certainly knew, were briefed and informed, on what it was they were talking about. It would lead anybody in the gallery or at home watching television to believe that they know the department and the minister's office and are involved in that process. Therefore, they should be included in the measure of accountability that is available, even by what the current government put out there in the Federal Accountability Act. Hopefully, this debate will allow us to make these types of amendments or changes to the act to allow a more wholesome process of accountability.

Over the past little while, we have seen a lot of my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl, who is on the government operations committee. Speaking of someone who knows her file, she knows it well. However, in her deliberations some of this stuff is now being brought out, and it seems as if there is this back-door method to try to find out what is right. Why do we pursue this in such a circuitous way? Why do we go around the back just to get to the front door? It does not make sense. Why do we not just take this issue, debate it and make the right decisions up front?

The current Prime Minister is also a fan of accountability. He said on April 5, 2006:

We also intend to eliminate the insider lobbying culture that grew up under the previous regime by banning all former ministers, ministerial staffers and senior public officials from lobbying the federal government for five years; by requiring a full record of contacts between lobbyists and ministers or senior officials; and by putting real teeth in penalties in place to enforce the Lobbyists Registration Act.

These are valid points and I will repeat, “by requiring a full record of contacts between lobbyists and ministers or senior officials”. But therein lies the fact that “ministers or senior officials” means the department. One cannot just say the department; one has to define who.

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Therefore, the spirit of what the current Prime Minister is saying is that the department has to be accountable. Who does one meet with in the department who knows the file? That has to include the parliamentary secretary. There is no choice.

• (1215)

We know by their actions that they are involved in the process of devising policy and being briefed on policy. Therefore, the spirit of what the Prime Minister is saying would be answered by including the very people who also serve as gatekeepers.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do not know if he has been listening to the entire debate, but the President of the Treasury Board made the suggestion that the Liberal Party amend its motion today to include not just parliamentary secretaries but all members of Parliament. If I have been listening correctly to the New Democrats, they have indicated, to my ears at least, that they are in favour of that. I am curious as to the member's position on that. Would the Liberal Party and the member in particular support the extension of the motion today to include not just parliamentary secretaries but all members of Parliament?

Second, I know the hon. member has been lobbied by his constituents on another issue where there has been a considerable amount of lobbying back and forth, and that is the long gun registry. I wonder if the member might tell people who is lobbying him on that issue, how they are lobbying and whether he intends to vote with his constituents on that issue.

• (1220)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a basic assumption that everyone wants to scrap it, but it is not true. I can tell the member right now that there are both opinions in my riding. The member made an assumption about my riding. When was the last time the member was in my riding? He shrugs, which means he has not been there. I will not and never will be dictated to by someone who has never been there and does not care about my riding. Never. Conservatives can run as many ads as they wish and do whatever in mail-outs, but they are not there.

Now let us get back to the situation about MPs. When lobbyists come to see me, as I mentioned in my speech, they talk about the issues with heritage or fisheries, and it is always registered and accountable. I have no problem with that. It is pure, open, accountable and not a problem. They can do that any time, if that is the way they feel about doing it. Most of them do that right now, especially when it comes to heritage. The member can take a look at my calendar. He can take a look at all the meetings I have had regarding some of the issues in heritage and certainly in fisheries and oceans, about any matter he wishes. I have no problem with that.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member did not really answer the question from the Conservative side, but the government should simply wake up and take its lumps, and if it feels somehow it should include all MPs in the rules, then let us do it. The Conservatives are the government. They should quit trying to amend the Liberal motion on the floor. If it is a good idea, then they should put it in and let us proceed.

The fact of the matter is that we know that Rahim Jaffer did not lobby the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

He did not lobby anyone on this side of the House. He knew where the money is. The money is on that side of the House. The contracts are on that side of the House. They are not over here, and that is the point. The only people we get on our side are the ones who do not get the contracts, the people who were ill-treated and were beaten out on the contracts by some perception of insider influence. They are the ones who come to the opposition with their stories of woe, and that is how opposition and governments function in this country.

The government is trying to somehow muddy the waters and is saying it has to look at lobbying on the other side of the House, but the fact of the matter is that all MPs have to lobby for their constituents for roads and bridges in their areas. That is common practice. But we are talking about contracts. We are talking about insider information. Mr. Jaffer was trying to use his friendships in the Conservative Party to get contracts for himself and his buddies.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, that is a very valid point. If one wants to do it, one should do it. It sounds pretty simple. Over the past while, I have received many visits from a loose coalition of certain identifiable groups. The transparency by which I run my office is fine, so extend it. However, why does it take a Liberal motion to do this, to show some vision, if the government indeed thinks it is vision? Why would that be?

The hon. member made a valid point. People in my riding come to me about particular projects they would like support for. That is how the system works. However, they know I am not the department. The department lies over here. If one is a gatekeeper to that particular department, which I am not, then one really has to raise the bar on what the gatekeeper's responsibilities are. That is essential.

I said it in my speech and I will say it again. In this particular case, the parliamentary secretaries are an essential part of that communication process. Why would we not be involved in allowing them to have the same responsibilities as other gatekeepers?

• (1225)

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in their 2006 platform, the Conservatives said they would require ministers and senior government officials to record their contacts with lobbyists. We know that the government has been challenged with both accountability and transparency. We could talk about access to information, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and government appointments, any of those things.

When one of our colleagues was up this morning, the President of the Treasury Board used a pretty frail defence. He said it would be administratively awkward. I guess that is really what he was saying this morning. Would my hon. colleague like to comment on that? They have made this promise that they would ensure and require ministers and senior government officials to record their contacts with lobbyists, and now we hear from the minister responsible for the Treasury Board saying that it might be administratively awkward.

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Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I did not hear that quotation, but that is a good one. If one finds things to be administratively awkward, one is in the wrong business. One cannot be top of the line in a particular administrative or executive function if one finds things administratively awkward.

If it is awkward, then how? Essentially, this goes back to that question. How is this so awkward? The government put out the very spirit of this particular bill that it introduced on accountability, providing conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency. Certainly, it has to follow the spirit of the law that it put out there. If the member is a huge proponent of accountability and transparency and his response is that it is administratively awkward, he should tell us how. How awkward would that really be in this particular case?

The other issue, and I quoted from the Prime Minister earlier, is the spirit in which the accountability is brought in. All we are saying is that the spirit of this particular law would include all people of certain knowledge. Therefore, why not the parliamentary secretaries?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on a question I asked of the member for Burnaby—Douglas regarding the changes that are being contemplated to the Lobbying Act. Currently, there is no requirement for the lobbyist to disclose the amount of money spent on specific campaigns. There is no requirement for financial disclosure and no spending limit for lobbying campaigns.

Does the member agree that we should perhaps change the Lobbying Act to require the lobbyists to explain? For example, in their efforts to derail the air passenger bill of rights, the airline lobby has spent lots of money on receptions and letters. There are 10 to 15 lobbyists working full time chasing members in the House. Does he think it is about time these lobbyists were required to report how much they are spending on campaigns like this?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I, too, am a big fan of transparency. The spending issue is one thing but then we get into the issue of what is lobbying and what is not. When it comes to these receptions, we all know what it is, as the hon. member knows. I have been to many receptions myself. We just do not talk about day to day issues. We talk about the issue at hand.

When it comes to the airlines issue, regarding the member's passengers' bill of rights, it is a big issue. Fisheries gets a lot and again with heritage.

• (1230)

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to speak. I will be sharing my time with the distinguished member for North Vancouver.

I rise today to reiterate our government's commitment to ensuring elected representatives put the interests of Canadians ahead of special interests. Like all Canadians, the government makes decisions every day. It makes decisions about the kinds of programs and services it offers and about policies affecting everything from entire industries to small businesses and individuals. Like individual Canadians, the government gathers available information and weighs options before making a final decision.

Lobbyists, whether they are paid or voluntary, provide information that contributes to the decision-making process. They bring facts

and an in-depth understanding of issues to the table. They contribute to the knowledge required to make the best decisions for all Canadians. In a modern democracy like Canada, lobbying provides an opportunity for different views to be considered.

At the same time, we need to ensure that lobbying is carried out in an open and transparent manner. That is why our government made it a priority when we were elected to introduce the federal Accountability Act and to ensure it included measures to toughen up the lax Liberal rules around lobbying.

Since bringing in this sweeping legislation in 2006, there are now clear rules for lobbyists to report their interactions with the government.

One of the key aspects of the Lobbying Act is that lobbyists must file monthly reports on lobbying activities they initiate with ministers and senior officials. These rules have made lobbying more transparent and open than it has ever been in Canadian history.

Today, any Canadian can find out who is lobbying ministers and senior government officials and in what context. In fact, this information is available on the Internet.

In addition to delivering on our promise to clarify the responsibilities of lobbyists, we have drawn a line between proper and improper lobbying. One of the most important changes we made was to ban key people in powerful positions in the government from lobbying for a period of five years after they leave those positions. This measure has gone a long way in maintaining the trust of Canadians in their government.

The people who fall under this rule could unduly influence the government's choice of policies, programs and services that affect Canadians directly. That is why the five year ban applies to key decision makers, including ministers, ministers of state and their exempt staff. It also applies to senior public servants, such as deputy ministers, chief executives of departments and agencies, officials in departments and agencies at the rank of associate deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, as well as those occupying positions of a comparable rank.

The five year lobbying ban also applies to other top government jobs, such as the Chief of Defence Staff and the Comptroller General of Canada. Finally, it applies to people identified by the Prime Minister as having provided support and advice during the transition period from an election to a swearing in as prime minister. All these key decision-makers are referred to as designated public office holders in the new act.

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The penalties under the Accountability Act are tough. If any designated public office holder breaks the five year ban, they can be subject to stiff fines of up to \$50,000 or even jail time. These rules have given Canada one of the most robust lobbying regimes in the world. They have also given Canadians the reassurance that senior government decision-makers do not use their personal connections to get special favours from the government once they leave office.

In addition to improving rules and the five year ban, the Lobbying Act includes a number of other measures to assure Canadians that lobbying is done in an ethical and transparent way. For example, the act created a Commissioner of Lobbying, who is an independent agent of Parliament. The commissioner is responsible for maintaining the registry of lobbyists, which includes information about all registered lobbyists and their activities. The commissioner is also responsible for developing a lobbyist code of conduct and has the power to carry out investigations to ensure compliance with the act and the code

As well, the commissioner must now table a report each year in Parliament on the administration of the act and the code. This is such a significant improvement because, as members will recall, there were no tools to enforce a breach of lobbying rules before. The Lobbying Commissioner now has a budget, thanks to the government, of around \$4.6 million to aggressively pursue anyone who breaches these rules and regulations.

•(1235)

That is a significant improvement over the loose rules under the previous government when this position was considered only as a registrar. Since day one, this government has put accountability and ethics at the centre of our agenda.

Canadians need to know that the Government of Canada holds the highest ethical standards and principles and provides programs that deliver value for money. Canadians told us clearly that they wanted a government that was more open and transparent, so we introduced the Federal Accountability Act to tighten up rules around lobbying. It is also why we are now looking at bringing in members of Parliament and senators under the Lobbying Act, including the offices of opposition leaders. If the members opposite are serious about providing real accountability to the Canadian people, they will have no problem supporting this measure.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member for Barrie explaining what the legislation now does, which is fine and we all appreciate that. However, he also said that because the previous government had a loose piece of legislation, his government brought in measures to tighten up that legislation.

There seems to have been a loophole that has been identified and this motion that was brought forward by the Liberal Party says that we need to tighten it.

If the member, the Prime Minister and the so-called Conservative Party, although sometimes I call it the Reform Party, believe in what they say, then they should be supporting this proposal from the Liberals which identifies a loophole as a result of the Rahim Jaffergate and we need to correct it. Will they support it, yes or no? I would ask that they tell Canadians.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we go one step further by extending it to all MPs. We realize that much important work is done in committees of Parliament and that there will be lobbyists approaching MPs on all sides of the table, and that is why it is important that we extend this as far as possible. I assume that the Liberal Party would not have a problem with that. It will be interesting to hear whether the Liberals oppose our position that this should be extended to all MPs and the leaders of the opposition.

However, I do find it bemusing to hear the Liberals talking about changes to the Lobbying Act when it was the sponsorship scandal that led us to making these changes. One would assume that as elected officials we would not want to breach the public trust. However, we must remember that the reason we have a Federal Accountability Act was because of the theft of \$40 million. Canadians kicked that government out of office because they were so disappointed that their trust had been broken.

It is interesting to see this being raised by the party that clearly did not understand what Canadian expectations were on lobbying.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if all these new rules that the member's government has set up are supposed to be solving the problem, what has gone wrong? How is it working so far?

The fact is that Mr. Jaffer had been dealing with cabinet ministers and requesting contracts but nobody over there in the government, those seven ministers and the parliamentary secretaries, thought to ask the man if he was a registered lobbyist. Did the alarm bells never go off? He is a man who members have known for years and have worked with. They knew he was unemployed and that he was lobbying and yet they let him have free rein through their government.

In terms of the government trying to amend the Liberal motion on the floor, it is absolutely ridiculous. If you in the government are so convinced that we should expand it to all MPs, then simply make the announcement.

The Deputy Speaker: I would just remind the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona to address his comments to the Chair and not directly to other members.

I will go now to the hon. member for Barrie.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the member asked what the difference is. There is a very clear difference. In the case of Rahim Jaffer, there was not a single cent of government money that was given out in an inaccurate manner. Not one dollar was lobbied successfully. If we compare that to the previous government, when there were not these rules, \$40 million were stolen. So, there is a tremendous difference.

Right now we have a system in which lobbyists cannot do things unethically. We have a strong system and it is working.

It is funny when the opposition members are desperate for questions to ask that they have to complain about something where not a single cent was taken.

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• (1240)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why would the Liberals not support having all members record meetings with lobbyists? Why would they want to keep it quiet? Particularly in a minority government, why would they be opposed to being able to report all meetings with lobbyists?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, it makes me think that the reason the Liberals are trying to avoid saying where they stand on this is that perhaps they still maintain that cozy relationship with lobbyists that they had when they were in government. I cannot understand any other reason why they would be skirting whether they want to extend this to MPs.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Canadian and a member of Parliament, I am pleased to defend the government's record on improving lobbying rules.

Over the course of 140 years, Canada has achieved remarkable success as a free, open and prosperous democracy. We are seen as one of the best countries in the world in which to live, a place with world-class cities and a place where people line up to come to. More recently, Canada is becoming known internationally as the jurisdiction that is leading the way on accountability.

Legitimate lobbying is one of the ways that the government remains responsive to the needs of Canadians and that is one of the reasons that this government acted to improve the rules around lobbying in Canada. Most important is the fact that Canadians deserve to know that their government is conducting its affairs openly and transparently.

The truth is that lobbying is not always about the next fat government contract or big tax break. Many interest groups, such as non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups, have government relations staff or consultants who speak with the government on their behalf. These efforts help government develop policy that better reflects the values and interests of Canadians.

However, these same organizations are not just lobbying the government. Parliamentarians play a key role in the development of public policy. These same members, senators and their staff are constantly approached by lobbyists looking to ensure their client's views are taken into account.

We think this is legitimate but it is also an area where we have not yet tread in terms of rules. So the negative picture that some people have of lobbying probably is not what leaps to mind when one thinks about people promoting support programs for families or better health, food and product standards, but this is an important aspect of lobbying that is often forgotten.

In short, lobbying, when it is done ethically and transparently, is a legitimate and fundamental part of our democratic system. Individuals, organizations and businesses can and should be able to communicate their opinions and ideas to government decision-makers and parliamentarians.

Our challenge as legislators is to have clear rules to ensure that lobbying is done and is open for all to see. Ultimately, that is what this government believes in and what this government is achieving.

That is why the Lobbying Act is so important and why the government took the time to consult with Canadians on its implementation. We also think that principle should apply equally to decision-makers on the government side and the parliamentary side.

Thanks to the actions of this government immediately after we were elected in 2006, Canadians now have the assurance that their government is handling its affairs transparently. Lobbyists now have clear reporting responsibilities for interacting with and advocating to government. In fact, one of the key aspects of the Lobbying Act is the requirement for lobbyists to file monthly reports on lobbying activities that they initiate with ministers and senior government officials. As a result, Canadians can find out who is lobbying ministers and senior officials and in what context.

In the quest for complete transparency in lobbying activities, this information continues to be published on the Internet. Canadians now have access through the Internet to information about lobbying activities. Canadians now know which lobbyists are communicating with ministers and senior government officials and what is being discussed.

The government has delivered on its promise to clarify the responsibilities of lobbyists and draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate lobbying. In fact, in introducing the Lobbying Act in 2006, we demonstrated to Canadians that they can have confidence in the management of the public sector, both in politicians and in senior officials.

It all goes back to accountability. This is the government that promised greater transparency and openness in government and we had to take action. We were elected in the wake of serious Liberal scandals. Canadians demanded to know that their government was being well managed, that it upholds the highest standards, values and principles, and that it provides programs that deliver value for money.

When this government came to power, our top priority was to implement this pledge to Canadians. We delivered. The Federal Accountability Act strengthened accountability in government, restored Canadians' trust in our public and democratic institutions and laid the foundation for the government we needed and will continue to want in the future.

As hon. members know, this act was one of the most comprehensive and complex pieces of legislation ever passed in this country. It made substantive changes to existing federal statutes and created two new ones. This legislation touched virtually every part of government and beyond.

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•(1245)

The measure designed to strengthen ethics in government comes through a stronger and more transparent Lobbying Act. Because of these measures, Canadians can be assured that lobbying and government advocacy is done openly. This was just one of the steps we took through the Federal Accountability Act to meet the evolving needs of Canadians for efficient, effective and honest government.

I am proud of the actions this government has taken to ensure the relevancy and effectiveness of our system of government. The reforms contained in the Federal Accountability Act descended from the political reforms that brought responsible government to our country. Indeed, they are democracy at work.

Canada deserves a government that is accessible, open, transparent and accountable. That is what the Lobbying Act helps provide. This act is working well in helping to create the necessary balance between government that is relevant, as well as open and transparent, to Canadians.

As stated earlier by the President of the Treasury Board, we think an important component is missing. Parliamentarians are a crucial link in the decision-making process. Members, senators and their staff are entrusted by Canadians to make decisions in their best interests. If opposition members want to really demonstrate a commitment to openness and transparency, they should have no problem supporting that.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I heard the hon. member talk about being open and transparent. The government is challenged in all kinds of ways about being open and transparent. There are all kinds of access to information items about which we could talk. We could talk about the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

The member is a parliamentary secretary and therefore knows that under the current Lobbying Act, whether it was deliberate not, we do not know, parliamentary secretaries are not designated public office holders. Why should he not be, if he is responsible for running the administrative dealings for his minister? We know of at least one parliamentary secretary who was delegated to be in charge of a \$1 billion fund. Why would he not, if his goal is to be open and transparent, allow parliamentary secretaries to be designated public office holders?

The second point I want to raise is he said his top priority was to implement the Conservatives' pledge to Canadians. In the 2006 platform, his government talked about requiring ministers and senior government officials to record their contacts with lobbyists. Why is the member not supportive of this amendment?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we want to take it one step further. We believe all members of Parliament and senators should fall under this act. In fact, when it comes to lobbying, the opposition gets lobbied just as much as the government does. The rooms behind us are called lobbies, because that is where a lot of lobbying takes place.

Every member of this place and the other place gets lobbied on a very regular basis. We do not know how many trade unions or other special interests groups have been lobbying the opposition.

We think we should take it one step further so all members of this place are subject to the act.

•(1250)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Rahim Jaffer was an unregistered lobbyist. Up to seven ministers and parliamentary secretaries were facilitating his efforts to get government contracts for himself and his friends. Nobody would even know about this had it not been for the drunk driving and cocaine charges.

The question we have to ask ourselves is this. How many other unregistered lobbyists like Rahim Jaffer could there be out there?

The member for Burnaby—Douglas talked about changing the act to require lobbyists to disclose how much money they spent on specific campaigns, since there are no spending limits for campaigns required at this point. For example, I am talking about the air lobby to try to defeat the air passengers' bill of rights, putting up money for receptions and hiring high-paid lobbyists to spend time chasing MPs on the Hill.

Would the member be in favour of supporting those types of changes to the Lobbying Act?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the very first act of Parliament that we brought in was the Federal Accountability Act. This act has been regarded in our country and other countries as one of the foremost pieces of legislation demanding accountability from government.

The fact is, as members of Parliament, we are all lobbied from time to time. My colleague just reminded me that the hon. member across the way has lobbied this government on a very regular basis.

Lobbying takes place on a regular basis. Many special interest groups take part in lobbying, and there is a very good reason for it. Lobbying is a very important part of what this government and Parliament is subject to. It is important to hear other people's ideas and opinions so we know what they are.

Nevertheless, we need to toughen up the act. We believe in it. We brought in at the very beginning. We are committed to the Federal Accountability Act.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting debate. I have listened to the new Liberal members and I am reminded of the debate around the Federal Accountability Act. The Liberals opposed that, not because they thought there was a loophole with respect to parliamentary secretaries, but because they thought the old revolving door of lobbying and cronyism that existed before was fine. They thought there was no problem with the system.

Why does the parliamentary secretary think the Liberals have not moved to amend their motion to cover all MPs and senators and not just parliamentary secretaries? Are they afraid? It is their motion.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to prejudge why the opposition is not willing to amend its motion. One would think it would. We are talking about strengthening it. If the opposition is really in favour and committed to strengthening it, it should—

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The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will come back to the motion before the House. The motion moved by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl tries to address a loophole that exists, which is parliamentary secretaries are not designated office holders and therefore not subject to the same rules with respect to the Lobbying Act as ministers.

In the previous government, parliamentary secretaries were sworn in as privy councillors so they would have met that definition, but they no longer are. This became a particular concern when we found out that the minister responsible for infrastructure had designated his parliamentary secretary to oversee a \$1 billion fund, to hold meetings on it and to do this work for the minister, all without having the same rules and regulations as the minister. It is a major loophole that allows a minister to designate a parliamentary secretary to do work under a shadow and under shade that a minister could never be afforded. This situation came to light with the happenings of the Jaffer affair.

It is important to note that the government's principal defence in this is ministers are not required or obliged to do disclosures. One thing it fails to mention, and it is addressed in the amendment that was introduced earlier today by the member for Beauséjour, is the fact that in 2006, during the election campaign, the Conservative Party said that this was essential, that there should be proactive disclosure of any meetings that took place with the ministers to the public.

It was part of the Conservatives' campaign platform, but was conveniently dropped when they introduced their act. They now actually use the defence that it is not an obligation for them to report these meetings proactively and that they have done the right thing, even though, by their own words, it is what they campaigned on in 2006. They should have done it and they were supposed to do it.

It is interesting to note that there are many instances, including for the parliamentary secretary responsible for infrastructure, where there has been proactive disclosure of other meetings with lobbyists that have taken place. Therefore, it has become a selective practice. If they feel it is worth disclosing and it is not anything embarrassing, they disclose it. If it is something that might be embarrassing or a meeting they do not want people to know about, it appears they do not disclose it.

When the former caucus chair of the Conservative Party, who is the husband of a cabinet minister, walks into an office, sits down at a desk and starts lobbying for government cash, would the Conservatives not think a proactive disclosure would be in order? The Conservatives said in 2006 that it was imperative that ministers and parliamentary secretaries disclosed these meetings. If they are proactively disclosing these other meetings, then why on earth would individuals in question be sitting down, having meetings and not disclosing them? By their own definition, that should take place.

Therefore, the argument now, reaching the point of being farcical from the government's side, is it will not support this because it also wants opposition members to disclose with whom they meet. It was not that long ago when the governing party was in opposition, and it may not have to wait long before it is in that situation again.

However, the government will recall that opposition parties do not have the power to fund programs or to deliver government services.

I have people who come and talk to me on all kinds of things. The best I can offer is that I will try to raise it with the government and ask that it take action, or raise it in committee. I certainly have no problem disclosing with whomever I meet, but the idea that the government would hold out on meeting its own election promise in 2006 because it wants opposition parties, which do not even have the power to give any money, to disclose who they meet with is just preposterous and shameful, quite frankly. It is an affront to what it ran on.

I sometimes wonder if the Conservative Party thinks the Federal Accountability Act was just the name of something it passed, that it was ticked off the list and it did not have to worry about it any more. It does not seem that it follows, either in word or spirit, much to do with that act.

If we take a look at the circumstances specific to this case, there is a real pattern of secrecy, a culture of deceit, that is permeating not only this issue, but across Parliament, that should give each of us great cause for concern.

● (1255)

If we draw a line back to the beginning of this whole sordid affair with the then minister of state for status of women and her outburst at the airport in Charlottetown, she berated the people who were working in that airport, allegedly threw her shoes, banging on doors, screaming at people, and doing something that, to be quite frank, if any other Canadian citizen did, they would be hauled away in handcuffs.

An hon. member: They would be prevented from flying.

Mr. Mark Holland: Somebody who undertakes this and under any other circumstance would be sent away in handcuffs and prevented from flying, we are supposed to just accept that she was sorry. Let us move on and there is no consequence. The Prime Minister protected the minister in this circumstance.

Then we have a situation where the husband of the cabinet minister is charged with cocaine possession and drunk driving. At that point, it would have been a good opportunity for the Prime Minister to say, "We had better do an enhanced security review of this minister to take a look at what kind of interactions have been taking place. If there is a potential that her husband has been coming in contact with illicit drugs, then there should be enhanced security screening of this minister". It did not happen. The minister continued to be protected.

Then the former minister of state for status of women sent a series of letters written by her office, masquerading as constituents, writing her praises, talking about the great job she was doing. They were written by staff masquerading as constituents. That was not enough for the Prime Minister to remove her.

Then there were the allegations that exploded on the front pages of newspapers, starting first with the *Toronto Star*, about very unsavoury dealings with her husband trying to lobby the government as an unregistered lobbyist. Even when those allegations first broke, that was not enough. She was not removed at that stage.

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Then we got to a point where the Prime Minister is visited in his office by a private investigator, who gives him information that is not disclosed to us and, suddenly, this is serious and credible evidence that is enough not only to remove her from cabinet but from caucus and to call in the RCMP, something that has not been done since 1987 under Brian Mulroney, when he had to call in the RCMP on a sitting member of cabinet.

What followed was a Prime Minister who hid the allegations, unlike following Mr. Mulroney's example where the allegations were disclosed, recognizing that the public had a right to know what is happening in the highest offices of the land. The Prime Minister shielded those allegations and said he referred them. What we find out is that no official referral took place with the Ethics Commissioner. In fact, the Ethics Commissioner said that she was reviewing media clippings, that was her access to information, and that she never received any formal request from the government.

We still do not know exactly what all the allegations are and all the information the Prime Minister has. We are still being kept in the dark. However, what did become clear in dribs and drabs, and we had to fight and scrape to get information, was that the former Conservative caucus chair was engaged in unregistered lobbying, had the opportunity to not only meet with parliamentary secretaries but with ministers through seven departments that we know of, and none of it was reported.

It is amazing to me, having been caught in this situation, that the government would not be leaping at the opportunity to support this motion, to say absolutely this should never happen again. That is what one would expect from a government that has been caught in this circumstance, but it has the audacity to go the other way, to say no, we do not need this, everything is just fine, do not worry.

Let us look at the seven departments that have admitted to having engagement with Mr. Jaffer and his unregistered lobbying. The principal department responsible for the green fund is the Ministry of Natural Resources. The minister who is currently responsible for that department and the immediate past minister have given us nothing but silence. We know absolutely nothing about their department's engagement with Mr. Jaffer or his business associates and the different schemes for government cash that he was pushing. We know nothing.

• (1300)

Not only did we have to wait to extract this information about the engagement with seven departments, but the principal departments, the ones most responsible for the fund, that were trying to be accessed by this unregistered lobbyist, we have no information. Parliament is still being left in the dark.

Requests for those ministers to come before committee have been completely ignored, so the ministers still are keeping us in the dark and Canadians are left without knowledge of what is going on. For the government, apparently this is what members call "doing the right thing". My goodness, if this is their definition of doing the right thing, I would hate to see their definition of doing the wrong thing.

This issue pertains to the former Conservative caucus chair, husband of a cabinet minister engaging in unregistered lobbying, being given the run of seven departments, an access that no one else

in this country could possibly have dreamt of, by virtue of his Conservative connections.

Let us look at what other actions the government is taking that are really shutting down the ability of Parliament and independent officers of Parliament to look into the dark corners, to reveal the truth.

The actions the government is taking to shut down dissent and those who would speak against it in a method that in my opinion is a direct attack against our democracy.

Let us be clear, the ability to dissent, the ability to criticize a government, the ability for independent officers of Parliament to open up the doors and take a look at what is going on inside, and report that to the public is one of the most fundamental freedoms. I would submit it is a freedom from which all other freedoms flow. If we do not have that right there can be no democracy because we do not know the truth.

Just a couple of days ago on the government's crime agenda as an example, when the government kept telling us that one of its bills, Bill C-25, was going to cost \$90 million. For months and months Conservatives said that was the cost of the bill, \$90 million. I did not buy it, so I went to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and asked that he review it. The Parliamentary Budget Officer asked the government for basic information, information that should have been turned over in a day, information like projected prison population. He was denied that information. He was rebuked and told he could not have the most basic of information, completely shut out.

What did he have to do? He had to build statistical models using StatsCan data for six months using one-third of the resources of his office to get at information the government was hiding from him. Now days away from that report being released, the government says the \$90 million is now \$2 billion. In a 24-hour period it goes from telling the public something is going to cost \$90 million, a line it has maintained all along, to when it knows it is about to be exposed turns around and says, "whoops we made a mistake, it's \$2 billion". That is one bill and that is the consequence of allowing a government to operate in secret and in the dark. That is the importance of a motion like this.

Let us continue down the list. The government began slowly in its means to control the message and bury information, first with its own MPs and its cabinet, making sure that if they did not speak off talking points that heads would roll. Members know that if they were on a panel and actually spoke their mind that they would be done. I could only imagine former members of the Reform Party, a movement started on the ability of members being able to speak their own mind, how they must feel to sit under a Prime Minister who has them under his thumb like that.

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If that was not enough, then it went to the public service and to websites. Even the Canada Day event here on Parliament Hill, the stage was changed to blue, and it eradicated websites of any information that did not fit the talking points. Bureaucrats, whom I have had an opportunity to meet across this country, tell me that they are terrified of speaking their own mind because they are afraid of reprisals from a government that has shown nothing but vengeance for those who would dare speak against it.

When someone like Richard Colvin, a well-respected diplomat, comes forward and says that he has information about wrongdoings in Afghanistan, about torture and abuse in Afghanistan, the Conservatives attack him. They attack his credibility. Instead of calling a public inquiry to get at the facts and the truth, they attack his credibility just as they do—

• (1305)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I would like to question the relevance of the current drift in the member's speech and actual motion at hand.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering will keep in mind the substance of the motion when he concludes his remarks.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, this goes right to the heart of this motion. If we do not have transparency or the ability to look into the dark corners of what is going on with the government, then there can be no democracy. This motion asks very simply for the ability to ensure that this loophole is closed, and that the Federal Accountability Act and the promises that the government made be honoured.

I am trying to establish a pattern of behaviour here that leads to the necessity for motions like this to open the doors to what is going on. It should not have to happen. The member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl should not have to bring forward a motion like this, but it is because of these actions that bury truth and shut down dissent that motions like this are necessary.

We move on from attacking the public service and the independence of that public service to distorting committees. We all remember the handbook to mess up parliamentary committees. If that was not enough, after it tried to play games and shut down parliamentary committees, it moved right to shutting down Parliament not once but twice in a one-year period. It was not to refresh an agenda but to shut down debate, in this instance the Afghan detainee issue.

The Information Commissioner has come forward and said that there are unbelievable delays in people getting access to information. Departments are getting Fs. The Information Commissioner came forward and said that, in an unprecedented fashion, the government is shutting down access to information and shutting the doors on letting the public know what is going on.

As I mentioned earlier, the Parliamentary Budget Officer is getting his office budget cut and getting a refusal to get even basic information to allow Parliament to know the costs of the things that we are voting on. Then we have the attack on the independent officers of Parliament.

The nuclear safety regulator, who tried to come forward and raise concerns about the actions of the government and how they would impact both the nuclear industry and human health, was fired.

The head of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, a man who came forward, stood up against the government on issues ranging from oversight to use of tasers to the RCMP pension scandal and others, and criticized the government for not implementing the recommendations of Justice O'Connor, the conclusions of Justice Iacobucci and others, was fired. He was replaced with a wills and estates lawyer with no background in the field, somebody who has donated heavily to the Conservative Party, and somebody from whom I am wondering if we will ever hear anything again in terms of criticizing the government.

The National Science Adviser, who spoke out against the actions of the government, was fired.

The victims' ombudsman, who came forward and said that the policies of the government are unbalanced, will not work and are not right for victims, was fired.

We go down the list to the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission, who criticized the government. He was fired.

If we dare speak out against the government, if we dare have a dissenting opinion or want to know the truth, watch out. This is from a government that is in a minority position. Imagine the unrestrained vengeance that it would unleash if it was given the opportunity.

That brings me to the ruling of the Speaker just last week. It said that Parliament had a fundamental right to know, to have access to information, and to not have the kinds of loopholes that are used and frankly abused, and that are addressed in motions like this.

It is time that the government stop hiding, stop burying, stop being vengeful on those who criticize it, and actually live up to the words and promises it ran on in 2006. Accountability is not only a word, it is an action. It is time that the government started showing some.

• (1310)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative caucus meetings must be pretty tense events these days. I hope no shoes are being thrown around.

The fact is the Prime Minister came in with a little hope that he would be different than the previous Liberal government of Chrétien and different than the Mulroney government. Both governments had their share of corruption. He has become, by all accounts, a big control freak. He has set up mechanisms to deal with avoiding scandals. What happened?

Rahim Jaffer, an unregistered lobbyist, has been getting around the system, violating it, not registering. Nobody in the government asked why he was not registered. How many other unregistered lobbyists are running amok in the Conservative government?

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It has to be tense over there. The government must have been asleep at the switch while all this was happening. The Prime Minister must be going crazy. If he does not clean out the whole works of them and put in a whole new set, I do not think he will be able to sleep at night and stay calm.

I recommend that he make some changes and get some of the new backbenchers—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, the member raises an important point. If a former Conservative caucus chair and husband of a cabinet minister of high profile could work his way through seven departments that we know of, and it could very well be more, for that many months, then how many other well-connected Conservatives have been given the keys to avoid all the different rules in place?

Rightfully, average Canadians, who do not have deep Conservative connections, wonder why they have to follow one set of rules and yet those who have deep Conservative connections follow another set of rules.

As a result of there being no requirement to publicly disclose who one is meeting with, and because one can do what the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities did and pass it on to the parliamentary secretary who is not subject to the same rules and use that loophole, we are really being left in the dark.

The heart of the motion before us is to try to ensure we have some light shed on just how much of this goes on. How isolated are the actions of Mr. Jaffer in his ability to skirt all the rules? What else is going on out there?

• (1315)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member from the Liberal Party took great liberties in discussing this motion, so I will take the same kind of liberties and pick up on a couple of the things he said.

I was really quite surprised that he would talk about democracy at committees when in fact he was the one who tried to force through a witness list that would not allow the government to choose witnesses on the gun registry issue, which will come before committee for the first time this afternoon.

He talked about what it would be like if the Conservatives formed a majority government. What would it be like if the Liberals formed government, if we judge them by what they have done as they head up a coalition to try to ram things through committees? It just shocks me that he would even use that as an example.

I want to come to something else. He used an example of cost overruns on a bill. A bill was passed by the Liberal government in 1995 that had the most horrific cost overrun in the history of Canada. It was projected to cost taxpayers \$2 million. It ended up over \$1 billion, and that was confirmed by the Auditor General. It is unbelievable. It would never have passed through Parliament if we had known it would cost that much.

I wonder if he would he come clean on some of these things.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, we do know what happens when there are majority Liberal governments. We have periods of unprecedented growth, prosperity, job creation and, by the way, no

deficit. That is what happened the last time we had a majority Liberal government in our country.

Maybe the member fundamentally understands the concept of democracy. I presented a motion at committee. The committee then had an opportunity, by majority vote, to exert its will. In this instance, my motion did not carry and the committee went a different way. However, the government seems to have this idea that democracy is it getting its way. We heard the statement by the member. Why should the government be able to select its witnesses? The government wants these witnesses. If it does not get its witnesses, it is not democratic and it is not fair. It does not work like that. It is a minority government. We have to have a majority vote of either committee or the House to get what we want.

I moved my motion. Unfortunately it did not succeed. The committee made a choice by majority vote to go in a different direction. That is the very nature of democracy. We present ideas and then we have to win over a majority of people to get support for our idea to get it implemented. A democracy is not one person, be it the Prime Minister or anybody else, standing up and saying, “This is my idea. Take it. If you do not, I will force it on you or I will find a way to bring retribution if you disagree with me”.

On the issue specifically of the witness list, when we have the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police who, through its membership across the country, support overwhelmingly a bill that promotes public safety, when we have the Canadian Police Association, when we have the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP, when we have countless victims groups, when we have the Bar Association, pediatricians and doctors, all these individuals who have come forward and have said that the registry needs to be maintained, that we need to kill the bill that would gut the registry, then I stand with police, with pediatricians and with those people who keep our communities safe.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I quickly remind the member for Yorkton—Melville that the only coalition that succeeded was the Reform Party, the NDP and the Bloc coalition to overthrow the governing party of Paul Martin.

When I listen to the member for Ajax—Pickering, I hear that the government operates under a veil of secrecy. I heard members speak earlier on why they would not support the motion. They spoke about the adscam and money that was stolen. They justified their decision because no money was paid out. Some time ago the Prime Minister received some lobbyists at his house. He justified it because it did not work out.

Rahim Jaffer, as the papers say, was waltzing from minister to minister. The justification is no money was paid out. If somebody attempts to rob a bank, but there was no money to steal, does that mean it is okay? Does mean we do not charge that person for intent? We do not charge people for their interest in robbing. Does that justify it?

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•(1320)

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, the government's position that the only way this could have been lobbying was if cash was given is a little like a person, to use an analogy with guns, who has gone out hunting without a hunting licence, saying he has not shot anything. He says that he may have gone out hunting, but it really was not hunting because he has not shot anything yet. It is a little like a person who gets into a boat with a fishing line and says that he or she has not caught a fish yet, so it is not fishing.

Just because scandal shut all of this down before Mr. Jaffer could get his cash, does not make it right. The government needs to consider what it is actually saying in this regard.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As there is some extra time, I wonder if the hon. member would like to answer my question on the cost overrun going from \$2 million to \$1 billion. This is something—

The Deputy Speaker: There is enough time for some more questions and comments, but unfortunately the member cannot answer that specific point unless another members raises it.

The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are starting to remind me of an old expression in Newfoundland and Labrador that says, "Who knows the mind of a squid". It is starting to become a reality here today.

My hon. colleague gave a very passionate and informed speech. He talked about parliamentary secretaries and their not being covered under the Lobbyist Act. Does he think it is an inadvertent omission or an intentional omission? With all the kind of subterfuge going on here today, I am starting to wonder myself.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, we have to ask this question. Why are the Conservatives so opposed to this motion? They campaigned on it. They said that they believed in it in 2006. They said that it was extremely important.

We introduced a motion to try to shut down an obvious loophole, one that the government should be very embarrassed about. If the omission was a mistake and it was honest, then it would want to support this motion. It would say that we exposed something that was a weakness in the system, let us fix it. However, the fact that it is standing in opposition to the motion begs a lot of questions.

For the member who rose on the point of order. Right now the gun registry costs, according to the RCMP and the Auditor General, \$3 million a year. By any definition, that is incredible value. We can attack the RCMP and the Auditor General and the validity of their comments, but I will stand by their numbers.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

It is rather ironic that the Liberals are putting forward this motion today, in light of their poor record of transparency. The sponsorship scandal went on for more than six years before the Bloc Québécois blew the whistle and brought this scheme to light.

Whether the Liberals or the Conservatives are in opposition or in power, it makes no difference, and I will explain why. When the Conservatives are in opposition, they behave in a certain way, and when the Liberals are in power, they behave just like the Conservatives. Take the anti-scab law, for example. When the member for Jonquière—Alma was in opposition, he said it was a good law, but when he became Minister of Labour, he said that it was not the interests of workers, but the interests of all Canadians that counted and that he was therefore changing his position. Once he was in power, his ideology changed.

The same is true of the program for older worker adjustment. When I ran in a byelection in my riding, the same member for Jonquière—Alma came to tell my constituents that the program for older worker adjustment would be restored shortly. We are still waiting for this program.

I have a colleague who, during this session, introduced a bill in the House that would abolish the employment insurance waiting period. Even though most of the opposition members supported this bill, the government is refusing to grant the royal recommendation that would allow this change to be made.

The Liberals did the same thing when they were in power. When in opposition, the Conservatives supported employment insurance measures, but the Liberals did not grant the royal recommendation.

The Liberals and the Conservatives say one thing when they are in opposition and another when they are in power. For all these reasons, I am a bit surprised to see the Liberals move this motion.

That said, we will not oppose greater government transparency, because it is a good thing.

I talked about election promises. I would remind the House that in 2006 the Conservatives campaigned on the promise that their government would be much more transparent than previous governments. So far they have not kept their promise. We are still waiting for this transparency.

In fact, what the government is doing is worse than a lack of transparency. It often uses the Access to Information Act to justify its lack of transparency. However, if transparency is so important to them, I urge the government and the Prime Minister to appoint an information commissioner. As we know, the current commissioner was appointed on an interim basis in July 2009 and her term will expire in June of this year. No one yet knows or can tell us if the government plans to fill this position, which is so essential to our democracy, permanently as of June 2010. It does not cost the government a lot of money and would demonstrate its goodwill. That said, we are still waiting.

The Access to Information Act is over 25 years old. To put this in context, my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour was first elected to this House 25 years ago.

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●(1325)

I was not even old enough to vote and my parliamentary assistant was not even born. This legislation has been around for a very long time. It is often said that one day in politics is an eternity, so imagine what 25 years means.

Twenty-five years is a quarter of a century. I must remind the government party of this. In 25 years, the government has had the time to reform the Access to Information Act. Also, 25 years ago, media such as the Internet, Twitter and Facebook did not exist. If for no other reason than to adapt to these new realities, the government should update this legislation.

I am not surprised that the government is dragging its feet regarding these announcements. One of the Conservatives' promises was to give all regions and rural areas high-speed Internet access. This measure was meant to bring our communities into the modern world. We are still waiting to hear from the government regarding these commitments, which are so vital to our communities. I am not surprised to see that the government is not making it a priority to ensure that Quebecers and all Canadians have electronic access to information. It is also dragging its feet when it comes to offering these services to our communities.

Moreover, the current legislation does not include parliamentary secretaries on the list of public office holders, which is not good from an ethics point of view. Parliamentary secretaries often have to answer ministers' questions and fill in for them. Because they are delegated by ministers, the same code of ethics and responsibilities should apply to them.

The government answered many questions about lobbyist registration from my leader and the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, our ethics critic. I am very worried by the government's assertion that Mr. Jaffer cannot be considered a lobbyist because he did not sign a contract with the government.

Does this mean that from now on, when budding lobbyists go hunting for contracts, they do not have to register as lobbyists until they actually bag a deal? Will this measure apply to every individual who wants to become a lobbyist? If so, then democracy will suffer. What the government is saying is that there is a double standard.

The ethics commissioner appeared before the committee and told us that she had received no documents from the Prime Minister's Office. In response to numerous questions from my leader, the Prime Minister said that as soon as he found about the allegations, he forwarded the relevant documents and information to the ethics commissioner.

However, when the ethics commissioner appeared before the committee, she said that she had never received any such documents. I know that Canada Post—which the Conservatives are planning to cut too—can be slow at times. However, I also know that those documents left the Hill over a month ago. There is no reason why the ethics commissioner should not have received them yet.

●(1330)

By making such statements, the Prime Minister's Office is once again trying to mislead us, and that is not right.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, there is no requirement currently for lobbyists to disclose the amount of money they are spending on specific campaigns. There is no requirement for financial disclosure. There are no spending limits for lobbying campaigns. In particular, in terms of the airlines council's role in fighting the air passenger bill of rights over the last year, it spent enormous amounts of money on 10 to 15 paid lobbyists' meeting members of Parliament, sending letters to MPs, phoning MPs and putting on receptions for MPs.

I would like to ask the member whether she and her party would be in favour of bringing in new rules for lobbyists, requiring them to disclose how much money they are spending on specific campaigns, identifying the campaigns and putting some sort of limit, because right now there are no limits whatsoever on these campaigns.

●(1335)

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. The Bloc Québécois will certainly never be opposed to measures that will provide an effective framework for lobbyists.

I would go even further than my colleague and say that it is not right that lobbyists should not have to register if they do not spend the majority of their time lobbying. Lobbyists, whether they spend one hour or 40 hours of their week lobbying, should have to register.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is a fact of life that even if we legislate, if there is no buy-in, it does not work. A perfect example is prohibition.

I wonder if the member thinks that is true in the case of the Federal Accountability Act. Does the member think the government is actually complying with the spirit of the act in its actions during its time in government?

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Yukon for his question.

Ever since this Conservative government has been in power, we have seen a culture of secrecy develop and that is unacceptable. The latest example came out in the Jaffer affair. When I refer to Mr. Jaffer I also mean his wife, who was removed from the Conservative caucus. The last time a government removed a member from its caucus was under the Mulroney government. The allegations made against that person were disclosed.

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In closing, since this is a matter of allegations, I would add that this government has a double standard. It says that it removed the former minister for the status of women because of the allegations. However, when we ask about the allegations of torture in Afghanistan, we are told there cannot be an investigation into mere allegations. What is more, they say the minister was removed for matters that do not affect the government, but they are not investigating a matter that does affect the government, namely, torture in Afghanistan. This is just another example of this Conservative government's inconsistency.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for agreeing to share her time with me. I congratulate her for the excellent speech and the many examples she gave concerning the culture of secrecy that has taken over Parliament, especially since the arrival of the Conservatives in 2006. The sponsorship scandal unfortunately showed us that it is possible for a government in power to fall into the murky waters of the culture of secrecy and favouritism, as shown by the examples that have been given since the motion was moved.

The Bloc Québécois supports the motion moved by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, which reads as follows:

That, given the apparent loophole in the Lobbying Act which excludes Parliamentary Secretaries from the list of “designated public office holders”, the House calls on the government to take all necessary steps to immediately close this loophole and thus require Parliamentary Secretaries to comply fully with the Lobbying Act, in the same manner as Ministers are currently required to do.

It seems entirely logical to me. I have not been a member for many years but I am nevertheless surprised that this was not done before. Had I been told that parliamentary secretaries were on the same list as ministers I would not have been surprised.

We now realize that there are loopholes in the law. Parliamentary secretaries, who have a great deal more power than an ordinary government backbencher, are not subject to the law. That problem can be remedied by this motion, if the majority of Parliament supports it. I believe that will be the case.

However, given the comments I heard today, I do not believe that the Conservatives will vote in favour of this motion. It is completely inconceivable that the party in power, which presented itself in 2006 as the champion of transparency and proclaimed its desire to make ethics a priority, would vote against such a motion.

I said earlier that both the Liberals and the Conservatives, when in power, frequently promised to clean up politics in Ottawa. Neither one kept their promises.

Over the years, the Bloc Québécois has made considerable progress on the ethics and transparency front, in particular by putting an end to corporate funding of election campaigns. Quebec prohibited businesses from contributing to election campaigns in 1977, under the René Lévesque government. At the federal level, parties were able to receive donations up until very recently.

Here are other achievements of the Bloc Québécois: tighter control over lobbying activities and the appointment of returning officers on the basis of merit by an independent organization, Elections Canada. That seems obvious, but that was not the case

before. The government directly appointed returning officers. That is no longer the case, and the Bloc Québécois played a big role in that.

Although foundations have not been abolished, we have succeeded in making them subject to review by the Auditor General. That is a step in the right direction. Our many questions also helped put an end to the Canadian unity fund, which dated back to the Mulroney era. This reserve, with close to \$800 million, was kept secret and helped fund various propaganda activities.

The Bloc Québécois has always maintained that the problem in Ottawa is not the lack of rules—although some issues could be fixed individually by filling in some holes in the legislation—it is the lack of political will to respect the existing rules.

We are in favour of this motion. During the 2006 election campaign, the Conservatives made themselves out to be the knights of transparency and ethics. This was after the Gomery commission was created by the previous government. With all the scandals that came to light, it was easy for the Conservatives to present themselves to Canadians as a different and transparent government. They claimed they would put ethics and accountability first. They ran their campaign under that banner. I know, because I ran in that election. I was running for my second term.

The Conservatives have completely failed in passing themselves off as the white knights of transparency and ethics.

● (1340)

The fact is that the Conservatives have not honoured their commitments to the public and democracy. Instead of strengthening ethics in government and promoting transparency, they have strengthened the culture of secrecy and cronyism. Earlier, a Liberal member referred to the early days of this government. It was clear from the start that the media no longer had access to ministers when they came out of a caucus meeting. Ministers no longer held scrums, which was something totally new for the media covering federal politics on Parliament Hill, because they had always had access to ministers. When a minister ran from the media, he made the news.

The new government had just taken power, and secrecy was already the order of the day. All the examples mentioned in previous speeches and all the examples we have heard about and seen in the media are now out in the open and show that this government has no intention of making good on the election promises it made four or five years ago.

The Bloc Québécois calls on the Conservatives to keep their election promises on ethics and specifically on lobbying. There are other loopholes in the law, including one that allows individuals to lobby without being registered if they spend less than 20% of their time lobbying or if they are just gathering information. An NDP member raised the same point earlier and said that the Lobbying Act should be strengthened. While I do not want to take a stand on behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues who are leading our charge on this issue, I think that the NDP member is right. The law must be strengthened, not broadened so that anyone can do anything.

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Lobbying politicians is a very delicate thing to do. It is not illegal, but it has to be done by the book. Special interest groups naturally want to tell the government that they have certain concerns and that they would like to see an issue handled in a certain way for the people they represent. There is nothing wrong with that, but the rules have to be very strict and everything has to be very well regulated so that things do not get out of control.

We were all a bit dismayed when the recent example of Rahim Jaffer hit us, once all the information was made public. No matter how much he denied it in committee, and no matter how we look at the situation, Mr. Jaffer was a lobbyist. He did not register, yet he still lobbied his former colleagues on numerous occasions. He received a warm welcome from staff and from the Prime Minister's Office, no doubt. At least, that is what he has always claimed. He still had the Conservative Party logo on his website. I will not repeat everything that we already know, but, one thing is certain, this gentleman created quite a stir when certain information was made public.

There is also the matter of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, who is responsible—the parliamentary secretary, himself, not the minister—for a program with a budget of about \$1 billion; not \$1 million, but \$1 billion. That is significant. He is an obvious target for lobbyists, which is why more stringent rules for this type of role are not only justified, but also necessary.

As I said, we would have expected parliamentary secretaries to have already been included. It is a stark and prime example of how important it is to apply strict rules to lobbying. The parliamentary secretary, who has significant responsibility, opened his door to Mr. Jaffer. He is not an ordinary backbencher.

That is why we must support this Liberal opposition day motion.

• (1345)

[English]

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the Bloc will be supporting this important motion to close a gaping loophole in the Lobbying Act.

The member mentioned that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has access to the \$1 billion green fund. I am quite concerned about other parliamentary secretaries. We have not heard, for example, from the parliamentary secretaries or the Minister of Natural Resources.

Does the member share the concern that while we may be closing this loophole, it may be a little late, and that the government should be very forthcoming on what it already may know?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the hon. member. This specific example shows us that something fishy is going on and there is a problem that needs to be addressed immediately. I do not understand how the current government can disagree with such a measure since a parliamentary secretary is not an ordinary MP. I do not mean “ordinary” in any derogatory way. A parliamentary secretary has an additional responsibility. He replaces the minister in committee; he listens and speaks for the minister. In

the House, when the minister is not here to answer the opposition's questions, it is always the parliamentary secretary who rises. He becomes responsible for what happens in the department. He even makes announcements on behalf of the minister.

Given that a parliamentary secretary may have significant funds to manage, it is clear he could encounter problems with regard to a certain form of lobbying.

• (1350)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to comment on the fact that there is no requirement for lobbyists to disclose the amount of money spent on specific campaigns, no requirement for financial disclosure and no spending limits for lobbying campaigns, especially in light of the air passengers' bill of rights and the lobbyists' efforts to kill that bill where they spent enormous amounts of money on advertising, on receptions and on visiting members.

Does the member think that members of Parliament should have a right to know how much money lobbyists are spending on their campaigns?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, we have to support any measure that makes our profession more transparent. I am not aware of the specific example that the member gave. Earlier, I heard him say that we need tougher lobbying rules. I think that it would be appropriate for people in general, not just parliamentarians, to know exactly how much all of these lobbying firms are spending and what they are spending the money on.

As I said, it is not illegal. It is easy to point fingers at lobbyists and firms that are hired to lobby the government and MPs and make presentations to them. If we have a proper framework and strict rules in place for this kind of work and if, as the member said, there is greater transparency in disclosing the amounts spent on certain campaigns, the people will be well served and interest groups that need these lobbyists to advance their causes will improve their image.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I am very concerned about is that this motion does not go far enough.

I am very concerned about the Liberal, Bloc and New Democrat MPs who lobby me on behalf of individuals who they do not identify. I am wondering why it is that they can carry out secret instructions from various organizations that they do not then disclose. I do not know who I am dealing with other than the Liberal MP who comes to me and says that he or she has a proposal. On whose behalf are they doing this and how does this particular motion address that very significant problem? I am wondering what the opposition members have to hide.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, if the minister and his party vote against this motion, they are the ones with something to hide. It worries me to hear an elected member of the House cast aspersions on the work of other members who have a legitimate mandate by calling them lobbyists. We were democratically elected to the House to represent people, and it is our job to talk to ministers about various issues in our ridings. If the minister does not represent his constituents well, he is not doing his job. What we do is nothing like what lobbyists do.

[English]

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak today to our opposition day motion put forward by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. I congratulate her for bringing this motion forward.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Brossard—La Prairie.

I have had the opportunity to look at the Lobbying Act through my work on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, and I look forward to a review of the act in the fall.

The omission of parliamentary secretaries from the list of designated public office holders is either a deliberately concocted loophole or a glaring omission that the government should be falling over itself to rectify.

I fully support the motion to call on the government to immediately close this loophole and require parliamentary secretaries to comply fully with the Lobbying Act in the same manner as ministers are currently required to do so.

I would think that the Conservative government would embrace the opportunity to fulfill its 2006 platform promise to require ministers and senior government officials, including parliamentary secretaries, to proactively record and report their contact with lobbyists.

The Lobbying Act's definition of a designated public office holder is extensive, including ministers, ministers of state and their staff, deputy heads and assistant deputy ministers, and those of comparable rank. It is a long list of people who have considerable influence on the decisions of the Conservative government.

It is a mystery as to why that list does not include parliamentary secretaries. There is no doubt that parliamentary secretaries have privileged access. They serve the ministers' role in question period, in meetings with stakeholders, in relations with the departments, and perhaps most importantly they have the ear of the ministers. They too have influence on the decisions made by the government. I would argue that influence is considerably greater than that of members of the House.

The Lobbying Act defines activities that when carried out for compensation are considered to be lobbying. Generally speaking, they include communicating with public office holders with respect to changing federal laws, regulations, policies or programs, obtaining a financial benefit such as a grant or contribution, and in

certain cases obtaining a government contract or arranging a meeting between a public office holder and another person.

When a lobbyist meets with a ministers seeking support for a project, there are two fundamental requirements of that lobbyist, that he or she is a registered lobbyist and that he or she provides a monthly communication report.

Canadians have on-line access on the registry of lobbyists, to the lobbyist's name and business, as well as details of the subject the lobbyist is to discuss with the minister, and also the name of the department and/or other governmental institution in which any public office holder with whom the individual communicates or expects to communicate. Therefore, it is wide ranging.

Let us say the minister, for example, was detained and unavailable to meet with the lobbyist, so the parliamentary secretary is called upon to fill in, in that particular meeting. The same lobbyist sits down with the minister's parliamentary secretary and pitches the very same project and all the paperwork disappears.

Lobbyists need to be registered. Nothing more is asked of them through the Lobbying Act. The parliamentary secretary meets up with the minister later that day, gives him or her a briefing, an update on the proposal, and offers a full endorsement of the project.

What do Canadians know about this meeting that took place? Absolutely nothing.

There is no reason that these two meetings should be treated so differently by the Lobbying Act. If the government is truly committed to transparency, it needs to ensure that all lobbyists and decision-makers are obliged to follow the same rules.

The rules of the Lobbying Act were put in place to meet the goal of increasing accountability. Any lobbyist who communicates with a designated public office holder must file a monthly report, including all arranged communications, telephone calls, meetings or any other communications arranged in advance.

The report must disclose for each communication that took place in a given month, the date of the communication with the designated public office holder, the name and title of all designated public office holders who were the object of the communication, and the subject of the communication.

● (1355)

Simple, straightforward information that should be readily available to Canadians, especially when we are talking about access to taxpayers' dollars.

We know that each minister and parliamentary secretary have unique arrangements in terms of the level of authority and departmental access that is provided to the parliamentary secretary, and it varies from department to department. We acknowledge that. However, we cannot dispute the fact that the opportunity exists for a minister to delegate a significant amount of decision-making authority to the parliamentary secretary should the minister choose to do so.

Statements by Members

The Lobbying Act, as it stands today, creates an environment where lobbyists can meet extensively with the Conservative government's key decision makers without anyone ever knowing it happened. It is troublesome that government members will stand here today and boast about the government's record on accountability and transparency while we only have to look at a newspaper over the last couple of months to see it has taken advantage of the loophole to get around the law as outlined in the Lobbying Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member will have four minutes left to conclude her remarks, but now we will move on to statements by members.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is a time when we turn our attention inward to ensure that we live balanced, focused lives, and help those around us to do the same.

The Canadian Mental Health Association supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness and this year it launched the 59th annual Mental Health Week.

[Translation]

Across the country, the Canadian Mental Health Association is encouraging Canadians to cultivate harmonious relationships with their colleagues and neighbours, as well as their family and friends.

Forging harmonious relationships helps us develop the resilience needed to deal with the stresses and demands of everyday life.

[English]

Important to the House is the fact that Canada loses some \$51 billion a year on lost productivity due to mental health problems. Studies continue to reveal that one in five Canadians will experience a mental illness some time during his or her lifetime.

[Translation]

I would like to congratulate the CMHA and wish it every success this week and all year long.

* * *

[English]

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, May 9 is Mother's Day. In honour of mothers and caregivers everywhere, bold leadership is required to stop the preventable deaths of women and children around the world. This year, an estimated 8.8 million children under the age of five will die from largely preventable causes and over 300,000 women will die because of pregnancy or childbirth-related complications.

Canada and other G8 leaders must lead the way through bold and urgent steps to catalyze global efforts and save the lives of these women and children. In order to be truly effective, this effort must include full access to safe reproductive care and not influenced by ideology.

During this week leading up to Mother's Day, CARE, the Canadian Association of Midwives, Plan Canada, Results Canada, Save the Children Canada, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, UNICEF, and World Vision are joining forces in Ottawa to get the attention of government.

This Mother's Day the greatest gifts we can give mothers around the world are the tools that they need, so they can access the health care they need close to home, where it is most effective.

* * *

[Translation]

LANAUDIÈRE 2010 DESJARDINS TOURISM AWARDS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the recipients of the Lanaudière 2010 Desjardins tourism awards. Most of the winners come from my riding.

Arbraska Rawdon won in the outdoor and leisure category, and Bergerie des Neiges took top place for farm tourism and regional products. The award for tourist attractions with less than 100,000 visitors went to the Musée d'art de Joliette. Winners in the various "Accommodation" categories included Auberge du Vieux Moulin, Bergerie des Neiges, Pourvoirie Domaine Bazinet, and Les Chalets du Lac Grenier. The human resources tourism leaders of tomorrow award went to Benjamin Vallée from Auberge du Lac Taureau and the human resources tourism supervisor award went to Josée Beaugard from that same establishment. Finally, La Source bains nordiques took home the sustainable tourism award and Mario Boisvert received the Réjean-Gadoury personality of the year award.

Congratulations to the winners, who are a testament to the vitality and quality of tourism in the Lanaudière region. Looking forward to seeing them this summer.

* * *

[English]

POLICE FUNDING

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2006 the Conservative government promised funding for 2,500 new police officers. Municipalities like New Westminster, Coquitlam and Port Moody were counting on this money for their police forces. Coquitlam, for example, has one of the lowest police to population ratios in the country, at one member for every 939 people.

Last month, I met with members of the Canadian Association of Police Boards, who were in Ottawa for the fourth year in a row asking the government to live up to its promise of adding 2,500 new police officers to Canadian streets and provide long-term, stable funding to continue to fight crime.

The CAPB represents more than 75 municipal police boards, employing in excess of 33,000 police personnel, and has repeatedly called on the government to provide dedicated funding for policing.

Police officers put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe. It is time for the Conservative government to deliver on its promise and give municipalities stable, long-term funding.

* * *

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as MS Awareness Month begins, I would like to recognize this cause that is so important to many of my constituents and many Canadians across the country.

The Sherwood Park MS Community Group is the largest MS group in the country. It works tirelessly to educate the community and raise awareness about multiple sclerosis. This group holds many events throughout the community, and actively provides information and support to the families and friends of those with MS.

I am pleased to say that funding by the Government of Canada for MS research is making a real difference. These investments are building our overall understanding of multiple sclerosis toward more effective treatment and, ultimately, a cure.

MS is an unpredictable and often disabling disease. I am proud to have such a large group of strong individuals in my riding that are fighting the disease and who live by the motto that MS is not the end but the beginning of a new journey.

* * *

• (1405)

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year during the first week in May, the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors leads a national awareness week in support of naturopathic medicine.

Naturopathic physicians are primary health care professionals with a minimum of seven years post-secondary education. They practise naturopathic medicine, which is a distinct primary health care system that blends modern scientific knowledge with traditional and natural forms of medicine. The naturopathic philosophy is to stimulate the healing power of the body and treat the underlying cause of the disease.

Each year during Naturopathic Medicine Week, naturopathic doctors hang up their lab coats and teach communities across Canada about naturopathic medicine, how naturopathic doctors can be valuable additions to health care teams, and how they work with patients to identify the most effective solutions to individual health needs.

Naturopathic Medicine Week is an excellent opportunity for all Canadians to learn more about achieving optimum health. I encourage Canadians to visit their local naturopathic physician in their communities.

Statements by Members

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON PALLIATIVE AND COMPASSIONATE CARE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has an aging population that will present intense challenges to our health care system in years to come.

At the front line of these challenges are those who need palliative or compassionate care, those who are depressed, those who cannot speak for themselves and Canadians living with disabilities, in other words, our most vulnerable Canadians.

Members across party lines have come together to address this challenge with a message of hope.

Margaret Sommerville of McGill University noted that, “Hope is the oxygen of the human spirit; without it our spirit dies, with it we can overcome even seemingly insurmountable obstacles”, including our last great act of living, dying.

These are issues of life and death. These are issues of basic human dignity.

I invite all members of Parliament to join the parliamentary committee on palliative and compassionate care.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): It is difficult for this Conservative government to recognize and to ensure implementation of official bilingualism policies.

It has been unable to ensure that both official languages are deemed equal. This was evident at the opening ceremonies of the Vancouver Olympic Games and also in its rejection of the bill for mandatory bilingualism of Supreme Court justices.

It has also massacred French in its official communications. Yesterday's poorly translated press release from the Minister of Public Safety is one of many examples. It states: “[...] M.P.s de tous les partis politiques tiendra un événement sur la Colline de Parlement dans le soutien de troupes canadiennes [...]. L'événement doit lever de l'argent [...]”

If Quebecers truly want their language, French, and their culture to be respected, the only solution is a sovereign Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is proud that Canada has taken the lead on the issue of maternal and child health as the focus of our G8 meeting in Muskoka. All G8 members lauded Canada's initiative to champion healthier mothers and healthier babies and to reduce maternal and child mortality.

Statements by Members

With agreement on a set of principles to guide the leaders of G8 countries, we believe progress will be made to reduce the number of deaths and to keep mothers and children healthy.

A limited number of interventions can prevent most maternal and newborn deaths. With better prenatal care, the presence of a skilled health assistant during birth, care for newborns and some antibiotics, we can make a real difference.

A number of Canadian NGOs and experts have called on the opposition to see the big picture. As we get ready to celebrate Mother's Day this weekend, let us put partisan politics aside and focus on what really matters.

* * *

CANADIAN NAVAL CENTENNIAL

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I joined the Canadian navy at the age of 16, lured by the dream of adventure on the high seas.

I rise today to commemorate the Canadian Naval Centennial. On this day in 1910 the Canadian navy came into existence when the Naval Service Bill received royal assent under the leadership of Wilfrid Laurier. Two old cruisers, HMCS *Niobe* and HMCS *Rainbow*, were purchased and the naval college was opened in Halifax.

• (1410)

[Translation]

At the beginning of the second world war, Canada had only 13 ships. By the end of the war, the Canadian navy had the third-largest fleet in the world, with more than 400 ships.

Each year we commemorate the Battle of the Atlantic, during which our ships escorted supply convoys to Europe under the constant threat of German submarines.

We can all be proud of our Canadian navy. It will continue to serve us proudly and with distinction around the globe.

[English]

As we in the senior service are proud to say, ready, aye, ready.

* * *

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to highlight North American Occupational Safety and Health Week and our government's actions to further protect Canadians in the workplace.

With many young workers finding their first job or returning to a summer job, it is important to teach our children that they have rights in the workplace and that they can speak up about unsafe working conditions.

On Monday in Charlottetown, the Minister of Labour launched two new online tools to reduce injuries in the workplace. The first is a new guide on preventing workplace violence, and the second is an e-tool for individuals on how to reduce musculoskeletal injuries. Both of these tools are available, free of charge, to all Canadians on Labour Canada's web page.

Hard-working Canadians are the backbone of our country. That is why we have introduced these new measures to further protect workers, strengthen our workforce and strengthen our economy.

* * *

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Sunday is Mother's Day. As we celebrate, mothers in other places across the globe are at risk. More than 300,000 women die each year due to pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications, yet maternal, newborn and child health accounts for only 3% of global aid.

While New Democrats applaud that maternal and child health will be a priority at the G8 summit this June, it is disheartening to know that the government refuses to fund the services necessary for maternal and child health, including a complete range of family planning services that include access to safe abortion. The government has made it abundantly clear what services and initiatives it will not fund, but it has not been equally forthcoming about what it will fund.

On Sunday, as we honour our mothers and caregivers, the greatest gift the government could give to women in Canada and around the world would be action. We have had enough empty promises. We need the fulfillment of these promises, concrete commitments and leadership to ensure the health of mothers and children here in Canada and around the world.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by turning its back on honest hunters and farmers in Quebec who want to see the useless and expensive long gun registry scrapped, the Bloc is showing, yet again, that it does not have a monopoly on Quebec values.

After 20 years of resistance and empty debate from the Bloc's leader, it is high time that his more taciturn disciples tell us why they are really here in Ottawa: to undermine Quebec's interests.

What do the Bloc members have to say to citizens in the regions, such as Abitibi—Témiscamingue, Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, Gaspésie, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Côte-Nord, that would begin to justify their disdain for the real concerns of Quebecers?

While the Bloc members take it easy in Ottawa, doing nothing except respond to the every whim of the Bloc's head office—to the detriment of their electors—the Conservative members are working to defend the interests of Quebec's hunters and farmers. We on this side are defending the interests of all Quebecers.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, World Vision and other organizations are gathering on Parliament Hill to promote awareness of child and maternal health, which, as we know, is a very serious issue that affects the poorest regions in the world.

The Bloc Québécois believes that if it truly wants to help these women, the Conservative government must adopt a strategy that takes in the full range of health care services these women are entitled to in terms of family planning, including access to contraception and abortion. These services play an integral role in the fight against infant and maternal mortality.

Yet, according to a Conservative senator, it seems as though the more we talk about this, and the more we push the Conservatives to take action, the more this government will dig its heels in and turn this into a political issue that will overshadow the basic issue of maternal health.

This reformist government must stop pushing its backwards ideology and must understand that what is good for women here is also good for women worldwide.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the goal of 100% high-speed Internet for all Canadians has been talked about for a decade, but the Conservatives have never committed to it and after four and a half years have done nothing to bring us closer to this goal.

[Translation]

Too many rural areas simply do not have the same access to essential services such as education, health care or economic development, that many Canadians take for granted, because these regions do not have digital infrastructure.

[English]

The Liberals, on the other hand, are committed to changing this Luddite path the Conservatives are leading us down. Today in Thunder Bay, our leader committed to the goal of 100% high-speed Internet connectivity within three years of being elected and to expansion of mobile coverage for rural and remote Canada.

[Translation]

The Liberals are convinced that all Canadians should have the same level of service, whether they live in Powassan or Winnipeg. We believe in a united Canada where urban Canada and rural Canada work together.

* * *

[English]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Elections Canada released the first-quarter fundraising results, and the Conservative Party predictably has

raised more money than the three opposition parties combined. One year after the Liberal leader's coronation, the trend is clear. The Liberal leader has seen three straight quarters of declining financial support.

Maybe it is because the Liberal leader has repeatedly been caught making contradictory promises to different audiences. He threatened an election, promised to raise taxes including the GST and a job-killing business tax, fired his staff and started over again, split his own caucus on more than one occasion, played politics on sensitive issues and took Frank Graves' advice to the Liberals to start a "culture war". Or maybe it is because Canadians know that he is just in it for himself.

We know it is not going all that well for the Liberal leader, but while he is fundraising, Canadians are still waiting for the other \$39 million stolen during the sponsorship scandal.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to try to find the words to ask this question.

Yesterday, Senator Ruth gave perhaps the pithiest, sharpest description one can imagine of Conservative political policy that we have all heard in a long time. Her advice to groups that are criticizing the government or that have an issue with the government or might want to raise the issue was, and I am not going to quote entirely, quite simply, shut the F up.

This is what the current government has come to. This is the culture of intimidation that has now been established by the Conservative Party. If someone has a disagreement with the government, just shut the F up.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously that type of language is completely unacceptable.

Let me tell members this. Canadians do not want to drag the abortion debate into the maternal and health discussions.

This government and the Prime Minister are focused on how to make a positive difference in the lives of mothers and newborn children in the developing world. We want to find ways that unite Canadians, not divide them. This is an excellent initiative for Canada to provide a meaningful role on the world stage.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about the senator's language, it is about what she is describing—a culture of intimidation. We have spoken about the Conservative's culture of deceit; today, we are dealing with a culture of intimidation.

Why this freeze on discussions with groups throughout the country? Why this hostility towards democracy in Canada. That is my question for the government.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is self-evident that view does not represent the view of the government. It is self-evident that is unacceptable.

Let me tell members what is equally unacceptable. It is the culture war the Liberal Party wants to impose on Canadians, to seek to divide rather than to unite. The priority of the Prime Minister, the priority of the government as we enter the G8 summit and the G20 summit, is to promote maternal health and the health of newborns. That is an admirable goal. It is one all Canadians can get behind.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pattern is clear. The Conservative position is clear. There is a culture whereby if you do not agree with the government, you are done. "Do not talk, keep quiet." That is the government's position. We have the examples of KAIROS, MATCH International and more.

The question again: why is democracy problematic for the Conservative government?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say again the language is unacceptable and in no way, shape or form represents the views of the government.

We had a good debate, with different points of view, in this House. When the Liberal Party tried to politicize a noble cause, this House had a good debate, and Parliament has spoken on this issue.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's comment by Senator Ruth exposes the Conservative culture of intimidation. When groups speak up, they lose funding. When individuals speak up, they are attacked. Public servants get fired. For example, KAIROS, MATCH, CRIAW, Linda Keen, Peter Tinsley, Paul Kennedy and Richard Colvin. As more speak up, the intimidation gets worse.

Why is the current government so intent on trying to shut up those who speak out?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

What this is, on behalf on the Liberal Party, is its effort to engage in a culture war with Canadians to try to further its political cause. It wants to divide Canadians, rural from urban, east from west, big city from small farm. That is wrong.

What the Prime Minister is doing on this important initiative is championing the cause of maternal health, of the health of newborn children in the developing world. That is something all Canadians can unite behind and be very proud of the Prime Minister's efforts.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is trying to change the channel.

The Conservative culture of intimidation and deceit starts with the example set by the Prime Minister. It is not that the Prime Minister

does not work well with others; he just does not want to work with anyone at all. Any voice other than his is one too many.

However, dissent sustains democracy. Intimidation suffocates it. Every voice matters, whether we agree with it or not.

Rather than shutting up others, when will the Prime Minister start to listen?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party wants a culture war and it is determined to do it. One need only look at what it is doing now on this issue.

The Prime Minister comes forward with an initiative to help maternal health, to help support newborn and children's health, and what does the Liberal Party do? It sends out fundraising emails, like the one I have in my hand, encouraging Canadians to contribute anonymously.

I would advise the Liberal Party that anonymous campaign contributions are illegal. This government changed the election financing laws to stop those types of terrible practices. The Liberal Party should immediately distance itself from this outrageous letter.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a Conservative senator showed the true face of the government. During a speech, she advised pro-choice groups to shut up about the government's decision to stop funding abortions abroad, because that would allow the government to reopen the debate in Canada and turn back the clock on women's rights.

Will the government, which is guided by a regressive, narrow-minded ideology, finally acknowledge its true intentions, which are to reopen the abortion debate in Canada by cutting off funding abroad?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, needless to say, what the senator said was unacceptable. Senator Ruth does not speak for the government. No one wants to revisit this issue, and we will not reopen the abortion debate.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are told that the senator does not speak for the government, but she hears what is said and discussed in the Conservative caucus, because she is sitting at the table. Moreover, she was very clear when she told groups to shut up about this issue and said that if they pushed things, there would be an even greater backlash. The Conservatives do not repeat what is said in caucus here, and they do not want to talk about it here, but they are getting ready to change things. That is their true face.

• (1425)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has always been very clear. The government has no intention of reopening the abortion debate. We cannot be any clearer than that.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's strategy on abortion is the same as its strategy on the gun registry. It is hypocritically using backbenchers to promote its Conservative ideology. We are not fools. Dismantling the gun registry and challenging the right to abortion are part of Conservative Party policy. The proof is that the Conservative members vote en masse in favour of these bills.

Why is the government stubbornly trying to impose its Conservative ideology on Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear on our position on law and order and on the safety of Canadians on the streets.

We believe there is no valid reason to have the long gun registry. It is a waste of money. It was a \$2 million promise by the Liberals that turned into a \$2 billion boondoggle. We have better ways to spend the taxpayers' money and it will not be wasted on a long gun registry.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a Conservative senator has implied that the Conservative government could do away with women's right to abortion in Canada. This scenario is especially plausible because the Conservative government is refusing to fund such measures abroad. The best way the government can guarantee that women here will not lose the right to abortion is to restore funding for NGOs that give women in developing countries freedom of choice.

Will the government act?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government wants to ensure that our G8 initiative is focused on saving the lives of mothers and children. We know what the tools are. We know what can be prevented and treated. In fact, our initiative will save the lives of mothers and children, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, who are in greatest need.

This government and all Canadians want to make a difference in those lives. We are looking forward to the G8.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about the authorities' lack of preparation for potential ecological disasters like the one currently affecting the Louisiana coastline.

Some companies are asking the National Energy Board to postpone its review of safety standards. These companies want more lenient safety requirements. That would be disastrous.

Why has the government left the door to this disastrous possibility open?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have strong environmental

Oral Questions

laws to protect our air, water and soil. The National Energy Board and this government would only allow any resource extraction projects to go forward if there were strong environmental protections.

I want to indicate very directly for the leader of the NDP that this government has no plans and no intention to reduce the environmental standards in this regard.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us in the 2010 budget strips the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency of its capacity to do its job to protect our environment and turns that job over to the industry friendly National Energy Board. That decision could have very dangerous consequences. In fact, we are witnessing the consequences of that very kind of deregulation right now in the gulf.

We know the oil industry is lobbying the ministers of the government to lower safety standards and we know the Conservatives are listening. Will the government reconsider its decision and maintain the integrity of environmental assessments?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are custodians to one of the most pristine natural environments in the world in our far Arctic. This government gives great priority to that file, which is why, just in this Parliament alone, we extended the environmental laws in our transportation sector to an additional 100 nautical miles offshore. We accord it a great priority.

This government has established whale sanctuaries in our far north and have quadrupled the size of Nahanni National Park.

We have no intention whatsoever of reducing environmental protections in the Beaufort Sea.

• (1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the oil that is gushing out of the BP damaged rig is killing wildlife throughout the gulf and destroying the marine ecosystem. It is now hitting the coast of Louisiana and Florida will be next. The oil will keep pouring out for days, maybe even weeks. It is about to enter the gulf stream, which means that the Canadian Atlantic coastline could ultimately be at risk.

Will the government tell us what it is doing to assess that risk and put plans in place to ensure that Canada's coastlines and our marine preserves are protected?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all Canadians are disturbed about what they see going on in southeastern United States in the Gulf of Mexico. It is an environmental tragedy.

The Government of Canada's job is to focus on ensuring those types of disasters do not happen in Canada. We have strong environmental protections. We have absolutely no intention of changing or weakening any of these important environmental protections in the far north.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians look at the environmental horror threatening the Gulf of Mexico and recognize how vigilant we need to be to protect our own coastal regions from a similar fate. They know that the Conservatives, including the Prime Minister, have campaigned for years to abandon the nearly 40-year moratorium on tanker traffic and drilling off B.C.'s coast.

Given the environmental sensitivity of these waters, will the Conservatives acknowledge that they were wrong and finally drop their calls to abandon the moratorium?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back in 1988, an exclusion zone was established between the various American interests and the Government of Canada that does not allow tankers carrying crude from Alaska to go to the United States either through the strait on our west coast or through Canadian waters. It must be at least 25 to 85 miles. The member for Vancouver South should know that the government has no intention of revisiting this issue.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not very reassuring since we know that just a few years ago the former minister of natural resources, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, was denying that there was even a moratorium on tanker traffic in those waters.

These are environmentally sensitive areas prone to seismic activity and important to our tourism and fisheries in British Columbia.

What concrete steps is the government taking to ensure that the west coast moratorium on offshore drilling and tanker traffic will remain in place?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot be any clearer than I was when I stated that the government has no intention to revisit the 1988 deal with respect to tanker traffic. We have no intention of making any changes. I think it serves Canada very well and serves our environment well.

* * *

[Translation]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative culture of deceit is so ingrained that the Conservatives are hiding their plans for AECL. Everyone in the sector knows that the government is planning to sell our world-class CANDU technology outright. That will have devastating consequences and cost thousands of jobs.

Why is the minister not doing anything to prevent the death of an industry? Why can he not just tell us the truth?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should probably be doing his job a little bit more carefully rather than reading the newspapers in the morning. He knows full well that last September we announced a key step in

the restructuring process and that we would be taking proposals from investors.

We said at the time that we were open to arrange investment options up to and including 100%. He knows that and he knows that we are moving ahead.

He also knows, from testimony that we heard at committee, that AECL needs this new investment to be able to compete around the world.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Nonsense, Mr. Speaker. It emphasized a P3 proposal.

Stakeholders who have been briefed by investment bankers brokering this backroom deal were told that the government's intent is to unload the entire CANDU sector.

It is the Avro Arrow all over again and the death knell for this industry.

Now we are hearing reports of former PMO staffers going to work for foreign nuclear firms.

Is the government trying to hide the fact that at the same time as it is destroying this industry, Conservative cronies are about to cash in?

● (1435)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that there is a five year ban on lobbying for PMO staff.

More important, on the issue of AECL he also knows that it needs new investment if it is to continue to be competitive around the world. Would he rather lose all of the jobs in Canada by not making a move on this?

He knows full well that we need investment, that we need to restructure and that is what the government is prepared to do. His government did not have either the leadership or the guts to do that when it needed to be done in the first place.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although they claim to be the law and order government, the Conservatives are encouraging gun owners to violate the Criminal Code and for four years have been renewing the amnesty for those who refuse to register their guns. According to police, the registry is a valuable tool in the fight against crime.

How can the government claim to enforce law and order, when it favours the free circulation of firearms and civil disobedience?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while we support the licensing and registration of prohibited weapons, we do not support the wasteful long gun registry. It is time to end the criminalization of lawful hunters and outdoor enthusiasts once and for all.

Police Chief Hanson from Calgary has called the long gun registry a placebo and says that it creates a false sense of security.

We hope that those MPs who have voted to retain the long gun registry will change their minds rather than following the latest order of the Liberal leader.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers unanimously support gun control. Along with the CLC and the Dawson College Gun Control Committee, who are here on Parliament Hill today, the National Assembly of Quebec, police forces, women's groups, advocacy groups for victims of crime, legal experts and public health experts all want the gun registry to be maintained as it is.

When will the government realize that its ideological obstinacy is jeopardizing the safety of Quebecers?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us hear what a chief of police said. Police Chief Hanson, speaking about the long gun registry, said, "I do not think it has worked all that well". He stated, "The gun registry sure as heck did not help because those were all illegal weapons in the hands of criminals who have no intention of following the rules".

Why does the member want to criminalize lawful hunting and outdoor enthusiasts? Why not focus on the actual criminals? Why would that party not support our initiatives against pedophiles and stronger sentences for pedophiles?

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government's attitude regarding the bilingualism of judges is very telling. They are prepared to accommodate a facade of bilingualism, but when it comes to using French where it counts, such as in our highest court, all of Canada has to be persuaded and too bad if francophones like Michel Doucet have to argue their cases before unilingual judges who are at the mercy of the limitations of translation.

Why does the government refuse to recognize the right to be heard and to express oneself in French?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite surprised by the Bloc's attack now on the Supreme Court of Canada. That institution has worked very well over the years and has been very respectful of both linguistic dualities within Canada. The government, in terms of the people we appoint, is guided by the principles

of merit and legal excellence. I am not quite sure why that should be such a big problem with the Bloc.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' argument that a bilingualism requirement could impede the careers of unilingual francophone judges simply does not hold water. Since its inception, the Supreme Court has not seen very many unilingual francophone judges.

The government is being totally ridiculous by claiming that competence must take precedence over bilingualism. Is the government trying to say that it would be impossible to find six judges who are both bilingual and competent outside of Quebec?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in one sense the member recognizes the importance of the Supreme Court of Canada, but again I am disappointed on the attack on the judiciary. Usually the Bloc members are attacking our attempts to get tough on crime in this country. Who is next on their list? Will it be the police tomorrow? Is the Bloc going to be attacking them?

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conflict of Interest Act prohibits a public office holder from using their position to promote the interests of a friend. We know that at least seven Conservative ministers gave their friend Rahim Jaffer privileged access. They bent over backwards to put Rahim's projects on a fast-track to government subsidies.

Will the minister admit that he and his colleagues violated the Conflict of Interest Act?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say two things. One is that Mr. Jaffer received no government funds as a result of any meetings or any mail that was sent in to the government. I say to the member opposite, who is the justice critic of the Liberal Party and would present himself as a future justice minister, if he has any evidence as a lawyer to suggest that anyone has violated the important Federal Accountability Act, the tough ethics legislation passed by this government, he should forward it on to the appropriate authorities and follow the example of the high ethical standards of the Prime Minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are quick to pay lip service to accountability except when their own get caught violating the rules.

Oral Questions

Chapter 9 of the Statutes of Canada, 2006 is very clear. It is illegal to give preferential treatment to friends regardless of whether government money actually changes hands. Given that compliance with this act is a precondition to appointment, will the minister perhaps explain what consequences will face those who violate the federal conflict of interest act?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the Liberal Party would have us get rid of an independent Commissioner of Lobbying, an independent Ethics Commissioner to make these adjudications. We will just send everything to the member for Beauséjour.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in all regions of Quebec, the local decision-makers, like Mayor Meilleur in Mirabel, are telling us how important the regional development agencies are. That is as true in Quebec as it is in the Maritimes.

But according to the Prime Minister, these agencies provide social assistance. So, when the time comes to slash the budget in order to pay down their deficit, the Conservatives are taking it out on regional agencies.

When their own incompetence catches up to them, they send the bill to the regions. When will the Prime Minister understand the needs of the regions?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, like several other departments and agencies, our agency is currently undergoing a strategic review of its programs. So it is normal that we are looking at the sound management of Canadians' money. We have committed to paying down the deficit, and must ensure that government programs are efficient and effective, and that they produce the desired results for Canadians.

Last week, I had the pleasure of announcing a \$100 million program to support communities. We are doing our job.

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has always spoken of dismantling the regional economic development agencies. With yesterday's selective spending announcement, he is making his vendetta a reality. In two years from now, the western economic diversification budget will be half of what it was under the Liberal government.

Why is the government willing to let western economic diversification die?

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question and his renewed interest in the west. It has been over 11 months since he has asked about the west.

In that 11 months we have invested in over 718 RInC projects and 241 CAP projects. Over 7,700 jobs have been created in the west through our economic action plan.

While the member gets up to speed, we are delivering results for the west.

* * *

• (1445)

JUSTICE

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that the justice system should put the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens ahead of the rights of criminals.

Yesterday we introduced legislation to establish mandatory jail time for fraud over \$1 million to ensure that the voices of victims are heard when white collar criminals are sentenced.

Can the Minister of Justice please update the House on our Conservative government's efforts to listen and respond to the cries of victims and their families?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to thank the member for his question and for his leadership as chair of the justice committee. It is very much appreciated by the House.

I am proud to say that yesterday this government tabled legislation that will crack down on white collar crime. Just a few minutes ago we introduced a bill in the Senate that takes direct aim at auto theft.

This is part of our continuing efforts to strengthen the criminal justice system. We are getting the job done for victims and law-abiding Canadians.

* * *

FILM INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while U.S. corporate raider Carl Icahn is gunning for Lions Gate Entertainment, he is counting on the Minister of Canadian Heritage to help him.

Lions Gate is the jewel of Canada's film and distribution industry. There is speculation that Icahn is out to dump the library assets, ditch the film distribution and slash film production in Vancouver.

Could the minister tell the House what steps he will take to address this hostile takeover bid by a U.S. corporate raider?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course this takeover the member is describing is still in the hypothetical stage. Nothing has been decided. It is a private business transaction.

If the moment comes when there is actually some decision to be made on this issue, of course our government will take responsible action and stand up for what is in the best interests of all Canadians.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hypothetically, if the minister is a fiction fan he should watch the movie *Wall Street* because the character Gordon Gekko is based on the buccaneer, Carl Icahn. This guy cuts through companies with a chain saw.

The government blew it with Falconbridge and blew it with Inco. Before the government blows it by selling off Canada's film industry, will the minister commit to public hearings to address the implications of the hostile takeover bid that is now under way by Carl Icahn?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no deal before us. This is an entirely hypothetical situation that the hon. member has described.

But I can tell the House what is not a hypothetical situation. It is the upcoming vote on the long gun registry. That member campaigned three times to say that he would scrap the long gun registry. We will see whether or not he flip-flops or whether he will stand up for his constituents on the long gun registry.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's bill to crack down on white-collar crime is not good enough. This bill would not have changed anything for Vincent Lacroix or Earl Jones. The Bloc Québécois introduced a bill that would abolish parole after one-sixth of the sentence has been served.

Since all parties agree on the principle, will the Conservative government allow our bill to pass in the House of Commons today, to prevent white-collar criminals from being released after serving one-sixth of their sentence?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to introduce legislation that cracks down on white collar crime. Among other things, we are putting a mandatory two year sentence on white collar crime involving \$1 million or more. We are making it user friendly for victims. We are allowing a judge to give a prohibition order to stop an individual once he or she is released from jail from ever dealing with anybody's money again.

This should have the support of the Bloc for a change.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelega, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Autorité des marchés financiers has a contingency fund for compensating victims of economic crimes. According to the Expert Panel on Securities Regulation, "the process of financial redress established by the AMF in Quebec is a best practice in Canada".

Why does the government want to undermine victims of white-collar crimes by scrapping the exemplary work of the AMF through

its expensive and unnecessary plan for a securities commission in Toronto?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let it be noted that in Quebec, as the member opposite knows, there was a fairly notorious scandal involving Earl Jones. Many Quebecers suffered financially from that. What was the position taken by the Earl Jones victims committee? The position was this: "We support the idea of a single national regulatory body overseeing financial organizations".

* * *

• (1450)

OMAR KHADR

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in July, the case against Omar Khadr is scheduled to proceed before a U.S. military commission process that has been condemned both in the U.S. and internationally for its violations of the rule of law. Last January, the Supreme Court found that Mr. Khadr's charter rights had been violated by Canada, that the breach of those rights remains ongoing and characterized repatriation as a possible remedy.

Will the government finally respect the rule of law as it applies to Canadian citizens and request Mr. Khadr's repatriation, or will it continue to ignore the Supreme Court of this country?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position on this matter has not changed. Mr. Omar Khadr faces very serious charges, including that of murder and attempted murder. The Government of Canada continues to provide consular services to Mr. Khadr.

In answer to the member's question about the Supreme Court's decision, the Government of Canada has complied with the Supreme Court's February 16, 2010 ruling.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, things have quite changed since that time. The hon. member has given us his refrain.

The Supreme Court of Canada recently affirmed Parliament's calls for the repatriation of Mr. Khadr. In June 2008, the member will know that the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate called upon the government to request this repatriation. In March 2009, this House made a similar recommendation.

If the government insists on ignoring the Supreme Court of Canada, will it at least listen to Parliament, remedy this fundamental violation of a Canadian citizen's rights and request his repatriation immediately?

Oral Questions

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, our position regarding Mr. Khadr has not changed. Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges, including that of murder. The Government of Canada continues to provide consular services to Mr. Khadr. Again, the Government of Canada has complied with the Supreme Court's February 16, 2010 ruling.

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POVERTY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the number of Canadians living in poverty increased by 900,000. EI covers only half of the jobless. Welfare cases are up more than 20% in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. and food bank use is skyrocketing. After the last recession, it took eight years for the job rate to bounce back. It took 14 years for the poverty rate to recover.

Are these sad statistics going to be the government's legacy, or will it now start to address the growing impoverishment of our citizens?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were well prepared for the recession that came from outside Canada into Canada. We had paid down almost \$40 billion in public debt. The most important thing is to protect jobs. We are still concerned with this tentative recovery that the unemployment rate remains above 8%.

However, let us remember how well Canada is doing. We have the best fiscal situation in the G7. We have the highest credit rating, the soundest financial system and the strongest growth in the G7 this year and next. Canada is poised to outperform all of its competitors.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, poverty in Canada is real and it has real consequences. Canadians in poor neighbourhoods have a death rate that is almost 30% higher than the rate in rich neighbourhoods. Poverty is making Canadians sick, but our government is doing nothing about it.

The Canada Health Act guarantees universal access to health care, but that does not exist in Canada for poor people. We need action. We need a national pharmacare program and we need to improve our EI and welfare systems. When will the health of Canadians become a priority for the government?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with the provinces and territories and we take this matter very seriously. That is why we have increased transfers to the provinces each year, by 6% again this year. This is the largest amount of health transfers in the history of Canada.

We will continue to work with the provinces and territories, which deliver health care in those jurisdictions, to address the matter.

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CANADIAN NAVY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago today the naval service bill received royal assent, establishing the Royal Canadian Navy. Canadians are proud of the long service of

our navy in keeping Canada and Canadians safe and helping to protect and keep the world secure through the international missions in which we have been a participant.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell the House what is being done to commemorate this special anniversary for our navy?

● (1455)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past 100 storied years our sailors have served in war and peace, on the seven seas and around the world. From the navy's creation in 1910 until today, it remains ready, aye, ready.

Canadians are celebrating this centennial in many ways. Our government is reinstating the executive curl on the naval officer's uniform and instituting a new sea service badge. Today, a centennial bell made from the senior services naval artifacts of the last 100 storied years rang out eight times in the other place. A centennial stamp was launched yesterday and a special coin and book will be released, celebrating the navy's special service and accomplishments.

I encourage all members and all Canadians to participate in the many public celebrations of our navy's proud history.

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[Translation]

LOBBYING

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were promised transparency and we got cronyism. The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse allegedly used his riding office to promote the commercial interests of a donor and neighbour. The hon. member was caught red-handed. The Conservatives are increasingly working for lobbyists and donors. They have deserted Quebeckers.

Do Quebeckers have to hire lobbyists or make donations to the Conservative Party in order to be heard by this government?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has always acted in the best interest of Canadians. That has always been the case and that will continue to be the case.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to Canada's chief negotiator, negotiations toward a comprehensive economic and trade agreement with Europe are progressing quickly and talks have reached the halfway point of a schedule that ends in 2011. Yet no information on the content of the agreement has been made public.

Does the Minister of International Trade not agree that it is time to make public the preliminary documents and the negotiating mandate of what he himself considers the most ambitious trade agreement ever considered?

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a time of economic uncertainty and this government is working to open new doors for Canadian business.

The economic agreement that we are hopefully signing with the European Union has the potential to increase trade between Canada and Europe by \$12 billion and to provide jobs and opportunities not just for Canadians and not just for Europeans, but to set a standard for the rest of the world to follow.

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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's talk about leadership on maternal health issues has to date been completely hollow and regressive. First, it took a divisive and ideological stance on abortion, putting Canada out of sync with its G8 partners. Now we learn the government has failed to respond to an invitation to the Women Deliver conference on maternal health in June, just weeks before the G8 summit.

Will the government actually put Canada in a leadership role on maternal health and attend this conference, or is this just more Conservative ideology on abortion?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can report that I will be attending the conference.

Canada has a leadership role in saving the lives of mothers and children. In fact, today unfortunately 340,000 mothers will die. We know what we can do. We can prevent those deaths. We have the experts telling us. We have cost effective, known remedies to prevent deaths. That is what Canada is doing in a leadership role.

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[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were pleased to learn this morning that thousands of forestry workers have been able to return to work in recent days.

The forestry workers were abandoned by the Bloc members. Can the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec explain why these forestry workers were able to return to work?

● (1500)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is very satisfied with this news. We are also pleased to learn from Renaud Gagné, the Quebec vice president of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, that work is resuming. We concur with the reasons he has given. People are again starting to purchase forestry products at a good price.

From the beginning, the crisis has been about the market, not loan guarantees, and this proves it. 1,500 workers have returned to work in recent days, including 1,000 in my riding in Lac-Saint-Jean. This government is acting in a clear and prompt manner, unlike the Bloc, which excels in the art of politicizing issues when the time comes to react and take action.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I raised the issue about support for the brave men and women who offer themselves as volunteer firefighters in rural communities across our country, specifically about a refundable tax credit. What I received from the Minister of Public Safety was pretty much an infomercial, self-serving at best.

Will the Minister of Finance commit to this tax deduction? If the Minister of Public Safety stands, I guess the firefighters will take that as a no.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just last week I met and listened to the concerns of firefighters representing my home province of Manitoba.

This being Emergency Preparedness Week, we recognize the valuable role that first responders such as firefighters play to ensuring the safety of our communities.

Our Conservative government remains committed to working with provincial and municipal governments that are responsible for first responders. The joint emergency preparedness program and disaster financial assistance arrangements are two such programs.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Bogdan Borusewicz, Speaker of the Senate of the Republic of Poland.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: To commemorate the Centennial of the Canadian Navy, I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden, Chief of Canadian Maritime Staff and Commander of the Canadian Navy.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Business of Supply

● (1505)

ALLERGY AWARENESS MONTH

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties, and if you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That in the opinion of the House, the month of May be recognized as food allergy awareness month.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke 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)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—LOBBYING ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: When the motion was last before the House, the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's had the floor. There are four minutes remaining in the time allotted for her remarks.

The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said when I was addressing the House, it is troublesome that the government will stand today and boast about its record on accountability and transparency. One only has to look at the newspapers of the past couple of months to see that it has been taking advantage of this loophole to get around the rules outlined in the Lobbying Act. That loophole is that the parliamentary secretaries are not included in the act. It is simply unacceptable that the government is tolerating, even touting, a system that enables those people who know the right people to bypass the requirements of federal legislation.

Canadians are rightfully outraged by the recent media reports, which indicate that former Conservative MP Rahim Jaffer had access to the Conservative government above and beyond that which would have been granted to someone who did not have connections to the Conservative Party. Former MP Jaffer was once the chair of the Conservative caucus.

Time and time again, particularly with the distribution of stimulus funding, we have seen that the government has no problem favouring its own ridings. The Conservative government has consistently demonstrated its preference for using the back door on legislative issues. We should not be surprised that it would use

that same back door to bypass the Federal Accountability Act and enable lobbyists to meet with parliamentary secretaries outside of the light of public scrutiny. This should not be tolerated and the government should move on this, as is suggested in the motion by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

No wonder Canadians are apathetic to politics when they see the government in action. We have a situation where there are two sets of rules, one being who someone knows determining the rule book he or she follows. The transport minister put his parliamentary secretary in charge of the lucrative \$1 billion green infrastructure fund. That is a tremendous responsibility for a parliamentary secretary. Just imagine the clout this carried when someone who knew him or who knew a parliamentary secretary made advances to him about accessing that fund.

Due to the loophole in the Lobbying Act, lobbyists who had the appropriate connections, including unregistered lobbyist, Rahim Jaffer, can meet with the parliamentary secretary regarding the fund without having to publicly disclose it. This is simply not right and it has to be fixed.

This is the Conservative government's own Federal Accountability Act. The government would have Canadians believe that this legislation is a looking glass that enables them to see everything there is to know about the workings of government.

If the government were sincere about its commitment to transparency, if it were truly accountable to the people of Canada, as it claims to be because that is the platform on which it was elected, it would support the Liberal motion before us today and close the loophole by including parliamentary secretaries in the definition of designated public office holder under the act.

The solution exists, but does the will? Does the will exist in the government to in fact close that loophole, to make right what is wrong today, to ensure that we never again have this situation Canadians face today. They really do not know whether the government is being accountable and transparent?

It would appear from this loophole that it is not. The government is on record as being transparent and accountable to the Canadian taxpayers. When we have a situation, such as we have seen and that has been reported on in the media, clearly the will must exist to change it.

We call on the Conservative government to make the amendments.

● (1510)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member would inform the House if she would be willing to amend the law in order to make it a requirement that any lobbyist that contacts her about an issue would have to register that contact.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the member opposite does not realize that he is part of the government and this is, in fact, the government's opportunity to change this loophole that exists. The government has the responsibility to act and if it wants to include anyone, it can. What we are asking today, which would be a step in the right direction, is to include parliamentary secretaries.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the Conservatives are not taking this motion seriously. They are trying to create all kinds of diversions and smokescreens all day. They have been wanting to talk about the gun registry. They want to amend the Liberal motion when it is very simple. If they are concerned about including MPs in the definition of people who have to be registered under this legislation, then it is incumbent upon them to introduce the legislation. I ask the government, where is it? Introduce it and we will deal with it at that time.

Rahim Jaffer was an unregistered lobbyist. In spite of all the rules that were set up, he was an unregistered lobbyist. He was running amok in the government. We do not know if he is the only person in that category, so I would like to ask the member, does she think that Rahim Jaffer is the only unregistered lobbyist running amok in the Conservative government trying to obtain contracts for himself and his friends?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, we have all heard of the saying, “where there's smoke there's fire”. I would think that if Rahim Jaffer had access to ministers and access to parliamentary secretaries, why would others not have access to the same ministers and parliamentary secretaries?

The onus is on the government to acknowledge what has gone on here, to come clean with Canadians, and to respond to the motion in a way that will show that it is clearly determined to close this loophole and ensure that parliamentary secretaries are included under the Lobbying Act.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was on the legislative committee for Bill C-2 studying the Federal Accountability Act along with the member for Nepean—Carleton and others. I really do think that we overlooked the idea of parliamentary secretaries because I have now reviewed transcripts and the material, and it does not seem that we discussed it. We did discuss a hierarchy of government office holders, public office holders, which really means government officials with anything to do with files that the government is working on.

Every Friday parliamentary secretaries answer questions. The Conservatives started putting parliamentary secretaries back on committees. We forget that, but parliamentary secretaries, and I do not want any more swelled heads over there, are really more important in the government than they had been in the past, so why should they not be included in this if they have a circle of influence with the government?

To deny this motion is to admit to all the parliamentary secretaries that, including the member for Nepean—Carleton, whose head quite clearly is as large as this chamber, they are of no importance. I might agree with that, but I agree with the amendment too.

• (1515)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, it is clear to anyone who has followed what has happened with the Conservative government that parliamentary secretaries do indeed have much more authority and they are now turning up on committees. It is foolhardy for us to even think that they do not carry that responsibility.

When people want to lobby, when people are insisting on lobbying, and they have not registered as lobbyists, the onus is on

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the parliamentary secretary to ask the question, “Have you in fact registered before you come to me to talk about any kind of project, or expenditure, or access to government money?”

The Speaker: Order. That will conclude the time for questions and comments.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following public bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-3, An Act to implement conventions and protocols concluded between Canada and Colombia, Greece and Turkey for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—LOBBYING ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I join with my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl to close what seems to be a serious loophole in the Federal Accountability Act. Over the past four years, we have seen that the Conservatives are great at talking but are completely ineffective when it comes to implementing real solutions.

Whether it is on the issue of transparency—where we have the example of departments constantly refusing to agree to access to information requests—or their fiscal abilities—the fact that, for six months, they denied that a recession was imminent and the evidence that it posed a threat to the Canadian economy—or their shameless partisanship in infrastructure funding and advertising contracts to announce a government plan, and we are not talking about a partisan plan, but a government plan that did not need to be announced, this government continues to prove to Canadians that its definition of accountability is completely void of meaning. It has proven, once again, that it is easy enough to talk, but it is much harder to handle the responsibility and transparency that comes with being the government.

The government took advantage of this loophole in the Lobbyist Registration Act as a way around the rules in the act. This is proof that they, most likely, knowingly left this gaping loophole so that parliamentary secretaries could continue this pattern with lobbyists.

At the moment, parliamentary secretaries to ministers are not considered public office holders under the act. This loophole means that lobbyists can meet with parliamentary secretaries, and as we all know, parliamentary secretaries are, to an extent, the ministers' eyes and ears. The fact that these unregistered lobbyists have access to parliamentary secretaries means that nobody knows what goes on in those meetings and there is no paper trail.

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That is why we are asking the government to close the loophole, to fix the problem by including parliamentary secretaries in the act's definition of designated public office holder. We hope that this will prevent future secret meetings between lobbyists and Conservatives.

The recent scandal involving Mr. Jaffer and the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is proof positive that we have to close this loophole right away. If he had followed the rules and registered as a lobbyist, Mr. Jaffer would have been required to report his meeting with the minister. Moreover, if parliamentary secretaries were included in the definition, Mr. Jaffer would have been required to disclose the fact that he met with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Everyone agrees that what we are talking about here is a billion-dollar green infrastructure fund.

This situation shows that ministers delegate certain powers, but not the responsibilities that go with those powers. We absolutely have to ensure that when powers are delegated, the responsibility and accountability requirements that go along with those powers are too.

The Conservatives only started making promises about accountability after they got caught in the act. However, it seems clear that if they cared about responsibility and accountability at all, they would have kept their 2006 election promise to make ministers responsible for reporting their meetings with lobbyists. Why has it taken four years?

The Conservatives promised that ministers and senior public office holders would be required to report all contact with lobbyists. Today we are asking the government to finally honour that promise, which should also apply to parliamentary secretaries. This rule should cover all parliamentary secretaries so that the Conservatives can no longer use them to avoid accountability, as they do now.

In fact, whether or not grants were given in the case that triggered this whole controversy has very little to do with the essence of the legal loophole we are addressing today.

• (1520)

The letter of the law is absolutely meaningless if its spirit is not respected. Ministerial accountability does not apply only when public funds are being granted. It is crucial in any situation that could eventually lead to that outcome.

On one hand, we have Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud who claim that they did not register as lobbyists because they were only putting out feelers. On the other hand, ministers have said they did not need to report anything because no funds were granted.

In reality, that has nothing to do with the core of the issue. It is the approach and the attempts that are of concern here. We must not allow lobbyists to approach any government entities, whether ministers or parliamentary secretaries, unless they are duly registered and the outcome of those meetings can be made public in a completely transparent manner.

This is what we are addressing and what we are trying to fix with this motion. I hope all of my colleagues in the House will agree to co-operate with us and plug this loophole once and for all.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs,

CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. Could she inform the House whether she herself would be willing to amend the law in order to require lobbyists to register contacts and interactions they had with her?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, even in French, my answer will be the same as my colleague's. The government has the opportunity to introduce these kinds of bills. If it wants to do so, it should introduce one in the House and we will take a look.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats have done a lot of work on the issue of lobbying for many years through the work of Ed Broadbent, but one of the things that concerns us about what the Tory government is doing is the shifting of some of the decision-making down to the parliamentary secretaries.

A parliamentary secretary could be given a billion-dollar fund without the public being told. The parliamentary secretary may meet with some of his or her buddies, say ex-Conservative MPs, and walk away with all kinds of deals because it is not under the Lobbying Act.

We have to ask ourselves, was it some kind of accident that Mr. Jaffer had access to the parliamentary secretary and was working under the radar while talking to many of his colleagues? Does the hon. member think that this was part of a larger plan? Were the Conservatives really trying to find a way to get around the Lobbying Act by allowing their buddies to hook up and meet with people without having to report it?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I do think that this loophole was left on purpose in the act, so that other friends and sympathizers could approach well placed government officials, in this case cabinet members, to do their lobbying without necessarily being registered. I agree that it was probably an intentional loophole.

• (1525)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the hon. member would be prepared to accept amendments to the law that would force lobbyists to register their contact with her.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I said it earlier in French and I will repeat it in English. The government is free to bring forth any bill it wants to address that question.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Conservatives have been challenged of late with accountability and transparency. We can look to access to information and the recent comments of the Information Commissioner. We can look to the recent comments of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

However, I have a question for my hon. colleague, who gave an outstanding speech. Why are the Conservatives so concerned about implementing a 2006 promise they made to Canadians in their platform? I will read from their platform, which said:

Require ministers and senior government officials to record their contacts with lobbyists.

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All day long we have heard resistance from our Conservative colleagues on this matter. Why does my hon. colleague think that is?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I am as baffled as my colleague is about this lack of will to implement this electoral promise and the Conservatives' total refusal of accountability in this instance.

Parliamentary secretaries are part of the governmental institutions and should be included in this act. I totally agree with her. There is no reason why they should not be part of the accountability act.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives were serious about this issue, surely they would bring in their own amendments to this act, not engage this House in smokescreens, wanting to talk about the gun registry and trying to draw people's attention away from the issue at hand. I think they are looking for diversions. Would the member agree with that assessment?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with my colleague on the fact that the Conservatives seem to want to divert the whole focus of this motion. This motion would cover a loophole in the act. It is nothing more than something that respects an electoral promise made by the Conservatives. I do not think we are asking for too much. We are asking that this loophole be covered by the new act.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the occasion to address the House and to thank my friends in the opposition for bringing forward a motion that I believe leads us to a fruitful discussion.

Of course, the government of the day introduced the Federal Accountability Act, the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. That was the first bill that we brought forward after the 2006 election. We needed to reassure Canadians that the government was run in an ethical and transparent way and that the people elected to represent Canadians' interests were living up to that responsibility.

The level of trust that Canadians have in their government is closely linked to the perception of equal access to decision-makers. That trust between citizens and their elected representatives is absolutely crucial to a healthy democracy, and all those scandals that had preceded our government during the era of the previous Liberal regime had severely damaged that trust. That is why the government introduced the Federal Accountability Act and raised the bar and the standard of accountability.

Naturally, when we were drafting the act, we looked closely at the systems that were in place. We noted the complete and utter lack of any kind of independent watchdog with the power to investigate lobbying abuses. We were very concerned that even the changes the Liberals begrudgingly agreed to did not go nearly far enough. The Liberals thought it was appropriate to house the Registrar of Lobbyists under the industry ministry. We disagreed. We believed in having an independent watchdog who would be accountable to Parliament, a commissioner, and that is what we introduced with the new Lobbying Act.

The Lobbying Commissioner now reports to parliamentary committees and carries out independent investigations. He does not serve at the pleasure of the government but rather at that of the

House of Commons. We gave that office the mandate it needed to investigate breeches in the act and in the code of conduct.

Under the previous government, there was extremely low compliance with registration requirements. The Federal Accountability Act changed all of that. We have accomplished our goal of bringing lobbying into the daylight.

During debate on the act, the former president of the Treasury Board pointed out that people should not get rich bouncing between government and lobbying jobs. He stated, "Lobbyists should not be allowed to charge success fees, whereby they get paid only if they deliver the policy change or the grant their clients want".

Those two principles guided our government's thinking in making two major changes to our lobbying regime. They are what led us to take the tough step to ban key government decision-makers from lobbying for a period of five years after their positions expire. It is also what led us to ban contingency fees. These two measures have gone a long way to maintain and build upon the trust that Canadians have in their government.

When we introduced the five year ban on lobbying by key decision-makers, some said that it was too tough, but when we take a closer look at those to whom it applies, we realize that our response was measured and responsible. After all, we are talking about people who, by virtue of the position they hold and the duties they perform, exercise a lot of power and influence. We are talking about people who are involved in some of the biggest decisions affecting the well-being of our country. These are people who, through their daily decisions and contacts, have a significant impact on the lives of Canadians and a direct impact on policy and decision-making of the government. Therefore, the people who occupy these kinds of positions need to operate by the highest ethical standards.

I am talking, of course, not only of elected officials on the government side, but of Parliament as well. The Lobbying Act currently applies to ministers, ministers of state and their exempt staff. We brought forward a five year ban on activities that also applies to senior officials, such as deputy ministers and chief executives of departments, agencies, among others.

The opposition members have made the argument over the last several days that Parliament is supreme, that Parliament has all the power and, taking them at their argument, presumably parliamentarians are the ones with all the power. Following further on that logic, if we want the Lobbying Act to provide accountability to those who have the power, then presumably the act would apply to parliamentarians who, according to the opposition's logic, have the power in our system.

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•(1530)

On numerous occasions today, my colleagues and I have asked members of the Liberal caucus, who together moved today's motion on the Lobbying Act, whether they would be prepared to subject themselves to the same scrutiny that they wish to put forward onto parliamentary secretaries on the government's side. Up until this moment, we have not had a single, solitary Liberal MP willing to subject himself or herself to that scrutiny.

Canadians do not want parliamentarians of any party, on the government side or opposition side, to engage in double standards or to hold others to standards that they themselves are not prepared to meet. That is why I am looking forward to some members of the Liberal caucus rising here in the House of Commons to consent that they would support the kind of scrutiny on their own activities that they are proposing to thrust upon parliamentary secretaries on the government side.

Therefore, I am putting forward for discussion today the idea that our members of Parliament, senators and the staff in the opposition leader's office should be subject to the same kind of lobbying rules that currently exist for ministers and ministers of state. That would, of course, capture parliamentary secretaries, all of whom are, by necessity, also members of Parliament, and it would put everybody on the same level playing field.

If members of the Liberal caucus believe their conduct is of the highest standard and capable of withstanding the most intense scrutiny, there should be absolutely no objection to that kind of decision. Therefore, I invite members of the opposition to join with me in working together, in the interests of Canadians, to raise the standard by which all members of Parliament conduct themselves in their relations with lobbyists by declaring their support for an extension of the act to apply to all parliamentarians, themselves included.

With that, I will close on the note that Canadians sent us here to raise the level of accountability. I am prepared to work with members of good faith from all parties, and I believe there are members of good faith in all of the parties, to help lift that bar and improve the system that we have put in place together. There is no reason that we cannot, in that same spirit of Canadian co-operation, come together now to restore faith, build upon the faith that Canadians have in our system, eliminate all double standards and treat all parliamentarians equally, at the highest level of accountability and with the best standards in the world.

•(1535)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to, in return, ask the member whether he would simply introduce the required amendments and bring them to this House in the normal pattern. He is a representative of the government. The Conservatives are the government and they should be coming to grips with this crisis that they are in right now where they have unregistered lobbyists, known to them for many years, running amok and looking for contracts. One would think that they would want to take this issue seriously and come to grips with their problems, admit that they have a problem over there and introduce the amendments that he is talking about.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of my question for members of all opposition parties was to ascertain whether or not we as the government would have support to extend the same high standards to which ministers are held to all members of Parliament. So far I have not heard a single, solitary member of the opposition declare his or her willingness to live up to those standards.

They are pointing out that they want parliamentary secretaries, all of whom are on the government side in the Conservative caucus, to live up to a certain standard, but none of the opposition MPs are prepared to declare themselves willing to live up to those same standards.

I would encourage the member, in his supplementary question, to rise and affirm his commitment to support that kind of legislative change.

As to whether or not the government will introduce an amendment to make that happen, he will have to stay tuned and I hope that, if and when we do, we will have his support.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, the member has got one.

Here is the situation. The question is, if it is so imperative for the parliamentary secretary right now, why was it not back then? *Mea culpa*, maybe they did not think about it.

I am just trying to raise the bar in a conversation about how we can do it. He talked about the functions of governance and how the Conservatives originally set out what they wanted to do in 2006 in the campaign. He mentioned the ministers, their exempt staff, the deputy ministers. Certainly even in his role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, he must realize the information that he holds and the responsibility that he wields to be involved in this.

The member also talked about past circumstances and past scandals that sullied the reputation of politicians. Does the current scandal not do much of the same?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member's opening "yes" was a reference to my question, would he be willing to subject himself to the same scrutiny that he would like to impose upon others. I am hoping that when he said "yes", he was answering my question. I do not know for sure if that is the case.

However, I will be sharing my time with the member for Peace River and I would conclude my answer to the member by saying I wish that he would work with us in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration to raise the bar, so that all members, himself included, myself included, would be subjected to the highest possible standards.

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• (1540)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate on the opposition motion today. We have to assume that the opposition has brought forth the proposal to extend the lobbying requirements to parliamentary secretaries in good faith. Yet, when we asked the members to level the playing field and be fair by including themselves, it seems that they refused to do that. I believe that not one of them so far has said that he or she would agree to impose on himself or herself exactly the same requirements and standards the Liberals are trying to impose on members of the government side. They refused to do it.

Why does the member think that is? I would like to get an idea as to why he thinks they refuse to do that. It seems like a double standard.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I guess members could call me an optimist. My belief is that at the end of the day we can all work together to improve the system and raise the bar.

When the member said that they are not willing on the other side, I believe that Canadians will pressure them to live up to the standards that they are calling for others.

Martin Luther King said, "I don't judge a man by my principle but by his own". I ask the members to judge themselves by their own principles and support imposing all of the same rules on themselves that they call for others.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. It is an opportunity for all of us to get up on an issue that is important to all of us, the issue of accountability.

Our government has certainly demonstrated over the last number of years its commitment to openness, transparency and accountability. The ethical atom bomb known as the sponsorship scandal caused many Canadians to lose their trust in elected officials.

People will recall that I was elected and the Conservative government was elected on our commitment to change the way that things are done here in Ottawa. There is no doubt that we have delivered. We put accountability and ethical behaviour squarely at the centre of our contract with Canadians and squarely at the centre of our governing agenda.

I can assure the House that our commitment to accountability has not diminished. Accountability is the only thing that will earn the public trust in government; ensuring it is a full-time job and the basis for everything that we do.

The Federal Accountability Act was the first step. This was the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history. Our commitment to ensuring accountability did not stop, though, with the passage of that act in 2006. It continues to be at the forefront of our engagement with Canadians. It pervades every action of this government.

One of the first things we did was to bring forward that act to reduce the influence of big business and big labour's donations in elections. As a result, a law banning contributions to political parties by corporations, unions and organizations and lowering the limit on individuals' political contributions came into force in 2007.

We do not believe that money should drive the political system or that untraceable envelopes of cash passed between Liberal operatives have any place in any government.

When we drafted the legislation, we wanted to ensure that our public servants could report wrongdoing without worrying about reprisals. We put into place a whistleblower protection act to ensure that these brave individuals would be protected.

As a result, Canada has one of the strongest, if not the strongest, whistleblower protection regimes in the western hemisphere. Canadians have a right to expect from their public officials, elected and non-elected, that they act ethically and are accountable for their actions. In almost 100% of the cases, they are accountable and they conduct themselves in this way.

These measures have sent a loud and clear signal that the people who are entrusted with taxpayers' money have a duty and responsibility to look after taxpayers' money. Those who abuse the trust and commit fraud are subject to prosecution and tough penalties.

We have also lowered the annual limit for political contributions from \$5,000 to \$1,000. We cut the influence of big businesses and big labour on the political process.

Canadians wanted a more open and transparent government and the government delivered. We put into place measures to provide Canadians with broader and better access to more information from public organizations than they had ever had before. For example, we extended the Access to Information Act to over 70 crown corporations. Over 250 organizations are now subject to the Access to Information Act.

To help restore public trust in government, we introduced measures to strengthen ethical conduct among lobbyists as well. One of the key aspects of the stipulation that lobbyists now have to undertake is the requirement that they file monthly reports for lobbying activities that they initiate with ministers, their staff and senior officials. As a result, lobbying is more transparent and open than it has ever been before.

Today, anyone can find out who is lobbying ministers, who is lobbying senior government, and in what context they are lobbying. This information is available on the Internet. Information about lobbying activities such as which lobbyists are communicating with which ministers and senior officials on what topics is available to the public. The government has also drawn a line between appropriate and inappropriate lobbying.

• (1545)

One of the most important changes that we made was to ban people who had been in positions of power from lobbying for at least five years after they leave those positions. We specifically targeted those who would influence the government's choice of policies, programs and services for personal gain.

This act is strict. If any designated public office holder breaches the act, he or she could be subject to stiff sanctions ranging from monetary penalties to jail time. Fines can be as high as \$50,000.

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These measures have given Canadians one of the most robust lobbying regimes in the world. More importantly, they have given Canadians the reassurance that former senior officials, politicians and their staff cannot use their personal connections to obtain special favours from the government once they leave office.

Our reforms have created the Commissioner of Lobbying and ensured that this agent of Parliament has the power needed to be an effective independent watchdog. This is a considerable break from the Liberal system where only a toothless registrar had oversight of these matters.

These are only a few of the measures that have been taken by this government to strengthen accountability in the public service and to ensure that lobbying is conducted openly and transparently.

I am very proud of the reforms that our government has introduced since first coming to power.

I think it is a little bit rich that we hear the Liberal Party presenting this motion today. It is, after all, the same party that brought us the sponsorship scandal that forced us to take the steps that I have outlined today. It is the same party that kicked and screamed at almost every single step of the process when Parliament was considering the Federal Accountability Act.

We on this side of the House believe that Canadians have a right to know who is pressuring their representatives. We cast a wide net in the Federal Accountability Act, but no system is perfect.

Today we have heard the President of the Treasury Board and the government House leader propose that these same lobbying rules be extended to all parliamentarians, to every single member of Parliament and to every senator as well. We also believe that the staff of the opposition leaders' offices should also be subject to these requirements. This only makes sense. After all, these parliamentarians play a key role in shaping public policy and Canadians have the right to know who is meeting with those people.

If the opposition is really serious about accountability to Canadians, they should have absolutely no problem with supporting these measures that were outlined today.

• (1550)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when my hon. colleague from Alberta talks about the Federal Accountability Act and certain scandals of the past, I go to the question that I asked his colleague. What about the current one? Could the member flesh out this idea about what the current scandal about a former MP is doing to the situation and how we can raise the bar?

The member made a passionate argument for extending it to all members of Parliament. My question is, if that was 2006 and this is 2010, why now? Was it ever discussed by him or other members about including everybody?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, it is absolute clear at this point who is and who is not supporting a measure that would include all parliamentarians. It is this side of the House that is proposing that we move further than any other party in this House as it relates to new measures. I believe that every member of Parliament should be accountable for whom they meet with, and to disclose to Canadians

and more importantly to their own constituents with whom they are meeting and by whom they are being pressured.

It is interesting to watch the doors of the opposition lobby, because we see a number of lobbyists go through those doors, former Liberal ministers. Canadians do not know what happens behind those closed doors. I think it is important and incumbent upon those members to disclose to their constituents and to all Canadians who those people are.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member discussed the whistleblower legislation. All of the government's initiatives have been a big improvement over where the government was before. But the question is: how did this whistleblower legislation work with the Rahim Jaffer case? Who blew the whistle on him?

The way he was caught was through the drunken driving and possession of cocaine charges. That is when people started asking more questions. Where was the government during this time? No one asked Jaffer or checked to see whether he was a registered lobbyist. He met with seven ministers and several parliamentary secretaries, but nobody asked any questions. Nobody went on the computer, as he suggested, and checked to see if he was reporting meetings with them. Had they done that, they would have realized that he was not.

Is Rahim Jaffer a one-off—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, the facts are absolutely clear as they relate to the issue that the member presented.

The first point is that neither Mr. Jaffer nor his partners received any government money. The second point is that all the documentation that we are discussing around committee tables has been brought forward by the government in an act of full transparency and full accountability. That is the way that Canadians would expect a transparent government to conduct itself and that certainly has been the demonstration in this case as well.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have chosen to talk about accountability and so-called loopholes here today, so let us find out what the Liberals are doing in this regard. I have here an email which was sent out by the national director of the national Liberal fund of the Liberal Party of Canada asking for donations under \$200, so that they can be "reported to Elections Canada anonymously".

Is this the Liberals' idea of openness and accountability? I would like to ask my hon. colleague, what does he think about this so-called anonymous donation request?

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Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, this highlights the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party. On a day that we are talking about transparency and accountability in this House, we have a letter that is being distributed by the bagmen of the Liberal Party asking for people to hide their donations. We are getting back to a situation where the next thing they are going to be asking for is for the money to be enclosed in brown envelopes. On a day that we are talking about absolute transparency and accountability, it is time that the Liberals joined the rest of Parliament on this expedition toward full transparency.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time this afternoon with my colleague from Mississauga—Streetsville.

I rise today to speak in support of the Liberal motion before us regarding a loophole in the Lobbyists Registration Act that makes it possible to get around the rules in that act. It is a shame that it has come to this. During the 2006 election campaign, the Conservatives were the champions of accountability. Once in power, they quickly pushed accountability legislation through. They were hoping to impress the gallery and set up a smokescreen.

I am referring to the *Stand Up for Canada* campaign platform the Conservatives waved around like a bible. In that platform, we find things that have lost their lustre over the years. I am thinking more specifically about the parliamentary budget officer position. The Conservatives are doing everything they can to prevent Mr. Page from doing his work. This was clear to us when the government took months to provide him with documents he was requesting. They eventually sent the documents not in electronic form, but in hard copy, in paper form, even though an electronic version existed.

Then there are government appointments. Even though the Conservatives criticized partisan appointments, in March they stacked government boards and commissions with 79 partisan appointments before bragging about cutting vacant positions.

Then there are communications and polls. The Conservatives promised to clean up polls and advertising, but a few weeks ago we learned that they have spent almost \$42 million to advertise their economic action plan. That is more than the total advertising bill for all of Canada's breweries combined. The Conservatives spent \$42 million to advertise their economic action plan when many non Conservative regions were still waiting for the so-called windfall that action plan was to provide.

Today I want to talk about their 2006 election promise to tighten up the Lobbying Act. Their plan was to require ministers and senior officials to register any communication they had with lobbyists.

What are the provisions in the current Lobbyist Registration Act? It defines paid activities that are to be considered lobbying. As a general rule, they include communications with public office holders for the purpose of amending legislation, regulations, federal policies or programs, obtaining a financial benefit such as a grant or contribution and, in some cases, for the awarding of a government contract or for arranging a meeting between a public office holder and any another person.

The law requires individuals to register as lobbyists when they expect to be paid for lobbying activities. This means that these individuals must provide certain details about themselves and, where applicable, about their business and the subject they intend to discuss. They must indicate, and I quote: “—the name of any department or other governmental institution in which any public office holder with whom the individual communicates or expects to communicate...is employed or serves”. This information is made public when it is entered into the registry of lobbyists.

One of the new rules designed to increase accountability requires lobbyists to file a monthly return when oral and arranged communication has occurred between the lobbyist and designated public office holder. Oral and arranged communications include telephone calls, meetings as well as any other communication arranged in advance. The information is subsequently made public when placed in the registry of lobbyists.

This type of report is not required for meetings with parliamentary secretaries. By excluding the latter from the definition of designated public office holders, the Conservatives have created, in the Lobbying Act, a loophole that they are currently exploiting. The Conservatives drafted this legislation. They know it like the back of their hand and they deliberately created a way to circumvent it.

• (1600)

We must close this loophole to ensure that parliamentary secretaries are required to register meetings they have with lobbyists.

The Conservatives are not keeping their promises. We have asked the Prime Minister to explain in detail the consequences for Conservative ministers and other public office holders who violate the Conflict of Interest Act and the government's own departmental guidelines. Our questions are met with silence.

In April, the Prime Minister's communications director assured Canadians that Rahim Jaffer did not have access to the government, but after weeks of obstruction and denials, one by one, Conservative ministers started panicking and giving out limited information on their dealings with Green Power Generation and its owners, Rahim Jaffer and Patrick Glémaud.

We learned that one Conservative minister, and then another Conservative minister—seven Conservative ministers in total—had opened their doors to Mr. Jaffer and his business.

The documents also reveal troubling and repeated violations of the Conflict of Interest Act and the Guide for Ministers and Secretaries of State, which was created by the Prime Minister himself.

The Conflict of Interest Act is clear about the role of public office holders:

—a public office holder is in a conflict of interest when he or she exercises an official power, duty or function that provides an opportunity to further his or her private interests or those of his or her relatives or friends—

It goes on to say:

No public office holder shall use his or her position as a public office holder to seek to influence a decision of another person so as to further the public office holder's private interests or those of the public office holder's relatives or friends—

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It is clear that Mr. Jaffer's friends, the ministers and parliamentary secretaries, or their staff, who personally intervened to fast-track his requests for funding, violated these sections of the act.

An employee in the office of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities wrote on a proposal submitted by GPG, "From Rahim—submit to dept."

When Mr. Jaffer asked for \$700,000 for a mercury capture proposal, the Minister of the Environment's staff forwarded his request to a senior Western Economic Development Canada official, who asked to have someone review the proposal on a priority basis because he needed to get back to Rahim.

According to one email, the current Minister of Natural Resources tried to put Mr. Jaffer in touch with the top official at his former department, the deputy minister of Public Works, about a GPG proposal to install solar panels on government buildings. When the file appeared to stall a month later, the minister's staff ordered bureaucrats to speed up their review.

These infractions are in addition to violations of the Prime Minister's own Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State, which states that:

Ministers and Ministers of State...are responsible for ensuring the *bona fides* of those with whom they have dealings... Public office holders shall act with honesty and uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of the government are conserved and enhanced.

Since the Conservatives continue to place themselves in conflict of interest situations and violate various codes of ethics, members of the current government must be accountable. They have to drop the "do as I say, not as I do" attitude.

Currently, parliamentary secretaries to ministers do not fall within the Lobbyist Registration Act's definition of designated public office holder.

We have to eliminate this loophole to make parliamentary secretaries accountable to the public with respect to their contact with lobbyists.

We urge the government to fix this problem by including parliamentary secretaries in the act's definition of designated public office holder to prevent future secret meetings between lobbyists and Conservative loyalists.

• (1605)

The Conservatives only make promises about accountability when they get caught. If they cared about accountability at all, they would have kept their 2006 election promise to make ministers responsible for reporting their meetings with lobbyists. Why has it taken four years?

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting for Canadians to try to figure out what has happened in the last couple of weeks, and they are confused. They are confused about the rules that were proposed by the government and what has happened.

There is a great deal of confusion around the responsibilities of parliamentary secretaries. I think it is fair to say that parliamentary secretaries have an enhanced role. We see one of the largest cabinets

ever in the history of Canada. Part of that is because of the roles of the parliamentary secretaries.

Does the member believe that the enhancement in the increased numbers of members in the cabinet and therefore the numbers in the parliamentary secretary role require that the rules contemplated by the Conservative Party when in opposition should be strengthened and be in line with the growth in the executive and the influence of the executive to include parliamentary secretaries?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre for his question.

[English]

As I said in my speech, the Conservatives knew very well what they were writing when they wrote the new legislation. They knew exactly what they were doing when they excluded the parliamentary secretaries. They also knew exactly what they were doing when it came time to deal with lobbyists. They would refer them, on almost an automatic basis, to their parliamentary secretaries so they would not be soiled in their vocabulary by these connections or meetings. Whenever the parliamentary secretaries would deal with, or would agree to or would discuss with these lobbyists would appear nowhere because the parliamentary secretaries were not subject to the new legislation.

On the question of my colleague, the member for Ottawa Centre, obviously the Conservatives knew what they were doing when they drafted the legislation and, yes, these parliamentary secretaries should be included in the law to avoid this type of business in future.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is somewhat along the same lines as the member for Ottawa Centre in terms of the requirement for the parliamentary secretaries to be covered under the Lobbying Act.

The opposition day motion, as I understand it, really speaks to power in that it obligates those with power in government or connections in government over government decisions and taxpayer money to obligate them to report if they are lobbied.

What I am a little worried about, and I do not mind admitting it, is what I hear coming forward from the government side, that it should apply to all members of Parliament. That is a very clever ruse by the government to make it look like all of us in the House are members of the government. We are not.

The government is the cabinet and those connected to it, the senior bureaucracy, the government itself, parliamentary secretaries, sometimes they are sworn in to Privy Council and sometimes now, but they have access to information. Backbench members on the government side and opposition members do not have that same access.

What worries me is the intimidation tactics of the government. I know how it works with farm organizations. If we said who lobbied us, the government would be scare them.

Business of Supply

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Malpeque is quite right. The Conservatives are trying to create a diversion by saying that all members of the House should be included. A brief lesson is needed to explain to them that they cannot be hypocritical and try to make people believe that opposition members are subjected to lobbying. We are the opposition. It is the government that is in power and that controls the purse strings, government spending and contracts, and not opposition members.

[*English*]

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to join the debate on a motion that would close a loophole, put into place by the Conservative government. I will speak directly to what the reasons are behind this loophole.

The motion before the House, as moved by my hon. colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl, is clear and concise. It seeks to close a loophole that allows parliamentary secretaries to meet with lobbyists and provide special access to their special friends of the Conservative Party.

I would like to discuss the blatant breach of conflict of interest the Conservatives have so successfully accomplished. I will outline the lack of transparency and the lack of disclosure of which the government is guilty. I will be addressing the question that is on the minds of all Canadians: Was this loophole a maliciously brilliant scheme, or was it an incompetent oversight by the Prime Minister? Either way, it is something that should have been addressed years ago, not after parliamentary secretaries have been caught with their hands in the proverbial cookie jar. Conservatives will argue that those hands came up empty, no cookies. Let us face it, once the hand is in the jar, even the resonant crumbs are enough to raise questions.

The past month has shown the Conservative culture of deceit grow to epic proportions. We have watched the development of the real Conservative culture: special access for special friends. What is this special access? Who are the special friends? How do we get special meetings and privileged access that most people only dream about?

Special access is the ability to have a meeting with a public office holder who has insight into where the money is kept for government contracts or funding and access to those who approve those contracts and programs. The Federal Accountability Act clearly states at part 1, paragraph 7:

No public office holder shall, in the exercise of an official power, duty or function, give preferential treatment to any person or organization based on the identity of the person or organization that represents the first-mentioned person or organization.

Who are public office holders? This is where it gets very interesting. According to the Federal Accountability Act, they are: a minister of the Crown, a minister of state or parliamentary secretary, a member of the ministerial staff, a ministerial adviser or Governor-in-Council appointees. Two words that stand out are “parliamentary secretary”. What is most interesting, however, is the definition of designated public office holder in the Lobbying Act which states that:

A minister of the Crown or a minister of state and any person employed in his or her office who is appointed under subsection 128(1) of the *Public Service Employment Act*.

What is missing here? Those two elusive words, “parliamentary secretary”. One can only conclude that “parliamentary secretary” is missing by design. Since April 8 of this year, the truth has come out. Canadians have learned about secret meetings between parliamentary secretaries, their staff and friends. At last count, seven ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

We know about these meetings. They are not secret any more because the Conservatives have been embarrassed into disclosing their contacts. Why? Because they are hiding behind the Lobbying Act. They are not mentioned in it, that is why. Yet the Conservatives have conveniently ignored their very own Federal Accountability Act. Special access for special friends.

There is no definition in either act but Canadians know very well what it means. It is clear. It means people who have privileged access to people in power, people who would not otherwise have had access without high power connections. This is a blatant breach of conflict of interest.

A typical group seeks a grant, a contract or funding for a program, fills out an application and submits it, sometimes on-line, into a deep, dark vortex. Then they hire a potentially \$600 an hour lobbyist who is registered to follow up and guide their application or steer it to the right channels or the right people. By law, all these actions are to be recorded. Obviously, not all actions are, only convenient ones, or at least until a person is caught.

In this case Mr. Jaffer, the former Conservative caucus chair, did not register as a lobbyist because he was technically not being paid upfront to lobby on behalf of his client. However, evidence reveals that finders' fees were anticipated. Mr. Jaffer's business model relied on success fees, or contingency fees or equity in companies. What a windfall to a company seeking funding if it was successful. That news alone could send its stock soaring. If the principals had equity in the company, they could sell for a lucrative profit. This is what is called “pump and dump” and it too is illegal.

Because Mr. Jaffer had friends in high places, he had privileged access to parliamentary secretaries to review his files and send them along to the relevant minister responsible, possibly accompanied by a personal note, “From Rahim with love”. Maybe not “with love”, but there is a definite privileged access to friends in high places, the same friends who can review a file, rather than allow it to sit idle for months in the great vortex that I described.

•(1615)

Where are the ethics in this situation? Where is the transparency? While not technically illegal, this situation I have described is clearly immoral and unethical. Why? If it were not for Mr. Donovan of the Toronto *Star* on April 8, these secret meetings and the conflicts of interest would have no end and would have flown directly under the radar of Canadians and of Parliament.

Business of Supply

Since then, ministers, ministers of state, and yes, even parliamentary secretaries have come forward admitting to private meetings. Why? They have been caught with their hands in the cookie jar and they are in a conflict of interest and a breach of ethics.

The parliamentary secretary for transport, the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, was put in charge of a \$1 billion fund for green infrastructure. This was a known fact within Conservative circles. Mr. Jaffer took advantage of this insider information. We also know that the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca and his staff had direct contact with Mr. Jaffer. The parliamentary secretary was clearly in a breach of the Conflict of Interest guidelines, an obvious loophole and a self-created legal buffer made by the Conservative government in the Lobbying Act.

What happened here was not an innocent oversight, but a deviously brilliant, immoral and unethical one which created a legal buffer to protect the minister and allow parliamentary secretaries to breach Federal Accountability Act rules, the Prime Minister's very own guidelines and the lobbyist registry regulations.

Canadians demand that Parliament and parliamentarians be trusted with such delicate matters as ethics, and so do I. The Conservatives came riding in to Parliament on their sanctimonious high horse and moved a Federal Accountability Act and Lobbying Act that are toothless and allow for a deviously brilliant loophole to exist to help them circumvent the law, certainly circumvent ethics.

Here is a quote, “what is appropriate is that we fulfill our election commitments by ensuring that everybody respects the Lobbyists Registration Act and that we put real teeth into it”. Who said that? It was the Prime Minister, that is who. Where are the teeth? Why are parliamentary secretaries not included? Where are they?

Here is another quote, “We also want to make it the law that one has to record every single contact with a lobbyist” Who said that? It was the Minister of Transport. Who was he referring to? Obviously it was not parliamentary secretaries. It is very convenient, is it not?

Why take so long to record these contacts? Why wait months, a year, or more, who knows? The culture of deceit is out of control.

The parliamentary secretary for transport, the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, says that he did not breach the Federal Accountability Act, but he clearly broke the conflict of interest rules and he acted against the spirit of these guidelines and the act. Mr. Jaffer said that he did not breach the Lobbying Act and was not a lobbyist. He too broke the moral and ethical spirit of the law and acted as a lobbyist. If one attempts to rob a bank and finds that there is no money in the vault, it does not mean one is not a bank robber.

When people have special access to special friends, magical things can happen. Red tape is eliminated. The vortex quickly becomes dinner and cocktails with friends at high-powered restaurants. It means privileged private citizens such as Mr. Jaffer can use a parliamentary office and email account to conduct business. It means opening the door to the PMO. Most noticeably, it is the ability to avoid registering as a lobbyist to avoid reporting those meetings, something the Conservatives have become masters of through their self-regulated legal buffer and loophole. This loophole is a premeditated measure to allow special access to special friends.

I hope the opposition parties will support this motion. The Bloc says that the Federal Accountability Act is flawed and now is its chance to add teeth. The NDP has handled the Jaffer scandal on both sides of the fence. I hope it can take a stand that will make a difference.

I will be supporting this motion, and I hope all members will do the same. It is good for Parliament and it is good for all Canadians.

• (1620)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's rambling rhetoric with rapt attention. I will give her credit for being good at how she said it. It does not have to be true. That does not matter. I have a question, and it has been asked before.

First, we support the motion. Does the member realize that?

Second, if it is good enough for us on this side, why is it not good enough for everybody in the House? We are talking about lobbying. For goodness' sake, watching an ad on television could get someone accused of being lobbied.

We get members across the floor all the time who come to us with sometimes very specific lobbying efforts on behalf of somebody. That is fine and it is legitimate. Therefore, why would everybody not fall under the same guidelines, as all members of Parliament and senators frankly should?

All we are saying is that we agree. We will support the motion, but why not go further and make everybody accountable? It seems to me that is accountability.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Edmonton Centre for his compliment. However, I want to also point out that it is you, as a government member, who is beholden to enact this legislation, not us. We are here. We are open to any sort of amendments you want to make. If you had wanted the act to have teeth, you would have made it so from the beginning, I would think. But certainly we are completely in agreement with making this law have the strength and the teeth it deserves.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would just remind the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville to address comments through the Chair, not directly at other members. Not that it caused any disorder, but I just remind her to be mindful of it.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear that the government will be supporting the motion. I would like to point out to the member who just spoke, though, that there is no requirement for lobbyists to disclose the amount of money they spend on their campaigns to influence members of Parliament.

Business of Supply

I would like to ask her whether she agrees that they should be required to identify specific campaigns, that they should be required to financially disclose and that there should be some spending limits on some of these lobbying efforts. We saw, last year, airline companies that supposedly are one step away from bankruptcy spending huge amounts of money on professional lobbyists and high-priced lawyers, putting on social events and receptions and sending letters to MPs, and we would like to know what that cost.

Would the member agree that we should be making those changes when the government gets around to making the required changes to this act?

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that we need to have full disclosure, especially of the amount of money lobbyists are spending. In fact, we had a situation where we took campaign donations from questionable sources and had them returned because we wanted there to be absolutely no doubt, no ethical breaches whatsoever.

In fact, I think we should just focus on open, honest, transparent and accountable transactions. We need to strengthen the Lobbying Act.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I loved my colleague's analogy about the teeth, and I would carry that one step further. It almost seems as if in this House this particular government, on occasion, claims it has teeth, but it is really like an elaborate set of dentures that is taken out and put back in at the convenience of the government. To me, that seems like somewhat of a double standard.

I would like to ask the member about the situation with respect to parliamentary secretaries. And for the benefit of anybody watching this debate right now, parliamentary secretaries are essential gatekeepers for information. If we are to go to the level of exempt staff, as well as deputy ministers, they liaise with parliamentary secretaries all the time, within the offices. I have witnessed it through my work with Fisheries and with Heritage.

I wonder if she could comment on that.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, we know the act has dentures. That is quite right. And they were removed at some of the most expensive restaurants around town, the watering holes where the Conservative members entertain their friends and give them access, as I have described, special friends and special access.

I think the point is that parliamentary secretaries are exempt from the act by design. It was by intent, this little loophole. It is a brilliant but devious loophole that was created so that their special friends could legally have special access.

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Sault Ste. Marie, Transport; the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, the Environment; and the hon. member for Windsor West, Canada Post.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to enter into the debate on this very

important subject of lobbyists and the influence lobbyists have on our parliamentary democracy, which I believe is undue influence. If there is one good thing that comes out of the scandal involving Rahim Jaffer and the member for Simcoe—Grey, it may be that Parliament feels compelled to revisit the role lobbyists play in the Ottawa of 2010.

Hopefully, a strong outcome or resolve will be reached by the process of the debate we are having today, which may lead to meaningful change that would finally tie a bell around lobbyists' necks. Then we would know when lobbyists were skulking around in the corridors of power and with whom they were meeting, and we would have some fighting chance to take measures to uphold the democratic process and not fall victim to what we believe is undue influence by lobbyists in Ottawa.

We thought we were doing that with the Federal Accountability Act. I was a member of the committee that went through the whole process on the Federal Accountability Act. We were dealing with so many egregious failures of ethics on the part of the Liberal Party that we were consumed with their ethical shortcomings to the point where we were trying to do perhaps too much too fast.

In the bad old days of the Liberals, there was so much traffic between the offices of senior lobbyists and the PMO, they had to have a revolving door installed. In fact, it became a safety hazard. People were getting nose bleeds because the revolving door was spinning around so wildly between the offices of Earncliffe and the Prime Minister's office. The same individuals did not know where they were half the time. They had to be reminded which hat they were wearing.

That is how ridiculous it was getting in the days of the Liberal regime, so we trusted the Conservatives. We believed that the Conservatives were as appalled about the Liberal lobbying influence in Ottawa as we were. We took it at face value that all the opposition parties were sincere in their abhorrence of the regime that was put in place so that well-connected Liberal lobbyists could gain privileged access to the corridors of power, to set up their friends to get not just one paw into the cookie jar but both paws at once.

We took extraordinary steps in the Federal Accountability Act and I supported the motions. Little did we know. It took Liberals 13 years to get so corrupt and arrogant. As I pointed out before, the virus seems to have mutated because it took the Conservatives only four years to reach that level of arrogance and deceit, to where they now are the ones who seem to have put in place a regime where well-connected Conservative lobbyists now rule the roost in Ottawa.

Lobbyists are like bats in an attic. They are very difficult to get rid of, they cannot stand the light of day and if they are left there long enough, they rot one's timbers. I find we are faced with this problem today.

Business of Supply

I know you will probably agree with me, Mr. Speaker, because I know your reputation for cleaning up corruption in Ottawa in your long career here, but it is very worrisome to me that the most senior lobbyists in Ottawa are also the most senior operatives in the Conservative Party. They are the very same names, those talking heads we see on TV, Tim Powers, Geoff Norquay, John Reynolds, Ken Boessenkool, Yaroslav Baran, Monte Solberg. All these guys, the most senior characters in the lobbyist world, are the most senior characters in the Conservative Party, and there is no effort to even hide it.

We see a guy like Tim Powers on TV introduced as “Conservative Party spokesman, Tim Powers”. He is actually a lobbyist. He is another guy who is whirling around in the revolving door. He probably has to pinch himself or have one of his staffers remind him where he actually is, in the PMO or his lobbyist boardroom.

• (1630)

The problem is getting out of hand. It undermines the most fundamental tenets of our democracy, that we should all have equal access to the government's grand largesse and the services it offers. Some people should not have better access than others based on their ability to trade on their connections or trade on the experience they developed in public life and are now trying to sell to private or personal interests.

That is the whole principle here. When we are in private life, we are not supposed to dine out on the connections we made in public life, unless that information is publicly available. It offends the sensibilities of most Canadians. It offends the ethics standards, the code of conduct and the conflict of interest codes, and it offends the Criminal Code of Canada when it passes a certain point.

The difference between lobbying and influence peddling is about five years in prison. Influence peddling is a very serious offence under the Criminal Code of Canada. In fact, section 121 is right up there with high treason in terms of high crimes and misdemeanours. That is how seriously those who drafted the Criminal Code wanted to condemn the practice of influence peddling.

We only have to look south of the border to see how lobbying has bastardized democracy. Capitol Hill in Washington is riddled with lobbyists. Finally, the Obama administration is putting its foot down. Obama made a speech recently. As his administration's next project, after the health care bill is finally through, he is going to drive the lobbyists off Capitol Hill. He is going to drive the money lenders from the temple. It is his goal and stated objective to clean up Capitol Hill from the undue influence of lobbyists.

We should be doing the same on Parliament Hill today. We should minimize their influence, tie a bell around their necks so we know whose office they are meeting in and what they are talking about and curb their opportunities to get both hands into the cookie jar. That is what we should be doing in Parliament in this debate today.

Let me give an example of why the public has a right to know who has the minister's ear. Let us put it in the context of the BP offshore oil rig disaster, the terrible environmental disaster that is happening in the Gulf of Mexico today. We have a right to know if most of the people the Minister of the Environment is meeting with are oil executives.

If there have been 120 registered visits from BP, Exxon, Shell and all the big oil companies, and the minister has been willing to meet only once or twice with the David Suzuki Foundation or whoever the environmentalists are, the public can use that information. The public should have that information. They might not be there with their hand out for some kind of grant or contribution. They might be there trying to shape public policy or environmental policy.

It would be very useful information for the public to see who has the dominant advantage of the ear of the minister. Those guys show up with well-connected, brand-name, Conservative lobbyists to break through the gatekeepers and barriers in getting access to the minister. They are very good at it. They sell access.

We learned in the Rahim Jaffer case that there are people out there with a commodity to sell and that commodity is access to the public office holders who create public policy. Taking it a step further, they are selling as a commodity their influence over those public office holders in the decision making that takes place.

That is what is fundamentally wrong. The public should be outraged at this issue, and I believe it is. I believe the public gets it. The public is aware that this kind of influence is taking place. Ordinary Canadians would have to pack a lunch if they wanted to penetrate the red tape associated with a fund like the government's green infrastructure fund. They had better dig in, camp out and get ready for a long fight if they are going to figure out how that fund is being administered.

• (1635)

However, if we phone a well-connected Conservative lobbyist like a Rahim Jaffer, all of a sudden the doors open and public servants jump and things are done immediately.

I have a quote from an email, “Rahim wants an answer by Friday and by the way, we will see you at the golf tee-off time next month”. This is a correspondence between Rahim Jaffer and a senior public office holder getting information about the green infrastructure fund that I and ordinary Canadians would not have a hope in hell of actually getting any access to. It is a graphic illustration, a depiction, of everything that is wrong with Ottawa in 2010.

Again, if there is any positive outcome from our examination and investigation of the application and administration of the green infrastructure fund, it might be that parliamentarians are finally seized with the issue that we are ready to take back our democratic institutions from those who seem to have undue influence and undue control over those very institutions.

I am not overstating things to say that the undue influence of lobbyists undermines the most basic tenets of our parliamentary democracy. It is not an overstatement at all. In fact, we are sounding the alarm, blowing the whistle on these guys, that enough is enough. We do not want to follow the route of the United States where nothing happens without the undue influence of lobbyists.

Business of Supply

One of the best points made today, that I am really grateful, was brought to the floor of the House of Commons was made by my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas who introduced into this debate a brand new element, one that is rarely discussed and I believe cannot be overstated. Not only should we be demanding that parliamentary secretaries fall under the category when they are under the lobbyist rules. And not only should the onus be on public office holders to declare the meetings as well as the lobbyists.

Those two things are important and we support them. But the one element my colleague brought to this debate was that we also have a right to know the amount of money involved and the budget of lobbyists on various campaigns. They should have to declare it.

It should have to be public because in the same spirit and principle that we should be getting big money out of politics, we should also then be making the case that big money should not be able to buy influence in terms of public policy, legislation, or crafting the direction we may take as a country. It is a glaring oversight.

The principle that was put in place that we should get big money out of politics is absolutely correct. We left a glaring oversight by mistake in place. Whether it is big pharma, big oil or whatever the lobbying group is, they can launch a \$100 million campaign to change the minds of parliamentarians to get a certain bill passed. How does the ordinary Canadian compete with that kind of influence?

There are interests in Canada that would pay anything to put in place a regulatory framework that would advance their private or personal interests. We have to protect ourselves from that undue influence or else our democracy and all the work we do to uphold the greatest parliamentary democracy in the world is in jeopardy. Otherwise, we might as well pack up our tent and admit that big money can still buy influence in this country.

I hope that as this debate concludes today one of the things we will take away from it is that we must put in place rules. We must put in place full disclosure requirements so that a lobbyist firms or lobbyists will have to post the amount of money they have spent on a campaign. In fact, there should be spending limits on how much they can spend because ordinary Canadians or the other side of that debate or argument should be on the same level playing field. Public policy should be shaped on the merits of the case and not on the depth of the pockets or the size of the chequebook.

This is one of the things that we have been so frustrated about. Really, the nub of the whole debate is that the public has a right to know who is influencing policy in this country, this Parliament and this government.

●(1640)

We would like to believe that our electoral process put 308 members of Parliament in this chamber and it is Parliament that decides the direction that this country will take in key important areas of public policy.

Let us not kid ourselves. There is another dynamic, another force at play here, that perhaps is shaping the direction Canada takes in the way that ordinary Canadians, all in good faith, cast their ballots in a way they would never have imagined.

One cannot swing a cat in Ottawa without hitting a lobbyist trudging up and down the hallways of this Parliament Building. They have access to the most privileged, senior offices in Parliament.

Another thing we should discuss today, and one of the things that has always bothered me, is that some of the most prominent lobbyists today on Parliament Hill are former members of Parliament. They wear their parliamentary pin, which gives them unlimited, exclusive access to virtually every corridor and office on Parliament Hill. They breeze by security with a wave of the hand and a “How are you”? and a “Thank you”.

I have waited many times for a machine in the member's gym because it is clogged up by some lobbyist who was a member of Parliament from 1984 to 1988 but forever wears that parliamentary pin in his lapel. Every time I want to use that machine there is a lobbyist on it. Then those lobbyists will be in the parliamentary dining room, brushing shoulders with decision makers and senior cabinet ministers. Somehow we have to curb the undue influence of these former members of Parliament who have been skulking around Parliament and get very privileged access.

I have seen lobbyists in our lobby. I think we should have a lobbyist alert. We should have a lobbyist watch. An alarm would go off whenever a lobbyist is in the lobby. We have to get the lobbyists out of our lobby. They should not be in there. Some of them get paid \$600 an hour for every contact they make with a member of Parliament. All they have to do is walk through the opposition lobby and they are rich. It is wrong.

I would not want to name names in the context of a debate like this, but guys like Don Boudria are always under foot. We are always bumping into that guy in the wrong places.

Lobbyists should not be rattling around Parliament Hill unchecked. They should always be on a leash, and on a very tight leash so that they do not get into trouble and they do not make a mess in places where they are not supposed to be.

We have made big progress in this debate today. I want to challenge two of the government's responses. This really bothers me after all the questions in question period associated with the Jafferlena debate.

The Minister of Transport falls back on two patented responses now. I think he has a copyright on these things. The first response is that there is no harm, no foul, because Mr. Jaffer never received any money. This is almost laughable. I notice the Liberals are saying what I was saying. It is like the analogy of robbing a bank and the vault is empty, but that does not mean no offence took place.

It is still against the law to lobby illegally even if an individual is unsuccessful, even if an individual is a bad lobbyist. If someone is lobbying illegally, that individual is lobbying illegally. If someone is influence peddling, it does not matter if there was no benefit to peddling influence, it is still a criminal offence under section 121 of the Criminal Code.

The other thing that the Minister of Transport would have us believe is that the government has done nothing wrong because it is up to the lobbyist and the lobbyist alone to register.

Business of Supply

We have established that there is an obligation on the part of ministers to uphold not only the letter but the spirit of the law, the very law that the government ran in to office on, the very law that was a centrepiece of its legislative agenda. It has a duty and a moral and ethical obligation if nothing else, to uphold both the letter and the spirit of the law.

The spirit of the law is that the public has a right to know if there is any illegal lobbying going on. That is why we crafted the Lobbyists Registration Act to begin with. It is almost laughable to hear the Minister of Transport and anybody else who answers questions on the Jaffer affair with, "We did nothing wrong. It is only up to the lobbyists".

We hope to correct that today. We hope that Parliament speaks loudly and clearly when we vote on this particular resolution today, that the burden, the onus, and the obligation is on both parties.

• (1645)

It takes two to tango. It is not particularly difficult, on the part of a minister, to post, declare and disclose when a minister has met with a lobbyist and what the subject matter was any more than it is an onerous duty on the part of the lobbyist. That has to be fixed.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to hear that the hon. member's gym membership is not as valid as it could be due to lobbyists using the facility. May I suggest that the member could go for a walk in the park; take a hike in Gatineau Park; go for a swim in the Ottawa River or put himself on the ice on the second longest skating rink in the world, the Rideau Canal; or even go for a jump off the cliff just over here on the other side of Parliament Hill.

He is a member of parliamentary committees. He is the vice-chair of a variety of parliamentary committees as are many members of Parliament and parliamentary committees are part of the political process, part of forming policy.

Therefore, perhaps we should go further and have lobbyists register their contact with all members of Parliament, not just parliamentary secretaries and ministers but members of the opposition parties, senators from all parties and independent senators, and independent members of Parliament.

Perhaps we should have all parliamentarians recorded as being lobbied when contacted by a lobbyist. Put the onus on the lobbyists and include all parliamentarians.

Would the member be in agreement to exposing all members of Parliament to being registered when lobbyists contact them? I think the public would be very interested in knowing that.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the answer is an enthusiastic yes. I checked that with the leader of my party earlier today. We believe that all members of Parliament should be subject to the same rule of full disclosure when they have contact with a lobbyist as well as indicating the subject matter discussed.

I do not see that as a burden. In fact, I do it all the time. My first question to someone who comes into my office on an issue is, "Are you registered as a lobbyist?", or "Should you be registered as a lobbyist given the nature of the meeting?". If the answer is no, then the meeting is over. I do not meet with them. I do not like having

lobbyists in my office at the best of times, but if they are not registered, they are not going to finish the meeting.

It was the Lobbying Commissioner who advised us when the office was first created. We were told that the first question we should ask at a meeting is, "Are you a registered lobbyist?" and if the answer is no, that is it, the meeting goes no further.

As far as lobbyists and running into them elsewhere, I think lobbyists should take a hike out in Gatineau Park.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my hon. colleague. However, he seems to be quite an alarmist over the idea of lobbyists. He is proposing everything short of leghold traps placed around this place for lobbyists. I hope he is not too alarmist over the fact. Maybe the sirens will go off.

I want to focus the question on former parliamentarians because this is the issue that is in the news. When it comes to former parliamentarians and former MPs, he complained about a few of them who wore their buttons and went ahead of him on the treadmill. It must have been an absolutely discouraging event to see these people ahead of him on the treadmill. I can well imagine. From a party that is used to sharing, I find it somewhat surprising.

Here is another issue. There are actually registered lobbyists who pose as candidates for a party. Lorne Nystrom was one I believe. Perhaps the hon. member can scope out what he feels former parliamentarians should be limited to, in particular, like his friend Lorne Nystrom.

• (1650)

Mr. Pat Martin: I think, Mr. Speaker, there is a cooling off period for public office holders before they should be able to enter into lobbying. I think that is the recommendation. As we extend the duty and the obligation of parliamentary secretaries to fall under the Lobbyist Registration Act, I believe the same bar, prohibition and cooling off period should apply. By extension, that is probably the intent of the motion put forward by the Liberals today.

If a member is going to fall under the rubric of the Lobbyist Registration Act, the member should be subject to the same cooling off rules. A member cannot simply leave his or her office as a member of Parliament one day and then the next day open up shop as a lobbyist trying to trade off the contacts and the privileged access a member may have developed through the years as a parliamentarian. Again, this is based on the same principle that the public does not want members to use the time they spent in public office for their personal and private gain unless the information being used is accessible to the public at large.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre, about a rule change that took place here under the Martin administration pertaining to the parliamentary secretaries and their influence on this Hill, and a change in how the job has actually become more important to be lobbied. The lobbyists recognize that and sniff it right out. What I am talking about is when the Martin administration came into effect it moved parliamentary secretaries onto committees.

Business of Supply

Committees in the past were independent, very much creatures to themselves and were able to do a lot of good work without the interference of a parliamentary secretary. It was criticized, ironically, by the Conservatives at that time but they now bask in this type of element and have turned it into more of a controlling nature than ever before.

What ends up happening is that parliamentary secretaries become privy to information ahead of time, information that the committee often does not have. There can be influence peddling on the committee for it to go in a different direction than it was taking.

I would like to ask the member about that change and how lobbyists have sniffed that out.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, in my opinion it was the beginning of the end for the effectiveness of parliamentary committees when parliamentary secretaries were parachuted onto them.

Parliamentary secretaries have access to cabinet documents. Their loyalty, obviously, is to the government that they serve and not to the committee as a whole. The beauty of parliamentary committees, in theory, is that baggage is left at the door and committee members are all equal no matter what party we are in. Our goal and mandate in committee is to work together in a collaborative way to create the best legislation possible.

As soon as parliamentary secretaries were put on the committees, they sabotaged, undermined and bastardized the work of the committees. I have seen it with my own eyes. Believe it not, the government even wanted parliamentary secretaries to be the chairs of committees. We had to take drastic action to at least curb that which we thought was ridiculous and would cause irreversible damage to the committees. I do not think parliamentary secretaries should be on committees.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member knows the legislation well and was on the inside while it was crafted.

I am curious about something. Is it his understanding that it would be plausible, not that anyone ever would, that someone would not register, then deal directly with a parliamentary secretary who is not bound by the lobbyist law, and then they could even extend that to perhaps staff people throughout? Nowhere in there would they technically have broken the law vis-à-vis the Lobbying Act, although in that highly possible scenario they could have crept into some criminal aspects.

However, in terms of the Lobbying Act, if someone were to go that route, would he or she possibly be able to circumvent the act and the legislation and still be able to achieve his or her goal?

•(1655)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague just outlined, possibly better than anybody else could, exactly what is wrong with the Lobbying Act as it stands.

It appears that Mr. Jaffer did exactly what my colleague from Hamilton Centre just described, knowing full well perhaps, because he was the caucus chair of the Conservative Party at the time that we crafted the Lobbying Act, that he could fly under the radar, make his contact with the parliamentary secretary, who, by some happy

coincidence, is excluded from the Lobbying Act and does not have to file anything, and then gets all the access to the senior bureaucrats and public office holders by that open door.

The door was thrown open for well-connected Conservatives who knew the secret handshake and knew how to get past the rules. That is what is offensive and that is what needs to be corrected. It is a loophole that should not be allowed to continue for another day and, by order in council, those guys could fix it.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today to the motion from the Liberal Party. Given the hour, I suspect that my remarks may be the last during today's debate.

We have heard arguments from the opposition members today, some more informed than others, on the reality of the situation when it comes to lobbying in this country.

We have also heard members on that side state a number of times that the government was opposing today's motion. This is baffling, as I am quite sure that at no point during the debate did any member of the Conservative Party speak in opposition to the motion before us today.

Instead, we have not only accepted the proposal that parliamentary secretaries be covered by the requirements of the Lobbying Act, but we have gone a step further. We on this side have proposed that these rules not only cover parliamentary secretaries but also members of Parliament, senators and political staff in the offices of the opposition party leaders. So far, however, not a single member on that side has been open to that challenge.

I find myself at a loss to understand the situation we find ourselves in here today. On one hand, we have the Liberal Party talking about accountability but, on the other hand, these same Liberal members are unwilling to even consider complying with the same lobbying rules that public office holders abide by every day.

We are talking about some pretty basic requirements. We are asking members of the House to accept public releases of names and topics of their meetings with lobbyists. We are asking members to conduct their meetings in the light of day. We have no concern doing that on our side of the House. We have nothing to hide.

The member for Malpeque even argued that opposition MPs do not have any role in the development of public policy. However, we know that is absolutely misleading. Right now there is a good chance that there is a meeting between lobbyists and opposition MPs behind that curtain.

The members on that side of the House seems to have convinced themselves that they should not have to be accountable to Canadians. Can anyone on that side of the House look their constituents in the eye and claim that they have no right to know who their MP is meeting with or that Canadians have no right to know what they are discussing? I find that hard to believe.

The reality is that the Liberal Party thinks that it finally has a leg up on the government when it comes to accountability. However, the strange thing is that when members on this side ask the Liberals if they are willing to be accountable, they dodge the question.

Business of Supply

We have heard evasive answers from that side of the House saying that government is free to bring forward legislation. The problem with that approach is that we have already seen what happens when we bring forward legislation to improve accountability. When we brought forward the Federal Accountability Act, those members kicked, screamed, squirmed and did absolutely everything possible, at nearly every stage, to delay and obstruct the legislation, and that was right after the sponsorship scandal.

The problem is that the Liberal Party has never grasped that it answers to Canadians. It has never grasped that it reports to Canadians, not the other way around.

What are Canadians to make of this?

We on this side support the motion we are debating today. There was no deliberate conspiracy to create a loophole in the Lobbying Act. We formed government at a time when Canadians were deeply mistrusting politicians and their representatives. We took quick action to create a regime that would provide accountability to all Canadians and we cast a wide net.

However, no system is perfect. We are always looking for ways to improve these rules. We will support this motion today. We are looking at options to go even further to ensure that we are all accountable to Canadians. I hope the opposition will support us in moving forward with this.

• (1700)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was on the Bill C-2 committee. The hon. member talked about fighting it all the way. I do not recall that. I recall meeting three or four times a week working to get the legislation, which was very rushed and very large in scope, to a decipherable level. I do not think the member remembers that because I do not think I saw him at those committee meetings.

My question is pretty simple. It has been almost four and a half years since those deliberations and the election that brought his party to power. Why did the Conservatives not do this sooner if they are in such agreement with it? Is it because they have revelations that many of their parliamentary secretaries, who are members of Parliament as well, had private meetings with the people who he says the public want to know about? They want to know about it because now they cannot know about it because under the regime that his party put in place four and a half years ago, it was not required.

First, why the delay? Second, what are the new measures that he spoke of about going further in a most robust and quick manner that are forthcoming after this four and a half years?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I wonder where the Liberal motion was for the last four and a half years to make improvements. Where were those suggestions? He said that he was in committee. Why did he not bring those suggestions at that point in committee? They did not.

The reality is that the Liberals want nothing to do with accountability. They would rather meet with their friends behind curtains and do their own thing and anything that would bring that to the light of day would be extremely embarrassing.

We can look back at the sponsorship scandal and see what happened. Where is the \$40 million? They still refuse to acknowledge where that money went to. There are always improvements that can be made and we will make improvements as we see fit, but I would like to know where the \$40 million went.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who just spoke a minute ago asked where the Liberals were during the last three or four years. I would just remind him that in the last three or four years we were not in government. In the last three or four years we did not have Rahim Jaffer gate. In the last three or four years nothing like this occurred so that we could bring in this motion, for example, or this suggestion.

Legislation develops as our country changes and society changes. Things happen and we address them. If there is higher crime, we bring in legislation to address it. I am puzzled today because I know the Conservative government introduced certain pieces of legislation to address crime and justice issues. I and my party thought they were good pieces of legislation to help our country and protect our society and we supported them.

I want to read into the record the motion from my Liberal colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl, which reads:

That, given the apparent loophole—

And the key word here is “loophole”. We just simply discovered that there is a loophole, something that we did not know two, three or four years ago.

—in the Lobbying Act which excludes Parliamentary Secretaries from the list of “designated public officer holders”, the House calls on the government to take all necessary steps to immediately close this loophole and thus require Parliamentary Secretaries to comply fully with the Lobbying Act, in the same manner as Ministers are currently required to do.

There was a friendly amendment from my Liberal colleague from Beauséjour. He spoke in question period and clearly outlined that when anybody approaches any minister or any parliamentary secretary with a proposal, that it is a violation of the act. The Conservatives' justification is that they were asking but they did not receive money.

I have always believed that Canadians are rather smart people and they will be able to read through this. While they were checking around to see what moneys were available, they submitted their proposals and they are saying that they did not receive any money. That is because the proposal, supposedly, so far, has not been accepted. They justified it that way.

What would have happened if the proposal, hypothetically, moved forward? What would have happened if one of the many proposals that were put forward by Mr. Rahim Jaffer was accepted? Then they would say, “Put the brakes on. Let me go register and then I will come back”.

Canadians will not buy that and they do not buy that. If the Conservatives believe they represent the people, they should be checking with their constituents. Canadians are not buying that. As I said earlier today, it is like when people go to rob a bank and there is no money in the vault, would the cops come in and say to the robbers that because there was no money they can leave?

Business of Supply

We talk about premeditated activities. Premeditated murder is an example. If somebody is charged with premeditated murder, what does that mean? That means that somebody is making an attempt to do it. They did not murder the guy so that is okay, they can get off because they did not murder him.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: That would be attempted murder.

Mr. John Cannis: Attempted murder, thank you, I stand corrected, but it is also premeditated, because Rahim Jaffer's plan was premeditated after he lost the election. I apologize and I thank the member for correcting me. It was attempted murder.

I want to get into their defence which is the supposedly \$49 million from adscam. We did the right thing as a party. We opened the books for Judge Gomery, because had then Prime Minister Martin not given the directive to open the books, that commission of judicial inquiry would never have happened. That is what we are asking the Conservative Party to do every now and then, to totally open the books, but it does not want to. We must tell Canadians.

• (1705)

The inquiry was front and centre. Canadians had the opportunity to tune in any time they wanted. At the end of the day, they caught the culprits. They caught the people who stole the money. Did we fine them? Of course we did. Did they go before the court? Of course they did. Did they pay restitution? Of course they did. Was any Liberal member of Parliament charged? No.

The Conservatives are standing here in the House of Commons misleading Canadians. They are being intellectually dishonest with their comments to justify their wrongdoing. They are trying to justify that it is okay for one of their people, in this case Rahim Jaffer and God knows how many others, according to the newspapers, to waltz around in a circle. The media talks about conflict of interest guidelines and Rahim Jaffer waltzing into several ministers' offices, pitching his business plans, et cetera. This went on for months and months. It was illegal. How do the Conservatives justify it? They justify it by saying that he never got any money.

When the Minister of Finance was handing out contracts that were for more than \$25,000 and needed to be tendered, he came back and said that they did not know and they would not do it again. That was from a senior minister who served as a finance minister in the provincial government of Ontario. Shame on him. He knew the rules. We all knew the rules. Then the Conservatives turn it around and say they will not give somebody a \$100,000 contract. They break it down to \$24,980, and that way there does not have to be a tender.

The veil of deception in the government is unbelievable. I tell my good friends over there that Canadians are catching on. Canadians are waking up. That is why this properly thought out motion by the Liberal member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl is before us. That member has been right on in this file. When she asks tough questions, the Conservatives try to corner her. She is trying to do the right thing for this time. This did not happen three years ago. Otherwise she would have told us. It happened now, and I thank her personally for bringing the motion forward.

I close by saying that Canadians are seeing beyond the veil of deception and the secrecy of those people. We cannot get

information. Come judgment day, Canadians will judge them accordingly.

• (1710)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the sponsorship scandal was going on, I would think that the Liberal Party, which at that point in time had been in power for 13 years, would have learned all the little tricks in lobbying that they could have seen and brought those suggestions forward.

My question to them is, why is this motion coming forward now, and why is this motion not including all members of Parliament?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I say to the new member of Parliament that I served as a parliamentary secretary to the minister of industry, and I can tell him how strict we were when people came to see us and the distance we kept from them.

The adscam scandal did occur. We were the ones who called the inquiry. We were the ones who opened the books. We were the ones who gave Mr. Justice Gomery latitude. We asked him to get to the bottom of it. Canadians, unfortunately, were being misled. Mr. Justice Gomery told us and the Conservatives before committee, "I helped bring down the Liberals. I gave you recommendations which you tossed out the door. Shame on you". They should follow Justice Gomery's recommendations.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague about an issue the member for Winnipeg Centre raised. With this parliamentary pin we receive, former parliamentarians can forever basically lurk about the House of Commons and the areas around here unfettered. That is a problem when a person becomes a lobbyist. It allows the person to have unfettered access to a certain degree, and it is not even measured or controlled. There are times when lobbyists who are former parliamentarians are lurking about in every corner of this place. It is unacceptable that there is no registration of them.

Perhaps a solution to that would be that if former parliamentarians become lobbyists, they lose the right to wear that pin, because they are getting paid by the private sector. It is a public right; it is from the history of this place. We could either get rid of it altogether, which would be fine by me, and if a person wanted to come to this building, he or she could get a temporary one or a pass if he or she is registered. Alternatively, former parliamentarians who became lobbyists would no longer have that right, because they would get access to ministers, parliamentary secretaries and MPs to push issues, and they get paid for it.

Would the member agree with that policy?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend makes a good recommendation. I cannot answer yea or nay at this stage because it needs to be given some thought.

What I can tell him is that any former member of Parliament wears that pin with pride for serving our country for however many years. I do not believe that privilege, service or history should ever be taken away. If that pin reflects that, then that person should be able to wear it.

I also believe that the current rules and those that existed previously do not apply today given what Rahim Jaffer did. Who knows what is going to happen three or five years down the road?

Private Members' Business

That is why my hon. colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl came forward with today's motion. It makes sense given what happened. If all these so-called future lobbyists know the rules of the game and do not follow them, they should be reprimanded.

The Deputy Speaker: There is enough time for a very brief question or comment. The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Prince Albert at the end of his question talked about the Lobbying Act applying to all members of Parliament. I suggest that is really a ruse because the government is cabinet and those who surround cabinet. Even Conservative backbenchers do not have tremendous access to power and certainly the opposition parties do not.

My experience with farm organizations and the government was the act of intimidation. If an organization speaks out against the government, then the government is not going to meet with that organization again or the door is slammed in its face.

Could we not see the reverse here? If the Lobbying Act applied to members of Parliament—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am going to have to stop the member there. There is only 30 seconds remaining for the member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque served proudly as the minister of agriculture. He knew his parameters. He knew his guidelines. There was never any suspicion regarding anybody who saw him. Were there mistakes made? To err is human, to forgive divine, but we will not forgive what is going on in the party across the aisle today.

• (1715)

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

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.

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the vote stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to seek it, you would find consent to see the clock as being 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

PAY EQUITY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS ACT

The House resumed from April 12 consideration of the motion that Bill C-471, An Act respecting the implementation of the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force and amending another Act in consequence, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on December 10, concerning the requirement for a royal recommendation for Bill C-471, An Act respecting the implementation of the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force and amending another Act in consequence, standing in the name of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for having raised this issue, as well as the member for Vancouver Centre for her comments. In his intervention, the parliamentary secretary noted that Bill C-471 proposes to do two things. First, it imposes a duty on the government to implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report. Second, it repeals the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, or PSECA. The parliamentary secretary dealt with each of these proposals in some detail as, in his view, each of them infringes on the financial prerogative of the Crown.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

He began by noting that the first recommendation of the pay equity task force report concerns the need for legislation. That recommendation reads:

The Task Force recommends that Parliament enact new stand-alone, proactive pay equity legislation in order that Canada can more effectively meet its international obligations and domestic commitments, and that such legislation be characterized as human rights legislation.

[*English*]

The remaining 112 recommendations in the report, he pointed out, describe the measures that should be included in that legislation. The recommendations taken overall seek to establish a new regime for the oversight of the pay equity process and the adjudication of pay equity complaints. Among these recommendations, several call for the establishment of pay equity oversight agencies. He referred to the fact that clause 2 of Bill C-471 states:

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

The Government of Canada shall ensure that all statutory oversight agencies are put in place no later than January 1, 2011 and that all the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force are implemented no later than January 1, 2012.

[English]

The parliamentary secretary raised two concerns with respect to the requirement to implement the recommendations. He felt that the bill imposes a requirement on the government that can only be met by the passage of legislation, a requirement which seemed to bind Parliament to passing that legislation. In his view, such a requirement was both impossible for the government to carry out and unconstitutional.

As well, he noted that the establishment of new agencies clearly requires the expenditure of public funds and therefore requires a royal recommendation. The parliamentary secretary then turned to clause 3 of the bill, which repeals the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act and related provisions from the Budget Implementation Act, 2009.

[Translation]

As he saw it, two effects would follow from repealing the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. First, a new purpose would be given to the Canadian Human Rights Commission and to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. They would now be given jurisdiction for public sector pay equity complaints. Further, as the liability arising from the statutory grounds of complaint under the Canada Human Rights Act differ from those under the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, the Crown, as employer, would be faced with potential expenses not currently provided for. The parliamentary secretary explained the difference between the liability schemes in some detail, which I will not repeat here. He also made reference to a number of Speakers' rulings from both this House and the other place, in which the need for a royal recommendation to accompany new or increased liability of the Crown is clearly illustrated.

[English]

The member for Vancouver Centre pointed out that the repeal of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act does not constitute a new legislative regime. Rather, in her view, it leaves the currently existing legislation in place. Second, she claimed that the requirement to establish a framework is not the same as the actual implementation of the framework.

[Translation]

As the House has no doubt gathered from this brief summary, the issues confronting the Chair in this case are complex. I would like to begin by reminding honourable members that the Chair is obliged to confine itself to dealing with the procedural aspects of the question. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2nd edition, p. 261 states:

... it is not up to the Speaker to rule on the "constitutionality" or "legality" of measures before the House.

[English]

The procedural issue which faces the Chair relates to the possible requirement for a royal recommendation.

There are three distinct elements in the bill. The first relates to the introduction of legislation to implement the recommendations of the pay equity task force, including the setting up of two statutory oversight agencies. The second element is the repeal of the PSECA, from which flows the third element, that of the repeal of the consequential provision stimulated at sections 395 to 405 of the Budget Implementation Act, 2009.

With respect to the implementation of the pay equity task force recommendations, it was indicated by the parliamentary secretary that such provisions would, in all likelihood, require a royal recommendation. Those provisions, however, are not part of Bill C-471, but of some future bill not yet before the House. It is my view that this aspect of Bill C-471 is similar to Bill C-288, Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, from the last Parliament, despite the arguments to the contrary advanced by the parliamentary secretary.

I remind the House of the ruling given on September 27, 2006, where the Chair stated at page 3315 of *Debates*:

[Translation]

As it stands, Bill C-288 does not contain provisions which specifically authorize any spending for a distinct purpose relating to the Kyoto protocol. Rather, the bill seeks the approval of Parliament for the government to implement the protocol. If such approval is given, then the government would decide on the measures it wished to take. This might involve an appropriation bill or another bill proposing specific spending, either of which would require a royal recommendation.

• (1725)

[English]

Bill C-471 implements no recommendations and establishes no agency. It simply requires that the government bring forth legislation and thus it is difficult to see how these provisions could be construed as requiring the expenditure of public funds.

[Translation]

The second main objective of Bill C-471 is the repeal the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, enacted by section 394 of the Budget Implementation Act, 2009 and the repeal of the transitional and consequential amendments stemming from the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act and stipulated in sections 395 to 405 of the Budget Implementation Act, 2009.

[English]

While it may impact the operations of government, the repeal of a statute does not normally require a royal recommendation. The parliamentary secretary contended that repealing this act and the related sections of the Budget Implementation Act, 2009 would have the practical effect of assigning a new mandate to the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

Private Members' Business

If Bill C-471 were adopted, the situation with respect to oversight of the pay equity process and the hearing of pay equity complaints would revert to that which was in place prior to the adoption of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. In effect, this is a change in the mandate of the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

As stated in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 834, this kind of change requires a royal recommendation.

[*Translation*]

A royal recommendation not only fixes the allowable charge, but also its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications. For this reason, a royal recommendation is required not only in the case where money is being appropriated, but also in the case where the authorization to spend for a specific purpose is significantly altered. Without a royal recommendation, a bill that either increases the amount of an appropriation, or extends its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications is inadmissible on the grounds that it infringes on the Crown's financial initiative.

[*English*]

Consequently, it is my ruling that in changing the objects and purposes of the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, Bill C-471 infringes upon the financial prerogative of the Crown.

Accordingly, the Chair will decline to put the question on third reading of the bill in its present form unless a royal recommendation is received. Today's debate, however, is on the motion for second reading and this motion shall be put to a vote at the close of the current debate.

[*Translation*]

I thank hon. Members for their attention.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that we are debating a bill that is going to have some troubles along the way, but here we are. I will certainly bring forward some of the ideas that I think need to be put on the public record.

The reason and rationale for this bill was because of the government's stripping away of rights that were provided for women, hard-fought rights. For many years, women and the allies of women who wanted to see equity in the workplace fought for pay equity. The basic principle was that the work done by women should be rewarded in the same way as work done by men and that we would have an understanding and some balance in our society in the way that work was recognized.

Arguments were made over decades. Eventually there was some daylight at the end, with the pay equity decisions that were made both in the court and through negotiations. With the stroke of a pen, the government, through a budget bill, took those rights away.

I do not have to tell the House of the concerns that many of us have with the government in the way in which it constructs budgets. It sneaks different proposals into a major budget document that it cannot get through in the House by stand-alone bills. In fact, that is what happened with this.

Not only that, to put this into context, we can well recall what happened when this was first proposed. It was first proposed in a financial update, along with other measures that the government had

to back down on because it was so tone deaf. It brought forward a fiscal update that would strip women of their rights to pay equity. It looked at not providing stimulus for the economy at a time when it needed it. It looked to take out the opposition parties, financially. There were also a couple of environmental measures as well.

The government backed down on a couple of those proposals, but it had the audacity to keep the proposal to strip away pay equity. It is astonishing when we look at the number of years it took for women to have pay equity recognized and monitored, and that is an important facet and was mentioned in the Speaker's ruling just a minute ago. It is not sufficient to say that women's labour will be recognized the same as men's labour. There has to be some monitoring mechanism to do that. It was understood through court decisions and through bargaining at the table over the many years that there had to be some form of monitoring to ensure pay equity would not only be done, but that there would be some oversight to it.

The government basically said that it did not need this, that we should trust it. I am with those women and others who say that trusting the government on that kind of issue is a little too cute by half. We cannot have a system where the government says on one hand that it will let this take its course and that it does not need any oversight. On the other hand, witness what has happened with the pay between men and women.

As members probably know, we are not at a point in our society, sadly, like others are, where men and women receive the same pay for the work they do. That notion of equity is either something the government does not understand or does not want to understand.

• (1730)

We know where gains have been made in other jurisdictions. It has been an issue where pay equity is recognized, it is embedded in contracts and it is recognized in compensation. Most important, and this is where the government has taken away the oversight, is to have a mechanism in place to ensure the employer, in this case the federal government, actually abides by the principles and the rules. Once that is taken away, then we basically say we will go back to the old way and hope that it happens.

We do not have to talk to too many women to find out that they need a little more than the good word of the Conservative government or any other government. They want to see a process in place, a process with oversight. They want to see some progress in terms of goals. They want to see the equal pay for work of equal value notion recognized. They want to see some form of oversight so when it does happen, there is a process in place to follow-up. This is 2010 but there are still inequities.

The budget put forward by the government was first introduced in a fiscal update and then in budget form. What the government put into that fiscal update and then in it budget would take away a right. That is why we on this side said that we would not support that budget.

Private Members' Business

Taking the right to pay equity away was not something we could support, but notwithstanding that, the government put it in the budget bill. Issues of confidence arose as a result. We said that we would not standby and watch the progress that women had fought many years for be taken away with the stroke of a pen.

This bill is about trying to right a wrong. It essentially says to the government that we will not standby idly and watch it take away rights when it puts together a budget. If a budget is supposed to be an aspirational document, this one was retrograde. The government went back to the days when women did not have protection, when there was no oversight in terms of women being compensated. The government wanted to leave it the way it was done before. We are not satisfied with that.

I will sum up by saying that if we look at societies where there is equity, if we look at societies that are truly democratic in all the indicators, such as participation in the economy, compensation from work, the ability for people to live independently and successfully, the measure between a man's compensation and a woman's, we will see that these things did not happen because of a whim. These things happened because decisions were made and laws were invoked to ensure they happened. If we standby and allow things to happen on a whim and allow the state of affairs to continue the way they are, then this place would be filled with only men. Women would not be here. We cannot allow rights to be taken away, certainly not in a budget.

We on this side will not support the government's attempt to take away rights. We will support the notion of righting a wrong. That is why we will support the bill.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed about the ruling that was just handed down. Bill C-471, An Act respecting the implementation of the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force and amending another Act in consequence, was introduced in the House of Commons by the leader of the official opposition. This bill would repeal the measures in this year's Conservative budget that eroded pay equity.

It is inconceivable that in 2010, a Canadian government can attack a right as fundamental as equal pay for equal work. The measures in this budget do away with pay equity for Canadian women in a reprehensible way. What is more, Canadians are starting to have a better idea of the sneaky, roundabout way the Conservatives govern. The ultimate goal of Bill C-471 is to restore pay equity as a human right.

It makes no sense to put pay equity on the bargaining table. One cannot put a price on legitimate human rights and turn them into bargaining chips. That is why all the members of this House should wholeheartedly support this bill, which seeks to correct this serious injustice, and state officially that equal pay for equal work is still a fundamental right.

I want to share some statistics that should give us pause. Women who work full-time earn only 70.5% as much as men in the same job category who also work full-time year-round. In addition, women of colour earn only 64% and aboriginal women earn a frightening 46% of what men earn. Most women still hold what are known as

“women's jobs” in teaching, nursing and health care, office work and retail sales.

With the measures in this year's budget, the Conservatives are trying to make women pay for their economic woes. I want to talk about how the Conservative vision, as reflected in the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, will affect the well-being of Canadian women. For starters, these measures limit pay equity for more women. To be able to claim pay equity, a group must first show that it is 70% female, which further limits the number of eligible groups. In other words, if a company has less than 70% women, the law does not apply. As a result, many women would no longer be eligible.

Furthermore, as I said at the beginning of my speech, the Conservative government made pay equity part of the bargaining process. But it gets worse: unions face fines of up to \$50,000 for encouraging a woman who has been discriminated against or encouraging one of its members to file a complaint regarding pay equity.

Thus, women are being deprived of their right to be represented. They cannot even turn to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. With all these obstacles, the Conservative government has the nerve to call this pay equity legislation progressive. Instead, this measure is regressive, as are most of the measures the Conservatives have brought forward since they came to power, measures to appease their right-leaning electoral base.

It is completely clear that the Conservative government has no intention of addressing gender inequity in Canada. Its track record when it comes to women thoroughly reveals its intentions. Its position regarding maternal health in developing countries is very telling. And we can see other examples in the measures taken regarding Status of Women Canada: the elimination of funding for public interest groups that advocate for women, the elimination of the court challenges program and the repeated attacks on the firearms registry. The list goes on. These are just a few examples that clearly demonstrate this government's backwards attitude to women.

• (1740)

Bill C-471 is about equality, respect and the protection of human rights. Above all, these rights can never be negotiated. This excellent legislative measure is necessary and it must be supported by all members. It already has the support of the majority of Canadians. This legislation is beneficial for and important to the women of this country who must always fight to advance their fundamental rights.

In its March 2003 presentation to the Pay Equity Task Force, the Canadian Human Rights Commission recognized that fundamental rights are closely tied to women's economic well-being. Discrimination is one factor that leads to their economic disadvantage and the gender wage gap is one indicator of inequality for women. The link is obvious.

Private Members' Business

Only an effective and efficient pay equity policy can contribute to women's equality.

Our legislative measure, Bill C-471, is based on the principle that pay equity is a human right. In fact, it is one of the earliest human rights recognized as an international standard. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has stated that pay equity is enshrined in many international agreements to which Canada has been bound for decades. We must highlight the quasi-constitutional nature of human rights, their pre-eminence over other types of rights and the need to interpret them liberally and progressively.

Furthermore, still according to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Canada has also signed recent international agreements that recognize the need for comprehensive equality action plans coupled with transparent and accountable institutions of government in order to move the equality agenda forward.

To the Canadian Human Rights Commission, human rights and the right to pay equity are universal and indivisible. Human rights, including the right to pay equity, must be the same everywhere and for everyone. Inextricably linked to equality, pay equity is also intended to be transformative. While pay equity aims to fairly value and compensate the work done primarily by women, pay equity is not "just about the money". Pay equity identifies and dismantles long-standing patterns of systemic discrimination in order to change how we do business and how society operates. In other words, while wage discrimination in and of itself can lead to a constricted ability for some to fully enjoy a range of human rights, it is the insidious link between wage discrimination and other forms of discrimination that can adversely impact the most disadvantaged workers. Unequal pay is part of the broader problem of systemic discrimination in employment, and pay equity is one essential tool for creating systemic change.

That is why pay equity has become a national issue and why members of this House must support and pass Bill C-471.

With this legislation in hand we could create a federal pay equity commission to ensure pay equity in the federal public service, crown corporations and federally-regulated sectors. This federal pay equity commission would enforce the principle of pay equity in the public service and federally-regulated industries. Most importantly, under Bill C-471, future pay equity measures would be considered human rights legislation.

In closing, this bill would benefit all Canadians and I am pleased to support it. I hope all my colleagues in this House share my enthusiasm and will make it their duty to support this bill wholeheartedly.

• (1745)

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss an issue of great importance to women and to all those who believe in the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. The subject is the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act which, I am proud to say, our government introduced into the House last year and was subsequently passed into law.

The previous pay equity system in the federal public sector was broken. It was lengthy, costly, and because it was complaint-based,

these issues were addressed only as an afterthought when complaints were made. As a result, women had to wait up to 20 years for resolution of their complaints following gruelling and divisive court proceedings. In fact, many employees had already left the public service by the time complaints were settled.

Why was this happening? It was because under the previous system, federal public service employers and unions were not required to take pay equity issues into account when they negotiated wages, and this was not fair to women.

There is a better way. That is why our government introduced the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. Our approach ensures employers and unions take pay equity into consideration every time they negotiate. It is time for employers and unions to be jointly accountable for setting equitable wages, for reporting publicly to employees, and for sticking to the commitments they make at the bargaining table. We should be putting dollars in the hands of women and not in the hands of those directing these costly and lengthy legal proceedings.

Others share our viewpoint. The Federally Regulated Employers-Transportation and Communications organization told a parliamentary committee that the legislation makes sense and that both collective bargaining parties must be responsible for implementing pay equity.

In 2004 a task force, appointed by the previous government, concluded that proactive pay equity legislation was a more effective way of protecting the rights of women. The same task force recommended that Parliament enact new stand-alone pay equity legislation, which is what we did. Our legislation addressed the key recommendations of the 2004 report by setting out a proactive and collaborative system to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

It does not change human rights. It protects them. We put teeth in this legislation. Fines will be imposed on either employers or unions that do not comply with their duty to ensure equitable compensation. As a further protection, employees will be able to resolve any disputes through the Public Service Labour Relations Board, an independent tribunal.

Pay equity legislation has been continually evolving since the first such legislation was introduced in Manitoba in 1986, followed by Ontario and Quebec. Our new federal model builds on those existing models. It goes a step further by truly integrating equitable compensation into the wage setting process and ensuring continuous action for years to come.

Women deserve fair pay rates now and every time their collective agreements are renewed, not 20 years from now, which is why I am proud of our government's pay equity legislation.

Let us be clear. When women are treated fairly, they prosper. We need look no further than today's public service. In today's public service, women and men have equal access to all positions. Today women comprise just over half of the overall public service and they have shown a marked increase in their participation in professional, scientific and executive ranks.

• (1750)

Since 1999, women have made great strides in accessing more top jobs in the public service. The glass ceiling does not exist in today's federal public service. Women are fully represented in positions of power and authority and are able to contribute at all levels. Women have made important strides in the federal public service. The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act reflects our commitment to ensure we continue to move in the right direction.

However, our commitment to women does not end there.

We support a wide range of initiatives that create opportunities for women and their families, including the extension of maternity and parental benefits to self-employed Canadians, as well as more targeted programs such as the women's community fund and the women's partnership fund.

The women's community fund supports projects at the local, regional and national levels to enable the full participation of women in all aspects of Canadian life.

The women's partnership fund facilitates the engagement of eligible organizations and public institutions through joint projects designed to address issues important to women.

Our government continues to introduce initiatives that improve the lives of women at home and abroad.

In the recent Speech from the Throne, we committed to further protecting women by cracking down on crime and addressing the unsolved cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women.

On the international front, Canada is championing a major initiative on maternal and child health in developing nations, during its G8 presidency.

Every year, more than half a million women die in pregnancy and nearly nine million children die before their fifth birthday. Far too many lives and futures have been lost for lack of relatively simple health solutions, all well within the reach of the international community. Often, the keys to life are no more sophisticated than clean water or the most basic treatment against infection.

Other members of the G8 share our concern. Together, we will take action to address this human misery.

Action was what was required when it came to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Our government acted when it brought forward the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act.

Let us not now undo the progress we have made. Let us not now return to a system in which women had to wait up to 20 years for resolution of pay equity complaints, and then only after gruelling and divisive debates in court. Let us not take a step backward for women. Instead, let us support the just system our government has put in place by opposing the bill before us today.

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-471 regarding pay equity, just a few days after we celebrated International Workers' Day on May 1, even though there are not many reasons to celebrate in Canada with this current government.

I would first like to state our party's position. The Bloc Québécois fully supports the bill introduced by the Liberal leader, although, if the Liberals had taken action as soon as we received the report of the pay equity task force ordered by their own government, we would not still be stuck in this debate, which will ultimately show two things: the Liberals are progressive only when they are in the opposition, and the Conservatives are misogynistic all of the time.

When he was with the National Citizens Coalition in the fall of 1998, the current Prime Minister made his view on pay equity clear. He said that, for taxpayers, pay equity was a ripoff and had nothing to do with gender. According to him, both men and women taxpayers will pay additional money to both men and women in the civil service, and that was why the federal government should scrap its ridiculous pay equity law.

That is what the Prime Minister said, and that is what he was quick to do in the 2009 budget.

Part 11 of the 2009 budget implementation bill has to do with "equitable compensation" and it enacted the Public Service Equitable Compensation Act. The term "pay equity" is nowhere to be found in the bill, which instead refers to "equitable compensation" without ever defining it.

The act applies strictly to public sector employers: the Treasury Board, the RCMP and certain agencies and crown corporations. Businesses under federal jurisdiction are not covered, including some crown corporations, like Canada Post and CBC.

I think it is important to hear what is in the preamble:

Whereas

Parliament affirms that women in the public sector of Canada should receive equal pay for work of equal value;

Whereas Parliament affirms that it is desirable to accomplish that goal through proactive means;

And whereas employers in the public sector of Canada operate in a market-driven economy;

So, what does that mean? Clause 3 states:

An employer shall, in respect of its non-unionized employees, take measures to provide them with equitable compensation in accordance with this Act. In the case of unionized employees, the employer and the bargaining agent shall take measures to provide those employees with equitable compensation in accordance with this Act.

Of course the Bloc Québécois voted against this bill, which made pay equity a negotiable right and part of a collective agreement. Instead, the Bloc Québécois asked that sectoral committees on pay equity be created, as has been done in Quebec.

Private Members' Business

We also denounced the fact that the bill created a third category of workers in Quebec consisting of those who fall under Quebec pay equity legislation, those under federal legislation on equitable compensation, and those still subjected to the ineffective complaint system under the federally regulated private sector and certain crown corporations.

So we had to ask ourselves this: If the Conservative government believes that equitable compensation is necessary in the government, why would that not also be the case for private businesses under its jurisdiction, unless it believes that this principle is costly and harmful to private enterprise?

The Liberals and their party leader have gone to the trouble of introducing Bill C-471 on pay equity in order to show women how important they are, and yet the Liberals voted in favour of the budget.

In his speech introducing the bill, the Leader of the Opposition said, "To come right to the point, hidden in the 2009 budget was a measure that undermined pay equity." The truth is, pay equity is worth nothing more to the Liberals than a couple of seats. The truth is, they voted in favour of the budget and in favour of driving pay equity backwards, knowing very well what they were doing, and too bad for women.

• (1755)

The pay equity issue is all but solved in Quebec. It is not complete yet because some female workers in Quebec are under the Canada Labour Code.

It is clear that the principle of equity, which is fundamental in Quebec, is not fundamental here. The federal government announced that it will cut \$1.7 billion in spending and chances are that during collective bargaining, because they will obviously have to negotiate pay equity in the future, the government's negotiators will say that it is necessary to decrease the operating budget or that a collective effort is needed. If nothing concrete happens concerning pay equity during collective bargaining, it will be blamed on the union.

People will say that I am a pessimist, a cynic. However, this is the government that rejects anti-scab legislation, this is the government that goes over the heads of federal-level unions and that even repudiates its own collective agreements. This is the government that is risking the health of workers covered by the Canadian Labour Code, as was shown in a study last week. This government is even going so far as to vote against a Bloc bill that would exclude labour disputes from the employment insurance qualifying period. The truth is, the Conservatives do not like workers and never take their side.

At the same time, this government is questioning the right to abortion. It is cutting funding to women's rights groups and it is against a preventive withdrawal program. The truth is that the Conservatives have no concern whatsoever for women.

They want nothing to do with pay equity, this "ridiculous legislation", as the Prime Minister called it a few years ago.

The Bloc, however, cares and has always supported the creation of proactive legislation.

On May 4, 2004, the pay equity task force published a report of more than 500 pages titled *Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right*. It recommended that the federal government put in place proactive pay equity legislation, and it presented a detailed plan outlining the best way to undertake this.

During the Pay Equity Task Force's consultations, stakeholders agreed on several key issues. Among other things, they agreed that they were committed to the principle of pay equity; that pay equity was a human rights issue; that employers had a positive duty to take steps to eliminate wage discrimination; that any new system must be available to unionized as well as non-unionized workers; that the new system must provide additional guidelines on how to comply with pay equity standards; that a neutral body responsible for providing information and support and ensuring compliance with pay equity standards should be set up; and that an independent agency with the power to settle pay equity disputes should be set up.

That all seems reasonable to me, and it is hard to see how anyone could be against this, yet the Conservatives are. They plan to silence anyone who speaks out against their equitable compensation scheme. They claim that they are making things better for women in the public service. They know that is not true. We all know that is not true, but the truth holds little sway with the Conservatives.

The theme for this year's workers' day was "For a fair Quebec". This bill can help make both Quebec and Canada more equitable places.

Successive federal governments have done a poor job of defending Quebec's values of fairness and equity, so I believe, as always, that sovereignty is the best way for Quebec to become a fully equitable society.

• (1800)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the bill today. I noted that the previous speakers referred to the fact that pay equity was initially begun in Manitoba. It was the first province in Canada to bring in pay equity in 1986. I was lucky enough to be elected in 1986 and be part of the government of Howard Pawley that brought in legislation, eventually to be followed by Ontario and Quebec.

At that time, in some ways we were the vanguard of this type of legislation, but not only pay equity legislation. That government dealt with some very controversial areas. We were the first to bring in daycare proposals. Myrna Phillips, speaker of the legislature in Manitoba for awhile, was the legislative assistant who worked on the daycare issue. Pharmacare was brought in by the NDP in 1970-71, under the Ed Schreyer government.

To this day, even though we talk about having a national pharmacare program, and the Liberals will promise it occasionally before elections when they are in red book mode, when they become government, and when the Conservatives become government, we do not see actions taken in the areas of pharmacare. We do not see actions taken in the area of daycare. We certainly do not see actions taken in the area of pay equity.

Another issue we dealt with in 1986 was the inclusion of gay rights in the human rights code. That was when I was first elected. Even our own caucus was having difficulties with this issue. I know I was one of a group of four people who stood our ground. We fought the issue and over time we turned the government around on it and it agreed to bring it forth. To his credit, Premier Pawley to this day says that the action he took to introduce the legislation was one of his proudest moments during his six and a half years as premier.

We in the NDP in Manitoba, like the Bloc in Quebec, have been at the vanguard of a lot of very progressive legislation.

When I see Bill C-471 introduced by the Liberal leader, I wondered why it would be introduced in 2010. When we looked into the issue a little further, we found that it was a case where the Liberals and Leader of the Opposition essentially got themselves into a problem. Last year, on March 4, 2009, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore instructed his party to vote with the government on the budget bill. Like this year's budget implementation bill, last year's was very similar, with an omnibus approach in which the government took a number of issues that it knew would be controversial in a minority Parliament and threw them in the budget.

There were environmental issues and there was this issue. The government decided to take the whole area of pay equity out under the purview of the human rights jurisdiction legislation and put it under the area of labour negotiations.

The members of the Bloc and the NDP understood what was going on with the government, regardless of its protestations, and members of the Liberal Party understood it as well. However, they were caught in this cat and mouse game, which the government has played with them over the last two year period. The government feels it can throw items like this into an omnibus bill and serve it up to the Liberals. The Liberals are so afraid to go to an election over it that they simply fall in line and vote the way they have. To try to recover and save some face in the matter and some credibility, the member has decided to come up with this approach. That is what we are dealing with right now.

● (1805)

The current Prime Minister has a pretty spotty record in this area as well. We have some issues and quotes from him. I believe the Bloc member dealt with it a few minutes ago, but the Prime Minister has made all sorts of very incendiary comments over the years. I recall him talking about the maritime provinces being overly dependent on government incentives and that got himself into a lot of trouble. He talked about building firewalls around Alberta and that got into a lot of trouble.

In 1998 the Prime Minister described our current pay equity laws in the following words. He said:

For taxpayers, however, it's a rip-off. And it has nothing to do with gender. Both men and women taxpayers will pay additional money to both men and women in the civil service. That's why the federal government should scrap its ridiculous pay equity law.

I do not believe the leopard changes its spots that easily. He knows he is close to a majority government and has to make some changes, so perhaps he will moderate his views a little to gain some short-term political advantage. At the end of the day, I do not really think he will have changed his views all that much.

Private Members' Business

He also pointed out specific flaws in the current legislation. He said:

Now 'pay equity' has everything to do with pay and nothing to do with equity. It's based on the vague notion of 'equal pay for work of equal value,' which is not the same as equal pay for the same job.

Just to be clear, we recognize we will not count on the government any time soon to support women's issues in our country. In fact, Conservatives constantly come up with the negative on any of these issues. They can be pretty much guaranteed to be pulling out the cost factors on progressive social initiatives. If we want to establish pay equity, they will be the first to say that they cannot do this because it will cost too much, that it will slow the economy down, that it will bankrupt businesses, that it will bankrupt the government. They will put as regressive a face on it as possible.

We have the issue of the court challenges program, another program that the government eliminated, which is hardly a friendly move as far as women are concerned.

On the whole issue of affordable child care, both Conservative and Liberal governments over the years have failed to create affordable child care in our country. I recognize Quebec has had the best affordable child care system in the country for a number of years now. However, people can look back to 1986 and the work Myrna Phillips and Muriel Smith did in the area of daycare, and the member for Saint Boniface knows the people to whom I refer. It was before she became the speaker of the legislature. We brought in that daycare program in Manitoba.

The fact is successive Conservative governments have never dared to tamper or change those programs, and that is the fundamental fact. The Conservatives rarely propose innovative social programs. We will never see that happening. They are more concerned about corporate taxes. They cannot offend the big corporations. They have to reduce the corporate taxes to attract more business to the country. Then they will be able to afford proper daycare and pay equity 200 or 300 years into the future.

● (1810)

The Conservatives' priority is driving corporate taxes down to zero, if it can get it there, which is the difference between the Conservative approach and the approach of the NDP. I think the women in this country know very well that they are far better off supporting the NDP than they ever have been or will be supporting governments like the Conservatives.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking out against Bill C-471, a private member's bill introduced by the Leader of the Opposition to repeal the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act from the 2009 budget.

Private Members' Business

• (1815)

[English]

I first need to indicate how confused I am about the Liberal position. This is a party that, today, once again, attempted to shut down a female member of Parliament's right to speak, a party that continually bullies our female members of Parliament. It is the male member for Ajax—Pickering who continues to do that on behalf of the Liberal leader.

I am talking about the debate that is going on about the gun registry, a debate that Canadians are seized upon and that many women care intimately about. It is an issue that we wanted to debate wholly and fulsomely but, unfortunately, the member for Ajax—Pickering attempted to shut down that debate by eliminating all but a couple of witnesses who actually sit on the side of repealing the long gun registry and tried to force through a whole contingent of witnesses who would only air one side of it.

Once again, they are bullying Canadians by trying to silence them. This is done because the leader, for whatever reason, is afraid to hear from police officers who are in fact in support of repealing the registry.

Today, after a motion had been made by the member for Ajax—Pickering, a motion to allow the mover of the bill only 30 minutes to speak when normal practice is that the mover of the bill gets an hour in every other committee, a bullying tactic by the member for Ajax—Pickering, the discussion period was limited to 30 minutes on a very important bill to repeal the long gun registry.

Again at that committee, the member for Ajax—Pickering bullied his way through committee and silenced the will of committee. The committee had voted very clearly on his motion to proceed with the 30 minute period for the person—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I question the relevance of the member going on and on. My understanding of it is that that side had been filibustering in that particular committee. Now we are on a private member's bill in regard to equity.

Mr. Speaker, I think you should look into the relevance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate the point that was raised. The member knows that members are given significant latitude in terms of relevance. I am sure the parliamentary secretary is speaking to the bill before the House.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to the bill because we are speaking about women's equality and how far women have come in this wonderful Canada that we call home.

Unfortunately, the Liberal Party sees fit to try to silence women, not only here in the House of Commons but across the country when things like the gun registry are being discussed, which is in their interest, for their protection and for safety. We need to make it more functional.

We need to make pay equity more functional, which is what our government has done. Today, when the member for Ajax—Pickering, after his motion passed in committee to allow the member for Portage—Lisgar to speak for 30 minutes on her bill, again limiting her because normally it is an hour, he then interrupted at the

beginning of committee and limited her once again to 10 minutes. He was able to silence a female member and make it seem as if this were a normal process.

I am sorry but I question the honesty of that member and democracy among the party.

[Translation]

The private member's bill before us today is flawed and unworkable in so many ways that I do not even know where to start.

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, which affects only the federal public sector, is based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. That is the same principle found in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

In principle and in application, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act shows that our government respects this fundamental value of Canadian society.

One of the flaws of the opposition's Bill C-471 is that it requires the government to implement a complex and costly pay equity system that would not serve federal public servants and the Canadian people well. We do not need that.

Canada and Canadian women have evolved a lot since 1970. In the last 30 years, women have made great progress, particularly in the federal public service, to which the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act applies.

In 1983, fewer than 5% of senior level positions in the federal public service were filled by women. Today, 41% of senior executives are women. This shows that women are increasingly taking their rightful place in the federal public service. They not only have access to these positions; their representation in most positions at all levels has also increased considerably over the years.

It is fair to say that there has been a profound change in the Canadian public service over the past few years and women have played an important role in that change. Today, the public service offers women and men equal access to all positions and the same pay within the same groups and levels.

Women have made significant progress in three decades and the Public Service Equitable Compensation Act recognizes that reality. Not only have women taken their place in the ranks of the federal public service, but their wages have been integrated into the bargaining process for all federal employees.

If you believe in the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and if you believe in the right to collective bargaining, that is as it should be. If you believe in equal pay for work of equal value, you will understand that public servants' remuneration as well as benefits must be established in the same way and at the same time, but not separately.

This proactive approach reflects the equality and equity enjoyed by men and women in the public service today.

I believe that most people would agree with me that it is better to adopt a proactive approach to all matters pertaining to remuneration than to engage in long and costly pay equity processes that will force future generations to pay women the salaries that they were entitled to from the beginning.

That is the aim of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act.

Of course, Bill C-471, sooner or later, after much effort, may lead to a system of proactive remuneration, but at what cost? Repealing the entire Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act—a new law which will soon go into effect—and replacing it later with another complex and costly law does not make sense.

It is even less logical to think that any law that might replace it in the future would even come close to equalling the level of accountability and effectiveness in the Public Service Equitable Compensation Act.

Repealing this act would be terrible. It would do a lot of damage and would not be progressive at all, considering that an effective solution is already available.

I also want to point out that opposition members like to downplay one of the major reforms that the Public Service Equitable Compensation Act introduced: recourse.

Our new system does not deny women or any employee the right to file complaints in court.

On the contrary, it upholds that right via an independent watchdog: the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

There is another reason why this bill is defective.

• (1820)

Currently, the public service is going to great lengths to renew its workforce and work environment to keep them relevant to the next generation of Canadians and to ensure that they contribute to our country's success. We call it public service renewal. One of our goals is to create a work environment that will persuade the best and brightest to work for Canada.

[*English*]

In closing, I will be voting against the leader of the Liberal Party's bill because it does not enhance the ability of women to fight for their rights. We would be taking a huge leap backward, should we go back to what we had previously. I am not willing to allow women to go back to a system where it takes 15 years for them to get their just due and I will not agree with the Liberal leader's position on this.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 6:27 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

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Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 5, 2010, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Mr. Lee Richardson: Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Calgary Centre has asked for unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30. Does he have consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

TRANSPORT

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to have a second chance at asking this question which I asked a few weeks ago. It was initially for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, but it was the minister responsible for FedNor who answered. It is about an important subject with regard to transportation, specifically rail in my area of Ontario. I was very disappointed in a couple of ways with the answer I received.

The answer was in the affirmative, that the federal government was actually going to come to the table with the \$15 million that was requested in partnership with the provincial government to make sure that the rail line between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, the Huron Central line, stayed in place. We have been talking about this for quite some time in Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Algoma and in this place. I was pleased that the answer was yes. Given that the provincial government had signed on to an agreement, the federal government agreed that the money would be there.

What disappointed me was the flippant way in which the answer was given. The minister could have expanded on the yes and talk about how the process would unfold in terms of the partners at the table. He could have said that a letter would be coming. I still have not seen a letter indicating how the process would work, how that \$15 million would be delivered, how the necessary agreement among all the partners would be arrived at, or what the timelines were. I did not get that. What I got was a yes, the government said it would do it.

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I then received a bit of a backhand, which I felt was rather unbecoming of the minister. It was certainly disrespectful of me as the member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie. It was as if to say that the yes was all due to the efforts of the mayor of Sault Ste. Marie, who happens to be seeking the nomination for the Conservatives in the next election. That answer indicated that I had absolutely nothing to do with it.

I have in front of me the questions that I asked in this House on two occasions. There was one in March of this year, which is the question I am speaking to today, and another one in the late winter. I also drafted a number of letters to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I spoke twice to him here in the House about this issue and had some conversations over the weekend by email with the minister's office. I believe I did my part in making sure that this very important investment actually happens for Sault Ste. Marie.

My question today is for the parliamentary secretary. I appreciate that he is here this afternoon. He answered my first question a month or two ago on this subject, and he should have some understanding of the importance of this rail line to our region.

I wonder if he could elaborate a bit more on how this process will unfold. The federal government is in. The federal government is at the table. What are the timelines? Who needs to be in contact with the minister's office to ensure that all of the agreements are signed and that this happens as expeditiously as possible?

● (1830)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope to answer as many of my friend's questions as I can.

This government is committed to establishing world-class infrastructure in Canada to support a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and better communities, a clear and necessary thing for all Canadians.

We are working hard to ensure that our infrastructure investments help Canada emerge from the recent economic crisis with a more modern and greener infrastructure in a number of different ways. We are doing this through the \$33 billion building Canada plan and the \$12 billion in infrastructure funding that is part of Canada's economic action plan.

Infrastructure Canada has actually committed more than \$9.6 billion toward 6,000 infrastructure projects across this country. When combined with contributions from provinces, territories, municipalities, and other funding partners that have joined this effort, this means a total of more than \$27 billion committed for infrastructure projects in communities across the country, like the member's own community and riding.

Thousands of communities across Canada have been able to benefit from this money, and build and upgrade infrastructure that stimulates the local economy, generating business and jobs. In just a one-year period of time we have announced 1,100 projects across Canada to clean up water systems, 60 projects to improve public transit, and 1,400 projects to upgrade local roads and highways that Canadians use every single day.

Communities in northern Ontario have also benefited and will continue to benefit from these infrastructure programs. This government supports the economic needs of Canada's communities, including those in my friend's riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

Over the past year we have heard from municipalities and industry in the area that the Huron Central Rail line is important to the economic sustainability of northern Ontario. We have heard that clearly.

On February 12 of this year, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities responded on behalf of the federal government. In a letter to his provincial counterparts, he explained that we are ready to provide our share of funding through the provincial-territorial base fund for this project. Let me quote part of that letter. It stated:

A joint call for proposals from Canada and Ontario was made pursuant to the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, for which the Huron Central Rail line applied. I would note that in reviewing the applications submitted for short-line rail projects, Ontario did not indicate an interest or priority in funding such projects, including the Huron Central Rail's call for funding under that program...

The Infrastructure Stimulus Fund is no longer able to make new commitments.

However, should Ontario now choose to support this project, I am happy to inform you that the Government of Canada is indeed prepared to support this initiative, provided that Ontario submits it for funding under the Provincial-Territorial Base Fund.

I know it is quite lengthy. It went on to say:

As you know, we have been negotiating a Canada-Ontario Provincial-Territorial Base Fund agreement since 2008, most recently with the view to fully accelerating Ontario's entire allocation over fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 as part of Canada's economic action plan.

We provided a draft of the agreement to you in August 2008 and did not receive initial comments until one year later in August 2009.

Ontario remains the only jurisdiction in Canada without an agreement in place to access their allocation of \$175 million.

The minister then concluded by saying:

—that we move swiftly to sign the Canada-Ontario Provincial-Territorial Base Fund agreement—

It is this government that is moving forward to try to get Ontario to do so and I will continue to answer my friend's question as the night progresses.

● (1835)

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of that letter as well and would be interested in allowing the parliamentary secretary to continue, to indicate whether, as I believe has been done, the agreement has been signed and the federal government has committed the \$50 million. We are now wondering about the process for that to flow and some timeline in terms of when that money will flow so that the investment can be made.

Huron Central has indicated that time is of the essence as it looks at trying to source materials and sign contracts for people to actually do the work. I would be interested in knowing what the process is, what the timelines are, and if there is any commitment at all from the government to go beyond the freight piece of this to look at actual passenger service between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury.

Mr. Brian Jean: There is never enough time, Mr. Speaker. I will continue with the minister's letter. He concluded by saying:

—that we move swiftly to sign the Canada-Ontario Provincial-Territorial Base Fund agreement, which could be the source of funds for infrastructure on the Huron Central Rail line initiative, and for other infrastructure priorities across Ontario. We understand that the Huron Central Rail initiative would proceed between now and 2015, and therefore this could have an impact on the extent to which Ontario's Provincial-Territorial Base Fund can be accelerated this year and next.

In essence, we are ready to go ahead and we encourage Ontario to get onboard as well, to sign the agreement in relation to this fund. I am very hopeful, clearly hopeful, that the Ontario government concludes its discussions on the base fund and signs the agreement as quickly as possible, so that we can move forward on this important project and many others throughout Ontario.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to follow up on a question that I posed to the government on its lack of support for Bill C-311, the climate change accountability act.

This bill, the only climate change bill before this House, will now face a final vote here tomorrow evening.

It is a first necessary step on the road to tackling dangerous climate change, what many consider to be the greatest threat confronting our civilization today.

A recent Harris/Decima survey found that two-thirds of Canadians think that climate change is the defining challenge of our times. The same number of Canadians want Canada to adopt ambitious targets, regardless of what many other countries may do. They know that how we safeguard our planet and our future, in the face of climate change, for our children and generations to come, will be the test of our mettle.

The government keeps repeating the deception, the delusion, that it will be too costly to take the needed action. In fact, the parliamentary secretary said as much in his incomplete reply to my question the other day.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. Fiscal prudence tells us that we cannot afford not to take action. Other countries agree. Europe, the U.S., and even China, are all moving quickly to invest in renewable energy technologies and to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Let me quote from a report released today in Washington by the United Steelworkers and Environmental Defence Canada, called “Falling Behind: Canada's Lost Clean Energy Jobs”. It states:

At every opportunity, the Canadian government emphasizes that it is harmonizing its energy and climate policies with the United States. Yet, when it comes to investing in clean energy jobs, Canada does not even come close to matching U.S. efforts.

The study found that the U.S. is investing at least eight times more per capita than this government is in energy efficiency, public transit and renewable power. It is estimated that we are losing out on 66,000 jobs because we are so far behind.

In fact, the current government has recently shut down the eco-energy programs for renewable power and green home retrofits.

Here is just one example of the impacts of these cancellations. The ground source heating industry in this country, a fledgling industry,

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has had its knees cut out from underneath it. Homeowners who installed ground source heat pump systems cut their energy use by 40% to 60%, but needed the eco-energy program to help with the initial installation costs, which will not be available now.

Now that the eco-energy program has been stopped, installations of this energy-conserving technology have already plummeted. This is moving in the opposite direction of where we should be going.

The climate crisis we face has become urgent. We are approaching the eleventh hour.

I would like to quote a parliamentarian from history whose country faced no less of a threat:

The era of procrastination, of half-measure of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences

Just like when Winston Churchill spoke those prophetic words in the 1930s, our time for debate is drawing to a close.

My question is simple. Since the Conservative government has not tabled any serious proposals of its own, will any Conservative parliamentarians show the courage and the vision to support Bill C-311 becoming law before more precious time is lost?

● (1840)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the NDP really believed in climate change, it would not be supporting this publicity stunt that is called Bill C-311.

The Copenhagen accord represents a major step forward. It is an international climate change dialogue, laying the foundation for a post-2012 international climate change agreement that includes commitments from all the major emitters.

Bill C-311 is out of step with this development. The approach being taken by our major trading partners under the accord, including the commitments being made by our largest trading partner and market, the United States, is in no way reflected in Bill C-311.

Canada is aligning its efforts to address climate change with those of the United States to ensure environmental progress while preserving a competitive Canadian economy. In accordance with this commitment, Canada has identified an economy-wide emissions target of 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. It is only 10 years from now and that is fully aligned with the emission targets of the United States.

We are also aligning our efforts in other areas. For example, we published new proposed regulations for automobile and light trucks that are consistent with the national fuel economy standards announced in the United States. Actions such as these will foster significant technical improvements and will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a manner which minimizes the burden on Canadian industry. That means jobs.

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In contrast, Bill C-311's targets would undermine Canada's competitive position in the North American market, devastate the economic recovery and be divorced from the actions being taken by others under the Copenhagen accord. The bill's 2020 target is too aggressive and enacts policies to achieve that would be fundamentally undermined, devastating the recovery of the Canadian economy.

To put it into perspective, the target of 25% below 1990 levels is equivalent to 39% below 2005 levels. According to the report released by the Pembina Institute and David Suzuki Foundation, GDP costs of up to 3.2% can be expected from adopting Bill C-311. This is a much greater impact than any other developed country that is considering its commitments to climate change.

As currently drafted, Bill C-311 is likely ultra vires under the Constitution, therefore exceeding federal authority.

For these reasons, the government does not support Bill C-311. We are sticking up for Canada, for jobs, and for the environment. Instead we will continue to deploy a full range of instruments to combat climate change.

We are making investments in renewable energy, which the member constantly votes against.

We are using incentives and regulations to accelerate the development and deployment of green technologies, which the member votes against.

We will take every opportunity to engage with our international partners, working toward a global solution to a global problem.

The member needs to stop the publicity stunts and the photo ops, and get serious about fighting climate change. Let us do it internationally. It is a global problem with a global solution. Bill C-311 is not the solution.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, as is obvious to anyone here today, I am not photogenic enough for photo ops.

If the response is "Our government has a plan and is taking action", I would like to see it. All Canadians would like to see it.

With regard to Copenhagen, the Copenhagen accord is a farce. Canada could have led Copenhagen to a real solution but instead we stalled.

In response to the statement that our targets will be reduced by 17% by 2020, our government has changed its targets more times over the last few years than the Conservatives have change their socks, or their environment ministers, and that is almost every year.

The government's targets are weak. They are not based on 1990 levels. They are well below what is needed to avoid dangerous climate change. It is merely rubber-stamping whatever the U.S. comes up with. It is an abrogation of our duty.

• (1845)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, the member, when he was at committee, heard from every scientist and witness who spoke at committee that Bill C-311, or whatever plan, to be successful, had to be done with a continental approach. That is exactly what we are doing. Bill C-311 does not take into account a continental approach.

His constituents also want to know how he is going to vote on the gun registry. He promised his constituents that he was going to cancel the wasteful long-gun registry. Is he going to respect the wishes of and his promise to his constituents, or he is going to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Windsor West.

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to raise this issue again. I am sure I am going to get the canned points from the parliamentary secretary. They seem to be unable to even think in this place anymore, as we were handed this speech from the Prime Minister's Office.

I have some very important questions about procurement in this Parliament with regard to Canada Post procuring vehicles from Turkey instead of Windsor, where we have a minivan that would meet the specifications for that procurement. The Canada Post argument was that it is responsible to tender this out under the WTO and NAFTA, which is wrong and a lie.

In fact, I had parliamentary research issue its own report on this. It is independent. It is done for all parliamentarians. It is one of the important pieces our democracy has left. It has told me that the only obligations to nations for procurement on this type of an issue are to the United States, Mexico, Hong Kong, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Liechtenstein, Aruba, Norway, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, Peru and Chile. It is absolutely false that we could not have had that procurement here.

It is interesting that the government, which claims fiscal accountability, is borrowing billions upon billions of dollars that we have to pay interest on in the future. We are passing that debt on to our children, yet we are not allowed to do procurement in our own country, when it has committed to keep jobs and communities alive.

My community has had the highest unemployment rate for a number of different years. The auto industry has gone through a number of tough years and is re-emerging. This was a perfect opportunity to provide more stimulus to Canadians. Instead, the government is borrowing from the people of Canada and sending the money to Turkey for no reason whatsoever. It is absolutely unacceptable.

It did this to the Navistar as well. Think of the poor people of Chatham. We saved that truck plant and could have produced trucks for our own soldiers. The men and women of Chatham could create the products that our own service people would use. Instead, the government allowed that procurement to go to the United States. Under our national defence procurement, it could do that. What is interesting is that the U.S., in that plant in Texas, can jump the queue on Canadian vehicles. It also mandated its vehicles to be produced there. It was a double standard.

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We have seen two specific cases where procurements are going to areas of manufacturing. We have had so many problems. We have a high dollar. We have poor trade relations with other countries. We go by these rules that are made up, in terms of NAFTA and the WTO, that do not apply. The department is propagating an absolute lie.

I asked the minister about that. He decided to not even address the issue. He did not even decide to take this on. This is unacceptable. We are calling right now for a procurement policy that is fair, responsible and done with other similar countries, as they are doing as well. This is not a system that is done independently from Canada. This is one that the United States as well as European countries do in terms of procurement, including Turkey.

I ask this minister to go back and make sure the government switches its decision and buys these vehicles from Canadians.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by clarifying a few points for my colleague. I will first point out that Canada Post contracting and operations are at arm's length from the government, which means that we do not control it. It is done through a management process and uses best practices.

As the member also knows, the government does not get involved in the day to day operations of any crown corporations. To do so would, obviously, not be in the best interest of Canadians. However, as a crown corporation, Canada Post has a responsibility to perform its contracting in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations in place at that time.

According to what Canada Post has communicated to the Minister of State, it completed an open and competitive request for a proposal to source light duty vehicles earlier this year. The reason for initiating this process on the part of Canada Post was twofold. It was to begin replacing its aging national fleet vehicles and to modernize the way it does business, which is in all our best interests as we pay for it as users of the system.

As we know and as the member knows, Canada Post selected the Ford Transit Connect. I feel it is my responsibility at this time to tell the House a few things about that particular vehicle.

This vehicle is used by a number of post offices around the world and it is one of the best suited vehicles for Canadian roads and winters. It will actually replace the Ford E150 cargo vans in Canada Post's fleet but, more important, it will represent large savings over the life of each vehicle, which means, ultimately, savings for Canadians and people who use Canada Post.

How will this take place? In addition to reduced fuel consumption and lower emissions, this vehicle was named the 2010 North American truck of the year at the Detroit auto show and, in addition to this, it won numerous other international awards.

The world knows that this is a good vehicle and that it is suited for Canadian temperatures and roads.

I will also point out that through the request for proposal process, a number of criteria were evaluated. This included things, which the NDP often talk about wanting: the environmental impact of this particular vehicle; the employee health and safety requirements

necessary for this type of vehicle; performance capability and capacity; and total life cycle of the vehicle.

In other words, Canada Post made certain to evaluate the necessary components of the vehicle to ensure that it had the best vehicle for mail carriers and for Canadians, because long term it will affect Canadians and people who use the postal service.

I would also like to clarify a very important point, which is that these vehicles will be purchased through a Canadian dealer. These are actually Ford vehicles and, as we know, Ford dealerships are very prevalent across this country and they will be purchased through them. The regular warranty work and maintenance work, which is also so important for the life cycle of the vehicle, along with other servicing requirements, will be handled at these same Canadian Ford dealers from coast to coast. This is great news, not only for our auto sector but for Canadians and for the mail service itself. They will be able to access these dealers in almost every major city in Canada.

Even more than this, the work to modify these vehicles and prepare them for Canada Post's requirements will also be done right here in Canada.

There are many benefits and this is indeed good news for the Ford dealerships across this country.

● (1850)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it still does not answer the question of why we have a department that is out there lying about something to the minister and to the general public. The fact that it had to be purchased under WTO and under NAFTA is a complete fabrication and a lie and it is being done by the senior management of Canada Post. That is unacceptable.

Second, when the parliamentary secretary talks about the best interest of Canadians, I do not think it is in their best interest to be shipping hundreds of thousands of dollars or millions of dollars over to Turkey to have vehicles procured there when the minivan actually made the qualifications over here as well.

That is very important because we are borrowing this money when we have Canadians who are laid off and are not able to get the things that are necessary for their families and we are sending that borrowed money to a foreign nation to do something that we can do right here at home.

It is unacceptable. We need a procurement policy for Canadians. Everyone else is doing it. Why are we not doing it?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his time here today and his enthusiasm over this particular issue. I understand why it is important to him.

However, he needs to realize and recognize that this will benefit Canadians. This will benefit many Ford dealers across this country that will be selling the vehicles to Canada Post. It will also be of benefit to the mechanics and the other people who do the work on the vehicles. It will help many Ford dealers across this country. Indeed, it will modernize the fleet and, in the long term, be of great benefit to the taxpayer, which is very important.

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●(1855)

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 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:55 p.m.)

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