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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 12, 1998

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 12, 1998

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1005)

[English]

POINT OF ORDER

BILL S-4—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: My colleagues, I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands on February 4, 1998 concerning Bill S-4, an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act.

[Translation]

Before I begin, I would like to thank all the members who participated in the discussion on this matter: the hon. member for Elk Island, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I would especially like to commend the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands for having raised his point of order in such an articulate way that demonstrated thorough research and concise argumentation.

The hon. member argued that Bill S-4 violates Standing Order 80 because it substantially increases the limits of liability upon the government, thereby infringing on the financial privileges of the House of Commons. He concluded by requesting that Bill S-4 be removed from the Order Paper.

[English]

I wish to remind all hon. members of citation 619 of Beauchesne's sixth edition which states in part:

Under Standing Order 80, the House of Commons claims that all aids and supplies are the sole gift of the House of Commons and are not alterable by the Senate.

In other words the House of Commons claims pre-eminence in financial matters, that is, public expenditure and taxation. Public expenditure is sometimes referred to as charges upon the public revenue, and taxation as charges upon the people. Therefore, all

legislation that entails charges upon the public revenue or upon the people must originate in the House.

[Translation]

To determine if Bill S-4 is properly before the House, the Chair must ascertain whether or not it does in fact constitute a charge upon public funds.

[English]

Before doing so, I want to say a few words regarding one of the precedents cited by the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

In support of his claim that Bill S-4 breached the financial privileges of the House, the hon. member made reference to a decision given by Speaker Lamoureux on June 12, 1973 concerning the then Bill S-5, an act to amend the Farm Improvement Loans Act.

At that time Speaker Lamoureux ruled that Bill S-5, while not proposing a direct expenditure did involve substantial additional liabilities on public moneys and therefore infringed on the financial privileges of the House. Obviously Speaker Lamoureux could find no financial authority to cover such liabilities and consequently ordered that notice for first reading of Bill S-5 be removed from the Order Paper.

While looking at the elements of the case before us I have discovered that there exists very few decisions in the area of liabilities and how these relate to the financial privileges of the House.

For those reasons I have relied on the well-established principles described in the 21st edition of Erskine May under the subheading "Tests used to determine whether expenditure involves a charge". In deciding if a proposal for expenditure actually imposes a charge, May stipulates that a charge must be new and distinct. This is explained at page 712 where it is stated:

The question may arise whether a proposal for expenditure or for increased expenditure is not already covered by some general authorization. The test for determining this question in the case of a substantive proposal, that is a provision in a bill, as introduced, is a comparison with existing law.

The comparison of provisions in a bill with the law on the subject, as it exists, may show that, while such provisions undoubtedly involve expenditure, the power to incur such expenditure is covered by general powers conferred by statute.

My colleagues, I would point out to you that these are very technical matters, so I would ask that you give them some attention.

Routine Proceedings

● (1010)

My understanding of the procedural implications of Bill S-4 is the following. The increased limits of liability are set out in the proposed amendments to the Canada Shipping Act but the actual compensation available to claimants is subject to the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act, more specifically section 30(1) of this act which states:

On receipt of a certificate of judgment against the crown issued pursuant to the regulations, the Minister of Finance shall authorize the payment out of the consolidated revenue fund of any money awarded by the judgment to any person against the crown.

To further quote from Erskine May, it is stated at page 717:

Where sufficient statutory authority already exists for payments to which bills relate, no further resolution and recommendation is required.

There follows a list of cases not requiring further authorization, one of them being case No. 2 which is "Liability, to pay damages, covered by existing law".

What this says is that in the case of the Canada Shipping Act, provisions are made for changes to liabilities which, as the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands says, will create a charge upon the public revenue. However as Erskine May explains, where there is an act already in force to pay damages, no royal recommendation is required.

I conclude that there is already statutory authority under the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act to make the payments that Bill S-4 outlines. Therefore I would rule that Bill S-4 is in proper form and that it should remain on the Order Paper.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROGRAM

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 3(3) of the Employment Insurance Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, two copies of the first monitoring and assessment report on the employment insurance program, the 1997 report.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in

both official languages, the government's response to four petitions.

* * *

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-315, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of expense of tools provided as a requirement of employment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to allow employees to deduct the cost of providing tools for their employment if they are required to do so by their employer as a condition of employment.

The deduction includes an allowance in respect to the capital cost of tools and rental, maintenance and insurance expenses. Regulations would set the appropriate depreciation rates applicable to the capital cost of various types of tools.

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

* * *

● (1015)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Joe Fontana (London North Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-316, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (interest on student loans).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce this private member's bill to amend the Income Tax Act, a bill which acknowledges that student loans are an investment in the future.

The purpose of the bill is to decrease the student loan debt load and facilitate access to post-secondary education by allowing students or their co-signers to deduct their annual interest payments on student loans from their annual taxable income.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-317, an act to amend the Income Tax Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, my private member's bill is quite short and simple. It is to delete paragraph 81(1)(n) of the Income Tax Act which grants an exemption of tax to the governor general.

We feel that should not be appropriate any more.

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

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-318, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, again I have a short bill to repeal section 1 of part II of schedule III and section 1 of part VIII of schedule VI of the act which removes the GST exemption for the governor general.

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

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was unavoidably delayed in getting here this morning. I was wondering if you could seek unanimous consent to return to tabling of reports.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to presentation of reports from committees?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The report deals with Health Canada and our investigation into Health Canada's performance of delivery of services to first nations across the country.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests the government to table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that all questions be allowed to stand.

[*English*]

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday during Routine Proceedings I withdrew order paper Question No. 6 which stood in my name. That was an error, given that I wanted to withdraw P-3, a notice of motion for the production of papers.

This was an oversight given that both Q-6 and P-3 are on the same subject matter. May I reinstate Q-6 and withdraw P-3 at this time?

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House agreeable to the suggestion of the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast?

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Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall all questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD ACT

BILL C-4—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That in relation to Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of the report stage at second reading of the bill and one sitting day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the said bill and, fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business on the day allotted to the consideration of the report stage and on the day allotted to the third reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the stage of the bill then under consideration shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

• (1020)

[*English*]

The Deputy 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.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion 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 nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1105)

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

(*Division No. 72*)

YEAS

Members

Adams
Anderson
Assadourian

Alcock
Assad
Augustine

Government Orders

Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)	Baker	Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)	Crête
Bakopanos	Barnes	Davies	de Savoye
Beaumier	Bélair	Debien	Desjarlais
Bélanger	Bellemare	Desrochers	Doyle
Bennett	Bertrand	Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche)	Duceppe
Blondin-Andrew	Bonwick	Dumas	Duncan
Boudria	Bradshaw	Earle	Elley
Brown	Bryden	Epp	Fournier
Bulte	Byrne	Gagnon	Gauthier
Caccia	Calder	Gilmour	Girard-Bujold
Cannis	Caplan	Godin (Châteauguay)	Grewal
Carroll	Catterall	Guay	Guimond
Cauchon	Chamberlain	Hanger	Hardy
Chan	Clouthier	Harris	Harvey
Coderre	Cohen	Herron	Hill (MacLeod)
Collenette	Copps	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hilstrom
Cullen	DeVillers	Johnston	Jones
Dhaliwal	Dion	Keddy (South Shore)	Konrad
Discepola	Dromisky	Lalonde	Laurin
Drouin	Duhamel	Lebel	Lefebvre
Easter	Eggleton	Loubier	Lunn
Finestone	Folco	Mancini	Manning
Fontana	Fry	Marceau	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Gagliano	Godfrey	Mathews	Mayfield
Goodale	Graham	McDonough	Ménard
Gray (Windsor West)	Grose	Mercier	Meredith
Guarnieri	Harb	Mills (Red Deer)	Muise
Hubbard	Ianno	Nystrom	Obhrai
Iftody	Jackson	Penson	Perron
Jennings	Jordan	Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Karetak-Lindell	Keys	Price	Proctor
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas)	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Ramsay	Reynolds
Knutson	Kraft Sloan	Ritz	Rocheleau
Lastewka	Lee	Sauvageau	Schmidt
Lincoln	Longfield	Scott (Skeena)	Soiberg
MacAulay	Mahoney	Solomon	St-Hilaire
Malhi	Maloney	Stinson	Strahl
Manley	Marchi	Thompson (Charlotte)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)	Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)
Massé	McCormick	Turp	Vautour
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)	Vellacott	Wasylcia-Leis
McLellan (Edmonton West)	McWhinney	Wayne	White (North Vancouver)
Mifflin	Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	Williams—102	
Minna	Mitchell		
Murray	Myers		
Nault	Normand		
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly		
Pagtakhan	Paradis	Dalphond-Guiral	Dubé (Lévis)
Parrish	Patry	Finlay	O'Brien (Labrador)
Peric	Peterson	Ur	Venne
Pettigrew	Phinney		
Pickard (Kent—Essex)	Pratt		
Proud	Provenzano		
Redman	Reed		
Richardson	Robillard		
Rock	Scott (Fredericton)		
Serré	Shepherd		
Speller	St. Denis		
Steckle	Stewart (Brant)		
Stewart (Northumberland)	St-Julien		
Szabo	Telegdi		
Thibeault	Torsney		
Valeri	Vanclief		
Volpe	Whelan		
Wilfert	Wood—136		

PAIRED MEMBERS

Dalphond-Guiral	Dubé (Lévis)
Finlay	O'Brien (Labrador)
Ur	Venne

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Jim Gouk: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I did not arrive for the actual reading of the question, so I did not vote. Had I been here, I would have voted against the undemocratic action of stifling debate.

REPORT STAGE

The House resumed from February 9 consideration of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee; and of Motions Nos. 20 to 30, 32 to 34, 45 and 47.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been consultation among all parties in the House and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anders	Asselin
Axworthy (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar)	Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Bellehumeur	Bergeron
Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)	Bigras
Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Brien
Borotsik	Canuel
Brison	Casson
Casey	

That any divisions requested during consideration of the report stage of Bill C-4 be deferred to the time of the conclusion of consideration of Government Orders on Monday, February 16, 1998.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1110)

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand and speak but I must admit that every time the government uses closure it makes me extremely annoyed. I think of what my electorate thinks of this kind of procedure. It is so disgusting and so despicable. This is one of the reasons the Reform Party was formed and why we believe we have to make changes to this place. This is such a disgusting act. We all realize how detrimental it is to the democratic process and to any kind of respect we might have for a place like this.

The amendments in Group No. 5 probably fit well with what the government has just done. It is denying the auditor general authority to audit this public agency and it is refusing access to information concerning this organization. The government members do this and then say they believe in democracy.

There are three aspects of Bill C-4 that are undemocratic. The government is slapping the western Canadian agricultural community in the face. That will be remembered. The government should look at the number of western Canadian members it has to get an idea of what western Canadians think of this lack of democracy.

Let us talk briefly about this bill in the time we have. Let us first talk about the supposed elections it refers to. Farmers will elect 10 members and the government 5 members and the president. The farmers are the shareholders of this corporation and should elect all members. They should be electing the president and the members of this organization. If you believe in true democracy, you believe in elections by the people who have a stake.

In Chile and Argentina senators are elected to their senates. Most countries in the world have elections. Elections mean democracy. This is an undemocratic act and we should make that public. This is an insult to the people and the farmers of western Canada.

I read an example of this kind of slap in the face in my newspaper last night. The editorial discusses the disposal of bases. When militaire Saint-Jean was shut down \$25 million plus donation of the property was given. When the base in Toronto was given up, 380 acres were donated, plus \$22 million. When the base in Calgary was given up nothing was given and no land was given by the federal government. That is typical of how this government abuses western Canada.

What about public information? I am a farmer in part. I received a letter from the wheat board in my mail last week. This letter is an insult to the intelligence of the farming community. This letter talks about how democratic this board will be. It talks about the

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real power of the farmer. It talks about complete accessibility. This is an insult to the people of the farming community.

If the Liberals cannot allow access to information, what are they trying to hide? What are they covering up?

• (1115)

When I read this letter I say that it is a cover-up. What are they trying to hide? What are they doing? Are they out selling grain for the farmers of western Canada or are they sitting on their duffs in some fancy office some place?

I want to know what kind of prices they are getting for grain. It is my grain. It is our grain. What kind of prices are they getting? They say that will destroy competition. Give me a break. If they release the prices they got for grain in 1996-97 that will not destroy competition. I challenge this government on the ability of the Canadian Wheat Board to be the only marketing agency.

This is about democracy. Let farmers choose. Let farmers decide whether they want to have the Canadian Wheat Board.

That is not the issue. The issue is the abuse that is going on. We should be able to access the information. It should be opened up so the auditor general can ensure accountability.

Rumours are created because of this sort of thing. What are the people in the Canadian Wheat Board being paid? What kind of bonuses do they get at the end of the year? What kind of perks do they get? How can they justify keeping all that secret from the farmers whose grain they are supposed to be selling?

I want to speak about competition. In my area of foreign affairs I often talk to trade delegations. I hear them say "Do you guys still grow grain over there? Do you still have grain for sale? We never see anybody coming to sell it".

We hear about the problems of ships sitting for 30 days or 45 days because they cannot take delivery. The Canadian Wheat Board is blowing the marketing of grain. It needs to be accountable. It needs to be examined. It needs to be subject to the scrutiny of its membership, the farmers.

They are talking about putting more crops under the control of the Canadian Wheat Board. That is a pretty scary thought. What about canola? What about feed barley? Will those crops be included? Will the wheat board inefficiently try to market an increased range of grain products? That is not good news for farmers anywhere.

This is about freedom of choice. A farmer has to decide what he should grow. A farmer has to decide what kind of fertilizers he should use. He has to decide when to spray and what to spray. He has to decide whether to insure against hail and all the other problems. He has to decide when to swath and when to harvest. He has to make all those decisions and worry about quality. The most important part is the paycheque that he gets for doing all that. The most important thing is the marketing of the product he produces.

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He controls everything else but he does not have any control over the people he should be electing to do his marketing.

Those people should be accountable. How much do they get paid? What do they do? How aggressive are they? He has a right, as a farmer, to know those answers.

We need to know we are getting the highest price possible. We need to know what this secret monopoly, which is filled possibly by patronage appointments, is all about. I hear the words accessibility and accountability. That is really what it comes down to.

We can look back to when this board was formed. Many of the farmers in my constituency have told me that they needed it at the time. I do not think we are talking about that. The issue of whether we should have it is not the question. The question concerns accountability. It needs to be open to the auditor general. It needs to be open to access to information. The people affected by this need to have access to it.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here we are after a vote to gag the opposition as we consider Bill C-4. The government has used its majority to gag us.

However, we in the Bloc Québécois will use the time we have left to point out the failings of the bill, as has been our practice since our arrival in this House, put forward constructive amendments and hope that the government majority will agree.

The Canadian Wheat Board, it will be remembered, will have sales of between \$6 billion and \$7 billion annually. This is not peanuts. We in the Bloc have a very constructive proposal, Motion No. 20, and I would like to take a few minutes to read it. I would invite you, Mr. Speaker, to pay careful attention, because this is important. It is vitally important as a moral issue and to give grain producers confidence in the Canadian Wheat Board.

You already know that the Board, although its prime objective is praiseworthy, has lost a lot of credibility among the main stakeholders, the grain producers.

Motion No. 20 reads as follows:

That Bill C-4, in Clause 4, be amended by adding after line 37 on page 7 the following:

“(4) Notwithstanding subsection (2), a department within the meaning of the Financial Administration Act includes the Board for the purposes of the Auditor General Act”.

What does that mean exactly? It means, currently and once Bill C-4 on the Canada Wheat Board is passed, the books will be audited once a year to see whether the people appointed by the government, primarily the president, are working for the benefit of producers or for their own benefit.

The company of Deloitte and Touche will do the audit. I will not ask how much that means a year for this firm, which is a willing contributor to the Liberal Party campaign fund.

In the interests of transparency, we in the Bloc Québécois are proposing not only that the auditor general be the one to audit transactions, but that he also be allowed to audit the Canadian Wheat Board's operations. The accounting firm will audit only the statement of income and outgo. You know how it works. An accounting firm prepares the following sort of letter: “On the basis of the figures supplied to us, we have audited a few invoices and everything seems to be in order”.

There is always this traditional phrase relieving the private auditor of all responsibility in the event of fraud. Whereas the credibility of Denis Desautels, who plays an extremely important role, is above all suspicion and he could also, as I was saying earlier, audit the Canadian Wheat Board's operations.

Let us take the sales figure of \$7 billion. A mere 1% adds up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Funds could be misappropriated.

• (1125)

Obviously, the president and the four other individuals appointed by the Liberal Party could be above all suspicion, but the absence of suspicion could later turn into slight doubts.

Take Senator Andrew Thompson, for example. He was a good Liberal who headed up the Ontario Liberal Party. He was appointed to the Senate by a Liberal government. Today, he has fallen from favour. But the Constitution tells us he was appointed until age 75. We are stuck with him. That was a Liberal appointment.

We are proposing that appointments be examined and approved by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, something the government party is unfortunately rejecting as well.

For the good of grain producers, I am asking the Liberal majority to seriously consider and approve—this is nothing to be ashamed of—the Bloc Québécois' proposal, which seeks to give more transparency to the Canadian Wheat Board. If the idea has to come from the Liberal Party, then let us remove my name and put the name of a Liberal member on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I can certainly live with that. As you know, the Canadian Wheat Board provides excellent services and is a neces-

sary corporation. Still, only 60% of farmers are willing to rely on it. This is not normal.

I will use the rest of my time to look at Motion No. 21, moved by the Conservative member from Manitoba. The hon. member proposes to add a heading, but I am almost certain that Liberals will vote against it. Let me give an idea of how narrow-minded the Liberals are when it comes to helping farmers. This motion makes sense. I cannot see why the Liberals will reject it. It reads, in part:

5. The Corporation is incorporated with the object of marketing grain grown in Canada in the best interests of farmers—

The motion states that the corporation works in the best interests of farmers. Does this not make sense? Is the CWB's *raison d'être* not to maximize grain producers' returns? Its role is to help and support our grain producers, not make them poorer.

Based on what Liberal members on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food said, the Liberals will vote against Motion No. 21, moved by the hon. member for Brandon—Souris. Again, all this is not very transparent.

Let me go back to the financial interests that the Liberal Party may have in passing Bill C-4. Given the refusal to have the books of the Canadian Wheat Board audited by a private accounting firm, and given the refusal to let Denis Desautels, the auditor general, take a look, we are justifiably concerned about the transparency of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Let us not forget that 15 directors will sit on the CWB's board of directors, 10 of whom will be elected by the producers themselves.

• (1130)

There are five others, including the president, who, to all intents and purposes—and we might as well be honest about it—will run the board of directors. He will run the Canadian Wheat Board. This very important person will be appointed by the governor in council and there will be no way to have the auditor general audit his books. That is unacceptable.

I launch an appeal, in closing. I appeal to my colleagues opposite to work for the benefit of farmers and not for their own personal benefit.

[*English*]

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my first words this morning have to be ones of condemnation as well toward the government for introducing closure on Bill C-4. I remind the House, especially those who do not sit on the Standing Committee for Agriculture and Agri-food, that the bill was rushed through the House last fall. At that time the excuse was that the government wanted to have the bill through before Christmas.

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I recall that even before the Canadian Wheat Board made its presentation on Bill C-4 opposition and government members on the committee were to have their amendments in. This is yet another example of this rush to judgment. A couple of more days to have concluded all this would not have been beyond the pale.

We are dealing this morning with Group No. 5 in which there are 14 or 15 amendments. In a broad brush way they include the auditor general, which my colleague for Frontenac—Mégantic spoke about it at some length; maximizing returns to farmers-producers and I will come back to that; the contingency fund; how any profits from the new wheat board will be consolidated; and the questions of lower than normal price, best returns, overtime and the accountability of directors.

I want to zero in during my remarks this morning on the contingency funds. For us this proposal is perhaps the worst feature of Bill C-4.

Bill C-4 does not reflect the wishes of western Canadian farmers. Despite objections from numerous farmers and farm groups section 39(1) remains in the bill. That section would allow for cash buying and thus undermine price pooling.

Bill C-4 also terminates the government's guarantee of adjusted initial prices. These two changes together would necessitate the creation of the contingency fund which has been estimated could cost farmers as much as \$5.45 a tonne every year for five years on every tonne sold through the Canadian Wheat Board. That is a total of \$27 per tonne marketed.

This is based on Mr. Hehn's estimate of a contingency fund that would be in the neighbourhood of \$575 million or \$580 million. Again we have no indication from the government about how big or how small that contingency fund will be. One assumes that the \$580 million comes loosely on a 10% contingency fund for the annual marketing of the Canadian Wheat Board, which is in the neighbourhood of \$6 billion.

The contingency fund could cost wheat and barely growers almost as much money as they received under the Crow payout scheme of two or three years ago.

Canadian Wheat Board supporters are not only being asked to accept legislation that fundamentally damages the board, but through the contingency they could be asked to pay thousands of dollars each if Bill C-4 changes are implemented. The bill ignores and repudiates the clearly articulated will of the vast majority of western Canadian farmers and is therefore totally unacceptable in its present form.

The minister responsible for the wheat board has been able to achieve the almost impossible. He has all the opposition parties united against the bill, admittedly for very different reasons but nonetheless in total opposition to what we have in front of us. It

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seemed to be unthinkable at the time but the impossible has been achieved.

• (1135)

Let me make it crystal clear that our caucus and our party oppose the bill because we do not believe that what is here unamended will improve the Canadian Wheat Board. Rather it will significantly weaken the Canadian Wheat Board.

The fundamental question that needs to be answered is whether the bill will or will not be an improvement over what we have now, particularly the three pillars of the current wheat board. The conclusion, as I have said, is that what is before us is a significant diminution of the wheat board which has been a critical factor in western Canada for the past 63 years.

There are three pillars of the wheat board. We believe two of them are at risk in the bill as we see it, price pooling and government guarantees. If the Reform amendments were adopted the third pillar would disappear as well, single desk selling.

As we all know, Reform wants to do away with the wheat board. They want a voluntary board or to do marketing which would effectively kill the wheat board. The notion of a voluntary board is a total fraudulent idea. It is a scam, as was noted by the Alberta Judge Muldoon who said that a dual market was simply a quick transition to an open market. This is something Reform critics and commentators never acknowledge.

I want to say how refreshing it was to hear the agriculture critic for the Conservative Party when he rose on Monday to speak to the bill and specifically to some of the resolutions, instead of the pathetic bleating and ranting of many but not all in the Reform Party.

One Reform Party speaker told us how many speakers from his party had risen to speak in this debate. Let me say as an interested observer that there was a heck of a lot more chaff than wheat in most of the content we heard on Monday afternoon. Particularly abysmal was the performance of the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt. I would encourage any fair minded person to go back and read his contribution to Monday's debate.

Western Canadian wheat growers have a policy that I do not agree with. They have a lengthy paper on dual marketing. They are the ideological soul mates of many Reformers. They must be somewhat embarrassed when they hear what is said many times on the floor of the House.

On the contingency fund, we would propose specifically under Motion No. 25 to delete all references to the contingency fund. Let me underline that we believe the fund is, as I have said before, the single worst feature of the bill. The idea of establishing such a fund

follows from provisions in the bill for cash buying. That is the logic behind it. The contingency fund is unnecessary if Ottawa would continue to provide financial guarantees to the board as it has done for the past six decades, guarantees, I might add, that are seldom used and as a result cost taxpayers next to nothing.

Furthermore, the government is either unwilling or unable to indicate how large of fund is required. I have alluded to that. The assumptions are somewhere between \$350 million and as much as \$575 million to establish the fund.

I note in passing that the parliamentary secretary to the minister of agriculture rose in his place while we were debating the bill last November and said that nobody could pinpoint exactly how large the contingency fund would be. It is another dilemma in our position on the bill.

We believe the government could make an important concession by guaranteeing federal finances that have seldom been required over the past six decades to support the wheat board. It would mean that the kind of money we are talking about would not be required to be produced by farmers but instead would have some genesis and some real assistance from the Canadian government.

• (1140)

Motion No. 30 simply reinforces the federal guarantee to the Canadian Wheat Board. It is in Group No. 5 as well.

Before I close I want to refer to one of the amendments before us. It was somewhat startling to hear what the member for Yorkton—Melville said on this grouping. Subsection 1 shall not be interpreted to prevent the corporation from making a contract to sell a type of grain at a price that is lower than normal in order to secure other sales of the same type of grain that will result in the best return to producers of that type over a period of time.

That amendment sticks out because it is totally hypocritical. That party has been chastising the wheat board over many years because it fails to get the best return. Now it is suggesting that we should do it as an order of business.

I close by saying that this party opposes any notion of a contingency fund and we want to see the continuation of government guarantees in Bill C-4.

Mr. Larry McCormick (Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this very popular Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Larry McCormick: Politics are alive and well in the Chamber. People are laughing about the popularity of the wheat board bill, but the standing committee on agriculture in the

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previous year listened to all groups involved in the production and the sale of wheat. They spent days and even weeks on the road listening and consulting with people.

Since that time the ministry has sent out hundreds of thousands of forms and letters of information to all growers in western Canada, all growers of all commodities. Growers have been happy with the Canadian Wheat Board. It has been one of the most successful bodies in the country.

The Reform Party is guilty of twisting the facts. We are not surprised about that, but it is unfair to the majority of the people who produce and grow wheat, the people whom I respect very much.

The bill, according to one of my colleagues, has been rushed to judgment. Again I repeat that my colleagues spent months on it. Since that time we have heard from representatives of all commodity groups at committee. Who would represent some of those groups? The growers cannot decide themselves who should represent those groups.

The Reform Party wants a voluntary wheat board. It wants its cake and to eat it too. It wants to do a flip-flop, jump in, jump out, and have it both ways.

The area of one of my colleagues opposite who sits on the standing committee has been dealt very severe blows by Mother Nature. In the Peace River area the people do not deserve what they have had in the way of weather. I know this hard working member has raised the concerns of these growers. Yet how do we address them? There are programs in place to help these people.

We survived the 1998 ice storm. It was the most severe natural disaster in the history of the country. There may be a difference between a major natural disaster and something we can insure against.

• (1145)

In this case the Reform Party wants the people who had no insurance to receive money for the buildings that burned down. They want the best of all of this. The members of the Reform Party want the auditor general. They are doubting the words of one of the most professional auditing firms in Canada. They tell us that this auditing company does not give them a transparent report.

Mr. Jay Hill: All they do is check the numbers.

Mr. Larry McCormick: They check the numbers. I understand that a professional auditing firm does check numbers and if it produced a report I would accept it. One of my colleagues in the standing committee has asked members of the Reform Party if they would give us an audited statement of the finances of their party and we are still waiting for that.

I just want members opposite to recognize the fact that the government, our party and the committee have not heard at all from

the majority of the growers in western Canada. The majority of the growers are satisfied with the status quo. They have faith in the Canadian Wheat Board.

The members of the Reform Party are asking that the Canadian Wheat Board be subject to audits by the auditor general.

Mr. Darrel Stinson: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Larry McCormick: What is wrong with that.

Making the Canadian Wheat Board subject to the Access to Information Act would force it to reveal far more information about its activities than any of its competitors. The release of company information would put the Canadian Wheat Board at a disadvantage when it negotiates sales with international buyers. This would not help their constituents.

I also ask members opposite to listen not just to the members of their own political party but to meet with their constituents in general. We cannot pay attention just to the letters we get from a few people. We have asked the members of these groups to come before us at the committee. They do not represent a majority of the people in this country. They do not represent the majority of the growers in western Canada.

A member opposite said that this party here does not represent the voices of the growers in western Canada with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board because these growers have not replied with the forms that were sent to them. The members of the Reform Party talk about the board of directors and that the growers have no control with this new Canadian Wheat Board.

I thought that when the growers had the opportunity to appoint 10 directors out of 15 they would have a majority. They will have the power to do what they want to do. They will have total control. What amount of money could they pay this director? If they do not like the director they could lower the pay. They have the majority.

I do not think this is a laughing matter. This is something I would like to see discussed fully in the House.

I have listened to groups from across the different prairie provinces and I welcomed the opportunity to learn from them. However the biggest thing I have seen from all these groups is that everybody wants to protect their turf. Everybody wants to say that they are representative of the groups. I do not think we can have 14 different marketing groups within some commodities. There has to be an umbrella to cover all of these groups.

The Canadian Wheat Board has been one of the most successful bodies in the history of this country. The amount of money and the quality of a great Canadian wheat product will make for increased sales in the future. We have to have control over a product like this. What more control can we have than 10 directors who represent the growers who produce this product?

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• (1150)

The member from the NDP said that all parties are against this bill. The member also said it was for various reasons. They are not all in support of the Reform policy and the Reform amendments. I would like to bring attention to that.

Yesterday we saw history being made in this House when we saw the PC party vote with the Bloc. I believe the NDP voted with its brothers too.

In this case the farmers of western Canada are watching the Reform Party, not just letting the Reform Party lead them. A group of these Reformers have taken out ads on the Ottawa radio stations to tell us in Ottawa how we should vote. We should not listen to the producers. We should go by a paid radio announcement. I heard these ads on the radio and I do not think some radio advertisement is the way to go. I would rather that the same groups made use of the standing committee which is open to the groups.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter. I look forward to standing in the House and speaking on the next reading of the bill.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to the Group No. 5 amendments on Bill C-4.

Motion No. 23, securing the best financial return for the producers is a unique concept. We have a farm crisis in western Canada and a lot of it comes down to the fact that the bottom line is in the red and not in the black.

On October 28, 1997 the minister responsible for the wheat board said in this House in a query to my compatriot for Yorkton—Melville “I can assure him however that the Canadian Wheat Board in every market in the world extracts the very best price it can possibly get for the farmers of Canada”. I will repeat that, the very best price it can possibly get.

All these amendments do is change the object of the Canadian Wheat Board Act so that it matches more exactly what that minister is telling us in the House and telling Canadians the purpose of the act is. If the minister honestly believes that the Canadian Wheat Board extracts the very best possible price, then he should wholeheartedly support these amendments.

Currently section 5 states “The board is incorporated with the object of marketing in an orderly manner in interprovincial and export trade, grain grown in Canada”, let me repeat that one portion “grain grown in Canada”. I find it odd that the act gives the board authority to market grain grown in all of Canada but only imposes its monopoly powers in the prairie provinces.

Why is the government monopoly good for grain grown in the west but not good enough to force on farmers in the rest of Canada?

Could it be they do not really want it? Are we not as smart or as capable to handle our affairs in the west? Do we not have a stake in our own marketing? We grow it, we take the risks, we like to have a share of the gravy at the other end.

If this government monopoly is supposedly serving farmers’ marketing needs in the west so well, I find it odd that farmers in the other provinces are not demanding that the wheat board take over their marketing too. The fact that it is not happening illustrates why western wheat and barley producers are so frustrated. They are being discriminated against. They are being forced to sell their grain to the government controlled monopoly while farmers in the rest of the areas in Canada can sell to whomever they wish.

At least these amendments would make sure that the prairie farmers are getting the best return that a government operated monopoly can get for them. As the wheat board act is worded, all they are guaranteed is orderly marketing, not good marketing.

These amendments would improve on the existing wording by saying the purpose of the Canadian Wheat Board in the orderly and co-ordinated marketing of grain is to maximize, and I underline maximize, the financial return to the producers it serves.

The first amendment, Motion No. 1, adds a preamble to the act to clarify the reasons why we have a Canadian Wheat Board and that the first priority of that board should be to secure the best financial return to producers. People from all political stripes can identify with that one. The board must be accountable to those farmers for that performance.

The second amendment, Motion No. 23, changes the wording of section 5 of the act to state “The object of the corporation is to secure the best financial return to producers of grain in Canada by marketing grain in an orderly and co-ordinated manner”. It also adds to section 5 that the board carries out this marketing activity “on behalf of the producers of the grain”. Put their interests first.

• (1155)

It is a sad day that my colleague from Yorkton—Melville has had to draft such an obvious amendment to put the best interests of the producers ahead of the rights of this marketing board.

This change in the object or purpose of the act resulted in three consequential amendments.

The first amendment, Motion No. 28, concerns clause 7 of the bill. Section 7 of the act is being amended to ensure that grain sold or disposed of is not only sold for a price the board considers reasonable, but that it must be done in order to fulfil the new objective of maximizing the financial return to farmers. What a concept that is.

The second consequential amendment, Motion No. 29, also concerns clause 7. It directs any profits from the sale of grain back

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to the producers rather than have the profits paid into the government's consolidated revenue fund which is kind of like putting them in a sinkhole.

The third consequential amendment, Motion No. 39, concerns clause 22 which is found at pages 16 and 17 of Bill C-4. It would ensure that undistributed balances would be paid back to the producers who are entitled to the payment rather than just being designated to the government's vague term "for the benefit of all".

Motion No. 45 would insert a sunset clause. The last amendment is what is commonly referred to as a sunset clause. It would require the auditor general to examine the wheat board's operation over the five year period ending December 31, 2002 to determine if the board had met its first priority as described in the new amended section, namely to secure the best financial return to the producers by marketing grain in an orderly and co-ordinated manner.

At this point the auditor general is not allowed to have a peek at the books, but he is allowed to look at other areas, like defence, CSIS and the RCMP, which are also highly political and could lead to problems. Why can he not look at the wheat board?

The auditor general's report on the wheat board's operation would have to be delivered to the minister no later than September, 2003. The minister would have to table the report in the House and in the Senate where it would be referred to a committee of the whole. This sunset clause would repeal the Canadian Wheat Board Act if it had not lived up to its mandate over that five year period.

This is another accountability measure. If the people who are running the wheat board, whether elected or appointed, know that their performance will be measured independently by the auditor general after that timeframe, they will make absolutely sure they are securing the best financial return for the producers. Their jobs are in the balance. Some accountability exists.

The real benefit of a sunset clause is that it forces the board, the government and Parliament to revisit this legislation every five years to make sure it is still needed and that it is achieving the objectives established by Parliament.

No producers have a problem with a marketing agency, a monopoly in this case, which is transparent and accountable to them serving their best interests. If the Canadian Wheat Board was truly accountable to the producers, we would not be having this debate today, nor will the debate stop after the government rams through this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to agreement made Wednesday, November 19, 1997, all questions on the motions in Group No. 5

are deemed put and the recorded divisions are deemed requested and deemed deferred.

The House will now proceed to the debate on the motions in Group No. 6.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 35

That Bill C-4, in Clause 17, be amended by replacing lines 16 to 19 on page 12 with the following:

““period” means a crop year”

Motion No. 36

That Bill C-4, in Clause 18, be amended by replacing line 2 on page 13 with the following:

“order of the Corporation with the approval of the Minister and the Minister of Finance.”

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC) moved:

Motion No. 37

That Bill C-4, in Clause 19, be amended by adding after line 31 on page 15 the following:

“(5) Section 33 of the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (5):

(6) The Corporation may enter into an agreement with a producer, at the beginning of a crop year, authorizing the producer to market independently of the Corporation, a specified percentage of the wheat or barley produced by that producer in that crop year.”

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.) moved:

Motion No. 38

That Bill C-4, in Clause 22, be amended

(a) by replacing line 36 on page 16 with the following:

“39. If producers of any grain sold and,”

(b) by replacing line 12 on page 17 with the following:

“separate account, and distribute to them in an equitable manner any balance remaining in the separate account after such payments have been made.”

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 39

That Bill C-4, in Clause 22, be amended by deleting lines 20 to 27 on page 17.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.) moved:

Motion No. 40

That Bill C-4, in Clause 22, be amended by adding after line 27 on page 17 the following:

“39.2 (1) The Corporation shall establish a plan for wheat pricing which shall have the following features:

(a) a producer will be able to hedge a specified portion of his or her wheat on a recognized grain exchange in Canada or in another country;

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(b) the quantity of wheat hedged by the producer under paragraph (a) will be delivered to the Corporation prior to the maturation of the futures contract entered into by the producer under the hedge;

(c) the Corporation will assume ownership and responsibility for the hedged position upon delivery of the wheat to the Corporation.

(2) The Corporation shall establish, annually, the portion of each producer's wheat which each individual producer will be allowed to hedge under this program.

(3) The Corporation shall establish the terms and conditions under which the hedge position of the producer is to be assumed by the Corporation."

He said: Mr. Speaker, I cannot let this opportunity pass without making reference to the fact that the government has brought in time allocation. The way in which the government has treated this very important legislation has been absolutely reprehensible right from the very beginning.

In my speech at third reading, which will probably be next Tuesday, I will outline for the House, for the viewing public and most important for the western Canadian farmers exactly what has transpired over the last year and a half and how the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and the government have handled this very important issue.

In debate on the last group of motions the hon. member for Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington made some absolutely outrageous statements which cannot go unnoticed. He said that the majority of growers are satisfied with the status quo.

• (1200)

That was the statement he made which clearly shows the fantasy world Liberal members live in when it comes to the Canadian Wheat Board and how it affects the livelihoods of western Canadian grain farmers.

I will now discuss the motions in Group No. 6. There are six motions listed under Group No. 6, Motions Nos. 35 to 40, inclusive. I will primarily address Motion No. 40 which I put forward and which was supported by my colleague from the progressive Conservative Party.

One of the unique things about this is that the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has accomplished the near impossible. This was referred to during the November debate of this bill at report stage. It was also referred to this morning by an NDP member. The minister has alienated almost every western farm group with the way he has bungled this issue from the very beginning. It is no small accomplishment to get everybody in western Canada angry with you, but he has managed to accomplish that.

I would like to pay some tribute to the farm organizations, some of which have banded together to form an ad hoc group called the coalition to fight Bill C-4. That is the level of intensity springing up across western Canada as farmers are trying to get this government to reconsider. I thank those groups for the time, energy and

considerable expense they incurred to bring forth proposed amendments to Bill C-4.

It is unfortunate the government does not respect this contribution. This is obvious because these groups that represent the majority of grain producers were not consulted when legislation was drafted in the first place and because the Liberals rammed the legislation through committee, allowing minimal time for witnesses to testify. Then today they invoked time allocation to limit MPs' opportunity to properly debate these substantive amendments.

I assure those groups from both sides of the debate, those content with the status quo in the Canadian Wheat Board and those calling for significant change, that their efforts have been valuable and very much appreciated by me and my Reform colleagues. Their submissions and input have guided us in our approach to Bill C-4. I thank every last organization and individual who made submissions to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, wrote letters to MPs and called to express their views on this important legislation.

One of these groups came up with an ingenious amendment that seeks to meet the needs of all parties involved with the Canadian Wheat Board. This amendment provides voluntary opportunity for risk management. It allows other producers to maintain their exclusive use of the Canadian Wheat Board to market their grain.

I was so impressed with the amendment proposed by the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association that I thought all MPs should have the opportunity to debate it as an amendment to Bill C-4 in the House of Commons. It is known as the cash pricing option. I will guide members through it as outlined by the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association in the brief it submitted.

The proposed amendment to the Canadian Wheat Board Act would allow producers to forward price 25% of their wheat production. They would use the same recognized futures exchange used by the wheat board for pricing and hedging of prairie wheat, that is Minneapolis for spring wheat and Chicago or Kansas City for hard, red winter wheat.

The option would work in this manner. The producer would first commit to a deferred delivery contract or sell a futures contract for part or all of his 25% allotment. Sometime before the futures contract month becomes a cash month, the producer would deliver his wheat either to an agent of the board at a country elevator or to a landed basis location, that being a terminal or a processor.

Upon delivery of the wheat, the grain company holding the deferred delivery contract would give its futures contract to the Canadian Wheat Board. The Canadian Wheat Board would then buy back the futures contract and execute the cash side, that is sell the cash wheat to any customer it desires. The producer's settle-

ment would be the futures price adjusted for exchange rate minus basis deduction from the Canadian Wheat Board. As well, the producer's settlement would be adjusted from base grade specs of the futures contract for grade, protein, moisture, and so on.

• (1205)

This cash pricing option would allow farmers to trade one quarter of their wheat in exactly the same way in which they presently trade canola, flax, rye and oats.

Under this proposal every farmer would have an equal opportunity to participate. Farmers who would forward price the maximum 25% are also taking on the risk that they may not get the best price. No one hits the market highs all the time. But farmers would have better ability to manage price risk and manage cashflow, especially in years when the initial price is set extremely low, like this year.

Farmers would gain assurance that they are getting the world price, and that is important for farmers who have become accustomed to dealing with the secretive Canadian Wheat Board. Many farmers are suspicious that the Canadian Wheat Board system does not deliver the world price.

The cash pricing option would have a number of other consequential benefits that the Liberals, if they would bother to pay attention, would find very attractive. The threat of border runs and civil disobedience that we have seen frequently would be reduced by allowing farmers access to the better prices they can see in the U.S. market.

As the Liberals struggle to put out fires in trade skirmishes with the U.S., this amendment would reduce trade irritants for the federal government by showing that Canadian grain coming into the U.S. is at world price.

All these advantages would be found, while at the same time single desk selling is maintained, reassuring those who favour this approach.

This amendment embodies the true spirit of compromise. It is a step in the right direction that boldly yet wisely seeks to progressively develop the western Canadian grain marketing system. Yet it also provides security to those who believe single desk selling is in their best interests.

I believe it is obvious that this amendment is worthy of serious consideration by all MPs in this House. While the opposition to the government's version of Bill C-4 has been loud and prolific from all sides of the issue, a group of Canadians has brought to us a mechanism with which to resolve a dispute. Producers are willing to give it a try. Members of this House should ensure they get that opportunity.

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I have just enough time to wrap up by saying how appalled I am on behalf of all opposition MPs, as the agriculture critic for the official opposition in the House of Commons today, that this government would move to bring in time allocation again, as we saw it do so often in the 35th Parliament.

I cannot let it go without saying that I think western Canadian farmers are going to be watching this debate. I am sure they have watched with intense interest up until today. I think the move today to shut down debate with one day of debate for report stage remaining today and one day only for debate at third reading is absolutely reprehensible, and this government should certainly be embarrassed, if nothing else.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with group 6 amendments to the Canadian Wheat Board Act and there are a total of six amendments here. Our party has proposed three of them and I would like to deal with them in some detail in the few minutes I have.

Amendment 35, regarding the pooling period, maintains the wheat board's pool account for the entire year, rather than having it broken down into shorter periods of time which is one of the proposals in Bill C-4.

The proposal, we believe, to shorten the pooling period is linked to cash buying, that is obvious, and other tools which are alleged by the minister responsible to make the board more flexible. We do not believe it would make the board more flexible, but we are sure that the long run result will be to undermine farmer confidence in the board and thus weaken the board in the long run.

Amendment 36 concerns the federal government guarantees.

• (1210)

This amendment, in the spirit of an earlier one, serves to maintain the government as the guarantor for the board rather than having the board set up a contingency fund to perform that task. I referred to that earlier when we were dealing with group 5 amendments.

Motion No. 39 is our other amendment regarding cash buying. I would like to spend a little more time going through what our hopes and expectations are in that regard.

Motion No. 39 is the amendment that would remove the current proposal in Bill C-4 to have the wheat board make cash purchases of grain. Bill C-4 does many things to undermine, we believe, the Canadian Wheat Board but nothing in the bill is more damaging than the proposal for cash buying. The wheat board has long had a practice of buying grain from farmers at announced prices and distributing profits to all producers on an equitable basis.

Now, under the proposals before us, in the brief time that has been allotted by the government, the wheat board will be able to buy grain from anyone, anywhere, at any time and at any price. We are absolutely convinced that this will totally destroy a fundamen-

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tal pillar of the wheat board and it will undermine farmer confidence in it forever.

The proposals for cash buying are linked to other damaging proposals in Bill C-4. The contingency fund is one and the proposal to shorten the pooling period or have several pooling periods on a 12 month basis, which has been talked about before, is another.

As I noted, the Reform Party would have us go beyond even the weakening of these two pillars by attempting to destroy the third pillar which is the single desk selling via the dual marketing proposal.

Who is opposed to cash buying? The previous speaker was saying how many people have become involved in this and come together. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool does not think that cash buying makes a lot of sense in this plan. I remind viewers and members that the wheat pool in Saskatchewan is the largest grain buying organization in Canada. The sister pools in Manitoba and Alberta are also opposed. They are joined by many other groups, including the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities and the National Farmers Union.

Those are our comments on group 6. We want to leave the indelible impression that we are very much opposed and say no to cash buying.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why you should be so lucky or have the luck of the draw to be able to listen to my pearls of wisdom on this bill, but it seems you are always in the House when I get up to speak. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker.

I am extremely disappointed with the motion passed earlier today effectively stopping the democratic voice of not only parliamentarians but the numbers of producers this legislation will affect.

When I came to this House a raw rookie not that many months ago I expected that I would have the opportunity to put forward the views of not only my constituents but constituents who are affected by this legislation. Now I find that the government has decided that the voices of parliamentarians should not be heard and that the voices of western Canadian producers should not be heard. It seems there is an obvious move afoot to have a piece of legislation put through this House without forethought and, quite frankly, the understanding as to how the clauses in this legislation will affect those very producers we represent.

I have put forward an amendment in Group No. 6. Before I go through the amendment, I would like to say that there are a number of excellent amendments that have been put forward to the House but unfortunately they are not being listened to by the drafters of that legislation, the government of this country. In fact, if the

government would listen, if it would understand the need for these amendments, I am sure it would appreciate that they should be implemented into this legislation.

• (1215)

On Group No. 6, I have put forward an amendment. I will read the amendment. It states that the corporation may enter into agreements with a producer at the beginning of the crop year authorizing the producer to market independently of the corporation a specified percentage of the wheat or barley produced by that producer in one crop year.

That speaks to options. It speaks to choice. I would like to emphatically state at this point that we are not opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board. That is not what the speakers before me or after me have said. I believe sincerely that the Canadian Wheat Board can compete effectively with other competition that is now in the marketplace.

As examples of that I put up the deregulation of utilities which has happened across this great country of ours in the past numbers of months, the deregulation of gas utilities, the deregulation of telephone utilities. I will give a brief glimpse into the future, the deregulation of hydro or the electricity industry that is going to come to this country. Those corporations did not wither and blow away into the wind. They worked harder to compete for the customer they were serving and have done so in a very efficient manner. It has produced efficiencies for the consumer or in this case it would produce efficiencies for the producer.

That is all we are saying. They can and should compete on the open market. The Canadian Wheat Board in my conversations with it will not even consider this particular tenet of what it should be looking at for the next number of years. Its head is stuck firmly in the sand and firmly with a monopoly situation. It is not going to happen.

With international trade, with the fact that the producers are not going to accept this piece of legislation, they are not going to be satisfied with what is put forward, there is still going to be substantial opposition to this legislation and to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Please, if there is one thing I can plead with the government and with the Canadian Wheat Board, it is put into place now what is necessary for the next year, two years or three years to make choices and options available.

My motion speaks specifically to that. It is a nice little segue into what is going to happen into the future. Let producers have a particular percentage of their product they can now sell on the open market on a cash basis, on a hedge basis, can go to the Chicago exchange and can hedge the type of cashflow they require in order

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to run their operations. A number of the amendments in this group speak to that very thing which does speak to choice.

Not all the producers, and I accept that, necessarily want to have that choice. But what they would have is the ability still to go to the Canadian Wheat Board under the pillars they are still guaranteed under the Canadian Wheat Board. They then could pool their grain. They could get their initial payments the way they would like to and plan their future in their farming businesses from year to year.

Quite frankly, when it happened in the other utilities a number of those customers stayed with the original utility because there was loyalty, because they wanted to, because it was convenient, because it was simple. If those are the reasons why producers wish to remain with the Canadian Wheat Board, so be it, and let the Canadian Wheat Board compete on that basis.

By the way, I would suggest at that time that the Canadian Wheat Board be able to compete on other commodities, not simply barley and wheat. Let it openly compete with the other commodities at that time, the canola, the flax, the rye and the oats. That is fair. Fair competition is fair for everybody. Let it have that ability. Do not simply have a monopoly for two crops.

The motion put forward by the Reform Party speaks basically to the same amendment I have put forward, perhaps a bit more detailed. It does speak to certain percentages of hedging available to it but in essence what we are simply saying is please allow for the options to be made to the producer.

• (1220)

I would like to speak to NDP Motion No. 39. This motion is to delete the one clause I suppose that gives a little opportunity to producers in this piece of legislation, the cash purchases. Cash purchases have been in place for quite a substantial amount of time, have been used for barley in the past and have been very successful.

I would like to mention a couple of points with respect to my motion once again. There are countless examples of how marketing outside of a monopoly is good for economic efficiency. In the November 13 issue of the *Western Producer*, the Canadian Wheat Board's chief commissioner, Mr. Lorne Hehn, said: "The growing domestic feed demand and increasing production of malting quality barley probably means that within five to ten years there will not be enough surplus feed barley to operate a predictable export program under the Canadian Wheat Board".

What is that saying? What it says is that barley is not even going to be needed to be marketed under the Canadian Wheat Board in five to ten years. By the way, I take exception to the five to ten years. I think it will be sooner than that. If Mr. Hehn thinks it is five to ten, he is again sadly mistaken in his forecasting for the Canadian Wheat Board. It is sooner than that. No longer will barley be required to be marketed under the board because there will not

be any need to market barley. It is going to be used domestically and only here in Canada for feed.

In March 1996 there was a study on the economics of single desk selling of western Canadian grains by two Ph.D ag-economists, Mr. Carter and Mr. Lyons. They state that a driving force for much of the Canadian Wheat Board activity is equity in treatment of producers rather than economic efficiency among producers. This is self-explanatory.

When oats and barley were removed from the Canadian Wheat Board jurisdiction, the volume of barley and oats exports to the United States increased dramatically. Is this merely a fluke or a strong sign of the Canadian Wheat Board's inefficient marketing practices? Make the choice. If someone wants to market through the board they can. If they want to market on the open market they should be able to.

The truth is that following the removal of oats from the Canadian Wheat Board in 1989 farm gate prices for oats have risen relative to world market levels and marketing costs have fallen by about one-third. When oats were taken off the Canadian Wheat Board prices went up. People still market it through the private sector and their marketing costs have reduced.

I have talked to the people who grow this. I have talked to the people who have oats. They say they would not want to go back into that system.

The motion put forward by me with respect to some options, fairness and choice has to be listened to by this government because that is what the producers are saying. If they do not get it in this legislation they will get it in the next legislation that will be coming not too far in the distant future.

I do hope some of the amendments are listened to honestly, logically and openly by the government.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I live in a great farming community, as I am sure you know.

I am pleased to share some of the comments from the government side with regard to particularly the amendments in group 6 but some other comments as well.

First, I find it interesting that members opposite would stand and complain about what they referred to as closure. They know full well that time allocation is a necessary tool that any government uses.

An hon. member: Rubbish.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: This is not rubbish at all. I have experienced the kinds of delays and filibustering that can occur with members standing in their place in a democratic legislature reading a telephone book or some other kind of nonsense simply to stall the government's program.

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I want to share and put on the record some of the time, when we talk about time allocation, that Bill C-4 has enjoyed. Its predecessor was Bill C-72. At second reading there were over two hours of debate in this place.

• (1225)

There were over 39 hours in committee. There was more time at report stage and an additional three and a half hours in the House. That was the predecessor to the bill which we are debating today. There was quite a bit of discussion on essentially the same bill and the same issue.

This bill was debated for over three hours at second reading. We should bear in mind that the predecessor to this bill was debated for 19 and three-quarter hours in committee in addition to the 39 hours. It was debated for several hours at report stage. There were over 11 and a half hours of debate in the House.

This bill is not about rocket science. This bill is fundamentally about democracy and the governance of special purpose bodies. I think the number of hours of debate in this place alone have been sufficient.

I categorically reject the comments by members opposite that there is heavy handedness or closure intended. Indeed we are allowing the opposition parties to put forth amendments. There has been substantial debate. Public hearings were held right across Canada, notably in western Canada where this legislation will have the greatest impact. The farmers will benefit dramatically from the changes which are being made to the governance of this body.

The changes which are being made to the governance will turn what is a cumbersome, old crown corporation, which we know has had some difficulty, into a mixed, modern type of system which will allow the farmers to appoint two-thirds of the directors to the board. How could it be more democratic?

If members opposite do not want western farmers to have that kind of democratic participation, maybe they should say so. I have some difficulty understanding how they could justify that position.

Indeed the government has listened to the farmers in western Canada. This has been an extremely democratic process. A lot of time has been spent on this issue both in the communities and in the House of Commons.

The amendments in Group No. 6 would lead to a reduction in the operating flexibility of the Canadian Wheat Board. That is exactly what this bill attempts to do. It will create flexibility in a new board. It will be able to elect its own chair, who will be elected by the farmers. It allows for democratic votes to take place in the farming community when certain products are being deleted or added. This is one of the most democratic processes I have ever seen in government.

Two of the proposed amendments would remove flexibility tools, namely shorter pool periods and cash buying authority. I cannot imagine why the Reform Party would want that to happen.

Other amendments would deny the wheat board the power to make adjustments to initial payments on its own authority. That is extremely important. It would reduce the ability of the wheat board to use funds from uncashed cheques for the benefit of all producers and to engage in cash trading.

Again I would ask members opposite why in the world they would want to restrict the wheat board. As many of them represent farmers in those communities, why would they not embrace this legislation? They should see it as an opportunity for democracy to occur in a special purpose body.

We have several of those bodies. We recently had a debate about changes to the ports legislation. Once again it is the same concept. It allows more local democracy. The principle is that the government which is closest to the people is the most efficient and best government. That is exactly what this bill will accomplish.

For those reasons we clearly cannot support these amendments.

The new flexibility tools are important provisions which must remain in the bill. These tools would allow the wheat board to offer producers alternative means of receiving payment. Again, why would we not want to offer those alternative means?

• (1230)

They would speed up cash flows, which is extremely important in any business, while retaining the benefits to producers of the CWB being a single desk seller. They would also allow the board to better manage its own risk. That is where we have seen the government trying to go in many areas to get better risk management in the hands of the operators on the ground and actually doing the work. We believe that would do exactly that.

The initiatives we are talking about are all enabling initiatives. They will or will not be used at the sole discretion of the board of directors. I remind members opposite once again that two-thirds of the board of directors will be appointed by farmers locally and five out of the fifteen will be established by the government.

It is important that the board be able to adjust initial payments quickly when market conditions make it appropriate to do so. That is one of the reasons flexibility is so important. It will help to get money in the hands of the producers as quickly as possible to attract deliveries of grain in a rising market.

It is a bit of the just in time mentality we see in business today. These modern changes will help them respond to those issues. If we were to adopt those amendments it will result in a slower

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process for getting money into the pockets of western Canadian grain producers.

What we are talking about and what they are trying to change is modernization of a system that will see—

Mr. Dale Johnston: Rubbish.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: It is not rubbish. The gentleman opposite says it is. I would like him to defend why he would be against local autonomy, why he would be against grain farmers having the authority and the responsibility to run the wheat board, which has not happened under a crown corporation.

Without these changes we will leave farmers in western Canada working with an antiquated system that will restrict their cash flow, will restrict their ability to do business in the modern world and will restrict their flexibility to adjust to changing conditions.

I am sure it will be no surprise to members opposite that the government will not be supporting these amendments. It is not because we did not hear them. We heard them but we categorically reject them because we think they are bad for the farmers of western Canada.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice of condemnation to the move taken by the government today to stifle debate on the bill.

I take exception to the last speaker who said that this was not closure but was simply time allocation and that we have had a lot of time to discuss the bill. That is rubbish. It is a real flip-flop for him and his party to take that stance when a few short years ago they stood on this side and condemned the Conservatives over and over again for invoking closure.

When you and I were boys, Mr. Speaker, a period that many people would refer to as the old days, a mythical character rode the western plains on a white horse and shot silver bullets. Known as the Lone Ranger, this relentless crime buster divided his time between rescuing damsels in distress and bringing bad guys to justice.

Today another mythical character roams the Canadian plains. Known in Saskatchewan as the lone Liberal, his mission is to round up farmers who think they have the right to sell their own grain. Along with his trusty sidekick for comic relief, the Canadian Wheat Board, he brings to justice villainous farmers who think that if they can grow it they can sell it.

With the lone Liberal and the CWB in hot pursuit these criminals are dealt with, with due dispatch and without delay, while lesser law breakers like rapists and murderers are sternly admonished and sent home. Prairie farmers beware. The lone Liberal rides again and he knows where they live. He also knows where they park their trucks.

• (1235)

If the lone Liberal wonders why he is the only Liberal from Saskatchewan, all he has to do is look at his sidekick, the Canadian Wheat Board. By pushing the CWB agenda and not standing up for farmers, his compatriots were trounced in June. The heavy handed approach favoured by the lone Liberal will only mean that he will be the last Liberal from Saskatchewan.

Farmers are frustrated. They are fed up with the paternalistic approach of the government. Its primary goal is to control all facets of the lives of farmers. If anyone wonders why these farmers resort to border busting, the reason is that the government has made sure there is no option to the Canadian Wheat Board; it is the only game in town.

Farmers are self-employed only in the eyes of the tax man. In reality they are public servants without the benefits, without the salary and without the pension. The wheat board is like big brother, directing farmers on when to deliver the product and how much they will be paid: "Just bring it to us. It is none of your business what we get for it".

Nowhere is the government's control fetish more evident than in its attempt to keep western farmers in line. For decades Liberals have been inventing ways to control the western economy. They did it in the national energy program. They are dying now to impose a carbon tax but in the interim they will settle for depriving western farmers of their property rights.

The bill even expands the board's control over wheat and barley to other grains, and to think the wheat board was set up as a temporary measure. Did we not hear that about income tax and the GST?

Failure to comply with this old soviet style state run monopoly results in a jail sentence. Farmers whose only crime is to try to get a fair price for their product are relentlessly pursued by the wheat police and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law by the government.

To make matters even worse, the board is now paying farmers less than the world price for grain. Compounding the problem is the fact that the board is so shrouded in secrecy that farmers cannot even determine how much less than the world price they are receiving.

Canadian taxpayers are on the hook for a \$7 billion liability through the board, but the Canadian Wheat Board is not accountable to farmers or Canadian taxpayers. It is an unbelievable situation.

The advance billing for Bill C-4 predicted an enhanced accountability to farmers. Instead what we have before us today is a badly flawed initiative in which the Canadian Wheat Board is accountable only to its master, the minister, the lone Liberal.

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The legislation continues to promote secrecy over accountability by ensuring the board escapes the scrutiny of the auditor general and exempts it, believe it or not, from the Access to Information Act.

Nobody is advocating that the wheat board should negotiate contracts in the media or in the public. We admit that. There has to be some secrecy to present day negotiations. The notion of commercial confidentiality may have some validity on current negotiations. But why is the government so opposed to releasing historic information? The only reason I can think of is that it may be trying to hide extravagant spending, bungling and mismanagement.

We know the Liberals love to brag. If they were proud of their record they would certainly want to tell us all about it. It appears that we will never know because the bill stifles the ability of the elected directors to represent the farmers who elected them.

• (1240)

How can directors act freely if they are bound by secrecy? By denying board members liability protection they will not be able to speak out and act on behalf of their farmer constituents. If the government thinks its problems will be over once Bill C-4 becomes law it is sadly mistaken. In fact the Canadian Wheat Board will become a target in international trade negotiations.

The changes to the Canadian Wheat Board Act before us today will not satisfy our trading competitors that the board is independent from the federal government. It will be nothing less than a monumental challenge to convince protectionist U.S. Congress members that the board does not have an unfair trading advantage.

If the government and the lone Liberal from Saskatchewan really want to empower farmers, they will accept the amendments proposed by my colleagues, the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River and the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville. It is high time for the Canadian Wheat Board to act in the best interest of farmers, not just of government.

I would certainly endorse Motion No. 37 in Group No. 6. It is not exactly what we had in mind, but it is a step in the correct direction. It would authorize a producer to market outside the Canadian Wheat Board a percentage of the wheat and barley produced by the producer in a crop year. This is the sort of thing we have been advocating all along.

Some people who like to spread misinformation about members of the Reform Party saying that it is the party that wants to knock the wheat board on the head; they want to kill it and do away with it completely. That is absolute rubbish. We have never advocated that. We have always advocated a dual marketing system. If the Canadian Wheat Board cannot operate without its state run monopoly, it must be as very poor organization.

Every one of us has to compete in our business life and in our political life. I think competition is good and so should the Canadian Wheat Board.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise with considerable interest to speak to Group No. 6. The aim of these amendments for the most part is to improve Bill C-4, which, we must admit, is a step in the right direction toward improving the Canadian Wheat Board.

When the Canadian Wheat Board was set up, its underlying principles were valid. At that time, we were in a period of full economic crisis, and grain producers were working hard for next to nothing. The wheat board was founded then, when it was needed. The effect of this was to raise prices and stabilize incomes, which were then very, very low. Times were tough.

While the bill is a step in the right direction, it could be a big step. It is a little step, because the three to five members on the previous board of directors were political appointments. When the Liberals were in government, they appointed their friends with very little regard, as we know, for the quality of their work. When we changed vehicles, from red to blue, the friends of the Conservatives were appointed. Here too, the appointments were very dubious.

This morning I drew a parallel with Senator Thompson who, a few years ago, was an excellent Liberal, but today is the shame of his party. They want to kick him out of the Senate as they did out of the Liberal caucus. Since he was appointed to age 75, they are stuck with their choice. That is what the Constitution says.

• (1245)

The bill is, then, a small step in the right direction, but it could be a medium step or a giant step. The opposition parties have brought in several motions, highly constructive suggestions for the most part.

My party, the Bloc Québécois, for which I am the spokesperson on agricultural matters, proposed Motion No. 46, which would require the Canadian Wheat Board to give access to information. Those mainly responsible for the existence of this Canadian Wheat Board, the producers, could thus, using the very founding principles of the Access to Information Commission, verify whether the Board was being administered very well, well, badly or very badly.

I would remind the House that, year in and year out, wheat sales hover around the \$6 billion mark, and are coming up to \$7 billion. I have just been doing the math, for the fun of it. If, for example, the board makes a one one-hundredth of one percent error—one-hundredth of a percentage point is very little, one-hundredth of a penny

is so little compared to a dollar, and we do not even bother to bend over to pick up a penny—that still represents a \$600,000 error. That is significant. If the error is one one-thousandth, that represents \$60,000.

The ten directors elected by the producers and the five appointed by the governor in council will, presumably, be highly competent of course. The CEO, who will be the only full time person, the one who will obviously call the tune for the Canadian Wheat Board, will be appointed by the Liberal Party. Let us face it, they are the ones in power today. So the CEO will certainly be a good Liberal, let me tell you, and will draw a nice comfortable salary, needless to say. If this president or CEO is out by a fraction as small as 1%, huge sums would be involved.

In the interests of transparency, we in the Bloc Québécois are suggesting that grain producers or anyone, I or my neighbours in the riding, should be able to request an audit in order to have this board release documents.

I would remind you that, in Group No. 5, we learned that the auditor general would not have the opportunity or the right to go and audit the books and find out how well or badly the Canadian Wheat Board was being run. Sometimes I honestly wonder whether the Liberal government headed by the member for Saint-Maurice does not have some things it is trying to hide from grain producers. It is a question I ask myself, and I hope that a member of the government party will give me an answer after I have finished.

The trust of grain producers must be restored at all costs. This is essential. It is terrible the number of telephone calls, letters and faxes my office has received from western farmers, from western groups working tirelessly for the defence of grain producers. Unfortunately, as soon as it looks like farmers are going to get any control, the government hesitates, although farmers themselves are the ones who know how it should be run.

As an example—I am digressing briefly—there will be 15 members on the board of directors. In that sense, it is an improvement. Before, there were three, four or five at most, and they were all partisan appointments. People were told “We are sending you there”.

• (1250)

For example, if a prime minister wanted to get rid of a member of Parliament, he would appoint him to the Canadian Wheat Board, where that person would get a good salary and nice perks. A byelection would follow, and some friend of the prime minister would get elected and get a cabinet post or some other big job. It would now be a good thing to change things, restore the producers' trust.

This is a step in the right direction, since 10 of the 15 directors will be elected by farmers, who will vote by region. For example, grain producers in the Peace River area will vote for Mr. Y, who

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will become their representative. If he does not do a good job, he will be replaced the next time.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Or Mrs. Y.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien: Or Mrs. Y, of course.

The problem is with the position of chairperson.

I will conclude by discussing another motion, moved by the hon. member for Prince-George—Peace River, who is making a very interesting suggestion.

The bill currently provides that the already existing advisory committee may—it may, but all this is not clear—continue to exist. Motion No. 48 moved by the Reform Party member proposes to clearly state that the existing advisory committee will be dissolved.

The board will have 15 directors, compared to the three members currently sitting on the advisory committee. We agree with the Reform Party that having a board with 10 elected and five appointed directors would be enough. This is not to say we necessarily approve of the number 10 for elected directors. Personally, I would have proposed that all members be direct representatives of grain producers, and that they be elected through a general vote.

If the chairperson does not do a proper job, he will be let go at the end of his mandate, as was the case with the Conservative Party, in 1993, when only two board members were kept.

Mr. Speaker, I would like you, as Speaker of the House, to ask the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture or, rather, the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, namely the Minister of Natural Resources, to take a close look at the many motions before us. These motions do not seek to weaken Bill C-4, but to improve it. After all, this legislation deals with sales of between \$6 and \$7 billion.

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we are debating now is group 6, a grouping of amendments including three very progressive amendments moved by my colleague and next door neighbour, the member for Palliser.

I want to make very clear at the outset that I too object to the government's imposing closure on this very important piece of legislation for western Canadian farmers and indeed for all the country.

I am sure the government House leader understands that the Canadian Wheat Board is a very important institution, doing about \$6 billion worth of business every year on behalf of western Canadian farmers. That \$6 billion worth of business every year provides a tremendous spin-off to not just western Canadian farmers or western Canadians but to the nation as a whole. That is why this legislation should not be forced through the House with closure but that this House should be more receptive to accepting

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some of the progressive amendments that have been moved by members on the opposition side of the House.

I want to be very clear at the outset that our party has stood historically behind the concept of the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1255)

We have had the wheat board now for roughly 60 years in this country. There was a real struggle back in the 1930s and the 1940s to fight for the creation of a Canadian wheat board that would market things collectively and operate as a single desk marketing agency for the farmers of western Canada.

I can remember the days when I was a kid and my grandfather telling about the struggles that people of his generation had in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s against the Winnipeg grain exchange and the Chicago futures market in terms of getting a decent price for the grain they were marketing to different parts of the world. After a long struggle and through all kinds of prairie popular movements, the creation of the Canadian Wheat Board occurred some 60 odd years ago.

Today there is a fight on the prairies once again about the very survival of the Canadian Wheat Board. Our party is firmly behind the wheat board. We want it democratized and as open and accountable to farmers as possible, but we want the wheat board to be expanded to include more grains so that it can market those grains for the farmers of western Canada.

What is the option? The option is to open up the market and allow the big grain companies like Cargill and others to market grain and reap the profits of the farmers of western Canada. That is the position taken by the Reform Party. It is trying to disguise that by saying it wants a dual marketing system, a double marketing system in this country.

Mr. Myron Thompson: That's what farmers are saying.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: The farmers are not saying that. When there was a vote in western Canada on barley and the wheat board, the farmers said very clearly they wanted to maintain barley in the Canadian Wheat Board by about a 65% to 66% vote.

The Reform Party says it believes in democracy and a referendum. There was a referendum on that issue. The Alberta government intervened on the side of the open marketers I think with about a million dollars and, despite that, the producers turned it down almost two to one going into the open market. Has democracy spoken? Reform Party members should be listening to democracy, listening to their constituents and listening to their farmers if they believe in what they are saying to the people of this country.

I am sure that the member for Wild Rose, being a populist, would agree that we should listen to the farmers of western Canada

and listen to the democratic choice those farmers have made in western Canada. He should come around to our ridings and hear what people are saying about keeping the Canadian Wheat Board.

Instead, what we are hearing from the Reform Party—and western Canadians watching should be aware of this—the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands said in the House a while back that the Canadian Wheat Board in this country compares to the old Soviet Union. What kind of extremism is that? Here is a party that is so extreme that it compares the Canadian Wheat Board, which is supported by Canadian farmers, the people in my riding, to the kind of institutions in the old Soviet Union. That is what the Reform Party is saying and it is on the record here in *Hansard*.

What does the member for Wild Rose say about that? Why does he not go wild on that one? That is what the Reform Party is saying.

If that was not enough, the member for Skeena, that great grain producing riding of Skeena, compared the Canadian Wheat Board to a police state. It has been a long time since I have heard that kind of extremism in the House of Commons.

The members of the Reform Party are getting very excited. I am afraid they are going to start rushing me. I have not had much training in boxing recently, but I hear those extreme voices being raised once again about jailing farmers. There are some farmers in a movement called farmers for just us who broke the Canadian law. They were found guilty by the courts in this country and here are the members of the Reform Party saying they want to stand up on behalf of law breakers. Again, the extremism in that party ought to be noted by ordinary people in this country. It is about time they were called to task on that.

Some of the farmers in farmers for just us have broken the law and members of the Reform Party stands four square behind them.

An important part of any parliamentary democracy is to listen to the people, and the people of western Canada have spoken very clearly, very succinctly and often on the need to keep the Canadian Wheat Board and single desk marketing and have that as an institution of economic good for the people of western Canada.

• (1300)

There was a referendum on that as it pertains to barley. The Reform Party lost that referendum. They pretended it did not exist. They do not listen to their constituents. In fact some of them should be recalled on this issue.

I would like to have a Reform Party member get up and tell us why they do not want to listen to the people. I believe the whip of the Reform Party is hanging his head in shame up there at the Chair because the Reform Party was not listening to the people of this country when they spoke so clearly in the barley referendum. I would like to have a Reform Party member get up and explain how

they can do this, how they can not listen to what the people are saying.

The wheat board is a very important institution. The wheat board sells about \$6 billion a year of grain. The profits are returned to the farmers, not to private investors. The wheat board is accountable to Parliament. The wheat board has its books audited independently by Deloitte & Touche. The wheat board is accountable. It is open. It is there for the farmers of western Canada yet the Reform Party is opposing the Canadian Wheat Board. I wonder why.

Let us look at who funds the Reform Party. Conrad Black. I do not know if he contributed to your campaign, Mr. Speaker, but he did not contribute to mine. He contributes to the Reform Party. Imasco, some of the big banks and believe it or not, the CPR. That is why the Reform Party is in opposition to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Just like the fights which occurred in the 1930s and 1940s with the far right in western Canada as they opposed orderly marketing, those fights are occurring again by these new radicals and new extremists who are taking a stand against orderly marketing in Canada.

The whip of the Reform Party is so ashamed, he is now across the House and is sitting with the Liberals. A few minutes ago he was hanging his head in shame, but now he is sitting with the Liberals, dissociating himself from the Reform caucus.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member has this problem with staying on course and relevancy. He got beaten in Yorkton—Melville badly for not listening to his people. As a result, he does not stay on the subject.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. member is discussing the Canadian Wheat Board Act which is what we have been debating here all day. He has some minutes remaining in his speech.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I have been representing farmers in this House for some 26 years. I know what the farmers are saying in my riding and around Saskatchewan and around western Canada. They want a strong Canadian Wheat Board. They want Parliament to support that Canadian Wheat Board. Yes, they want it to be more accountable, they want it to be more democratic, but they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

The real debate is whether or not that wheat board continues to exist. The Reform Party will destroy the Canadian Wheat Board. They will set up a dual marketing system. They will destroy the Canadian Wheat Board.

They have had members in this House that have compared the Canadian Wheat Board to a police state. The member for Skeena did that. The member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands was compar-

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ing the wheat board to the old Soviet Union. These are extremist statements. But that is exactly where the Reform Party stands. They are also not listening to the democratic will of western Canadians who voted very clearly to keep barley within the context of the Canadian Wheat Board.

So I say to them, why do they not listen to their constituents? Why do they not listen to what people are saying? If they did that, we would have a strong wheat board for the farmers of western Canada.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely astonishing to listen to that member from Saskatchewan rant and rave about how he is the great protector of the rights of Canadian farmers. Here is a member who fled from the rural ridings of Saskatchewan because his support was non-existent. He fled to an urban riding to seek re-election. What did he care about the farmers? He wanted to go to the city so he could get himself another job.

• (1305)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order and it is a legitimate one. The member from the Reform Party is geographically challenged. The riding of Qu'Appelle is one-half rural and one-half in the city.

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure all hon. members are happy to learn the demographics of the hon. member's riding, but I am afraid it is not a point of order.

Mr. Dick Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is quite likely the hon. member's thinking is one-half in the mud and one-half in the sand. There is no doubt about that.

We have heard the member talk about this glorious wheat board, a wheat board that is determined to shackle the efforts of Canadian farmers. That is the philosophy of communism where the state is in control of everything. I am not surprised that it is coming from that member from Saskatchewan, a disciple of the socialist communist philosophy.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There are times when members get carried away. I would like to ask the member to withdraw that. He said I am a disciple of the communist philosophy. I am not. I never have been. I have always been critical of that. I would like him to withdraw that comment.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that what the hon. member said or what is objected to is necessarily unparliamentary. I am unaware of a precedent that would rule it is an unparliamentary term. If the hon. member could assist the Chair later with that, I would be glad to do it.

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I know that hon. members generally would prefer to continue their remarks in a temperate vein and I would urge that.

Mr. Dick Harris: Mr. Speaker, the member is not listening to what the Reform Party has said because he chooses not to. He chooses to keep his head in the sand and not listen to a new way of doing things.

It is a way of doing things which we believe would free the farmers from the oppressiveness of the Canadian Wheat Board. It would free the farmers from the dictatorship of the Canadian Wheat Board. It would free the farmers from the corruptness of the Canadian Wheat Board, free the farmers from the mismanagement of the Canadian Wheat Board and free the farmers from the influence of the Liberal friends of the Canadian Wheat Board.

An hon. member: What corruptness?

Mr. Dick Harris: Mr. Speaker, they ask what corruptness. There has been allegation after allegation by Canadian farmers who have sought to take this issue to court only to find that the Canadian Wheat Board and this Liberal government do everything they can to keep the issues out of court.

When one Canadian farmer wants to try to do something for himself to improve his standard of living, to expand the best possible market for the product that through his toils he grew out of the ground, what do they do? They throw him in jail because he will not be guided by the dictatorial powers of the Canadian Wheat Board.

It is a sad day in this House when the Liberal government brings in closure on an issue so important as this. This is an issue that takes away the rights of Canadian farmers. It is a bill that serves to increase the secrecy of the Canadian Wheat Board. It is a bill that serves to cloak more in secrecy the goings on, the financial dealings and how they are doing business so that ordinary Canadian farmers and members of the opposition cannot get access to find out where the mismanagement is occurring, where the corruption is occurring, where the sleight of hand is occurring in the Canadian Wheat Board.

Who could we expect in advance to support the government on this oppressive bill? None other than the New Democratic Party members. We could have bet a day's wages that they were going to jump on board with the Liberals on this bill. The only type of authority they understand is a state authority.

• (1310)

That goes back to the roots of this member's philosophy when he talks about big brother looking after everything and not letting any individual initiative come to the surface, not rewarding individual efforts. That is not the style or the philosophy of the NDP. It wants a collective state where everyone works for the state. They get little in return and they pay into the big brother government.

No wonder the NDP member fled his rural riding after the 1993 election and sought refuge in the city where he could find some new fields on which to sow his socialist philosophy. It is unfortunate that he did and we have him back in the House.

The Liberals have put forward an oppressive bill. It oppresses the right of farmers to work hard, to succeed and to try to make life a little better for themselves. It places them under the thumb of a wheat board that does not want to open its books to Parliament. They would not even let the Auditor General of Canada look at the books.

What are the Liberals trying to hide by putting in a bill like this? They do not want the Auditor General of Canada, the watchdog for Canadian taxpayers including the western farmers, to look at their operation. Why? Because it would expose the mismanagement, the nepotism and yes, the corruption in the Canadian Wheat Board. There is that word again. It comes up all the time when I think of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Darrel Stinson: The arrogance.

Mr. Dick Harris: The arrogance. Good word. Have we got some more here? We could go on and on. I should have a thesaurus here. We could have a lot of fun here today.

The Reform Party supports the freedom of choice for farmers. The Reform Party supports the individual initiative of Canadian farmers. The Reform Party supports that that initiative can be rewarded by getting the best price possible for their products. If they can do it themselves, then we want to let them.

We cannot support this bill or any of the amendments put forward by the Liberal Party or the NDP. I rest my case. This is a terrible bill in the history of farming in Canada. It cannot be supported in this House.

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 60 years the wheat board as a crown agency has done an admirable job for farmers, for all farmers, those with small farms, those with large farms. Studies show that each year farmers make \$265 million more selling wheat through the wheat board than they would selling to the private grain trade.

It is the best grain marketing organization in the world. The wheat board has been able to get good prices and returns the profit to farmers rather than having it line the pockets of private grain graders. The wheat board is a \$6 billion industry and certain corporate interests would love to get their hands on it. It is because of that that we see the Reform Party and its business friends trying to abolish the wheat board.

The Reform, like the Liberals, want a winner take all economy and they want to get there a whole lot faster. To this end we have

seen the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange and Cargill rally behind the position or more likely lobby that position. We see the National Citizens' Coalition attacking the integrity of the wheat board. It is no surprise that a former Reform MP, Stephen Harper, is leading that charge.

Producers support the wheat board. It has ensured stability in their interest. Statements made in the past by Reform members compared life in Canada under the wheat board to life in the former Soviet Union. They call Canada a police state because we have a wheat board. These remarks only prove that Reform members are capable of writing for the tabloids. These remarks only prove that Reform is capable of writing for the tabloids. These remarks are extremist rhetoric and we have listened to a whole lot of it. They do not accurately reflect the work and actions of the wheat board.

• (1315)

The Reform Party's agriculture critic in the last Parliament is not with us today. He came from the riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar which is a fairly large farming area. I suggest his party's stance on the wheat board is one of the main reasons he is not here. The majority of the farmers do not support Reform's position on the wheat board.

There is no question that producers are not happy with the government's amendments to the act. There is no question that more accountability and transparency are wanted. The producers, however, do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. They want the Canadian Wheat Board. If this government seriously wants support for the changes it must ensure access to information and it must ensure that there is accountability. Its failure to do this again leaves people questioning high paid appointments and patronage. This only taints the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the agreement reached Wednesday, November 19, 1997, all of the motions in Group No. 6 are deemed to have been put to the House, and the recorded divisions are deemed to have been requested and deferred.

[English]

The House will now proceed to the debate on the motions in Group No. 7. This group contains Motions Nos. 42, 43, 44, 46 and 48. Pursuant to agreement made on Wednesday, November 19, 1997 all motions in Group No. 7 are deemed proposed and seconded.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.) moved:

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Motion No. 42

That Bill C-4 be amended by adding after line 16, on page 18, the following:

"24.1 The Act is amended by adding the following after section 45:

45.1 (1) A producer may, in the form prescribed by the regulations, elect to be excluded, with respect to one or more types of grain, from the operation of this Part, for a period of not less than five years.

(2) An election under this subsection may be terminated only by two years notice in the form prescribed by the regulations.

(3) The Corporation shall establish procedures to preserve the identity of grain from producers who have made an election under subsection (1) and to prevent co-mingling of grain from producers who have made such an election."

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC) moved:

Motion No. 43

That Bill C-4 be amended by deleting Clause 26.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 44

That Bill C-4, in Clause 26, be amended by deleting lines 30 to 34 on page 19.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 46

That Bill C-4 be amended by adding before line 1 and the heading "Agricultural Marketing Program Act" on page 22 the following:

"Access to Information Act

30.1 Schedule I to the Access to Information Act is amended by adding the following in alphabetical order under the heading "Other Government Institutions":

Canadian Wheat Board
Canadian Wheat Board"

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.) moved:

Motion No. 48

That Bill C-4, in Clause 36, be amended by replacing lines 22 to 27 on page 24 with the following:

"(5) Section 9 of this Act comes into force on the date on which the first directors elected assume office pursuant to section 3.08 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, as enacted by section 3 of this Act."

He said: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that the government might lead off debate, especially on this group of amendments. It is so typical of the government's arrogant attitude and how it has approached debate on this bill that it will not put members forward to debate these amendments. It is absolutely despicable. I hope and pray that the western Canadian farmers who are following this debate are taking note of the complete disdain with which the government has treated this debate over the last number of days. There are hardly any Liberal members in the House. The few in the

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House have not even addressed the issue. They are not interested in having an honest, open and proper debate on the 48 amendments which have been put forward, and they are very substantive amendments.

I notice the member for Malpeque, a Prince Edward Island potato farmer.

The big issue in this set of amendments is contained in Motion No. 43 which was put forward by my colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party to remove the inclusion clause. If there is one clause in Bill C-4 which has raised the ire across the board of western Canadian farmers it is the inclusion clause. The government knows it. There were many submissions and presentations made to the government in committee and across the land against the inclusion clause, and yet the government and the hon. member for Malpeque will not stand to defend it.

The reality is that people from coast to coast in this country who are involved in the farming communities know that the member for Malpeque should be down at the other end of the House. He should be in the NDP caucus. The only reason he is not is he knew he could never run for the NDP in Prince Edward Island and have a hope of getting to the House of Commons, so he decided to run as a Liberal.

As a past president of the National Farmers Union we know where his thinking is. We know that he wants more state control of agriculture in Canada. He wants expanded control of the Canadian Wheat Board. He wants more control, just as the hon. member from Regina just said. They want more crops brought in under the Canadian Wheat Board, more farmers in jail, I would assume.

● (1320)

Let us have a look at what witnesses, the few we had time to hear from, said about the inclusion clause when they appeared before the standing committee on agriculture last fall.

The prairie pools sent a written request to the minister by association which can demonstrate that it is the predominant organization which exists solely to represent the producers of that commodity in the designated area. They want it very clearly defined who is going to initiate including more commodities under the control of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Even the prairie pools have some serious concerns about this inclusion clause. United grain growers say no to the inclusion clause. Western Canadian wheat growers say no. Canadian canola growers, no; flax growers of Western Canada, no; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, no; oat producers of Alberta, no. The list goes on and on. Virtually every group of witnesses, every farm organization that appeared before the committee said no

to the inclusion clause and yet does it make any difference? Are they listening over there? They are still there.

I would like to remark on what has happened over the last little while with this bill, the reality. I spoke on Monday. I raised a question of privilege on this very issue, because what we have seen is this government and this minister, the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, showing complete disdain, a lack of respect for this institution. That is the reality of what has happened. He is just proceeding as though this bill is law to the extent that because we have so many western Canadian farmers in the caucus of the official opposition in this House who wanted to speak to this bill, wanted to properly debate the amendments, actually brought in closure today to shut down debate. They do not want to hear from western Canadian farmers.

There is a group that has grown up from grassroots western Canadian farm organizations specifically to fight this bill. The thing that unifies it is the inclusion clause. That is the one thing that unified all these groups under a common umbrella. They said no, we certainly do not want that. Yes, we want to see change with the Canadian Wheat Board, but we certainly do not want to see it expanding its already mandatory powers over wheat and barley to other commodities such as canola or flax, things marketed on the free market right now.

Let us look at the organizations that make up this coalition against Bill C-4. Included are the Alberta Canola Producers Commission, the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission, the B.C. Grain Producers Association, an organization that I was very proud to be the president of for a number of years when I was actively farming. I probably shovelled more grain that ended up in Canadian Wheat Board cars than most members on the opposite side have ever seen in their lives.

Also included are the Canadian Canola Growers Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canadian Oil Seed Processors Association, the Flax Growers of Western Canada, the Manitoba Canola Growers Association, the Oat Producers Association of Alberta, the Ontario Canola Growers Association. Even Ontario canola growers are in on it because they are concerned about this. Others are the Western Barley Growers Association, the Saskatchewan Canola Growers Association, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association and the Winnipeg commodity exchange. They all joined together to try to fight Bill C-4, largely because of this inclusion clause.

I would add that this meeting I referred to in my point of privilege last week, the meeting that the hon. minister for the Canadian Wheat Board held in Regina on January 21, some of those organizations I just read out were invited to attend that meeting. And what happened at that meeting?

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• (1325)

The majority of those organizations invited urged the minister to drop the inclusion clause brought forward because of one member, the hon. member for Malpeque who joined the House and perhaps will join in the debate. We welcome him and we would like to hear from him in this debate later on. Those organizations walked out in complete disgust. They wanted to discuss the bill and the ramifications of this bill on western Canadian farmers. The reality was the minister was there to discuss how to hold the elections. We had not even voted on how many directors there would be.

There is an amendment that has been put forward by me on behalf of the Reform Party to have all 15 directors elected. We are not going to vote on that until next Monday evening. Yet the minister holds a meeting in Regina and invites farm groups to discuss how to go about holding these elections, as though this bill were already law. We wonder why the Parliament of Canada has become irrelevant in the minds of so many Canadian citizens. It is because of the arrogant attitude of ministers like that.

What happened at this meeting? The majority of those groups walked out in complete disgust. It is interesting that both the premier of Alberta and the premier of Manitoba wrote to the Prime Minister about this inclusion clause. I have copies of the letters. They wrote scathing criticism of this inclusion clause that the socialists obviously support judging by the heckling coming from that end. They join their other Liberal brothers in trying to support this state run commodity organization.

Unfortunately my time has expired. I would like to go on for considerable length discussing this, but that's life.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just an observation at the outset. While we very much in this corner of the House oppose what the government has done today by invoking time allocation, it is interesting to note how quickly the debate is now going through once time allocation has been proceeded with.

We have been dealing with these groups of amendments for several days. It seems, by my calculation, to be taking slightly over a day to get through one group. We started at group 5 a couple of hours ago and now we are in the seventh and final group. It seems the Reform Party, which put up 19 or 20 speakers, is able to rush out and say look, the government forced us into time allocation and are they not a horrible group of people. Reform has the thing through. It won what it thinks it will be able to carry out to the farmers. It is a sham and a shame.

Group 7, the one we want to zero in on this afternoon, is the inclusion clause. As the previous speaker indicated, our caucus does support the inclusion clause. We want to explain why we support the clause.

The previous bill allowed farmers to decide in a vote to remove or exclude grains from the board's authority. It seems to us that it is only fair, normal and natural that farmers can also vote to add additional grains. I stress that such an inclusion of a grain besides wheat and barley would occur only after a vote of farmers and/or producers. That is democracy in its truest form.

There has been a great deal of concern how a vote to include a grain would be actually triggered.

• (1330)

As the legislation stands a farm group would have to seek conclusion. The minister would then decide if the group was sufficiently representative of producers of the commodity in question. Only then would a vote occur.

Our proposal in Motion No. 44 was actually suggested by the minister of agriculture for the province of Saskatchewan when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food last fall. We proposed that the process to include a grain be exactly the same as that of excluding a grain; that the board of directors of the wheat board ask for it; and that, if they do, farmers would then vote on it. This would streamline the process for the inclusion of a new grain and make it less divisive than we think the legislation before us now proposes.

We believe these are sensible and moderate propositions quite in contrast to the venom which has been spread in recent months by the so-called coalition against Bill C-4. The activities of this coalition are nothing more than an undisguised frontal attack on the Canadian Wheat Board. The coalition is trying to do through the back door what it failed to do through the democratic process.

I just want to run through its demands. The coalition continues to insist that barley be dropped from the wheat board's jurisdiction. As my colleague from Regina indicated a few minutes ago, farmers voted on that question in 1997. Some 63% of them voted in favour of keeping barley under the board's jurisdiction, notwithstanding the \$1 million the Alberta government put up in paid advertising to try to ensure the vote would go against keeping barley within the CWB.

The coalition is also demanding cash buying and dual marketing as has been noted earlier. In our humble opinion and in the opinion of Judge Muldoon from Alberta that is nothing more than a prescription for doing away with the wheat board. It is something that farmers have rejected as recently as 11 months ago.

The coalition and its Reform partners are demanding that the inclusion clause for grains be dropped altogether from the bill. Who is it who wants barley out from the wheat board jurisdiction in the inclusion clause? We heard the previous speaker, the Reform agriculture critic, talk about some of those groups. I do not think he mentioned all of them. I just want to make sure we get them all in. Most of the faxes that arrived in my office carried the identification

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of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, a well known farm group.

What other bona fide farm organizations belong to this unholy coalition? The Winnipeg Commodity Exchange. I do not think I heard the member make reference to the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange. The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce has big farmers out there. The oilseed producers which includes Cargill and unofficially the Reform Party.

We say to these corporate interests and to the Reform Party that a debate about the wheat board is a debate for farmers and not a vote for corporations.

Let us compare the coalition to one group that supports the inclusion clause, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, arguably the largest farm organization in Canada and an organization that has the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as a member. Other supporters of the inclusion clause include Wild Rose Agricultural Producers from Alberta, not the member for Wild Rose but the agricultural producers of Wild Rose; the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, which represents more than 200,000 rural taxpayers; and the Government of Saskatchewan. The previous speaker noted that Premiers Klein and Filmon had written to the minister responsible for the wheat board. Let the record show that the premier of Saskatchewan has recently written, urging that the inclusion clause remain in the bill.

We ask the Reform Party and the agribusiness lobby why they are worried about a possible producer vote to include grain, a party that talks constantly about plebiscites and referendums? Let the farmers decide. New Democrats have always supported the wheat board because it works in the best interest of farmers. That is why we support the inclusion clause.

Just before I take my place, I want to respond to something that was said by the member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley who assured the House that the NDP would be supporting Bill C-4. I want the record to show, as I said during debate on Group No. 5, that the minister responsible for the wheat board has done the impossible. He has all opposition parties offside on this legislation.

• (1335)

At this point in time we will be voting against Bill C-4 as it now stands.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, some day in the future there will be a dual market because every farmer in the country cannot be kept under a monopoly. That will change. I have no doubt about it. When it happens I hope the government of the day apologizes to farmers and pays compensation. I will be waiting to see the day. I am sure it will happen in my lifetime, God willing.

I am sure the hon. member for Palliser voted against the time allocation motion, having the debate shortened, but he seemed to support it in his speech. I cannot imagine why he would do that when we are trying to get all the facts on the table. We are trying to present them to the government that is bringing forward the bill so that it can learn to change its ways and change the bill to reflect what is best for Canada and for farmers.

I would like to bring NDP members up to date. They talk about survival of the Canadian Wheat Board as do the Liberals and Bloc members. It is paramount in their minds. Everyone should be talking about the survival of Canadian farmers in western Canada.

I will describe a typical farm in western Canadian. We are not talking about a quarter section or a half section any more. We are talking about investment dollars in the millions, just under a million dollars to run a decent sized grain farm. We are talking about a significant business.

It is foolish to talk about marketing grain as it was done 60 years ago or to say that is the way it should be done nowadays. The cosmetic changes the Liberals are putting forward in the bill do nothing with regard to true price discovery. They do nothing with regard to freedom for individuals to produce a product and sell it on their own as they see fit. The bill is a recipe for disaster for western Canada.

I would like to talk for a minute about what would happen if the wheat board went to a dual market or allowed farmers to sell on their own. Who would then market the grain? One of the biggest marketers would be the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. I lived in Saskatchewan before I moved to Manitoba. There was a lot of support for Sask Pool. Many of my old CCF relatives, current NDP relatives and others in Saskatchewan support the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool is a top grain marketing co-op in the world. The pool placed 23rd overall. It was the largest grain marketing co-op. Those that ranked above it were involved in dairy, meat and sugar.

If a farmer were allowed to sell his grain outside the wheat board, he might choose to sell it to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, with its size in the world economy, especially in the agricultural sector, could very well find out what is a good price. It could compete against the wheat board. It could compete against Cargill, UGG and ADM. At that point the farmer would have the choice. He would say that he got a real good price from Sask Pool and that is where he would like to sell his grain. If Sask Pool suddenly decided to shaft the farmer for a few years and to start giving grain away for political reasons or doing something foolish to cause the price paid to the farmer to go down, we would soon see the farmer selling to an alternative buyer.

● (1340)

Sask Pool has made an alliance with an eastern European country with regard to the possibility of changes in the future grain marketing system in Canada. UGG has formed a strategic alliance with a Japanese company, Marubeni. I read from a report:

Industry sources said the alliance is also part of a long term strategy by Marubeni as it is watching for deregulation of Canada's wheat and barley markets.

What do they think Saskatchewan Wheat Pool is doing? It knows a deregulated market for marketing grain is coming down the pipes. Everybody in the House should know it by now. There is enough information around. For some reason the Liberal government is sticking its head in the sand. Instead of trying to make changes today it will keep western Canadian farmers in this straitjacket monopoly for the next 10 years to 15 years. Maybe this straitjacket will only last until the next election, with any luck.

I would like to speak for a moment to price discovery. This deals with the inclusion clause, Motion No. 43. The proposed inclusion clause would allow the mechanism to fundamentally change the price discovery process and reduce the relevance of the grain purchasing price setting mechanism. I will use canola as an example. It has been raised in the House and everyone is familiar with that product.

The Winnipeg Commodity Exchange canola contract provides a price reference and an effective hedging tool for producers, grain merchandisers, exports, importers and processors both domestically and internationally. They have a choice. They have to decide when they market canola how they will do it.

Therefore the futures price for canola, and this could read wheat or barley, either way, reflects the world price of canola. This function of a commodity exchange provides for an effective and efficient way to discover prices, to hedge those prices and to transfer price risk.

What am I talking about? I am talking about a major Canadian business, for example a \$1 million farm or a \$500,000 farm on the prairies, making decisions in their corporate or personal best interest. They need to maximize the profits they can make for their farms.

The proposed inclusion clause, if used to grant authority over canola, would allow for price discovery process supporting the canola contract to change from an open market system to a closed regulated system and eliminate the relevance of the contract as an international pricing and risk marketing tool.

I ask members of the NDP and the Liberals whether this is what they want. I think they do because this is the bill they have put forward. They do not want a true price discovery mechanism to be in place. By not having access to what actually is happening in the Canadian Wheat Board as to pricing and so on, it looks to me like

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they are trying to keep the whole thing kind of hidden, kind of secret, so that the true price for grain is never determined. The farmer takes what he gets, according to what the wheat board wants to give him.

● (1345)

I could continue to speak about the wheat board and the impact it has on demurrage costs and a lot of other things, but I think I have made the basic points as to why farmers have to have choice. It is their pocketbooks we are talking about. They should be able to sell their grain to whom they want, whether through the wheat board or privately.

I do not support Bill C-4. I support a wheat board for the farmers who want to be in it.

Mr. Paul Bonwick (Simcoe—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prior to dealing with Bill C-4 and some of the amendments which have been proposed, I would like to respond to statements which have been made by my Reform colleagues across the floor.

First, Reformers have suggested they are all knowing and representative of the western prairie farmers simply because the majority of Reformers come from the western provinces. They also suggest that we on this side of the House and our Conservative and NDP colleagues should not be speaking to this bill because they are all knowing and they are the representatives. They suggest that we should be listening and doing nothing else.

I am here to tell them that when we are dealing with an issue which affects the entire country, when we are dealing with an issue that represents \$6 billion to \$7 billion, guaranteed by every man, woman and child in this country, I am going to speak to it. It is my parliamentary privilege to do so, just as it is for members from Quebec, the maritimes, B.C. and northern Canada.

Ninety per cent of my riding is agricultural. The people in the agriculture community want to see a couple of clear things coming from this House. They want clear questions, clear statements and clear answers. They do not want to hear all the rhetoric, misinformation and grandstanding which Reformers are throwing out. Some of the statements with respect to Bill C-4 which have been made today and in days gone by have been absolutely ludicrous. We should be dealing with the straightforward points the government is recommending with respect to Bill C-4.

Before I speak to those points I would like to mention a couple of comments which appear in *Hansard* that my Reform colleagues have made. Perhaps these members, when they see fit, might apologize for the comments. Literally they have been grandstanding. They have been creating anarchy on the western plains. They should be ashamed of themselves. These are not my words. These are their words.

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The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands said: “This is little more than a personal anecdote. Most of the 200 farmers present were staunch supporters of the Canadian Wheat Board. I might even say most of them were rabid supporters of the Canadian Wheat Board”. I quote the word rabid. They are classifying wheat board supporters.

I would like to give the House a dictionary definition of the word rabid. This is how they are classifying western wheat producers: “Rabid: furious, violent”. Is that the kind of language we expect to hear in the House of Parliament? The definition continues: “unreasoning; headstrong; fanatical—affected with rabies”. That is what they have branded the producers of the CWB. They have branded them as rabid supporters. I suggest that the member should consider apologizing for his absolutely outlandish comments. They are completely unacceptable and something which I certainly would not imagine coming from a parliamentarian.

What this bill is about and what we should be discussing today are clear and precise facts such as are the wheat producers going to have control of their wheat board. The answer is yes, absolutely yes.

I would like to give my colleagues across the floor a little definition of democracy. It is anything over 50%. They like to throw out these referenda. If they do not have the majority of support in the ridings they will step down from their seat. Democracy is 50% of the vote, gentlemen. The grain producers have 66% elected representatives on the wheat board. That is a vast majority. Two-thirds of the directors will be directly voted in by the wheat producers. So their myth is set aside. No more fallacies, just simple truth. The farmers will have control.

• (1350)

With respect to government appointments, the government of this country is backing the Canadian Wheat Board to the tune of \$6 billion. Are Reformers suggesting this government should have absolutely no role to play? Are they suggesting that we sign a blank cheque every year and we have no control or mechanism in place to make sure the money is being spent wisely? If that is what the Reform Party is suggesting it would have this government bankrupt in no time at all. I suggest the Reform Party should be ashamed of itself.

We certainly would not be prepared to offer a corporation \$6 billion in guarantees without having some control in this House.

I would like to speak to the farmers' involvement. We have heard the Reform Party throw out many names and agencies of people who have been opposed to this bill, most of whom are somehow either directly or indirectly related to the Reform Party.

I would like to take a minute and go over a chronology of events, the consultations the hon. minister went through. This is not something that we are bringing closure to in a matter of one day. This has been ongoing for many months. Unlike my colleagues across the floor, my opposition members in the NDP, in the Conservative Party and in the Bloc chose to table some of their amendments during committee, in front of the experts. They felt they would stand the test and have good debate on them.

Not my Reform colleagues. They withdrew all their amendments at committee. They said we are going to do it in the House where we can grandstand, where we can do nothing more than support the people who support us, the Reform members who were not elected and decided to join various organizations that came forward to present themselves. That is unacceptable.

I would like to take a minute and go through this chronology. These are facts. A factual brochure on the grain marketing system was distributed to over 200,000 farmers, not executives and board members, but farmers, organizations and industry representatives in December of 1995. There was series of 15 town hall meetings held across the prairies in 1996 to provide farmers and other individuals the opportunity to express their views. Twelve days of public hearings were held in Winnipeg. There have been many opportunities for the farmers to provide their comments with respect to this bill.

The panel travelled across the country and it heard what the farmers want. Not a couple of specific Reformers, those who are all knowing, those who are wanting to yell across the floor or act violently. They heard from common sense individuals, good business people, farmers, grain producers.

This bill will do a good job for the Canadian wheat producer.

I will conclude with a couple of the principles behind the Canadian Wheat Board and the acts mentioned therein. I will read some notes I have made as I have gone along. I would encourage my Reform colleagues to listen for a change. No more heckling, no more laughing, no more grandstanding, but represent their constituents the way they should and listen for one moment.

The changes in CWB governance and operation will enable the CBW to function more effectively in carrying out its mandate to market western wheat and barley for export and domestic consumption on behalf of farmers. The current commissioner structure of senior management will be replaced by a part time 15 member board of directors comprised of 10 producer elected representatives and 5 government appointees, including a full time president and chief executive officer who can only be appointed with consultation with the rest of the board. Not simply the minister's whim, but the rest of the board has to be consulted in this. Further, the rest of the board is going to decide his salary.

• (1355)

No more grandstanding. The facts are out. The Canadian Wheat Board bill, Bill C-4, is a good bill. It is a good bill for Canadian wheat farmers and now they know the facts.

I think they will look a little differently on some of the comments made over the last several days.

The Speaker: I see it is two minutes to the hour of two. I am going to recognize the hon. member for Brandon—Souris. He would be able to get a couple of minutes in, if he would like to do that, and then continue after.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity to do at least two or three minutes prior to the break because it is nice to have members of the committee from the government side listen to some of the comments I am about to make.

I know that when I give these comments and they are done in a logical fashion, they will listen to logical arguments. I know they will do that.

First of all I would like to state emphatically that this House has introduced closure, even though they wish to say it is time allocation. There are a number of issues, a number of things that should well be said on behalf of our constituents by individuals who are elected to this House, the parliamentarians, to give forward their views and their thoughts on the amendments. The hon. member who sits on the committee gave us his closing arguments on Bill C-4.

We are dealing with group 7, the amendments that have been tabled. We have dealt with groups 1 through 6 and there are a number of good amendments.

This section is the one I have the most concern with. I have said to the minister, to other members of the committee and to my own constituents who do not like this legislation that, in fact, if this particular clause were removed from the legislation I would reluctantly consider looking at the whole legislation in favour.

However, the inclusion clause is the clause that scares the living daylights out of me. I should tell you why. The inclusion clause was not in the original piece of legislation that was tabled, Bill C-72, prior to the House adjourning for an election. During the period of time from April to June 2, it seemed there were literally hundreds and thousands of people who approached government who wanted to include into this piece of legislation an inclusion clause that would allow other commodities to be put into the legislation to be on a monopoly single desk selling basis.

The Speaker: Like many of my colleagues, I will look forward to hearing from the hon. member after question period.

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STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, national flag day provides all Canadians with an opportunity to reflect on this great nation. On February 15 my constituents in Brampton Centre will join millions of fellow Canadians across every region to pay homage to the colours of our flag and to celebrate what our flag represents to us.

The greatest enthusiasm will be exhibited by the children in the schools in my riding. There will be drawings of flags, poems about our flag, posters, paintings and skits all dedicated to the celebration of the Canadian maple leaf.

Congratulations to tomorrow's leaders for showing their patriotism toward the flag. Congratulations also to all Canadians who will take the time to honour our flag and, by so doing, to honour Canada and Canadians.

* * *

ADOPTION

Mr. Jim Gouk (West Kootenay—Okanagan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, although birth is a joyful occasion, it can also be a painful experience.

• (1400)

Usually adoption relieves the pain, but when Arnold Hinke and Catherine Locke of Nelson, B.C., decided to adopt a baby girl from Nepal they had no idea of the real pain they would have to endure: months spent in Nepal dealing with rigid regulations; tens of thousands of dollars in expenses and lost wages; completion of the adoption last December, only to have their new daughter kidnapped as Mr. Hinke prepared to leave for Canada; recovery of their daughter, only to have the adoption derailed by police rulings without involving the court or government; and a high risk that the baby may be turned over to her kidnapper who claimed without proof to be the birth mother who abandoned her at birth and did not attempt to reclaim her.

The situation was looking more and more hopeless, but justice eventually prevailed and Mr. Hinke was finally allowed to bring his new daughter home. In fact he is arriving home today.

I want to thank my colleague from Red Deer, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Michelle Cadieux and her staff at the Canadian Co-operation Office in Katmandu for all their help.

I welcome Robyn Marie Locke-Hinke to her new home in Canada. She is one very lucky little girl.

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CITIZENSHIP AND HERITAGE WEEK

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 9 to February 15 is citizenship week. The purpose of citizenship week is to provide Canadians with an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the privileges and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship.

This week the Department of Citizenship and Immigration will be recognizing Elizabeth Saveta Milojevic, a constituent in my riding, for her outstanding work in providing assistance to refugees on their arrival in Canada. Ms. Milojevic's work exemplifies the humanitarian and generous spirit of Canadians.

On behalf of the constituents of Etobicoke—Lakeshore I congratulate her for upholding the values of Canadian citizenship.

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[Translation]

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of Quebec's suicide prevention week, the Bloc Québécois would like to draw attention to the efforts by the Government of Quebec to stabilize and lower the suicide rate in Quebec.

Suicide is the primary cause of death among young men between 15 and 29 and has been on the rise since 1990. More women than men attempt suicide. This is a complex phenomenon if ever there was one, and the risk factors involved in suicide are many: psychological problems, drug or alcohol dependency, dysfunctional families, difficult economic circumstances, job loss, social isolation.

The federal government's cuts in transfer payments to the provinces have forced them to cut health and social services. Furthermore, the empty job creation promises of the Liberal government are not helping anyone in difficulty to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

By giving the provinces their due, the Liberal government will be helping to prevent suicide. We encourage it to do so.

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CANADA-QUEBEC RELATIONS

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a group of political science experts released a working document which attempted to identify some potential solutions for settling the problem of Canada-Quebec relations.

Those experts included Prof. Guy Laforest, well-known across Canada and a staunch member of the Yes side during the last referendum campaign. According to him, one of the weaknesses of

the Government of Quebec was its inability to demonstrate the validity of the sovereignist project.

Such an expert opinion is worth its weight in gold. It confirms that the people of Quebec made the right choice in the two Quebec referendums in 1980 and 1995, namely to opt in favour of keeping Quebec within Canada.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND HERITAGE WEEK

Ms. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening I had the opportunity to attend a special session of the Court of Canadian Citizenship in my riding. I would like to thank the minister of immigration for attending. I would also like to thank the Kiwanis Club of Casa Loma for hosting the ceremonies.

In this Citizenship and Heritage Week I would especially like to thank the presiding judge, Judge Pamela Appelt, whose warmth, empathy for our new Canadians and pride in our country were truly inspirational.

The highlight of the evening was the swearing in of Ms. Kim Fouk. Many people feel that the famous photo of Ms. Fouk fleeing her village in Vietnam exemplified to the whole world the horror of war.

It was an honour for me to meet Ms. Nancy Pocock who was there supporting Ms. Fouk. At 87, Ms. Pocock remains as an effective activist and pacifist as she was against the Vietnam war. For her work in the refugee communities in Canada she has been recognized by receipt of the Order of Canada.

It is important that once a year we recognize the importance of citizenship and heritage in this week long celebration. Events such as last evening help us all to pause to recognize how proud we are to be Canadian.

* * *

STATE OF ISRAEL

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat, a festival that the people of Israel and Jews around the world celebrate by planting trees.

Over the past 50 years trees have had a very symbolic status in Israel. Zionist settlers have planted literally millions of trees, truly living up to the biblical passage about making the desert bloom.

This year Tu B'Shvat is much more than just a celebration of Arbour Day. This time it marks the beginning of a year long celebration of the jubilee of Israel's independence.

• (1405)

Fifty years ago this spring the modern state of Israel was born, ending thousands of years of exile for the Jewish people. Yesterday

marked the birthday of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, one of the few freely elected chambers of democratic deliberation in the entire Middle East.

Happy birthday, Israel. Canadians salute 50 years of democracy. We look forward to the development of peace and human rights among all peoples of the Middle East.

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[Translation]

JACQUES CHIRAC'S STATEMENT

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the sovereignists are using every means possible to demonstrate that Canada is a divisible country. They often use the example of other countries to prove their point.

They must have been surprised yesterday to hear the Canadian Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs quote a statement by French President Jacques Chirac on this matter, as follows:

France is one country indivisible. It is indeed made up of regions and provinces, each different from the other, each with its own population, customs, history and sometimes language. This is especially true of Corsica, whose identity and uniqueness are recognized by all.

Under the circumstances, then, it is hard for the separatists to pester France to back them up, as they did in the last referendum.

* * *

[English]

SENATE OF CANADA

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday one of the Senate's own members called on the red chamber to show some guts and expel absent Andy Thompson.

Who is this agent for accountability? He is Ron Ghitter, a red Tory bag man, a Mulroneysycophant, appointed in the dying days of the Tory chief's patronage orgy.

Who is this new found defender of the public interest? Last year he cost Canadians more than 150,000 tax dollars including \$40,000 for travel alone.

Who is this model of excellence? Having shown up only 148 times since 1993, his attendance record is a pathetic 55%. What hypocrisy. Canadians simply do not buy this feigned outrage from an unelected and unaccountable political hack.

At least absent Andy Thompson has the decency to stay in Mexico and not pretend he is doing his job. As for Ron Ghitter, if this Mulroneysycophant is so concerned about accountability, why does he not resign his seat so Albertans can elect their own senator?

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The Speaker: I would encourage all members to temper their remarks in this statement period.

* * *

PAY EQUITY

Mrs. Claudette Bradshaw (Moncton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to address the issue of pay equity. On January 23, 1998 I met for the second time with the local representatives of the Public Service Alliance of Canada regarding pay equity. They have made me aware of their views and are quite concerned about this issue.

This past fall I met with the President of the Treasury Board to make him aware of the concerns of the PSAC representatives in the greater Moncton area.

[Translation]

I can assure you that wage parity is of great concern, not only to the Public Service Alliance, but also to the Government of Canada.

The government has always given precedence to the option of a negotiated settlement. That is why Treasury Board took the initiative with the negotiations which began on April 15, 1997.

I would like to assure the Alliance and the government of my interest in finding a prompt solution to this impasse.

* * *

[English]

RAILWAYS

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Transport told Canadians that the government was proud of CN Rail, which is abandoning rail lines, farm families and farm communities across Canada, because it is now the fifth largest rail company in North America.

No doubt this deal is good for CN. It will be able to increase its use of Chicago and the North-South Illinois Central line. So long east-west rail links. Hello the Gulf of Mexico. That is exactly what the NDP and other critics said would happen as a result of the free trade agreement and NAFTA.

This is bad news for farmers and bad news for Canada because our rail system will continue to go downhill and because the government, the Reform Party and the Tories want it that way.

* * *

WEI JINGSHENG

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West—Mississauga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to welcome Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng to Canada and to the House of Commons.

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Considered to be the father of the democratic movement in China, Wei Jingsheng started the Xidan democracy wall movement in 1979 and was subsequently imprisoned for subversion.

• (1410)

After spending most of the past 18 years in prison, Mr. Wei was exiled on medical grounds to the U.S.A. last November, just six months after the publication of his book, *The Courage To Stand Alone*.

Mr. Wei will be appearing before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade this afternoon. All are welcome to attend.

As chair of the subcommittee on human rights and international development, I am especially proud to have the opportunity of meeting with the courageous Wei Jingsheng.

I welcome the hon. Wei Jingsheng.

* * *

RUSSELL MACLELLAN

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, after being savaged by four painful years of Liberal government in Nova Scotia, the Grits needed someone to turn their provincial fortunes around. They found their Mr. Fixit in Ottawa in Russell MacLellan.

As an MP, Russell voted to decrease cash transfers to Nova Scotia from \$638 million in 1994 down to \$411 million by the year 2003. Nova Scotia needs a commitment from Ottawa to restore adequate health care funding for Nova Scotia.

Will Russell MacLellan work with the federal Progressive Conservatives in asking that the federal government restore the CHST floor based on the provincial level and not on the federal level, or will he continue to betray Nova Scotians as he has with the BST promise and his toll highway pledges and allow Ottawa to continue its massacre of Nova Scotia's health care system?

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month the federal government took an historic step in announcing Gathering Strength. This important initiative marks a new era in developing a renewed partnership with aboriginal people.

Inuit, Metis and First Nations have expressed support for Gathering Strength, particularly for the statement of reconciliation. Aboriginal Canadians who experienced atrocities at residential schools have waited far too long to hear that the government is deeply sorry.

The apology is not lip service. A \$350 million healing initiative that will help those affected by residential schools is proof that the government is truly changing the way it does business with aboriginal people.

I applaud the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the entire Liberal government for their sincere apology to aboriginal Canadians. I look forward to seeing firsthand the rebuilding and renewing of Canada's relationship with aboriginal people.

* * *

HERITAGE

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, what is going on at the Department of Canadian Heritage? It is the department charged with the responsibility of preserving all that is good, wonderful and Canadian.

It has lost its rudder. Under this minister it has produced a calendar with Children's Television Day and even with Books and Copyright Week. The only thing they missed was the Iranian communist party and support of radical feminist objectives. However, Easter and Christmas were excluded.

Now it has produced a quiz asking which act created Confederation in 1867. The heritage department answer: an act of union. Wrong, oh bated breath. It was the British North America Act.

All is well. The minister has given Canadians a \$20 million a year Canada information office. I just have one question. What kind of information is it disseminating?

* * *

[Translation]

TRIBUTE TO SISTER THÉODORA BERNIER

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice to that of all my constituents to mark the 100th birthday of Sister Théodora Bernier.

In her 81 years of religious life, Sister Théodora worked as a teacher in Quebec City, a nurse in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, a director at a community centre in Montreal, a director at a craft workshop in Rigaud, and a commissioner for 25 years.

Year-round and in all kinds of weather, Sister Théodora travelled the roads of Quebec, going from town to town and from door to door to sell crafts hand-made by nuns and thus help the work of the Franciscaines missionnaires de Marie in 77 countries throughout the world. She gained the admiration and respect of those who had the pleasure of meeting her.

Sister Théodora retired on October 30, 1995. She is an endearing person who is witty and has a sense of humour. She recently said "When I turn 100, I want people to sing and dance".

That is what we will do tomorrow. Happy birthday, Sister Théodora.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1415)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, today the finance minister showed what is happening to this year's budget surplus. His priority is not tax relief. It is not debt reduction but more spending, pay raises for the top 3,300 government bureaucrats.

All Canadians would like a pay raise and the finance minister could give it to them by simply giving Canadians broad based tax relief.

Why does the finance minister think it is okay to leave his bureaucrats with more money in their wallets but not Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Since we have taken office we have said that the payoff for deficit cleanup, for cleaning up the balance sheet and for the tremendous effort of Canadians, will in fact be lower taxes. It will in fact be greater security for our social programs. We will continue on that vein.

The one thing I would say within that context is that it makes very little sense to me, given the importance of the public service and the tremendous dedication, that the Leader of the Opposition should attempt to downgrade their efforts for the country.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I wish the finance minister was as concerned about the dedication of taxpayers as he is about the dedication of bureaucrats.

This is just what Canadians were afraid of, that the finance minister would spend any surplus on made in Ottawa projects, not on tax relief for ordinary Canadians: pay raises for the top bureaucrats, the \$3 billion memorial fund for the Prime Minister, a sop to this minister, a trinket to that minister.

After the finance minister is done with all these Liberal spending projects how much money will be left for broad based tax relief?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that a party that is supposed to be based on market principles would refuse to recognize that the top executives in the public service are absolutely necessary to the nation. We need the highest possible quality.

Oral Questions

When a lot of them are now going to the private sector because the salaries are higher, I am surprised the Reform Party would lack the foresight to be able to pay senior public servants that we need the price they deserve in the market.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize paying bureaucrats what they deserve, but what we want is to pay taxpayers what they deserve.

We still do not have the answer to our question of what is happening to the vanishing surplus. What worries Canadians is the finance minister's reports say there is a surplus right now. The spin doctors are now saying there will not be a surplus at the time when the budget comes down, that in fact there will be a \$2 billion deficit.

Why are the finance minister's spokesmen predicting a deficit if the books say surplus? What is his explanation for the vanishing surplus?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can see the jealousy of the Reform leader because we have been successful.

He is just trying to take away the credit of the Minister of Finance because the Minister of Finance and the government have been able to balance the books and now there will be money. Today he is no longer interested in the reduction of the debt. Today it is the reduction of taxes. Tomorrow what will it be?

For us it is very clear. Half the surplus is going for economic and social programs because we have problems in Canada that need attention, and the other half will be going for tax reduction and debt reduction.

It is clear, Mr. Speaker, and I am sorry the Leader of the Opposition—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Northeast.

* * *

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in 1996 CTV news exposed the Canadian forces vulnerability to chemical and germ warfare.

An access to information document confirms this and I quote from that document:

The Canadian forces lacks automated chemical and biological detectors. The absence of such capability would result in mass numbers of casualties should there be a direct attack or be located downwind.

• (1420)

This minister has had two years to correct the situation. How dare he send our sailors into harm's way without adequate protection.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is adequate protection. We have some of the best detection and protective equipment of any country when it

Oral Questions

comes to dealing with chemical and biological weaponry. Those people who are going into that area, the 340 personnel, are going to be properly equipped. They are already properly trained. They will be inoculated. They will have all the equipment necessary.

I think it is irresponsible for the hon. member to put such scare tactics into the public eye, particularly for the families and friends of the people who are going into the gulf area.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is fairly probable that the minister does not know what is going on in his own department.

This document goes on to say:

Although [detection] systems are in place in the Canadian forces, these are not sufficiently responsive to permit the donning of protective equipment or [to] adopt protective postures which would significantly reduce casualties.

Adequate equipment is not expected until the year 2000.

How will our sailors know if they have been exposed to biological or chemical warfare agents? Is he hoping that the wind will always blow the other way?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Speaking of wind, Mr. Speaker, we are hearing a lot of it from across the aisle.

I think he said the document was about two years old. That is about where his thinking is.

Our people have the best equipment. They are well prepared and well trained to be able to deal with these circumstances. They will be as best protected as they can be.

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[Translation]

1982 CONSTITUTION ACT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it has now been 16 years since the 1982 Constitution was unilaterally imposed against Quebec's wishes.

Next week, in a reference based on this same illegitimate Constitution, the federal government and its Prime Minister want the Supreme Court to deny the right of Quebecers to decide their own future.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, politically and I would go so far as to say morally, the Constitution Act, 1982, does not apply to Quebec and that those who claim otherwise are guilty of constitutional heresy?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Constitution was perfectly valid for the Government of Quebec when it asked us to amend it to allow a new school board system in Quebec. We cannot use the Constitution when it suits us

and reject it when it does not. Here, as in France, the rule of law must prevail.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would remind members that the school board issue came under the 1867 Constitution. However, the words I quoted were the very words used in 1987 during the Meech Lake accord hearings by Yves Fortier, the federal government's lawyer for the Supreme Court reference.

Does the Prime Minister not think that the credibility of his spokesperson, Yves Fortier, is seriously compromised by the fact of his appearing before the Supreme Court to argue the exact opposite of what he claimed in 1987?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Fortier was an ardent defender of the Meech Lake accord. His remarks, if they are to be quoted fairly, should be quoted in full.

Mr. Fortier described the 1982 Constitution as "an unfinished work" and he added: "As a jurist, I view 1982 as a turning point in Canada's constitutional history. It marks the patriation of our country's Constitution, the approval of an amending formula and, above all, the entrenchment in our Constitution of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms".

Whatever one may think of the Constitution Act, it is the law that applies in Canada.

* * *

YVES FORTIER

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

In 1978, Yves Fortier, counsel for the federal in the reference to the supreme court, praised the merits of a unilateral declaration of independence as a solution to patriation, and I quote "In our opinion, proclaiming our Constitution independently of any other country would constitute a solemn declaration of autonomy".

Does the minister agree with the words of Mr. Fortier, who is serving as his counsel in the reference to the Supreme Court of Canada?

• (1425)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if this is a trick question it is not very difficult.

International law permits the unilateral elimination of any colonial vestige. However, Quebecers in Canada today are not colonized, except in the heads of a few separatist leaders.

Oral Questions

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister endorse the remarks of his spiritual leader Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who said and I quote “Should the British refuse to patriate the Constitution of 1867, we would still have the option of holding a massive demonstration of national will, which would imply on our part a unilateral declaration of independence”.

Does he agree with these words, yes or no?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should have listened to the answer before posing his second question. That would have saved my repeating the fact that international law permits the unilateral elimination of traces of colonial relations, but Quebecers in Canada are not colonized, except in the heads of members of a party which denies the rule of law and democracy for all.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

In the past six weeks more than 18,000 jobs have been wiped out; the latest, 700 at Inco. No wonder young people are worried about their future. No wonder when 48,000 fewer young people are working than this time two years ago.

How can the Prime Minister find it acceptable that 48,000 fewer young people are working today as a direct result of the Liberal government’s policy?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that when we formed the government four years ago and a few months, there was 11.5 % unemployment in Canada. It was down to 8.6% two months ago. There was a slight increase last month because of the unfortunate incident in Quebec and in eastern Ontario with the ice storm.

We have many programs to help young people in Canada. The basic thing we have to do is restore the finances of Canada in a way that we can be competitive and create jobs. That is why we have done it and we have created in Canada more than a million new jobs in the last four years.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 48,000 fewer jobs for young people. Student protests in Quebec against escalating education costs are the latest eruptions of frustration and worry among Canada’s youth. No wonder when average student debt loads have climbed above \$25,000. No wonder when Liberal policies have caused tuition fees to jump 31% since this government took office.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge today that a national system of grants must be at the heart of any serious commitment to providing the educational opportunities young people need in the new economy?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I have to say that education is a primary responsibility of the provinces. When I met with the first ministers in December we discussed the problem of young people finishing university with a difficult situation of debt they have accumulated during the time.

We have decided to work with them. It is also why we have decided with the millennium projects for Canada that the main one will be to establish a millennium scholarship program to help the young people of Canada to get the best education, because the level of unemployment is much lower for young people with a university degree than for those without.

* * *

IRAQ

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. First I want to assure the minister that we are not using scare tactics. This is a very serious situation in Iraq and we have many unanswered questions.

This government is undertaking a very serious responsibility when it sends Canadians into what might turn into harm’s way.

Since yesterday what measures has the Minister of National Defence taken to ensure that the crew of the HMCS *Toronto* will be inoculated against Saddam’s anthrax?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will be inoculations. An anti-anthrax serum will be sent to the HMCS *Toronto*. It will be docking in a few days in Crete.

• (1430)

It is expected that the first of the inoculations will take place at that time. There will also be antibiotics that will be put on board. A medical doctor will go on board the ship to ensure that every precaution is taken, even though there is a low risk of being in contact with anthrax while that ship is in the gulf. Nevertheless every precaution is being taken.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, we have been in contact with the a company in Lansing, Michigan that manufactures the anthrax vaccine. We had to go to the Americans because the minister did not have the answers.

Is the minister not aware that it takes three injections and four weeks for the vaccine to take effect? Saddam Hussein is not going to sit on his butt for four weeks before he shoots the first missile.

Oral Questions

What is the minister going to do to protect our troops and why are we sending our troops into danger unprepared?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes it does take three inoculations and three inoculations will be administered.

But the hon. member is wrong when she says that it does not have some immediate effect even with the first inoculation. It does. Even with the first inoculation, by and large, the serum will take effect. Antibiotics are also put on board. Between the two they will have the desired effect.

* * *

OLYMPICS

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Through a series of incompetent and unsettling events, Ross Rebagliati was stripped of his gold medal by the international Olympic committee. All Canadians who adhere to the spirit of fair play and justice rejoiced today in the reinstatement of Ross' gold medal.

Will the Prime Minister on behalf of all Canadians ask for an apology from the international Olympic committee for this unfortunate event which amounts to an insult to all Canadians?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the appeals council has voted to reinstate the medal is in itself an indication it has realized that Mr. Rebagliati had done nothing to infringe on the rules of the medical council of the Olympic committee.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I again ask a question of the Prime Minister.

Will the Prime Minister request that the Canadian Olympic committee begin, with the international Olympic committee, a process of review of not so much this matter but make sure that this unnecessary situation never happens again to our young athletes going to Olympics?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are some very clear rules in which many countries, including Canada, have signed on with regard to drug doping in sport.

Canada has the best record of any country in the world in strengthening and adding to that kind of a set of requirements.

Mr. Rebagliati did not do anything to oppose or to infringe on any of those requirements. We are dealing with a set of clear indicators and clear regulations agreed on by everybody.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Rebagliati for his fantastic performance.

* * *

[Translation]

BILL C-28

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, under the current act, and in the opinion of a well-known tax consultant firm, shipping companies incorporated abroad and administered from Canada are protected from any challenge by Revenue Canada regarding their place of business and, therefore, the taxes they might otherwise have to pay in Canada.

However, the current legislation does not clearly protect holding corporations engaged in international shipping activities, as do the finance minister's companies. According to the explanatory notes, Bill C-28 will correct this situation.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. By protecting holding corporations in the Income Tax Act, by protecting his business, through legislative provisions, from any possible challenge by Revenue Canada regarding place of residence, is the minister not clearly and directly putting himself in a conflict of interest?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was mentioned on a number of occasions, but I will say it again. Everyone knows the Minister of Finance was a very successful businessman who left the corporate world to come to serve Canadians.

As for the existence of a conflict of interest, the ethics commissioner said that everything was done according to the rules. The minister acted very responsibly. He made sure that the specific clause in the omnibus bill would be under the responsibility of the secretary of state, as is still the case.

I have absolute confidence in the finance minister's integrity and honesty.

• (1435)

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The current act provides tax savings for shipping companies, but does not say that holding corporations in the shipping industry enjoy the same treatment. Under Bill C-28, holding companies will now be entitled to these tax savings.

Since the Minister of Finance owns such holding companies abroad, how can he continue to claim, through the Prime Minister, that he is not in a conflict of interest?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the finance minister took over his portfolio, a clear procedure was established. Whenever some issues may result in a

conflict of interest, or in an apparent conflict of interest, the Minister of Finance always makes sure the issues are dealt with by the Secretary of State for Financial Institutions.

Everyone knows the rule. Again, the minister is an excellent Minister of Finance and he is not in any way in a conflict of interest.

* * *

[English]

MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT ON INVESTMENT

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, because the Minister for International Trade is not showing leadership and informing Canadians about the MAI, he is bungling this issue.

It is common knowledge that the trade minister was a big opponent to trade and investment when he was in opposition. Let us examine what he said in the free trade debate in 1992. He said it is a shame we have to rely on newspapers to begin to enlighten not only Canadians but elected Canadians.

What is clear is that this minister is not doing any better to enlighten Canadians about the MAI. Is this because he does not believe in free trade or is his heart not in it?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the member's second question in four months. If that is to be a sign of interest then clearly the questions about where people stand on trade, on investment and on job creation are pointed at the Reform Party.

The member will know that as soon as I became trade minister I wanted to engage in greater debate, not hide it. It was I who requested the committee to look into the MAI. It was the committee that made a report. We sent more information to the members of Parliament and engaged NGOs.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, considering he has only had two questions in four months one would think he would have a better answer.

If the minister would start listening to himself he might recollect what he said in 1992. During the free trade debate in 1992 he said this House should condemn the government for its failure to be completely open with Canadians about the principles and objectives of the NAFTA. That is exactly what we are talking about with the MAI.

Yesterday in the House when asked why he was not involving Canadians, he said we put it out to committee for its recommendation.

Oral Questions

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in four months one would think he would have prepared those two questions better or at least finished the second question.

I am not sure what the member's complaint is. We have engaged the Canadian public in a national debate. We want more debate and more information. The question that should be asked is what is the Reform Party doing. How many briefings has he had across the country? As opposition critic, has he triggered a national debate in this House? Has the Reform Party used opposition day motions? No, it has not. It is its own insecurity that motivates the two pathetic questions in the last four months.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources Development promised a complete report on the effects on the public of his EI reform. He tabled the report this morning.

How useful is this report, when the people surveyed were unemployed in the summer of 1996, six months before the reform's main amendments took effect?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are at the beginning of the most important EI reform in 25 years, a reform designed to adapt our system to the market economy we now live in.

As a government, we promised five reports and five there will be. This morning, I tabled the first one, which evaluates the impact of our reform on the clients we serve and on the Canadian economy. I think that this report contains some information of great importance for us.

• (1440)

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, meanwhile, the unemployed are starving.

What sort of credibility can a minister who is constantly claiming to be following the situation very closely have when in fact, as we see today, he is relying on a worthless report?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the opposition is interested exclusively in the report itself. Is it because the report indeed shows that, on the basis of preliminary data, the reform's effects are more positive than those he is busy describing, in other words, people are not starving?

Perhaps he should take an interest in the fact that unemployment is down in Canada since our government took office and that our

Oral Questions

economic policies are perhaps the right ones. That may be what the report is starting to show and that is why he is rejecting it.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans said yesterday that Canadian fishermen have access to foreign quotas. He said "It is only when they choose not to fish that the offer is made to foreign fleets". How dare this minister accuse Canadian fishermen of choosing not to fish. He knows that is not true. Will the minister apologize to Canadian fishermen right now for his false accusations?

The Speaker: Be very judicious. I will permit the minister to answer that question.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for permitting me to answer a question that is clearly out of order.

The fact is that on the east coast fishermen are offered to fish various stocks. If it is not taken up by Canadian fishermen, under international law we offer it to other nations who may wish to fish that stock.

In addition, there are certain pelagic species such as bluefin tuna where quotas are established for the whole of the ocean because these fish move. Certain nations such as Japan fish in our waters but they are fish that we would be unable to take ourselves if the Japanese were not taking them.

We tried to interfere with the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the minister a few facts.

His own officials told the committee this morning that there are presently 22 foreign factory freezer trawlers off the coast of Canada. I have in my possession 21 letters from Canadian fish companies asking for these quotas which they are being denied.

Will the minister now tell us that he will not renew any foreign quotas to anyone until Canadian fishermen and Canadian plant workers are back to work?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should not inflate himself with indignation beyond the point where he can conveniently contain it.

The fact is that in this instance on the east coast we offered to Canadian fishermen the various quotas of various stocks. Only in situations where they do not wish to fish for some reason or another is it offered to others.

In addition to the mistake he is making, he is also saying in effect that the foreign fleets that operate in that way and that deliver to Canadian plants for Canadian shore workers to get work from would not get that work. What is he trying to do? Is he trying to deny Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurentides.

* * *

[Translation]

IRAQ

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

This morning we learned in the National Defence Committee that any military confrontation with Iraq will result in heavy casualties, particularly because of the Iraqi policy of using human shields. This is one more argument in favour of a diplomatic solution.

Does the minister believe that he has really contributed to the search for a diplomatic solution by doing the rounds of the Arab countries, as he did yesterday, merely in order to justify Canada's support for the American position?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I may correct the record, I was in New York and not in the Arab countries. I returned with the sense that there is a possibility of working for an accommodation of the major difficulties. But we still come down to the bottom line that Saddam Hussein has to agree to live up to the rules of the United Nations.

We are trying to defend the integrity of that organization and to ensure there is a degree of rule of law around the world, which the United Nations represents. We can continue to work and use our good offices around the world to try to see that accommodation but we must maintain the bottom line is that people—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

* * *

● (1445)

[Translation]

ALGERIAN SITUATION

Ms. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Canadians are horrified at the situation in Algeria, where innocent victims have been dying in horrific massacres for months now.

We want to know what our government is doing to express our support to the people of Algeria, particularly the Algerian women and children who have been the victims of numerous atrocities.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians was officially invited by the Algerian parliamentarians to visit Algeria. The Minister of State and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons will head that delegation in the coming weeks, and our parliamentarians will meet with their Algerian counterparts and with representatives of the civilian community and of the government in order to exchange views on the situation.

Canadians are in solidarity with the people of Algeria in these difficult times, and I trust that we will have the support of this entire Parliament.

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[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Over a month ago we exposed the fact that a confidential letter was leaked from the office of the minister of Indian affairs. The minister says she is investigating this breach of confidentiality but her actions indicate that she is not taking this matter very seriously. Yesterday she could not even remember the name of the investigator until the Deputy Prime Minister slipped her a note.

Can the Prime Minister assure this House that this investigator's report will be tabled in its entirety in this House?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to the question by the hon. member, an investigation is currently under way. When it is completed, the findings will be sent to the Minister of Indian Affairs, and then we will see exactly what the situation is. That could be done under the Privacy and Access to Information legislation.

[English]

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we have the ludicrous scenario of the minister investigating herself and then reporting to herself.

The Prime Minister should know as a former minister of Indian affairs that trust is very important to aboriginals and indeed to all Canadians. There is a very real sense of betrayal on the part of grassroots Indian people as a result of this unacceptable breach of confidentiality.

Oral Questions

Can the Prime Minister tell us what particular steps he will take to restore the faith of grassroots aboriginal peoples in his government?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the occasion to talk with some aboriginal people. I think the work that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has done since she has been responsible for that department has been outstanding. She has the confidence of the government and of the native people.

* * *

TRADE

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if this government signs the MAI without a full cultural exemption, the protection of Canadian culture is at risk. If there is no protection we will be signing our cultural sovereignty over to Blockbuster, Walt Disney and Ted Turner giving them the freedom to strike down our cultural programs.

The Minister for International Trade will be making a MAI policy statement to the Centre of Trade Policy and Law on Friday. Why not tell us first? Will the minister tell Parliament today how this government intends to protect Canadian culture under the MAI?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we said very clearly at the outset of the negotiations at the MAI that we would prefer a complete carve out for culture, that it should not be on the table. If it is going to be on the table we have said that we are going to move for an exemption. If there is no exemption, there is no signature to the MAI.

The only party in this Parliament that does not want an exemption for culture is the Reform Party of Canada.

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister then is telling us there will be a complete carve out for culture in the MAI or they will walk away from the table. Am I hearing the minister correctly?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Yes, you are.

• (1450)

The Speaker: I would ask hon. members to please address the Chair when they are asking or answering questions.

* * *

[Translation]

IRAQ

Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this new Iraqi crisis we have had trouble getting any information here in Parliament. The Government refuses to inform the House properly.

Oral Questions

Our role here as MPs is to be informed, but we have to get the information from the Pentagon on what the situation really is as far as the safety of our troops is concerned.

How can the Minister of Defence imagine that our troops, even with an inoculation in Crete, will be protected, when he knows that three injections, and four weeks, are required before they are properly protected? It is not true that they will have some protection. Is he going to call up Saddam Hussein and ask him to wait four weeks until our troops are prepared?

[English]

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the defence committee had a briefing this morning, so there is every bit of information flowing to hon. members opposite.

The hon. member, just like his colleague, has it wrong in terms of the three inoculations. It is a series of inoculations. The protection starts with the very first one and builds with subsequent inoculations. Meanwhile, until the last inoculation has been given to them, they have antibiotics to cover the situation.

Furthermore, on the ship they will have protective clothing, masks and full outfits. They also have the ability to seal off the ship if there is any exposure.

There is lots of protection.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian troops going to Iraq are not prepared. That is clear. Nor do I believe the minister is prepared to face up to the situation.

There is talk of an anthrax vaccine, we are starting to get information, but it is coming from the United States. It is like the story of the helicopters.

Does the minister find it normal for helicopters to be sent to Iraq that require 30 hours of maintenance after an hour of flight time? Had the government been ready, we would have bought helicopters ages ago and saved Canadian taxpayers \$500 million in the process.

[English]

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member, having not been able to make his case about our Canadian troops, is now going back to the helicopter issue.

Let me say this on the matter of our personnel. They are properly protected. I have gone over this matter very carefully with Canadian forces doctors within the last hour and every day this week. I can tell the House they are properly protected. For hon. members to suggest otherwise is scaremongering. It is irresponsible.

[Translation]

ICE STORM

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, families and the owners of small business that were hard hit by the recent brutal ice storm are now concerned about their financial obligations.

Has the minister taken steps to convince financial institutions to show some flexibility and understanding in dealing with the problems of the victims of the storm, and if so with what result?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a very important one. I am pleased to inform the House that I have spoken directly to the Canadian Bankers' Association and the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

I asked both to be flexible and compassionate in this exceptional and disastrous situation. Both indicated that was their intention.

All those with problems in this regard I would ask to contact us or their members of Parliament, because we want to monitor this situation.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it appears as though the Prime Minister and the government just do not understand the seriousness of the breach of trust that occurred in the ministry of Indian affairs.

If they really want an independent investigation, that person must report directly to Parliament. What they are telling aboriginal people and Canadians is that independence is not important. It looks simply like damage control.

When will the investigator report to Parliament, not to the minister?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the member that the report should be released within the next 10 days to two weeks.

* * *

● (1455)

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade.

Oral Questions

Representatives of the three unions for the asbestos workers of Thetford Mines and Asbestos have just learned of the federal government's intention to pursue diplomatic exchanges with France instead of immediately filing a complaint with the WTO.

Does the minister not realize that his decision not to file a complaint with the WTO only makes it harder and harder to stop the movement to ban asbestos, which is gaining momentum in Europe?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has worked very hard and very seriously on the asbestos issue. We want to submit the case to the WTO at the right time.

The French government has now promised to send a representative next month. At the same time, the Government of Great Britain has also promised a consultation process. As an initial position, we think that a negotiated agreement is very advantageous for workers as an alternative possibility.

* * *

[English]

TRANSPORT

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport has asked for a review of the grain handling and transportation system from farmer to port. If this review is to have any credibility, producers must have all options of grain transport available to them.

Will the Minister of Transport halt the elimination of one of these options? Will he ensure that not one more kilometre of track is torn up, allowing time for Judge Estey to report?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question. It is an important issue to this government, to her, and to constituents across Canada, especially in western Canada.

The hon. member will know that the rail lines in this country have to submit five year plans before they do anything with any rail line anywhere in Canada. If the hon. member wants to familiarize herself with the process, she will learn whether or not a particular rail line will be closed down. Then when the decision is made, if a decision is made, on a rail line abandonment, that procedure, that process takes an entire three-year period before that track is torn up.

* * *

IRAQ

Mr. Bill Matthews (Burin—St. George's, PC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of National Defence informed the House that the Prime Minister and the government were waiting for Saddam Hussein to come to his senses. I would suggest that the revelations of the last couple of days require that the minister come to his senses as well.

Anthrax is a biological weapons agent. Anthrax vaccine takes 28 days to take effect from the date of inoculation.

I want the minister to guarantee to members of this House and guarantee to members of the Canadian public that the HMCS *Toronto* will not be allowed within the anthrax danger zone within 28 days of inoculation.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the risk is low for the HMCS *Toronto* in the gulf. However all precautions as I have indicated to this House have and will be taken.

It is not true what hon. members are saying about these inoculations. The first inoculation has in 85% of individuals an effective factor and until the subsequent inoculations are taken there are antibiotics that will cover the situation quite adequately. The medical doctors of the Canadian forces and I have discussed this matter. I am quite satisfied that our troops are properly protected.

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry.

Granting councils like the Medical Research Council and NSERC are the basic foundations of research in Canada. Their funds have been reduced considerably over the last number of years.

What is the minister doing to strengthen the granting councils to ensure Canada's competitiveness in a changing world?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot recently from some of the granting councils and their users about the crisis of funds.

I am pleased to point out that in last year's budget we introduced the Canada Foundation for Innovation, an \$800 million fund to support research and development in Canada's universities and teaching hospitals. We added \$47 million per year to the networks of centres of excellence, made it a permanent program. We added money to IRAP, as we promised again in the red book.

There is no doubt of the important and essential role that Canada's research granting councils are playing.

● (1500)

I am confident that the Minister of Finance will find a way to relieve some of their pressure in due course.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, very slowly we are getting information from the aboriginal affairs ministry about the type of investigation into the leak from the department.

Government Orders

We now know who the investigator is. We now know that he will report within 10 to 15 days. For the credibility of the investigation, will the parliamentary secretary assure the House that that report will be tabled in the House and not just to the aboriginal affairs minister?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to reassure the member that the report results will once again be sent to the department, in accordance with the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act.

[*English*]

We are going to release it as soon as possible.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the government House leader what the nature of the business of the House is for the remainder of this week and next week, seeing that we now know when the budget is due.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will complete the report stage of Bill C-4. The divisions requested will be deferred to the conclusion of Government Orders at 6.30 p.m. or thereabouts on Monday.

Tomorrow will be an opposition day.

On Monday the business to be called will be second reading of Bill C-21 respecting small business loans. This will be followed by second reading of Bill C-20, the Competition Act amendments.

On Tuesday the House will consider third reading of Bill C-4, the wheat board legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to designate next Wednesday as an allotted day.

Next Thursday we will consider second reading of Bill C-19 respecting the Canada Labour Code. We will then complete any of the previously mentioned bills that are still outstanding. We will then proceed with several other second readings such as Bill S-4, Bill C-6, Bill C-8, Bill C-12 and Bill S-3.

Finally, I expect to be asking next week to extend the regular sitting time next Wednesday on the allotted day for the convenience of the party whose motion we will be discussing on that particular day.

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader could indicate whether it is in the government's plans in the next short

while for this House to have the opportunity to vote on Canada's participation in the war in Iraq.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know there is no war in Iraq at the present time.

I wish to indicate to the House that this item was dealt with last week pursuant to an order of the House. There is no further business to be announced on that issue at this time.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, about an incident that occurred shortly before question period.

I do not know whether it is a threat or some tasteless humour, but after I spoke in the House before question period I received a picture from an anonymous Reform MP. It is a picture of a mean looking bird of prey chewing the head off another bird of prey under which it says "how Reformers deal with the NDP".

• (1505)

I would like to ask your guidance, Mr. Speaker, as to whether or not that person could identify himself or herself or whether the Leader of the Opposition could help me to identify that person. It is one thing to have a debate in the House but it is another thing to be tasteless and have this kind of a note sent across the way.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Qu'Appelle approached the Chair earlier and showed me a piece of paper on which was the bird that he had referred to. There was no name on the paper.

Colleagues, I understand that this paper was delivered by one of our pages. Our pages should never, never be used to carry this type of trash. I would hope, my colleagues, that in future this would not occur. Quite frankly, in the name of our pages here who are part of this House of Commons, I do not want them to be used that way.

The hon. member has a grievance. He does not have a point of privilege. I would hope this would not occur again.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential amendments to other acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee; and of Motions Nos. 42, 43, 44, 46 and 48.

Government Orders

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brandon—Souris had the floor. My colleague, you have eight minutes left in your remarks.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that leniency. I did not realize I had that much time but I can certainly spend that much time speaking to this very important piece of legislation.

It is nice to see members of the committee on the government side still in the House, obviously listening to some of the more proactive amendments that have gone forward.

As I mentioned on this particular group of motions, the major issue that is being dealt with here is the inclusion clause that has been put into this piece of legislation.

In Bill C-72, when it was tabled prior to the election, there was no mention of any inclusion, the inclusion clause being that of canola, flax, rye and oats. We were told in committee after Bill C-4 came back and this inclusion clause appeared mysteriously in the legislation, that when the committee went throughout the country on Bill C-72 it had heard from hundreds and hundreds of people who wanted to come forward and have the opportunity to include these other clauses as a single desk seller on the Canadian Wheat Board.

Well, surprise, surprise. When we sat in committee and dealt with Bill C-4, very few of those hundreds of individuals who wanted inclusion came forward. As a matter of fact the majority of the people who came forward to committee spoke totally in opposition to this particular clause, that of inclusion.

There were some individuals who did suggest that inclusion was fine, but almost all of those individuals and organizations who came forward spoke totally in opposition to inclusion. Let me give some names.

The canola growers. These are the same producers that this government suggests it is going to represent, that the Canadian Wheat Board represents the producers of western Canada. These are the same producers that came forward and said emphatically that they did not want to be part of the board with this particular commodity. They said that canola should be out of the board with no option at all of having it put in. These are the same producers that this government says it is trying to represent and have represented on the Canadian Wheat Board.

My most serious concern is with the loss of industrial opportunities in this country because of this inclusion clause. That comes specifically from the canola processors. They were in front of the committee and they said again emphatically "If we are to invest industrially in western Canada, why would we do it when our raw material could be jeopardized?" Just the simple fact that the word canola is in this particular legislation will scare investment out of our country. That is not scaremongering, it is fact.

• (1510)

I have talked to the chief executive officers of these corporations which I assume members of the government have not done. B.C.O. said "Why would we invest tens of millions of dollars into a commodity that we may not have access to if in fact this legislation goes through?"

Our area of western Manitoba and western Canada depend on this type of industrial job creation. If we do not have the ability to develop our own markets and our own raw material, then we will not develop those jobs.

The flax producers also came before the committee. They do not want flax put in as an opportunity of inclusion into the legislation. The same producers that this government says they want to represent are saying "Do not represent us. Get it out of the legislation".

The oats producers also came forward. In fact oats used to be a commodity under the Canadian Wheat Board. It was a single desk seller. It was taken out of the wheat board's jurisdiction and surprise, surprise, they do not want back in. They say that since oats has been taken out, their value has increased in that commodity, that in fact it has reached world markets, that in fact its marketing costs have dropped by about a third from the point when they were in the Canadian Wheat Board.

The same producers that this government says they want to represent in the Canadian Wheat Board do not want to be represented.

If the government is going to go forward and pass this legislation with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board with wheat and with barley, my plea if you will, is please do not extend that to other commodities. We do not want it. The producers do not want it. We do not know who wants it quite frankly, perhaps with the exception of one hon. member on the government side who is going to destroy the wheat board with this type of clause.

Another organization has some serious concerns and it came to committee. That organization is the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange. The Winnipeg Commodity Exchange deals in canola futures. If it were a single desk seller, those canola futures would not be available to the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange. That organization has substantial employment in the province of Manitoba and certainly develops a market for the canola product that is produced by western Canadian farmers.

We are having an excellent debate, if I can just share that, with the proponent of inclusion and everyone else who is opposed to inclusion, but perhaps there could be order.

Government Orders

When I approached this government, this minister and these individuals who are so bent on having the inclusion clause, the answer they gave me for having the inclusion clause was, first of all that everybody wants it, which they do not. Second was that if you have exclusion, then you have to have inclusion. Guess what. We would be more than happy to get rid of the exclusion clause with the Canadian Wheat Board to in fact achieve getting rid of the inclusion clause in this particular piece of legislation. There are no more other answers.

There was one more which was really ridiculous but I will share it. The other answer was, "Hon. member for Brandon—Souris, do not worry about it. It is never going to be triggered, it is never going to be enacted". That was the answer I got back from members of the committee, "Do not worry about it. Inclusion is in the act but it is never going to happen".

• (1515)

Guess what. If it is never going to happen, get it out of there. Do not leave the inclusion clause in. It is putting fear into the marketplace. That fear in the marketplace is going to have a dramatic impact on the industrial development not only of the crop itself for the producers but also for jobs that we can create in western Canada based on these crops, based on the value added of these crops. Just having it in there is a very scary situation.

I will pass my time on to others whom I know speak as passionately as I to this particular clause. If there is one amendment that the House listens to honestly, to all the people who have spoken, this is it. Make no mistake. The inclusion clause must be taken out of this legislation.

Mr. David Iftody (Provencher, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in the House and to join with my colleagues on both sides of the House to discuss this important piece of legislation.

I shared what I want to say with a couple of the Reform Party members outside the House this afternoon when we were discussing this. My interest in this bill of course is as a rural member in Manitoba on behalf of the farmers there. It is also of particular importance because I shared with them my own family background where the Iftody family came to this country 100 years ago. This year we will be celebrating 100 years of being in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

My ancestors came here as farmers. They were clearing the land as grain farmers. Those good people and their successive generations, like many immigrants from eastern Europe, cleared that land and planted primarily grain. That evolved to a much more sophisticated system but all of them will tell, if hon. members will listen on both sides of the House, of the changes that have occurred in the industry in the past 100 years.

They will tell, and some have told me, of the monopolies in the 1920s and 1930s of the large private grain companies that were gouging the farmers, controlling that process.

I find it absolutely surprising, strange and odd indeed that some of these members of Parliament are advocating a return to that place where invariably with the break-up of the wheat board we would have a companion, parallel process of monopolization with one grain company buying the other and buying the other until we are left with one or two large companies again in Canada competing against the small farmer whom these folks ostensibly are trying to protect.

That is the background to some of the comments I want to make on this. First, in the small business sector, or perhaps a farmer in a small farming operation, where would he or she today in the free market find an underwriter for exporting their product overseas? Some of the members have raised that question most recently about moneys owed to Poland, Russia or Asia because they need forward financing in order to buy the grain. Who would do that? Would the farmers be expected to pay the premiums on that and the risk of exporting in insurance as other manufacturers? Who would cover that? We have not talked about that.

We have a guarantee of \$6 billion by the Government of Canada for the Canadian farmers. I think that is significant.

The Export Development Corporation, for example, does provide insurance policies as well for farmers who are exporting. Even in my own riding, if they are shipping overseas they do not know whether that receipt will come back void, that the company has shut down and they will lose that shipment. They need those guarantees. They are well placed companies, some of them doing \$55 million or \$100 million worth of exports. They need that insurance. They seek that insurance. It is provided through instruments of the Government of Canada.

• (1520)

With respect to the democratic process of the election of the board members, I cannot understand how it is, after the whole history of the wheat board and talking to farmers in Manitoba, grandfathers, sons and daughters who have farmed, that somebody would argue that for the first time in history we would allow and elect 66% of the members of that board, freely and duly elected, by the farmers. This is the first time. Yet we have opposition to that. We have members of parliament who will stand in this House and vote against that democratic process and that principle. I find that really puzzling and troubling. This is a historic moment.

For the first time these farmers lobbying in the coffee shops in my riding of Provencher, for example, will have the opportunity to talk to their colleagues about their plans for the marketing of grain in Canada, outside of Canada, to the U.S., to the Asian markets, and they will seek the approval of their peers. They will lobby and they will put their ideas forward in Alberta, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

If they have the guarantee of those people and have the confidence of their brother and sister farmers they will get that vote.

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They will get that vote and they will become a board member. How can anyone argue against that?

There is now emerging a charter challenge against the wheat board under the rights and freedoms. The Prime Minister of Canada, at that time the minister of justice, brought in the charter of rights and freedoms. He argued for it in the House of Commons. The very people now who want to use that were arguing against the charter. They did not want the charter. They were arguing for the notwithstanding clause in the charter which eventually they got. The notwithstanding clause in the charter generally says that any rights that may be abridged or abrogated in the charter, notwithstanding the collective good, may be overridden. What some of the members are forgetting to discuss is the larger question of the collective good.

I found it curious that they would apply to the human rights commission to invoke the charter of rights and freedoms to be able to accomplish we do not know what, but a charter of rights and freedoms that they attacked in 1980, in 1983 and that they continue to attack today. I find that puzzling indeed.

There has been some discussion about the inclusion clause. I too have some concerns about it. My bottom line for the farmers in my riding of Provencher is that I want them to prosper, I want them to do well, I want them to have a fuller say in the marketing of their grain, but we look at it in the long term.

Everyone is talking about the spot market and rushing over the border with a load of grain. We saw what happened in the Durham wheat question when our farmers were bringing grain over into Montana. There were almost fist fights at the local elevator prompting them to go to their congressmen and senators. Then they imposed an arbitrary cap on the kind and amount of wheat we could send to the U.S. Is it not logical and clear to some of the members in the House? How long do they think we will ship our grain over with our trucks to the U.S. before the American farmers are on the phone to their local politicians? Do we want to be beholden to them? I do not think so.

I do not argue that we do not need changes to the wheat board. We need some fundamental changes to the wheat board. It must be responsive to Canadian farmers. I asked and requested it to be responsive to the farmers in my riding. To suggest that we blow it open and disband it and put it in the hands of a short term interest is not wise and it is not prudent. Ultimately it would hurt farmers.

I do have some concerns with the inclusion clause. I share some of the views of my colleague from Brandon—Souris. I appreciate his views. I too met with a number of people to discuss this.

• (1525)

I met with canola growers. I met with western wheat growers following their meeting with the hon. member I had mentioned.

They said to me that they would support the bill if the inclusion clause were removed. They said they would support the bill.

I said I will meet you half way if you give me a letter stating that is a public position of yours. I would take it to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and to the Prime Minister and say look, we have some movement here. I am still waiting for the letter. I was hoping to have received it today. I have not received the letter and the member for Brandon—Souris said that if there were some changes, he would support the bill.

I think there is still some area for discussion here. But the bottom line is this. With the underpinning of the 66% of the board and the members having control over that process, how would it be possible that they would violate the will of the farmers they are ostensibly elected to represent and they would include something in the board, canola for example, without the approval of those farmers? I think it is inconceivable. It cannot happen.

The member was asking those rhetorical questions. Could it happen? I think very unlikely. It is a safety measure, but you cannot look at these structural changes in one year, three year. We talk about five year and ten year corporate plans. In something this important to western Canada, we need a 25 year plan.

In summary, I think we can support the basic intent and spirit of this bill, which is to bring a democratic reform to the Canadian Wheat Board, that regular farmers, men and women, can sit on that board and make long term decisions which are in their best interests and in the best interests of their children.

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is sort of a miracle, in view of the fact that the government over there has once again put time allocation on the free speech of members of Parliament representing their constituents, that I am able to speak at all. I like to participate in miracles. I am glad to have this opportunity to speak.

I live on a dairy farm. It is not a western grain producing farm but it depends very much on the free movement of western produced grain. I have some idea of what farmers across western Canada are facing.

It is a privilege to speak during this report stage of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board.

I want to at least give the government a bit of credit for being consistent. This legislation was flawed in the last session as Bill C-72 and is still flawed. Perhaps one of the biggest shortcomings is that the legislation will not bring about voluntary participation in the Canadian Wheat Board. This means farmers still will not have the freedom to choose how they want to market their grain.

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Bill C-4 gives Canadian wheat farmers no options. Thousands of farmers have told the government they are not happy with the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. These farmers want the right to market their product themselves and Bill C-4 simply ignores those demands.

Like so many initiatives by this Liberal government, it is window dressing. Bill C-4 is a poor attempt by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to make it appear as though it is responding to farmer demands for change. By doing so and by effectively doing nothing, it has dodged the real issue of marketing options, and the minister's attempts to placate producers with this legislation could backfire.

The Canadian Wheat Board's grip on the sale of wheat and barley is an extremely controversial and divisive issue among Canadian wheat farmers. Yet the government fails to recognize that this controversy will not simply go away. As a result, farmers on both sides of the issue are growing increasingly frustrated because the minister will not deal with the situation.

The minister has adopted a zero sum approach in this matter, an all or nothing attitude. Instead of establishing mechanisms which would allow farmers to choose how their grain will be sold, the exclusion and inclusion clauses in the bill leave no room for compromise. These clauses mean that various grain producing groups could eventually vote to have their product included in or excluded from the Canadian Wheat Board. This means that a particular grain product is either in or out. There is no middle ground for farmers who are on the losing end of a vote concerning the inclusion or exclusion of a particular grain product. Far from preserving the Canadian Wheat Board, this situation could ultimately destroy it as one producer group after another chooses to get out from under its thumb.

• (1530)

These concerns are not new to the Liberals. Nor are they without merit. In fact the government ignored recommendations from its own western grain marketing panel. In July 1996, after a year long study, the panel told the government that the Canadian Wheat Board should operate more like a private company.

It went on to say that the board's monopoly on the sale of wheat should be reduced and that its monopoly on export feed barley should be ended. Yet, with an all or nothing display, the plebiscite that the minister finally permitted for barley growers early this year gave farmers little choice.

Basically they were asked "Do you want to go or stay with the Canadian Wheat Board?" There was nothing in between. What kind of choice is that? The plebiscite charade has left farmers more frustrated than ever.

We know how dangerous it is for governments or government agencies to try to settle issues by wording questions that influence

the outcome. We saw that in the latest of Quebec's never ending referenda. The point here is that attempting to influence the outcome never helps to settle the issue. It just makes it worse.

Bill C-4 would allow for the election of 10 members to the new board of directors. However, this is not enough, as a fully elected board of directors is necessary if the voice of farmers is truly to be heard.

For example, if just three elected directors were to shift their vote to align with the five government appointed members of the board, the majority of directors elected by the farmers would find themselves outvoted. So much for democracy.

The ability of the directors to represent the farmers who elected them is in doubt. That is one of the reasons I fully support Motions Nos. 42 and 43 to this flawed bill.

Just like CSIS, Canada's secretive spy agency, the Canadian Wheat Board does not have to answer to the Access to Information Act. It cannot be audited by the auditor general. How can the directors act freely if they are bound by this secrecy?

In addition, the directors would not hold ultimate authority over the Canadian Wheat Board. That is because the agriculture minister and the finance minister would.

In effect, the corporate plan, which includes all the businesses and activities of the Canadian Wheat Board, as well as its annual borrowing plan, would have to be approved by the Minister of Finance. This means that even though the Canadian Wheat Board would no longer officially be a crown corporation, the federal government's grip would actually be tighter from a financial point of view.

The directors could also be denied liability protection if they were to speak and act freely on behalf of farmers. Directors would only be covered for liability if they acted in the best interest of the corporation. This creates an automatic conflict of interest as any instructions given to the Canadian Wheat Board by the federal government are defined as being in the best interest of the corporation.

If a director does not follow government directives, will they be held liable for not acting in the best interests of the corporation? I would suggest that there are some serious consequences which the government has failed to address in the bill.

The bill would also mean that a province planning to make changes demanded by a majority of its farmers is out of luck. Bill C-4 is binding on the provinces. Because this is the case, the federal government should have consulted with the provinces on the reform of the Canadian Wheat Board. This was not done and the Liberals charged ahead on their own. The message from the federal government clearly says "Forget it. We are in charge here".

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In addition, the Canadian Wheat Board is being left wide open as a target in international trade negotiations. This legislation will not satisfy our trading partners that the Canadian Wheat Board is independent from the federal government. This is significant because countries like the U.S. are pointing out that the Canadian Wheat Board, with the large degree of involvement and control by the federal government, gives Canada an unfair trading advantage. This will make the Canadian Wheat Board a target during the next round of trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization.

Is this the best the Liberals could come up with? There are approximately 110,000 grain farmers in the prairie provinces and parts of British Columbia. The Canadian Wheat Board controls \$5 billion in sales annually. Even with the significance of these numbers it is hard to believe that the government has simply introduced this recycled legislation.

• (1535)

It is not just Reform MPs who are opposed to the legislation. As I mentioned earlier a majority of grain producer groups oppose Bill C-4. In fact they have been busy since the House last debated the legislation. The coalition against Bill C-4 has continued to pressure the agriculture minister to take the opposition amendments seriously. The list of member groups opposed to the legislation includes, to name only a few, the Canadian Canola Growers Association, the Flax Growers of Western Canada, the Western Barley Growers Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association. How much more does the government want?

As well, almost 100 witnesses stood before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food to comment on its predecessor, Bill C-72. Virtually all farm groups appearing told the committee that this was a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation.

What has the government done? In one word, nothing. Like so many other Liberal promises the government's legislation is similar: long on style but short on substance.

In conclusion I want to serve notice that I will not be supporting this piece of government legislation. I further urge members on both sides of the House to vote against Bill C-4 at third reading. It is clear the government has been consistently wrong on how to best address the needs of Canadian wheat farmers, and this bill is no exception.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to take part in the debate today on Bill C-4 at report stage, specifically on the matter of inclusion.

Before I start to address my remarks to that section, I want to register as loudly as I can my very strong disapproval for the

government using closure or time allocation to kill debate on the bill.

It is absolutely shameful the Liberals have done this. They were the biggest group arguing against Brian Mulroney's use of closure in the 34th parliament. It was shameful that Mulroney used closure as much as he did. But guess what happens when the Liberals are in power? They up the ante and even use it more often.

On an item that is so important to the Canadian farmers we see Liberals using closure to close down the debate which is very consistent with the way the minister and the government have handled the issue in the last number of years I have been in parliament.

I think we need a bit of history about this debate. I want to put on record that my family and I have a 2,000 acre grain farm in Alberta. We are under the Canadian Wheat Board area, unlike the member for Malpeque who has influenced the debate so much with the inclusion clause. We are not growing potatoes in Prince Edward Island. We are under the Canadian Wheat Board area so we know firsthand what the effects are.

There has been a growing mood over the last 15 years or so for people to want a choice on how they market their grain. I know some constituents want to continue to use the Canadian Wheat Board to average their prices and accept the pooling method. I respect the choice that they want to make.

I am hearing more and more people saying that they do not want to be part of that system. They want to market their own grain. That rush of people is growing more and more as the government mishandles this piece of legislation.

What is the debate all about? I believe it should be about a matter of choice. It was interesting when the member for Provencher talked about eastern Europeans who really settled the land in Manitoba where he is from. A lot of people came to Canada, farmed and opened up the west. What were they coming here for? They were coming for new opportunity. They were coming so they could have some choice in what they did, not to be under the socialist system of eastern Europe.

Is it not ironic that the people who are trying to support the idea of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board and its monopoly are largely coming from the board members themselves and the advisory group? What does that tell us?

• (1540)

At a time when eastern Europe went through dramatic changes socialist countries with failed policy, especially in agriculture, were breaking down the barriers, realizing that a market economy was the way to go, and moving to a market economy. At the same time a country like Canada with its Liberal government is moving to strengthen its monopoly over more crops grown by farmers for the Canadian Wheat Board.

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Something happened. The communist countries and Canada passed in the night a few years ago. It is a failed policy in Europe. Why would it not be a failed policy here?

We have seen the special panel hand picked by the minister to review what was happening in terms of what farmers wanted on grain marketing. He did not do it willingly. There was a lot of pressure on him to make changes. His response was to hand pick this panel. I think his former campaign manager was the chair.

The panel members travelled across western Canada, determined that they would hold on to the wheat board monopoly. The evidence from farmers was compelling. They said "I do not want that. It is fine if my neighbour does, but give us a choice". I attended some of those hearings and the percentage of people who said that was overwhelming.

The panel had to write a report that reflected what it was hearing across the country. Did the minister of agriculture at the time listen to his own hand picked panel? He never even met with the panel. After a year of study and travel around western Canada and a couple of million dollars of taxpayers' money the minister does not even read the report because he hears that the panel is recommending that farmers want choice.

What kind of government do we have? A monopoly situation, state controlled. Does that not remind us of something we used to hear about in communist countries?

What did we hear from the farmers who attended the hearings? I was at many of them. I heard that they wanted choice. I heard that they are not able to plan properly. They have high input costs. It is a big business these days. On our farm machinery costs are probably half a million dollars. They need to know what prices are for their product. The farmers who are doing well are bypassing the Canadian Wheat Board because it is not reflecting their concerns. They are bypassing the Canadian Wheat Board because the board does not provide them with the options they need.

Modern farmers are now growing crops which the board does not handle. If this board is left in place I predict that the amount of grain it will handle will continue to go down.

The special panel made a report which the minister did not like. He took his own survey and said that there was overwhelming support for the board. Then he instituted Bill C-72.

Then the agriculture committee travelled across the country and listened to farmers. The member for Malpeque was a member of that committee. I attended many of those hearings as well. Farmers were saying that they wanted choice. Some farmers on the other side of the issue wanted to keep the Canadian Wheat Board in tact

to market their grain. They said "Don't touch it. Leave it as it is". I respect that opinion.

Younger farmers said they wanted a choice. There were the growing number of people who were making presentations. I never heard anybody say they wanted more crops included under the Canadian Wheat Board mandate.

When Bill C-72 died and the sphinx that rose from the ashes of it became Bill C-4, all of a sudden there was an inclusion clause. Crops were included that were not previously under the board: flax, rye, canola and peas. They can now be included. It was a red herring floated by the member for Malpeque, but it suddenly took on a life of its own and now it is in Bill C-4.

Farmers are not happy. Farmers walked out on the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board about three weeks ago at hearings in Regina. They will not accept this.

We have to wonder who wants this monopoly power and why they want the monopoly to include more items than before. I suggest it is the Liberal government that needs to maintain control. I suggest the Liberals are faltering. They realize that the only way to keep this is to keep the lid on it and not give the auditor general power to audit the books of the Canadian Wheat Board, as we requested, and not to let us have access to information in the Canadian Wheat Board.

Ninety-nine per cent of the Canadian economy runs on a market economy. There are some exceptions such as power companies that have control because they are the only supplier. But then we put in things like public utilities boards to look after the public's interest and have hearings before they can have rate increases.

• (1545)

On the other side for farmers, what do we have? We have the Canadian Wheat Board and it says that any grain that is exported from Canada in wheat and barley has to go through the Canadian Wheat Board. Farmers cannot do it themselves. Supposedly they are not smart enough, I guess.

Yet we are able to sell our canola, our flax, our rye, our oats, our peas, our clover, our hay and livestock every day on the world markets, and farmers are doing fine. So what kind of a piece of legislation do we have here? It just does not make sense.

I do not see the member for Malpeque wanting the Canadian Wheat Board for potatoes. Why does it not include potatoes? Why does it not include Ontario? Why does it not include Quebec? No, western Canadian grain farmers have to have big brother government do it for them. Even worse, we are going to include more of your crops so you are not going to have the flexibility to be able to operate. It is absolutely shameful and it should be withdrawn.

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Mr. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do welcome the opportunity to speak on group 7 motions of Bill C-4.

This section of motions especially relating to the inclusion clause seems to have provoked a lot of yelling from Reform members. Sadly, their yelling is based on scare tactics and misinformation. Their comments are generating a lot more heat than light on the subject at hand, Bill C-4, and what it will do for the farm community. In their efforts to mislead western farmers, some members opposite have attacked me personally and where I live and what I produce. They do so on the basis that they believe I authored the so-called inclusion clause.

The fact is I did not author the inclusion clause. Western Canadian farmers authored the inclusion clause through the hearings that we held in western Canada last spring. That is who authored the inclusion clause. They demanded choice in terms of putting other products under the Canadian Wheat Board.

Members opposite talked about the member for Peace River. He said he was at some hearings. Yes, I will admit I saw him at some hearings. I was at them all. The members of the previous standing committee on agriculture were at them all. We heard what individual after individual farmer had to say to us in terms of wanting to strengthen the Canadian Wheat Board by having the opportunity through a democratic process to put more products under it.

There is no question why the vast majority of farmers want to see the Canadian Wheat Board strengthened and expanded. It is easy to see why they have such great faith in the Canadian Wheat Board, and I will turn to the study by Kraft, Furtan and Tyrchniewicz on a performance evaluation of the Canadian Wheat Board. They conclude in their study: "The results show that Canadian Wheat Board marketing averaged an increase to the wheat pool account of \$13.35 per tonne, or \$265 million per year for the 14 year period over what would have been realized by multiple sellers". That is a pretty good performance, and that is what farmers want to see more often.

They believe strongly in the Canadian Wheat Board principles, single desk selling, price pooling, guarantee of prices and guarantee on borrowings by the Government of Canada.

Contrary to what has been said, what the inclusion clause allows is an opportunity for farmers with no choice currently but the open market to look at another option, that of single desk selling.

I was not surprised at all when the Winnipeg commodity exchange came before the agriculture committee which I was at and attacked this bill strenuously. Of course it would attack it, because when the open market fails and the Winnipeg commodity exchange fails, it does not want farmers to have a choice to go

another approach of marketing, which is single desk selling through the Canadian Wheat Board. That is the reality.

• (1550)

The member for Peace River has said this many times as did the member from Prince George earlier. I quote the member for Peace River: "There is a growing mood that people want choice". He talked about choice many times, and that is what the inclusion clause does. It puts farmers in charge of their own destiny through a democratic process. It gives them the choice of another option in terms of marketing. That is what farmers demanded during our committee hearings.

I have been called a potato producer so many times, although I do not grow potatoes, because I happen to currently live in Prince Edward Island. This impression they are trying to leave is because I am a strong supporter of the Canadian Wheat Board. Because I do not live out west they think I do not know anything about it. I would like any Reform member opposite to stack up against my list of staying at homes in western Canada over a 17 year period in community after community in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. and talking to farmers around the kitchen table.

When I went out west, first as president and organizer of the National Farmers Union, I to ask in my own mind why people so strongly supported the Canadian Wheat Board. What was this instrument that they had such great faith in? They talked about the history of how the grain companies used to rip them off and how the Canadian Wheat Board has been part of their salvation in terms of being one of the paramount marketing institutions in the world today since its beginning in 1935.

As a result of this, I studied that extensively. I spent time in the Canadian Wheat Board offices. I spent time in farmers' homes and I believe very strongly that there is very strong support. Votes on the Canadian Wheat Board have shown that there is strong support for the Canadian Wheat Board.

I am very proud to stand in the House, having served for 11 years as president of an organization mainly centred in western Canada, in support of the inclusion clause going into Bill C-4. That is what farmers demanded and when farmers demand something this government tries to act on it and give them that choice.

I want to speak on one other motion, Motion No. 46, the access to information request. The amendment under Motion No. 46 would require the Canadian Wheat Board to reveal far more information about its business transactions than does any of its competitors. The obligation to disclose commercially sensitive information would place the Canadian Wheat Board at a disadvantage when it negotiates contracts with international buyers.

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Under this bill, the new board of directors will have access to any and all information it wishes to see concerning the Canadian Wheat Board operations and sales contracts.

There are other government operations that are not subject to the Access to Information Act. The Export Development Corporation, which is also involved in international trade, is an example. Producer elected directors will be able to decide what information could be released to producers without compromising Canadian Wheat Board operations.

I would like to point out that the Canadian Wheat Board has not been secretive. In fact, it has been very open. The Canadian Wheat Board is currently engaged in its annual grain day meetings where the commissionaires of the wheat board travel to towns across western Canada to meet with and answer the questions of farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board has a 1-800 service to answer farmers' questions. It issues a detailed audited annual report which is second to none. In fact, I asked at committee if we could see a detailed audited annual report of the Reform Party. I have not seen that come forward yet. It is one of the most open annual reports of any organization. It has opened its books up completely to independent academics so they could evaluate the board's performance.

• (1555)

The farmer elected advisory committee members also have access to Canadian Wheat Board information.

An hon. member: Why do they not all support Bill C-4?

Mr. Wayne Easter: The member asks why all the wheat board advisory members do not support Bill C-4. They all support the inclusion clause. There is a little difference of opinion on the advisory board in terms of whether some of the things in this bill would weaken the board.

The bottom line is that this bill, with the election of a board of directors and in offering more choice through the inclusion clause, puts farmers in charge of their own destiny. The party opposite should be supporting farmers' taking charge of their own destiny.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I was not going to speak on this bill today, but when I heard some of the debate that was going on I felt implored to do so.

I used to work for the National Citizens Coalition. I talk to the people at home, because I realized they may be the only ones listening. I remember when Andy McMechan's wife would call us at the National Citizens Coalition and tell us about how her husband was in shackles and in jail because he tried to sell his wheat independently.

As a result, they were facing financial hardship. They were going to lose their family farm. She called in desperation to David Somerville and the rest of us at the National Citizens Coalition to ask us to help cover their bills. They faced thousands of dollars in fines. Their tractors and their trucks were seized. Her husband was in jail. She had no one to turn to for help, simply because her husband wanted to market his grain independently. There was no wheat board to turn to because the wheat board was enforcing the monopoly.

I have heard members opposite say they do not like monopolies. They think monopolies are bad. However, they support a monopoly which is state sanctioned.

It is not just Andy McMechan. There are other farmers out there who have had their properties seized. Their abilities to conduct their business and to put food on the table for their families have been restricted by these policies.

Members are standing in the House today to say they are proud of this bill when they know that some of their constituents, people on the prairies and grain marketers, are in jail, in shackles, facing tens of thousands of dollars in fines.

Most of the time I am honoured to stand in this House to represent the people of Calgary West. However, today we are considering passing a bill which would entrench in law expanded powers for the wheat board. Its new powers would go beyond the control of wheat, to oats, barley, flax and other crops. I am not proud of what this House is about to do. The government is going to expand the powers of the wheat board and put more grains under its control.

It boils down to free choice. Andy McMechan was not allowed the free choice to market his grain independent of the wheat board. As a result he was deprived of his ability to put food on the table for his family. He was fighting for the right, as were the other farmers who faced these restrictions, to have voluntary compliance with the board. If they want to market their grain through the wheat board, that is fine. But they had no other option. They were put in jail and faced fines. Their wives and their families were so desperate that they had to turn to non-government organizations for help.

• (1600)

It is unbelievable that we have that going on in this country. That they will not allow for free competition, that they are encouraging a legislated monopoly, and I heard another member say it today, indicates just how poorly run this monopoly is.

They talk across the way about how, during the 1920s and 1930s, there were private monopolies. No person who supports free competition supports a monopoly of any kind, whether it be government or private. For them to go ahead and support the idea of a government monopoly that can put people in jail for wanting to

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market their grain independently, I do not know how they can sleep at night when they back something like that.

I think in many ways, and this is unfortunate, it speaks to the arrogance, to the elitism and to just how out of touch how many of the people who stand and represent constituents in this Chamber are. They can support a bill that would jail their fellow citizens for wanting to market their grain independently. Like I say, it is not a proud day when I have to stand and speak to this.

I implore the people across the way, because they are the only ones who can really make changes at this stage. They have the narrowest majority of any government during this century aside from coalition governments. For those who may be watching in their offices who represent rural constituencies and who know that vast chunks of their electorate do not support a monopoly bargaining on behalf of the Canada Wheat Board, please I implore them, they have no better opportunity than in this bill here to stand up for their constituents and to not merely read off of ministerial talking points and to represent their constituents and come clean on this. Otherwise they will have to go back to face their electorate in the next election.

They have an opportunity here that few governments and few backbenchers in governments are ever afforded and they have a real opportunity to stand up and make a meaningful contribution. If they do not take this opportunity, shame on them.

For the folks back home, expanding jurisdiction basically means that the government wants to expand beyond the wheat board and be able to go into things like canola and flax and oats and barley. A government never asks for power unless it intends to exercise it. This means it hopes to rule out competition on these products like canola, flax, oats and barley. It intends to expand this monopoly beyond wheat and take it to these other grains. Therefore it will be impacting far more farmers than what the wheat board already does.

Once again, they have an incredible opportunity here to help out and to safeguard those farming operations across Canada. They owe it to them to stand up and stand for freedom on this.

Some people across the way speak of democracy and yet they forget about minority rights. Just because 50% plus 1 of people decide they happen to be in favour on one particular plebiscite does not speak to minority rights. The only time we must have a democracy and where people must follow one rule is when you can have only one rule.

It would not be fair, for instance, for one person to say they have to pay only 10% tax and another person to say they thought it was appropriate to pay 20% tax. You have to have something that is straight across the board, an even keel for all. Certainly in terms of

a marketing organization for grain, you do not need to have everybody within one board. They should be allowed to have dissenting opinions.

For those farmers who wish to market through the Canadian Wheat Board, God bless them in their pursuit, but how can others legitimately say they wish to see their neighbour jailed, put behind bars, their equipment seized, and fines of tens of thousands of dollars placed against their operations because they want to operate outside the board? I am not proud today, knowing this type of legislation may pass in this House.

Also, I speak to the fact that the auditor general cannot have access to audit the Canadian Wheat Board. If you add up all these incriminations, that people are going to jail for wanting to market their grain independently, that the auditor general cannot look into the books, that they are encouraging a government monopoly, all these things, I implore backbench MPs in the Liberal Party, please, they have an opportunity to stand up against this. If only a handful were to take a stand in their caucus they could seriously change and amend this legislation.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): 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 Cumberland—Colchester-transport; the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill—fisheries.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Madam Speaker, what we have heard today from the Reform Party is the triumph of ideology over common sense. I know Reformers do not like the fact that an agency within the government purview works and works for those for whom it is designed to work and is one which is supported by the majority of those farmers who use it because we know that it is supported by the majority of farmers who use it, in spite of the continual denial of that by the Reform Party.

It works, as has been made clear many times, indeed by every credible study of the wheat board's activity. Mention has already been made of the study by Kraft and Furtan, two of Canada's most prominent agricultural economists. They point out that each year farmers make \$265 million more selling wheat through the wheat board than they would selling it through the private grain trade.

What do Reformers have against farmers being \$265 million better off each year selling their wheat than they would be through the private grain trade? What possibly could be a problem with

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that, except that the Reform Party does not want those farmers to make those extra profits.

There was a study by another one of Canada's most prominent agricultural economists. I know the Reform Party hates the fact that these good economists say the wheat board is doing a good job. Andy Schmitz who is known all over the world as one of the most prominent agricultural economists also pointed out that the wheat board increases the returns to barley producers by \$72 million a year.

What would the Reform Party have against barley producers making \$72 million more a year than they would if they used the private trade? Why would Reformers be opposed to that? Because their ideology, their crazy right-wing, neo-Conservative ideology does not want that to fit. They do not want that to work, but it does work.

Last year there was a plebiscite by farmers across western Canada, those who were interested in the barley trade. Sixty-three per cent of those farmers, including the majority of farmers in those areas represented by Reform Party MPs, voted in favour of the Canadian Wheat Board and barley. It was even difficult to get 63% of the population opposed to the GST, but 63% support the wheat board and barley.

Why will Reform Party members not listen to farmers who support the wheat board in large measure? Sixty-three per cent support the board.

It makes no sense to choose an ideology over common sense. Yet that is what the Reform Party is doing.

We hear also some of the most peculiar, indeed almost crazy statements by the Reform Party. The Reform Party member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, for example, compared life in Canada with the wheat board to life in the former Soviet Union. He recommended that we read the *Gulag Archipelago* if we want to find a Soviet parallel to Canada with the wheat board. It is at least extremism if not craziness.

They are all like that but only some of them speak out in these terms. The Reform Party member for Skeena said that Canada is a police state because we have the Canadian Wheat Board.

It really does make us wonder when this blind right-wing, neo-Conservative ideology, this extremist rhetoric prevails over common sense.

• (1610)

Mr. Myron Thompson: You are absolutely wrong.

Mr. Chris Axworthy: Madam Speaker, the hon. member says I am absolutely wrong. Do they think that I am wrong when all the studies point out that the wheat board works for farmers?

Let us get to the question of inclusion. They have also made crazy statements about this. What objections could anyone have to farmers being asked to decide whether they want their product to be marketed through the wheat board? How could that be anything other than a genuine democratic vote, a genuine respect for democracy? That is all this is doing, saying to farmers if they want to use the wheat board to market their product, they can do so.

I do not see anything unreasonable about that, yet Reform Party members are going apoplectic about the possibility that people should have the right to decide to use the wheat board. Why do they get in that state? Because they just do not want the wheat board.

They talked about dual marketing. That is just the code, a step along the way, to getting rid of the wheat board, which is of course exactly what they want to do. Why do they want to get rid of the wheat board when it makes sense for farmers, when it returns to farmers a premium year over year, hundreds of millions of dollars more than without the wheat board? Because their ideology does not like it. Ideology, common sense. Ideology prevails.

It is time Reformers responded in a common sense way, gave up their crazy opposition to things that work and supported things that support Canadian farmers. Canadian farmers will continue to support the wheat board. We have to make sure the Liberal government continues to support the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Gerry Byrne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand to speak today to the debate on this group of motions put forward.

I think it is very timely that we take into consideration actually a group of motions, because that is exactly what Reformers are trying to do. They are trying to lump in a whole bunch of issues, cloud the entire issue so that they do not understand it and they are hoping and praying that nobody else will.

Categorically their attempts have failed to confuse those who do not support the wheat board. They have failed to confuse those who would try to follow in those particular paths.

We heard from the member for Calgary West who asked this House to support a great Canadian institution by basically rendering it immobile and ineffective through their motions. However, this House will not do that. This House will protect a great Canadian institution for the benefit of producers whom it serves, and that is exactly what we intend to do.

Several members of the Reform Party suggested in this House that what really will happen here is that this Canadian Wheat Board as being an instrument of the federal government, as they declare, will actually be under sanction, particularly under threat by international forces, by international trade tribunals because it is an overly effective trade mechanism for the farmers of western

Canada. That has basically been the allegation on the floor, that the Canadian Wheat Board will be under threat by foreign players because it is too effective an instrument in terms of international trade. It has an unfair trading advantage.

Put this into perspective. We have heard from the hon. members opposite that the Canadian Wheat Board is an ineffective organization, that it does not work in the collective best interests of farmers. Yet these same members say that the Canadian Wheat Board will be under attack by international interest because it is too effective a competitor in the international marketplace. That just does not seem to make sense, quite frankly.

I think the hon. member for Calgary West probably spent a little too much time down in the United States of America following Mr. Newt Gingrich's bandwagon, and I think he knows exactly what I am talking about. When he starts to defend the United States of America's ability to come in and try to dismantle a great Canadian institution, probably for its benefit and not for the benefit of western Canadian farmers, I am a little suspicious of that. I wonder exactly what is the intent. Quite frankly, I think the Canadian Wheat Board has to be strengthened and should be strengthened, which is what Bill C-4 is about to do.

• (1615)

The official opposition and a number of groups that oppose Bill C-4 have said that the federal government has ignored the Western Grain Marketing Panel and its recommendations. They have accused the government of not listening to the panel that was selected. This is clearly not the case. I would like to indicate the extent to which Bill C-4 reflects the recommendations of the Western Grain Marketing Panel.

Many aspects of the bill, such as those providing more flexibility payment options for farmers, would allow the Canadian Wheat Board and its client producers to do many things it cannot do today. However, the decisions to implement or not to implement these services would rest where it should, with the farmer controlled board of directors.

With respect to the panel's specific recommendations regarding the Canadian Wheat Board, the first recommendation was that the amendments should accommodate restructuring the governance of the Canadian Wheat Board in accordance with a number of specific guidelines.

Certainly Bill C-4 would restructure the Canadian Wheat Board from being a crown corporation with five appointed commissioners only, to a mixed enterprise where farmers would control the majority of the board of directors. I will get to that a little more when I talk about the specific recommendations of this panel.

The panel's second recommendation was to permit the Canadian Wheat Board to make cash purchases. That is in Bill C-4.

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The third recommendation as to permit the Canadian Wheat Board to make payments to farmers for grain storage and for carrying costs. That is in Bill C-4.

The fourth recommendation was to allow deliveries to farmer owned condo storage without regard to the delivery quotas or contracts. That is in Bill C-4.

The fifth recommendation was to permit the Canadian Wheat Board to purchase grain from other than an elevator rail car or from other origins. That is in Bill C-4.

The sixth recommendation was to allow for pool accounts to be terminated or paid out at any time following closure of that pool. That is in Bill C-4.

The seventh recommendation was to allow for the assignment of negotiable producer certificates. That is in Bill C-4.

The eighth recommendation was to clarify the board's authority to utilize risk management tools including futures and auctions in dealing with the farmers and customers. That is in Bill C-4.

The recommendations that deal with the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board that came from the Western Grain Marketing Panel are all contained in Bill C-4.

The panel recommended that the Canadian Wheat Board should be governed by a board of directors of not less than 11 and not more than 15 elected and appointed members. It went on to recommend that the board should be composed of a majority of farmers, a minimum of three representatives from the trade and a minimum of two representatives from the federal government.

Bill C-4 follows that recommendation very closely. There would be 15 directors with a two-thirds majority elected by farmers. There is no requirement in Bill C-4 that the trade be represented on the board of directors as a number of groups have expressed concern about individuals with financial interests in the grain trade being on the board. The government would appoint five directors from within the industry, the financial sector, academia or other backgrounds.

Another recommendation of the panel on governance was that there should be a modern corporate structure under which a chief executive officer would be hired and would be responsible for the overall operations of the Canadian Wheat Board, reporting to the board through its chairperson. This recommendation has been largely fulfilled in Bill C-4. There would be a chief executive officer responsible for overall operations. There would be a chairperson of the board. The one difference is that the chief executive officer would be a member of the board itself.

Another recommendation from the panel was to ensure a rapid and smooth transition to the new governance structure. The panel

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recommended that the first members of the board of directors should be appointed.

• (1620)

This recommendation was in Bill C-72, but when that bill did not pass it was decided that, in order to live up to the commitment to have the board of directors with elected members in place by the end of 1998, Bill C-4 could dispense with the interim board of fully appointed members. That change in Bill C-4 has been well received.

Another recommendation was that the Canadian Wheat Board advisory committee should continue to function until all farmer members of the board are elected. In Bill C-4 the Canadian Wheat Board advisory committee would continue until its term is up, which is expected to be the same time as the new members of the board of directors will be ready to take office.

Finally, there was a recommendation that a mechanism be established which makes it possible for the Canadian Wheat Board to begin development of a capital base. Bill C-4 goes part way in that direction in that there is a provision for a contingency fund that is limited to three uses. It could not be used to make investments in facilities, but the contingency fund partly goes in the direction of this recommendation.

If we look objectively at the 13 recommendations that were made by the panel with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board, Bill C-4 in many cases follows them exactly. In other cases it follows them quite closely.

Bill C-4 is the mechanism for farmers to decide themselves through whom they elect to the board of directors, or in some cases through a vote of farmers, to what extent wheat and barley would be covered under the Canadian Wheat Board or in an open market system with or without the participation of the Canadian Wheat Board. As well there is a provision in the bill that provides a process for farmers to add oats, canola, flax and rye to the jurisdiction of the wheat board with or without export control provisions.

Let me just summarize. With respect to the organization and operational tools of the Canadian Wheat Board, Bill C-4 follows very closely the recommendations of the Western Grain Marketing Panel.

Let it never be said in the House that the government does not listen to advice given by producers and those who are interested in the Canadian wheat industry.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I hope the farmers in my riding are watching today. If they are, after hearing the NDP socialists from that end of the House and hearing the hon. member for P.E.I. they are probably wilder than any wild rose that grows in that riding.

One thing was mentioned earlier. They were disgusted on that side of the House and inferred that I would dare lead my farmers to believe this and that. I have news for that group of people across the way. In my riding the farmers lead me. I am here to give their voice. I have gone to extensive efforts to find out exactly what the people of Wild Rose would like for me to say today. I am going to make every effort to represent them in that regard.

Regardless of what they are saying across the House, Wild Rose grain growers are not in favour of Bill C-4. They do not want it. There are a lot of things about it that they do not like. If they are going to amend it there are some things they would want to see in it which obviously this group is not going to include.

One thing that concerns farmers in Wild Rose is that the vote to decide whether we have Bill C-4 will basically be that of the Liberals. We know they support the entire bill because they have been told to do so.

I do not imagine that there have been many wheat board town hall meetings in the city of Toronto lately. I am quite certain they have not had very many in Montreal. Our Bloc friends would not have a lot of wheat board meetings in any of their ridings. Yet, all members of Parliament from those areas will not hear the voice of the west. They will hear the voice of the leaders in the front row who say to them "When you come to vote on Bill C-4 you will vote what I tell you to vote. That is the way it is in the Liberal Party. You will vote the way you are told".

I am thankful I belong to a party that gives me full privilege to vote according to the way my constituents want me to. I know how the farmers in Wild Rose want me to vote on this issue. I will be representing them, even though no one else is willing to listen to western farmers. After all, that is who we are talking about: western farmers. That is who is being affected.

• (1625)

I was talking to some of my colleagues across the way in the street awhile ago. I mentioned that they should consider what is being said in the west and not listen to the rhetoric or their own caucus leaders. They should listen to what is being said in the west and vote for those people because the bill affects them.

One member made an interesting comment. She said "No, this wheat board. You are all in". She said that it was like a dental plan, that if we were to have a dental plan for Canadians they would all be included. I asked if that would include Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. She said "Absolutely".

Then I said that all the farmers must be rushing from Ontario and from Quebec to get to Winnipeg to sign up for the wheat board because it is so great. I would like to see the repercussions if the government were to announce that all grain growers throughout the

country, including Ontario and Quebec, were to immediately come under the Canadian Wheat Board. I would love to see the response.

Let us consider the opting out clause. The member for Yorkton—Melville and the member for Portage—Lisgar would love to be with us, but today they are in a courtroom with a farmer who is also fighting for the right to sell his own product.

All the things we see around us, the paper on our desks, the chairs, the books and whatever is made, are the product of hard work. At the end of the day producers can market their goods the best way they choose. However, a grain farmer in western Canada cannot do that. The government tells them how to market their barley and wheat because of these kinds of bills. Farmers simply want the option to use the wheat board or to use some other mechanism.

In 1993 the Conservative Party had the wisdom to open the continental barley market. During those years farmers flourished. Barley farmers phoned me in 1993 to tell me how well they did. When we do some checking we also find that Canadian Wheat Board marketers got off their backsides and worked hard because they now had some competition and did better than they had ever done. That is a good sign to me that competition is healthy and that it ought to be considered.

Another farmer is being arrested because he tried to sell his grain. I was at Andy McMechan's trial and I was at Bill Cairns' trial. I watched them being chained and shackled and taken off to jail. At the same time I saw a violent offender being given community service. The policies and legislation of my colleagues across the way makes that possible. Two rapists are walking free because of the wonderful way socialists and Liberals think that a rapist can walk free and get community service. However, a farmer trying to demand the right to look after his own produce goes to jail.

Not only that but I saw the farmers get consecutive sentencing. I have been trying to get consecutive sentencing in the House for a long time. Clifford Olson murdered 11 people and he got one life sentence. Bill Cairns tried to sell his grain on two occasions. He got 60 days and 90 days consecutively. "We will show those rotten crooks, those mean people, those dangerous offenders who dare try to sell their own produce".

They worked hard. They sowed their grain. They planted it. They hoped to get the right moisture. They worked hard to get it into the bin, and suddenly it is not theirs any more. It belongs to somebody else. They have no way of marketing their produce without going through the government's Canadian Wheat Board. They want the option.

I will read from an article of which I am sure most people in the House are aware. It concerns the Privacy Act and is entitled "Canadian taxpayers hold \$7 billion liability through Canadian

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Wheat Board—high profile panel wants to end government secrecy":

Canadian taxpayers hold a \$7 billion liability through the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) and have paid millions of dollars on behalf of foreign grain purchasers in order to hold this liability to its current level.

Although the CWB does produce an annual report which provides a limited amount of information, its exemption from the federal Access to Information Act means taxpayers and farmers are unable to independently evaluate its operations and performance.

How much the CWB fitness instructor gets paid, details of financial returns realized from the sale of wheat and barley in the 1960s and 70s, and a breakdown of demurrage costs paid by farmers over the years is just some of the information a high profile agricultural committee wants the federal government to disclose.

A detailed synopsis of the \$7 billion taxpayer liability and the transactions that led to this debt are also being requested. The outstanding amount owed is equal to \$1,000 for every family of four in Canada.

• (1630)

Maybe we should have some wheat board meetings in the cities of Toronto and Montreal, but they are not very interested. They might be interested in knowing that as taxpayers they are also being burdened with the load.

This group of people want to put an end to the secrecy at the Canadian Wheat Board but the government will not allow it. In fact when these farmers came to Ottawa last week, the agriculture minister, his secretary and no one else would meet with them. They do not want it to become open.

The question that the farmers in Wild Rose are asking is, what is it they do not want us to know?

One of those members had the gall to say to me one day "We must keep a lot of things secret because most farmers do not really know the proper method they should use to market their grain". He said that if some information were disclosed to the farmers they would use it wrongly and it would not be helpful.

The Canadian Wheat Board is for the benefit of the government, not for the benefit of Canada's producers.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I find it rather hypocritical and want to read for the sake of the record some of the comments which Liberals made with respect to the matter of closure while they were in opposition.

I cite for the record today the now Liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs who was reported in the Toronto *Star* as saying on April 1, 1993 "It displays the utter disdain with which this government treats the Canadian people".

I quote from *Hansard* of November 16, 1992 when the now Liberal government House leader said "I am shocked. This is just

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terrible. This time we are talking about a major piece of legislation. Shame on those Tories across the way”.

That is what was said by Liberals and today we have closure on this bill.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, who is now the Deputy Speaker, said “What we have here is an absolute scandal in terms of the government’s unwillingness to listen to the representatives of the people in this House. Never before have we had governments so reluctant to engage in public discussion on the bills brought before this House”. How appropriate that is for this occasion today.

As well, the same individual who is now the Deputy Speaker said “I suggest that the government’s approach to legislating is frankly a disgrace. It cuts back the time the House is available to sit and then applies closure to cut off the debate”.

Lastly, that same member from Kingston and the Islands said “This is not the way to run Parliament. This is an abuse of the process of the House”. That is exactly what is now being done by the Liberal government this afternoon.

I was hoping that as a result of an amended Bill C-4 we would have a viable, modern, democratized Canadian Wheat Board which would allow some market choice, some voices of moderation and a reasonable position.

• (1635)

Instead in cynical fashion the Liberal government has, by its bill, not respected the farmers as mature adults able to make wise choices. They can make choices for themselves. It is not like they are little kids and we need to do it for them because they are not wise enough to do it for themselves.

This legislation will not bring about that voluntary participation in the Canadian Wheat Board. Farmers will not have that freedom to choose, to exercise their mature adult will. This bill, as the minister knows, gives farmers no options of that sort.

Thousands of grain farmers have told the government what they are asking for and what they want. They want that choice. They want the choice of marketing for themselves. It is not that others would have to, but it is only if they wished to do this they could do so. Bill C-4 simply ignores those farmers. It is a feeble attempt by this Liberal government to appear as though it is responding to farmers’ demands for change. It is a kind of charade, but it has dodged the real issue of marketing options for farmers.

The minister attempts to placate producers with this legislation but they are not fooled. It will backfire. The Canadian Wheat Board’s tight grip on the sale of wheat and barley has an extremely divisive effect back in the constituencies in the west among

Canadian farmers. A much better approach could have been taken by the minister responsible for the wheat board.

It is not a controversy that will simply go away. All farmers are getting more and more frustrated because the minister will not deal with the situation. The minister has taken an all or nothing attitude instead of paving the way for farmers to choose how to sell their grain.

The inclusion clauses in the bill leave no room for compromise. It is unbending and a cruel joke. This means that a grain is either in or out. Far from preserving the Canadian Wheat Board, it ultimately will destroy it as one producer group after another chooses to get out from under its thumb.

The government has ignored recommendations from its own Western Grain Marketing Panel. We heard some selective quotes from the member opposite about some of the things the government did follow in some fashion but not citing those where it did not.

In July 1996 after a year long study the panel told the government that the board’s monopoly on the sale of wheat should be reduced and that its monopoly on the export of feed barley should end. That was one of the recommendations of the panel which was not cited by the hon. member opposite.

With that all or nothing kind of display, the plebiscite that the minister then fixed or rigged earlier this year permitting barley growers gave them little choice. The question was did they want to go or stay with the wheat board and nothing in between. What kind of choice is that when there could have been other options and a fairer way to word the question?

Farmers are more frustrated than ever. That barley vote was not unlike the referendum in Quebec where they determined the outcome by the wording of the question. Farmers were fully aware at the very outset, from the wording of the question, what the determination would be.

The election of 10 members to the board has been referred to often here. That is not enough. A fully elected board of directors is mandatory if the voice of farmers is truly to be heard. This hybrid kind of board will be, as we have said before in a speech in the *Hansard* record, like the offspring of a donkey and a horse, a mule. It will be unproductive.

For example as has been cited, if just three directors shift their vote to align with the five government appointed members, the majority of farmer elected directors would find themselves outvoted. That my friends is not a wise choice. It is not a choice for farmers across our country.

The ability of those elected directors to represent the farmers who elected them is also in doubt. Just like CSIS, Canada’s

secretive spy agency, the Canadian Wheat Board does not have to answer to the Access to Information Act.

I found it interesting to hear the member for Saskatoon—Rose-town—Biggar citing these studies in terms of all the benefits and all the extra dollars accrued to farmers by way of the Canadian Wheat Board operations. I am not sure where these studies all come from in that we do not have access to information. Even 30 years afterward, why would anyone need to withhold that information from us if there is nothing to hide? We do not presently have a need to have the wheat board audited by the auditor general. How can those directors act freely if they are bound by some oath of secrecy?

I agree with the Bloc member's motion. It is a good one. Motion No. 46 under this Group No. 7 would bring the wheat board under the jurisdiction of the Access to Information Act which is good for farmers.

I am also concerned that the directors could be denied liability protection if they were to speak and act freely on behalf of farmers, which is what one would think the wheat board is all about and what it should be doing.

• (1640)

Directors would only be covered it would seem for liability if they act in the best interest of the corporation. Any instructions given to the Canadian Wheat Board by the federal government are defined as the best interest of the corporation. If a director does not follow government directives, then they may well be liable because they are not looking out for the interest of the corporation. The mandate of the wheat board should be to look out for the best interests of farmers.

The government as we know has also neglected to tackle the Canadian Wheat Board's role in grain transportation in this bill. There is an impending crisis in the system of grain transportation and the Liberals are either unwilling or unprepared to do anything about it. This is the very best as it stands before us now unamended that the Liberals could come up with.

There are approximately 110,000 grain farmers in the prairie provinces and part of British Columbia and the Canadian Wheat Board controls \$5 billion in sales. Given the significance of those numbers it is hard to believe that the government has simply introduced this recycled legislation. I am for recycling but not in this regard. We need some reformed legislation.

Almost 100 witnesses stood before that agriculture committee to comment on the predecessor, Bill C-72. Virtually all of the farm groups appearing told the committee that it was a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation. We need reformed legislation.

In the report stage of this bill the Liberals rammed it through committee in less than two weeks despite overwhelming objections

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by producer groups. Witnesses were forced to present views in a confusing round table format, providing MPs with little opportunity to analyse thoroughly the legislation.

The presence of Reform MPs through the course of this debate has really been quite tremendous. The Liberals were for the most part conspicuous by their absence, at times not even present in the House.

The wheat board minister obviously found little support in that Regina meeting and was booed off the stage.

Grain producer groups opposed to Bill C-4, the coalition against Bill C-4, have continued to press the minister to take the opposition amendments seriously. Numbers of coalitions listed on numerous occasions over these last days oppose this bill.

On January 21, and this is the case which was referred to before, the minister discussed in a fairly contemptuous fashion the matter of directors when in fact this has not yet been passed. This shows a disregard for Parliament and really in my view a contempt of Parliament. A number of those groups invited to that Regina meeting walked out protesting the meeting. Again that is a very graphic testimony to the fact that this Bill C-4 is a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation.

In closing, I would say the farmers I have talked to, although not all agree, do want reformed legislation of the sort that includes the amendments that the Reform Party has put forward. Regrettably this bill instead of being known as the act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board may tragically in history go down as the act to end the Canadian Wheat Board. That will be a sad day.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am happy once again to speak on behalf of my constituents and all farmers across the west who are really after only one thing in this debate: freedom of choice.

If it has not been made clear by all the members who have spoken over the last days and months that the government still fails to understand what is bothering thousands of farmers who attend meetings to express their frustrations with this bill, then let me make it absolutely clear. Western producers demand a say in how the products of their labour are dealt with.

Members opposite will claim that this venue is being given to them by this bill in the form of a semi-elected board. They do not explain why this board cannot be completely elected. They fail to make a logical case for why its president must be a creature of the government or why it must continue as a western Canadian monopoly that forces otherwise free citizens to hand over their property with compensation based on arbitrary and secretive business dealings.

My colleague from Yorkton—Melville has put forward an amendment to allow farmers to opt in and out of the Canadian

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Wheat Board. His amendment will put the freedom of choice into the hands of the producers so that with proper notice they can decide to participate in the board or seek a better deal elsewhere if that is what seems in their best interests.

Some might argue if we have farmers opting in and out and deciding one year to include a particular grain and a few years later to take it elsewhere, that we will undermine the ability of the board to conduct its business over the long term. But this amendment prescribes certain limits. The farmer must opt out for a minimum of five years and give two years notice of opting back in. This is not a case of leaping in and out on a whim. This is a case of letting well informed and self-motivated farmers decide their own future.

• (1645)

The member for Brandon—Souris earlier today made an excellent case on the position of oat growers in western Canada since oats have been taken out from under the board. Some might argue that if everybody is acting independently this will undermine the pooling concept and lead to chaos. Certainly our colleagues on the left will throw up their hands and say that Reform is advocating a return to the 1920s, just before the depression that made some of these government organizations necessary.

They are the ones who are stuck in the early decades of this century when farmers were lucky to have telephones. The modern reality is that farmers have access to more knowledge in a few seconds than some of our colleagues have obviously taken advantage of in the last few years. The days of government paternalism are gone. They have been swept away by the Internet and the satellite dish. It is about time the government got the message.

All those who support the Canadian Wheat Board are just as free to continue to use its services as they are now. If the Canadian Wheat Board is the great provider that they desire, obviously they will be encouraged to continue to stay there. If large numbers of farmers vote with their feet to find a better service elsewhere, this should be a clear indication that changes are called for in the board or even in the government's approach to what it tries to do for these producers.

We have myriad examples of government departments believing that it is in their best interest to keep information to themselves rather than let private citizens make up their own minds about what they want. The more compulsory a government action is, the less it wants anybody to know what it is up to.

We have amendments before us to put the activities of the board before the auditor general and to make it open to the Access to Information Act, both of which the government rejects. Along with today's motion to arbitrarily limit debate we cannot help but believe the government and the wheat board have something to hide.

Fearing possibility that farmers might truly have a democracy and decide for themselves, the Reform Party does not want to see destruction of the wheat board. We simply believe that it must behave the way a public service should: voluntarily, openly and with full accountability to the producers it is meant to serve. If it is not strong enough to stand solidly on its own merit and falls by the wayside, the producers have spoken.

Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I commence my debate with respect to this issue I wish to raise a matter that arose in the House on Monday. It pertains to the member for North Vancouver.

He made a comment in the House to which I responded from my chair. The matter he raised was a suggestion that the whips order their MPs how to vote. I wish to withdraw a comment I made in respect to his comment on that.

I do not believe that is the case in every party, especially not in the NDP, but at that time I used the word lie, and *Hansard* picked it up. I wish to withdraw that word out of respect for this institution, but I still maintain that his comment was not accurate with respect to the NDP. I wanted to get that on the record at this time.

The NDP at this point, as most people know, believes that Bill C-4 before the House is flawed legislation. It undermines the Canadian Wheat Board as we know it. The NDP tried to improve the bill in committee, but the Liberal majority refused to accept our amendments.

Bill C-4 proposes a number of issues which we do not support. As a result of three or four key issues, we will not be voting for the bill. I wish to take some time right now to inform the House of why we will not support the bill, in particular the clauses we are discussing right now.

First, the bill proposes a cash buying option. In our view this will destroy a fundamental pillar of the wheat board. It will undermine farmers' confidence in it. The wheat board would buy grains under cash buying from anyone, anywhere, any time at any price. We believe this disrupts the board's long practice of buying grain from farmers at announced prices and distributing profits to all on an equitable basis.

• (1650)

The second reason we are opposed is that Bill C-4 proposes a contingency fund which would cost farmers as much as \$575 million in check-offs. It is our view that is not needed at this time, particularly because farmers cannot afford it. A contingency fund is not necessary if Ottawa continues to provide financial guarantees to the board, guarantees that have been seldom used.

My constituency of Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre has a significant number of farmers. They are squeezed right now with

input costs. They have fuel cost crunches for spring seeding. They have fertilizer cost crunches for their inputs affecting this coming season. They are very concerned about the transportation increased costs as well as a result of the minister responsible for the wheat board doing away with the Crow benefit, which has taken about \$350 million to \$375 million dollars a year out of the Saskatchewan economy.

This was taken out of the economy after the bill which established the railway to the west coast, passed by parliament over a century ago, provided for a Crow benefit in perpetuity. The reason they did that was not because they were shortsighted in terms of their forecast for inflation or value of the dollar. They gave the CPR billions and billions of dollars in alternating sections of land across the western part of the country. They gave the CPR the mineral rights to those lands so that in future the revenues from the land and the minerals the mining and oil companies produced would have provided more than adequate compensation to the railways in a very generous way.

The Liberal government and its predecessors, the Tories, allowed the CPR to hive off the land and sell it to Marathon Realty. The profits have gone away. They have allowed, persuaded and encouraged the CPR to take its Cominco, its mining companies, its Pan Canadian oil company, the second largest oil company in Canada, and hive them off into subsidiaries and not use those revenues or profits to sustain the railways and the transportation to western farmers, to our western population.

Literally billions and billions of dollars have been hived off. All we have left is a stand alone branch line kind of railway system in western Canada. The railways are now saying that they are not sustainable on their own.

If the billions and billions of dollars in assets are returned to the CPR there will be more than adequate transportation in they country. That is where we have a problem. Canadians do not understand the fact that Liberal and Tory governments in the last 100 years have allowed and encouraged assets to be removed from the CPR which were meant for, intended and provided by the House of Commons and the Parliament of Canada for the maintenance of the railways and a transportation system for western Canada.

Now we see CNR going south and expanding in the United States at the expense of what is happening in Canada. Billions and billions of dollars were hived off into Marathon Realty, Pan Canadian, Cominco, the shipping and airlines. They are all gone. All the assets are gone and the poor old railway says it cannot make a profit.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is now the minister in charge of the wheat board from Saskatchewan. He encouraged all this. He put the nail in the coffin in terms of some of the transportation problems that western Canada now has. Farmers will never forget that.

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Another reason we oppose Bill C-4 is that it claims to put farmers in control of the wheat board's destiny. The Liberal government will continue to appoint the chief executive officer. This makes talk of a farmer controlled board in our view a travesty.

How can a farmer controlled board not have accountable to it its chief executive officer? Anybody in business will know that the chief executive officer has to be accountable to the board. The board knows what is going on and the CEO reports to the board.

The government has made it a political issue. The minister who has screwed farmers on the Crow rate will now screw them on this matter with respect to the wheat board. I do not think farmers will be very happy about that.

We support many parts of the bill. We support the provision for a possible inclusion of more grains under the wheat board's jurisdiction. This inclusion allows farmers to decide in a vote to remove grains from the board's authority. It is only fair that farmers can vote to include extra grains as well.

• (1655)

Agribusiness and the Reform Party are a bit concerned about this matter. The Reform Party embraced the referendum principle. It should understand that if there is a referendum among producers to exclude or include something perhaps the referendum decision should be honoured.

Reform philosophy is always do as I say and not as I do. Reformers say one thing to one part of the country and the opposite to another part of the country.

One of the fundamental principles of Reformers is that they believe in referenda. Yet, when it comes down to the inclusion or exclusion referendum, they think it is bad. They only want one as opposed to both. They want the exclusion referendum but not the inclusion referendum. Reformers believe they know better than farmers, that they know better than the 60,000 farm families in Saskatchewan. I do not believe that for one second. Neither do the 60,000 farm families in Saskatchewan nor the farm families in Alberta or Manitoba.

We have a bit of a problem. The organizations that are opposing the Canadian Wheat Board, a strong institution supported by our party, are good farm organizations like the National Citizens' Coalition. One Reform member used to work for the National Citizens' Coalition. I challenge the member to name 10 citizens.

I will name a few citizens who belong to this organization: Conrad Black, Imperial Oil and Pan Canadian that has just plundered and raped our oil resources from railway system and hived them off for its shareholders all over the world. These are the real citizens of Canada that support the National Citizens' Coali-

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tion which supports the Reform Party. Its chief executive officer is Mr. Harper, former Reform member of Parliament from Calgary. I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Harper but his philosophical and ideological position is in lockstep with the Reform Party.

That is one example but there are other significant examples. The Winnipeg Commodity Exchange, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, oilseed producers or processors and Cargill are all great people who support the abolition of the wheat board. They want to see the wheat board totally dismantled so they can go in there and finish the plundering of farmers that the CPR has undertaken and the Liberals, the Tories and the Reformers are all partners in.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Ref.): Madam Speaker, here we are in the final 20 minutes of debate on the bill under closure. It is absolutely outrageous that we are facing closure again in the House.

All through the last parliament we had closure, closure, closure. The Liberal government has set a record for closure. In the last parliament alone it moved closure more times than in the entire Mulroney period prior to the Liberals. We thought that was an outrageous record, but this government has demonstrated itself to be totally incapable of understanding the principles of democracy.

Here we are in the last 20 minutes of debate on an important bill. When we look at the schedule through to June we have February, March, April, May and June. We have five months in which to be talking about important bills like this one, bills that Canadians are interested in.

And what is happening? The government is moving closure on a very controversial bill. When we look at the schedule we must ask ourselves what is the rush. Over the next four months there is nothing but a litany of boring, inconsequential, insignificant and irrelevant nonsense on the schedule of what we have to debate over the next few months. It is boring.

For the people in the real world it is boring and frustrating. When they look at the schedule that is coming down the pike, they wonder why we are not talking about the Young Offenders Act, which they have been pleading with us for 20 years to do something about. What are we doing? We are moving closure on an important bill and moving to boring insignificant stuff.

• (1700)

They ask us why are you not talking, for goodness sake, about the immigration and refugee problems we have in this country. We cannot talk about that because, amazing but true, Liberals think that immigrants to this country should not have to speak one of the official languages. They are quite happy for anybody to come here.

They support the recommendations in the report that say that international agencies overseas should pick our refugees for us and send them here, even if they are incapable of settling here.

When we look at things like this and the people in the real world outside, the voters of Canada, want us to be debating these things, what is happening? We are having our time cut short. We are moving on to things that are technical in nature, technical bills, boring bills, insignificant bills.

The speaker before me from the NDP mentioned that the Reform Party believes in referenda and enacting the will of the people, and we do. There was a plebiscite run for the farmers in connection with this bill, not directly related but indirectly related, but it was flawed in many ways. First of all, it was a plebiscite, not a true referendum, and it had a carefully engineered question. There was no discussion about how that should be organized.

It really gave the barley farmers, who were the only ones involved, an all or nothing option. It reminded me of that advertisement on television right now where the man comes into the office and says tell me about RRSPs, and the adviser says yes, just put your head here between the vice and I will tighten it a little. That was exactly what was happening to those barley farmers. They had their heads put in a vice where they had no option but to give the answer that the government wanted them to give. When we look at Bill C-4, we have to ask what is the rush.

No wonder the Liberals did not want to write property rights into the charter of rights and freedoms, because when you look at what they are doing in this bill, they are preventing people from selling their own property on a free market. What sort of way is that for a civilized country to conduct itself?

An hon. member: It is a socialist way.

Mr. Ted White: It is a socialist way, as one of my colleagues said. Fancy telling people they cannot sell their own property on a free market, they have to be controlled by big brother.

It is wrong and there are so many contentious issues in this bill, we should have been able to properly discuss it, to spread it out over a bit more time where there was an opportunity to get full input that could make a difference to the bill. Instead of that, we are faced with closure.

As I said, we will be moving on to some pretty boring stuff next week. I was just looking for a list of some of the bills here, and I see I do not have it with me, but just reading the names alone is pretty shocking when, as I mentioned, we could be talking about something like the Young Offenders Act, getting the age lowered to 10, for example. Everybody out there for 20 years has been asking for that, or publishing the names of young offenders.

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I went to a meeting in my riding a few weeks ago, a together against violence group. They had a group of young people there who had previously been young offenders, and we discussed the issue of publishing names. Every one of them agreed that it would have been a tremendous disincentive for them to continue to commit crimes if they had their names published in the newspaper, if they had the public embarrassment that they were violating the rules of society.

These are things people want us to be talking about. They want us to be talking about automatically upgrading to adult court for serious crimes.

Next week we have, for example, Bills C-21, C-20, C-19, S-4, C-6, C-8, C-12, S-3. That is a list of all the bills we are going to be looking at. Unfortunately I do not have all the descriptions here, but they are certainly not worthy of the rush we are exhibiting with this closure on this bill here.

In closing I would just like to say that I am appalled that we have once again run into this problem of closure where democracy goes out the window and we get the Prime Minister sitting over there with a silly smile on his face, happy that he is once again forcing us to abandon debate on an important bill so that he can rush through an agenda that suits the socialists at the other end of this House.

• (1705)

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of Bill C-4.

The amendments contained in Bill C-4 are based on nearly three years of extensive consultation and discussion with western grain farmers to determine what kind of grain marketing organization they want. Western Canadian grain farmers have asked to retain the Canadian Wheat Board but they also want a more democratic, accountable and responsive Canadian Wheat Board, one that is truly in their hands, allowing them to shape the Canadian Wheat Board to meet their needs.

That is what the proposed changes in Bill C-4 actually provide for. The proposed changes in Bill C-4 would put more power into the hands of producers than they have ever had before throughout the Canadian Wheat Board's 63 year history.

The proposed changes would modernize the governance of the CWB. They would improve the accountability to the producers and through the creation of a producer elected majority board of directors and, most important, the marketing changes proposed in Bill C-4 are enabling. They would give the farmers the tools and the power necessary to shape the CWB's marketing structure to fit their present and their future needs.

I would like to address some of the questions that have been raised to clear up some of the misconceptions that have arisen around Bill C-4 and its proposed amendments to the CWB act.

Some farmers have asked if they would have more control under the new system of CWB governance. The answer is yes. The 15 member board of directors would be comprised of 10 producer elected directors and 5 federal appointees. In essence the farmer elected directors would enjoy a two to one majority on this board. Directors would have effective control of the strategic direction of the new CWB and would be able to reflect the views and the needs of farmers in future operational and marketing decisions.

These elected directors would not be subject to dismissal by the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. Only those who elected them would be able to accomplish this through a subsequent election.

Under Bill C-4 all directors would be entitled to complete disclosure of all CWB facts and figures, bar none. That is transparency. They would be able to examine the prices at which grain is sold and the premiums achieved and all the operating costs and whether the CWB is operating effectively. With their full knowledge of the CWB and its global competition the directors would be in the best position to assess what information should be made public and what for commercial reasons should remain confidential.

So why is the board of directors not 100% producer elected? That was another question asked. Under the proposed legislation the government would continue to maintain a substantial financial commitment to the CWB. The government would continue to guarantee the CWB's initial payments, its borrowing and its credit sales made under the credit grain sales program.

This represents a strong case for the government's having a role in appointing some of the members of the board of directors. In addition, the CWB has the public policy responsibilities. For example, the CWB is charged with issuing all wheat and barley export licences for all of Canada, not just the prairies.

I have heard the question why is the CWB not legally obliged to get the best price for farmers' grain. The CWB does seek to obtain the best prices possible. In fact, it is a matter of policy.

• (1710)

However, making this the corporation's legal objective would be difficult because the CWB seeks to obtain the best price for producers jointly through pool accounts. It is not always possible to show, after the fact, if higher returns could have been realized for individual producers because a different set of marketing decisions may have been made. Therefore, to make the CWB legally responsible to achieve the best price for individual farmers would result in countless legal challenges being made to the board's

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marketing decisions. It would sort of be like dealing with it by 20:20 hindsight.

Looking to the future, the board of directors would be responsible for ensuring that the sales programs would be well managed and that the CWB operated in the best interests of the producers. This would be preferable to taking a legalistic approach.

Why does the CWB need to establish a contingency fund? What would this money be used for? These are more questions which have been asked.

A contingency fund would be developed in order for the CWB to make adjustments to the initial payments during the crop year on its own authority, without the delays involved in getting government approval, to provide for potential losses in cash trading operations and to provide for an early pool cash-out.

The contingency fund would provide the CWB with the ability to adjust the initial payments and to get money into the farmers' hands more quickly. I am a farmer. I know how important that last statement is.

Given the history of adjusted initial payments the related risk would be minimal. It would be less than the related benefits to farmers. It would be up to the board of directors, with its two-thirds producer elected majority, to determine if, when and how the contingency fund should be created. How it is set up will be the responsibility of the board.

Why can the Auditor General of Canada not examine the CWB's books? The CWB currently retains an independent firm of chartered accountants to audit its operations. Through its pool accounts the CWB is managing farmers' money, not government appropriations. Therefore it has always made sense that a private sector auditor, rather than the auditor general, audit the CWB's books.

Under Bill C-4 the CWB would cease to be an agent of Her Majesty and a crown corporation. It would become a mixed enterprise. This would reduce even further the justification for involving the office of the auditor general.

Finally, some of the private sector users of financial reports take comfort in the fact that private sector auditors, unlike the auditor general, are liable under the law for negligence and other professional misconduct.

The proposed changes in Bill C-4 are balance and fair. The government realizes that the changes contained in Bill C-4 cannot hope to satisfy all parties. I think we have all heard that in the House today in what has been a polarized debate among representatives of the western grain producers.

The government, nonetheless, feels that the proposed changes to the CWB would equip farmers with the tools and the power to

shape the CWB as they see fit so that it can meet the needs of the farmers of today and the farmers of the future.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand that the time should now be expiring as a result of the motion this morning. Because there was a further deferral transferring the vote to Monday, there is no need to have the 15 minute time period for the bell.

• (1715)

Therefore, I think if you would seek unanimous consent to add back the 15 minutes to the time, or at least the time required for the opposition House leader to make his speech up to a maximum of the 15 minutes which should have been there to begin with, we would be favourably disposed to that.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is going to be tough with the Liberals here trying to shake me loose.

There are two issues here for those of us who do not know a lot about wheat farming, indeed who do not know much about farming at all in this country and there are many who do not. The first issue is one of democracy and how democracy works in this country and the second issue is of law and order. I want to speak briefly on both of those. I do not think I will take up the 15 minutes but one never knows. Perhaps I will give the House leader of the government five minutes to sum up his side.

The issue of time allocation in a democracy is one which one could consider takes a lot away from our democracy today and it does. Time allocation or closure is about the right of an individual to speak in the House of Commons. It is about the rights of individuals to hear in the House of Commons not just from one party but from all parties.

This case, Bill C-4 referring to the wheat board, is an issue we think everybody, whether they are farmers, whether they live in the city or wherever they live in this country, should be able to hear about it. It is an issue of the right to speak for others.

We have farmers in our caucus and probably there are farmers in all the caucuses here. Some of my colleagues are wheat farmers. I think where they come from this is about the right to speak for the farmers in their areas who are concerned about Bill C-4 and about a monopoly of the wheat board. This bill is really about the rights of farmers.

The government is again calling for time allocation or closure on an important bill. This has only been done twice I believe in this 36th Parliament, the other being on the Canada pension plan bill, another major issue in this country. Minor bill after minor bill comes through this House and we seem to find the time to be able

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to debate those. But when an important issue comes up, what the government does in effect is it restricts the right to speak out, it restricts the right of people to hear, it restricts the right to speak for others.

And it has certainly restricted the rights of farmers across this nation. I guess I can understand why there are no elected Liberals on the prairies because that is the feeling a farmer would get: Where am I best represented? The results of elections are obvious.

Members are now rating me. At least I got a one and someone gave me a one and a half. When you rate somebody in this country you have to have some standards upon which to rate.

When we are talking about standards and rating that is exactly what the farmers do. If we had the farmers rating who in this House best represented them, we would see a 10 on this side and perhaps one-half a point on that side.

• (1720)

I want to talk about the second issue in this House as a non-farmer, as an individual who depends on his colleagues for comments about the true effect of Bill C-4. I want to talk about law and order.

There is something dreadfully wrong in this country when we put our farmers in jail for trying to sell their product and at the same time I find myself fighting day and night to put bad guys, real criminals in jail and find very little success at it.

I know there are rules that are given to farmers for selling their product, but must the first option be to put a farmer in prison because he does not live by a rule, that he wants to sell his product, that he wants to be productive? Must that be the Liberal way?

I want to draw an analogy here. For the Liberals who do not know what an analogy is, I am going to draw a comparison, something similar.

In my community a fellow by the name of Darren Ursel raped a young lady. He went to court. The judge said "Well, it is your first time and you said you were sorry. Well, I guess you will not do it again. You do feel remorseful. And you were tender at times". He gave this fellow a conditional sentence, no time in jail.

I really wonder what the wheat farmers across this country are thinking when they compare that to what happens when one of their own ends up in prison for trying to convince the government here that there is another way to sell wheat. I just cannot imagine how a farmer ends up in prison and a rapist ends up walking the street. For a person like me who is not a farmer, I look at it and I say there is something dreadfully wrong in this country.

There are two Reform members who are not here today, who are out once again in court fighting for the rights of farmers. I think it would be wise for members on the opposite side to get out there a little bit, get into these communities in the prairies. I know they

will not get elected in the prairies, but it is not bad to show up once in a while.

It would be a good idea to go out there and listen to what happens in these court cases. I am absolutely certain that members opposite would come back into this House and say the same as we are saying. Listen to what is happening in this country. They are throwing farmers in prison while they are leaving rapists on the street. That says very little for a government.

This bill continues a monopoly that has existed for some time. We will get outvoted in this House of Commons because there is a majority government. It is a fact that the only time farmers will get a restriction of a monopoly, get to act the way they want to act, get to live the way they want to live, get justice the way they want justice is to wait until we upset the Liberal government in an election.

• (1725)

For those farmers out there we know why we get their support. It has been three days straight here that farmers, like the gentleman behind me, have been fighting day and night in debate to try to get things changed, while those on the opposite side insist that the letter of the law is more important than the right of a farmer. That is wrong. It is very wrong.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak briefly to what is happening in this House because I am very concerned.

I am concerned because during a time when our country is being torn at the seams and there are a lot of presumed regional differences, we have the threat of a large region of our country having its wishes and its aspirations ignored. The Liberals have the power and we concede that. They won the election. They have the majority of the seats. But it is unfortunate that they are misguided in their evaluation. They keep coming back to this statement that the farmers want what they are doing here. Unfortunately it is based on incorrect data.

The reason it is based on incorrect data is because of a prior strategy and a prior program that the minister and possibly the bureaucrats had. Consequently when a question was asked of the farmers, the question was not such that the farmers could respond the way they wanted to. It is a question of asking is there a will to solve the problem. Instead, they gave the farmers but two choices: Do you want the wheat board or do you not?

The majority of the farmers want the wheat board. That is what we are here representing. There is a majority, we believe, that want the wheat board. But there are also a large number of farmers who feel that the wheat board could do better for the farmers that choose to use the wheat board if there would be some competition. I do not believe that the monopoly of the wheat board is a necessity nor is their health threatened if some small number of farmers when

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opportunity presents itself choose to use a different form of marketing their own products.

I spoke on another part of this bill the other day. I will repeat what I said then. For example, a farmer raises his grain totally at his own expense and with his own investments. He sees one place where he can get \$5 a bushel for a grain that the wheat board is offering him \$3 for, and the farmer can get the \$5 immediately instead of waiting for those final payments from the wheat board. It seems to me eminently reasonable, and most prairie farmers agree with this, that the farmer on that occasion, having found a market for his product, should have the freedom in this country to market his product where he so chooses. That would happen to be the one with the best price.

What we have is a majority government in this House, most of the representatives of which come from areas where the Canadian Wheat Board Act does not apply. I am not saying they are not qualified to speak to this. I know the other day there were some members of the Bloc who took exception because they thought hey, we are Canadians. Absolutely they can speak to it and yes, it is a Canadian question.

• (1730)

At the same time the government errs by not hearing the people who are most affected by the decision about to be taken. I am going to right now incite a riot. I am going to appeal to the members to oppose to just straight out defy their whip. They are going to have a whipped vote on these amendments. I am going to ask them to say instead of listening to our whip we are going to do what is right on behalf of those constituents who live in ridings that are not even our own. I appeal to them and urge them to do that because that is what is right.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5.30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the report stage and second reading of the bill now before the House.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order adopted on Wednesday, November 19, 1997, all motions in Group No. 7 are deemed to have been put and recorded divisions are deemed to have been requested and deferred.

Pursuant to the order adopted earlier today, a recorded division is again deferred until Monday, February 16, 1998, at the end of the period provided for the consideration of government orders.

It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

The House resumed from December 5, 1997, consideration of the motion that Bill C-208, an act to amend the Access to Information Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to comment on Bill C-208 which would amend the Access to Information Act to add an infraction to that act.

More specifically, the bill states that a person who with intent to deny a right of access under this act destroys or alters a record, or falsifies a record or makes a false entry in a record or does not keep required records is guilty of an indictable offence and may be imprisoned for up to five years or fined up to \$10,000 or both.

Let me begin my comments by stating clearly that I support the general goal of this bill and I commend the hon. member for Brampton West—Mississauga for having introduced it.

I have some experience with respect to access to information. I dealt with the act in my former capacity as mayor of the municipality, chairman of the hydro-electric commission for Kitchener—Wilmot and especially as chairman of the Waterloo regional police.

The act as it now stands makes an offence of obstructing the work of the information officer and commissioner and provides a penalty for that offence. The act also authorizes the commissioner to disclose to the Attorney General of Canada information relating to the commission of an offence against any law of Canada by any officer or employee of a federal government institution.

Certain events that occurred during the Somalia and the blood inquiries have drawn public attention to the fact that the Access to Information Act contains no penalty for this sort of action. One can argue then that these events clearly illustrate and underscore the need for an infraction in the Access to Information Act.

There is a provision of general application in the Criminal Code. Section 126 of the Criminal Code states:

Every one who, without lawful excuse, contravenes an act of Parliament by willfully doing anything that it forbids or by willfully omitting to do anything that is required to be done is, unless a punishment is expressly provided by law, guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

It could be argued that section 126 of the Criminal Code might apply to the situation of somebody deliberately destroying a document in order to thwart the access act, in so far as a destruction

would result in the person willfully omitting to do anything that the act in this case requires to be done.

This brings me to an interesting point which is also my main concern with respect to Bill C-208.

• (1735)

Section 126 creates an indictable offence, which is the most serious type of offence in the Criminal Code. The section 126 offence carries a maximum penalty of two years. I believe that the seriousness of an indictable offence in section 26 is one of the reasons it might be necessary to add a specific offence to the Access to Information Act.

In this cases, the specific offence of deliberately destroying documents subject to the Access to Information Act should not be quite as serious as an indictable offence with a maximum of two years imprisonment.

This is not what Bill C-208 proposes. Rather, it proposes to create a specific offence in the access act. But this specific offence not only would not carry a lesser maximum penalty than the one attached to the offence in section 126, it would in fact carry a heavier penalty, a maximum penalty of five years.

It is important to outline that the Criminal Code provides offences in three types, summary convictions, indictable offences and hybrid offences that the crown can elect to prosecute either as an indictable offence or as a summary conviction offence. The summary conviction offence carries the lightest penalties and the indictable offences, of course, carry the heaviest. With hybrid offences the attached penalty depends on the procedure selected by the crown.

An important point is that when an accused is prosecuted by indictment he can choose to be tried before a judge and jury, which can be a very slow process. In addition, the accused is entitled to a preliminary inquiry when the offence is an indictable one.

I understand the hon. member wants to mark the seriousness of the offence by making it an indictable offence. However, it may also be counterproductive if it results in the crown not proceeding and prosecuting with that offence because in light of the particular circumstances of the case it is felt that it would not be worth the costs and efforts of the justice system, or when they view the penalty as disproportionate to the crime, taking into account the circumstances of the offence and the motives of the offender.

I would also wonder how much benefit and how much additional protection society would get from sending the offender in this case to jail.

Let us look for a moment at the list of some of the Criminal Code offences that are hybrid, and for which the penalty would be lighter than a straight indictable offence when the crown proceeds by summary conviction: for example, criminal harassment, more commonly known as stalking, uttering threats, assault, assault

causing bodily harm, unlawfully causing bodily harm, assaulting a police officer, and sexual assault.

These offences are serious offences, but making them hybrid allows some discretion for adjusting the procedure and the penalty to the circumstances of the offence.

I would argue that destroying documents, while undoubtedly serious, is not more serious than assaulting a police officer.

I think a comparative study of Criminal Code offences should be carried out in order to classify a specific offence of destroying documents in the access act and determine an appropriate maximum penalty in this case.

In conclusion, I view the creation of a penalty for deliberately destroying documents to thwart the Access to Information Act is an important issue to be looked at in the context of an overall review of the access legislation.

I reiterate that I support the goal of Bill C-208, which is to add to the access act the penalty for deliberately destroying documents that are subject to that act.

The hon. member has worked hard on this, but I am unable to support the proposal of Bill C-208, which is to create a penalty that would be a straight indictable offence with a maximum penalty of five years in jail. This, in my view, is simply too heavy a penalty, and providing for such a serious offence might be counterproductive in relation to the objectives.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to participate in the debate on Bill C-208, an act to amend the Access and Information Act introduced by my hon. colleague from Brampton West—Mississauga. I want to commend her for her hard work in bringing this private member's bill forward.

We in the Reform Party believe that government must be accountable to the Canadian people. For too long governments have been ignoring their constituents and, once elected, stop being accountable to the very same people who elected. The affairs of government are often done in complete secrecy.

• (1740)

We in the Reform Party believe that Canadians have a stake in government affairs as duly representatives and must ensure that our actions are open to public scrutiny. The Access to Information Act was introduced with just that intent, to ensure that information collected for public purposes, paid for by the taxpayers of Canada, remained accessible to them. I will speak about that in a moment and give some specific examples.

However, that has not been the case. There are numerous examples of the Liberal government taking it upon itself to decide unilaterally what is good for Canadians without talking to them. It decides what the public should know and what it should not know. The Somalia inquiry is one example. We have talked about that for

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a long time. The Krever inquiry is another example which was mentioned by my colleague from Alberta today.

This is an example with which I am more familiar. It is a recent example about which I have been questioning the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans over the last two weeks. I have been pushing the government to release the foreign observer reports which the minister refuses to make public. We want to know what he is hiding from the Canadian public.

These reports contain vital information pertaining to the fisheries crisis, yet the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is hiding behind the Access to Information Act, saying that he would be breaking the law if he were to release them. That is what he said, that he would be breaking the law.

I would like to read into the record the section of the act which the minister is referring to, and he has done so in writing: "Subject to this section, the head of the government institution shall refuse to disclose any record requested under this act that contains financial, commercial, scientific or technical information", and that is what I believe he is referring to, "that is confidential information supplied to a government institution by a third party and is treated consistently in a confidential manner by a third party". That is what he is hiding behind. Yes, it sounds pretty reasonable. I can decide what is good for the public and what should be allowed to be released.

Let me go on. Subsection 6 states: "The head of the government institution may disclose any record under this act"—and he has received lots of written requests—"or any part thereof that contains information described in paragraphs 1(b), (c) or (d)", which is what I have just read, "if that disclosure is in the public interest"—and I do not think that is too hard to defend—"and it relates to public health, public safety or the protection of the environment". Lo and behold, the environment is being destroyed by the offshore trawlers. It is well documented. Our resources are being depleted. Yet this minister refuses to disclose the reports.

I again commend the hon. member for bringing forward this private member's bill. Information is vital to members of public. They pay for it. They have a right to it. Yet we have a minister who wants to offer information in confidence. He continues to say "I will give it to you in an in camera session". I want to emphasize that it is not me who wants this information, it is the public. It not only wants it, it has a right to it.

We have to move forward to make sure the public is allowed to obtain this information. Even his own colleague, the hon. member for Gander—Grand Falls, recognizes the vital importance of this information and was condemning this minister for withholding these documents from the Canadian public.

Yes, the minister has offered an in camera session. The Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans is now drafting a report. We will be making recommendations to the government on the state of the east coast fisheries.

We are about to table the report. It is in its final stages. The information is overwhelming with respect to the offshore fishery. I think that will be well noted. That is why we are after this. We are after this for the interests of Canadians and fishermen. Nobody has a personal private agenda, which we have been accused of. We are here to represent the people of Canada, whose tax dollars paid to train these observers. They paid for them yet they are not allowed to see what is going on. It is absolutely appalling.

I have another example. I have a constituent who, unfortunately, is the widow of one of our military personnel, Master Corporal Rick Wheller, who was killed during a military exercise in April 1992. It was a very sad accident. For over five years since his death his widow Christina has attempted to obtain truthful answers from DND regarding the circumstances and the safety regulations. Again this has to do completely with access to information. She has made numerous requests and has been promised these reports. The reports she has received had missing pages, blanked out information, and the list goes on and on. I could go through the dates she has been there and the promises. She was promised a report last December by senior officials of the department. They will not release it. To date, she has not received this information. It is an absolute disgrace.

• (1745)

This widow of one of our military people wants to know what happened to her husband. It is five years later and the minister will not release the information. She still does not have it. It is an absolute disgrace.

Taxpayers want this information. It is access to information. I commend the member for introducing legislation that, if anything, will go further in making sure these records are not destroyed and are protected. We have seen incidents where they have been shredded or have gone missing. It is very important that the public has access.

Those are just a few examples. Without all the facts we are not able to provide solutions to this crisis. We are looking for solutions. We are trying to stand up for the taxpayers. We want a government that knows what is good for Canadians and their children.

Bill C-208 proposes to amend the Access to Information Act. It would provide sanctions against persons who destroy or falsify government records.

I have just given two examples of this. I have been fighting with the minister of fisheries to get a public document. He wants to stand behind the very act we are talking about. Shamefully he will not give us the information. I have spoken to many people and they

all agree it is in the public interest and is destroying the environment. Now we have an act that is giving the minister discretion.

It states that the minister may. I would like to amend it further to state the minister must. Now we have an act that gives the minister of fisheries and any other minister discretion on what they would like to release.

At least this bill will ensure the information is not destroyed. I hope all my colleagues are listening. This boils down to information the public pays for and is entitled to. We should ensure that the safeguard of this information is fundamental. We should stand up and fight for people who have a right to what they pay for.

[Translation]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to speak to Bill C-208, an act to amend the Access to Information Act.

I would first like to point out that the entire matter of access to information is of special interest to me. This is why I eagerly accepted the invitation of my Bloc Québécois colleagues to speak to this bill.

On December 1 last year, I spoke in this House in favour of another bill, Bill C-216, which was also intended to amend the Access to Information Act by broadening its application to include crown corporations. At the time, I read a variety of documents on the application of the Access to Information Act and I noted, like a number of us today, that it requires certain amendments to ensure that it serves the intentions of its authors.

I would like to let the member for Brampton West—Mississauga know that the Bloc Québécois supports the bill she introduced, since it improves the Access to Information Act by providing severe penalties for certain infractions. The act we are dealing with today was passed in 1982, and it came into effect the following year.

• (1750)

It gives Quebeckers and Canadians the right to access information recorded in any form whatsoever, for the most part relating to government institutions with a few important exceptions I have already listed, Crown corporations in particular.

Like our fellow citizens, we as members of Parliament regularly make use of the Access to Information Act to obtain more information on how our institutions operate. That act constitutes an invaluable tool in our work and provides numerous answers for our constituents.

Bill C-208 represents an interesting advance, an improvement to the act, by penalizing severely anyone who attempts to destroy or

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falsify documents, or neglects to retain them. The penalty for such offences would be a maximum imprisonment of five years and/or a maximum fine of \$10,000.

You will agree with me that these are worthwhile amendments, since they represent an unequivocal sanction of any person attempting to flaunt the Access to Information Act.

It has been much said that the Access to Information Act is a toothless piece of legislation that does not meet today's requirements. None other than the present Privacy Commissioner, John Grace, is among the critics. The Privacy Commissioner has a variety of concerns, but where the object of this bill is concerned, he has spoken out strongly against the lax enforcement of the Access to Information Act.

After seven years of observation in his capacity as Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Grace has drawn some very worthwhile conclusions for the purposes of our examination. In particular, he points out that it lacks effective enforcement mechanisms. In his 1995-96 annual report, he lists three serious incidents which serve as typical examples of someone's blocking the right of access to government documents by destroying or falsifying documents, or by camouflaging them.

Three departments were involved: Transport Canada, National Defence and Health Canada. In each case, public servants falsified documents, or simply destroyed them. I do not want to be a prophet of doom, but I think the commissioner's discoveries are but the tip of the iceberg.

His 1996-97 annual report on the tainted blood scandal sounded the alarm on a number of terrible cases. The general remarks of the information commissioner on the act he applies are not, therefore, surprising. Allow me to read you his remarks, which summarize our position on the question, and I quote:

The access law has proved itself toothless to respond in any punitive way beyond exposing the wrongdoing. While exposure is far from being entirely ineffective, some penalty provisions in the access law are overdue. Nothing should focus the mind of any would-be record destroyer more than one conviction or one penalty levied upon a public official for such behaviour.

While we support the amendments to the Access to Information Act in Bill C-208, I have to say they do not go far enough.

In his latest annual report, the information commission revealed that a number of offences were the responsibility of senior officials, who used their authority to have their subordinates destroy or falsify documents. In all fairness, the distinction should be made between the person doing the act and the person making the decision, and this distinction is not provided for in Bill C-208.

Furthermore, in addition to the destruction or falsification of a document, provision should be made for the fact that ordering destruction or falsification of a document or using the threat of

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reprisal against a person who refuses to obey such orders constitute offences.

• (1755)

These are other situations not covered in the bill to which we are giving our full attention today. The maximum sentence of five years for an offence as provided for in the bill is consistent with the recommendations made by the information commissioner in his 1996-97 annual report.

By making it a criminal offence for anyone to commit such an act, we are adding a dissuasive force that should be enough to make a number of potential offenders think twice.

Despite the good points raised in Bill C-208, broader reflection is required if the necessary improvements are to be made to the Access to Information Act.

To this end, we hope to have the opportunity eventually to discuss Bill-286, which suggests a broader reform, with particular attention to falsification and destruction of documents and to access to confidences of the Privy Council, which is also accountable to the people of Quebec and of Canada.

The Access to Information Act is like a jewel without a box. As the information commissioner put it, legislation considered toothless is rapidly depleted of content, if not totally cast aside.

It is high time that we, as parliamentarians, take action before it is too late. Let us not wait for several more reports from the information commissioner before introducing the necessary amendments to the Access to Information Act. And the reason we must do this, even though all these amendments will have no real impact without a stronger institutional will, expressed at the highest echelons of the federal administration, is so that the act as implemented will embody its underlying ideals.

I therefore urge all parliamentarians to support Bill C-208.

[*English*]

Ms. Elinor Caplan (Thornhill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to participate in the debate on Bill C-208, to amend the Access to Information Act.

I begin by commending my colleague, the member for Brampton West—Mississauga. She has done us all a great service in raising this issue and bringing the bill before the House. By all I mean not only the people in the House of Commons but the people of Canada. It gives us an opportunity to talk about the importance of access to information, access to information legislation and having an access to information commissioner. The flip side is the protection of personal privacy and the regime that we put in place for making sure that we have openness and transparency in government.

As a member of the Ontario legislature I was proud to be part of a government which in 1985, as its very first piece of legislation, brought forward the access to information and protection of personal privacy legislation. It was a first for the province of Ontario. From that experience I know that no piece of legislation is ever perfect. The only thing that is ever carved in stone, unlike the wonderful ice and snow sculptures on our front lawn, are the gargoyles in this beautiful Chamber.

Legislation is living and it must be reviewed from time to time. My colleague has brought forward an important issue. The people of Canada not only deserve and need to know what government is doing, but government needs to know that it has an obligation to give information. Government is not only the elected officials. Government is those people who work in the bureaucracy and public service. It has an obligation to ensure that the public is made to know and has access to that which is in the public interest.

We know there have some problems. Certain events during the Somalia and blood inquiry have drawn to the public attention the fact the Access to Information Act contains no penalty for the destruction of information. That is what this piece of legislation is about. It proposes that an infraction be added to the existing act.

• (1800)

My own personal commitment to freedom of information and access to information should be unquestioned. On September 30 I raised the issue in a question to the President of the Treasury Board who has responsibility for access to information in the Government of Canada. I raised a question because of a report that had been tabled by the access to information commissioner.

My concern was that in his report the access to information commissioner also identified problems. One problem he identified was the lack of timely access. It was taking too long to get the information after a request was made.

Another thing that he identified was the concern that often it was the identity of the requester which determined whether or not the information was going to be given. In other words, who was asking for the information was a part of the judgment in the decision as to whether or not the information could be released in the public interest.

I believe these are problems. I do not think it should matter who is asking for the information. If it is possible to release the information and protect the personal privacy requirements of the legislation, the information should be made available regardless of who is asking.

I would hope we see an amendment to the access to information legislation as it exists today. It might be possible to amend the bill to include the policy that already exists in the privy council office where the identity of the requester, the identity of the individual or the organization asking for the information, is protected. It is not known in the minister's office or in the senior bureaucratic offices

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who is asking for the information when the decision is made about release of the information.

That is a very good policy. I hope we see it either transformed into an actual part of the statute or a regulation that could accompany the statute. However I certainly believe it should be the policy of every government that it does not matter who is requesting the information.

I also believe that timeliness is very important. Delayed information should not be used as a way of limiting the public's right to know those things. It has a legitimate right to have that information.

I am also very strong on the protection of individual and personal privacy. It is a value that I hold dear and that I believe in. In the information technology age it is a challenge to have access to the information we need to do the research we do at the same time as protecting an individual's right to privacy.

I do not believe the right to privacy is absolute. Nothing in this world or in the House is ever clearly black and white. I have said often I think we live in a world where there are shades of grey. Sometimes there is a legitimate public policy reason why we should have the ability to determine available information.

For example, I had a call from a constituent who was very upset because she had filled out a customs form and as a result had been informed by the employment insurance office that she had collected employment insurance illegally. She had left the country on holiday for a few weeks. When she returned she was a good citizen and filled in the customs form.

• (1805)

I told her that the people of Canada believe people who are out of the country on holiday should not be eligible to collect employment insurance benefits. That is a correct policy. I also think it is appropriate for the department of revenue to share information about people who have left the country. In the name of good practice and more than good practice but effective use of the resources of individuals, taxpayers want to know the laws are being obeyed and upheld. I believe it was appropriate for that information to be shared between departments.

The bill before us today is supportable in principle but I have a few problems with it. As I said, no piece of legislation is ever perfect. I would like to offer one of the problems I have with the bill.

Under the existing Criminal Code offences are defined by three categories. There is a summary conviction offence which carries the lightest penalty. Then there are indictable offences which carry

the heaviest penalty and allow a person to elect trial by judge or jury. Then there is the hybrid offence.

In this piece of legislation the member has chosen the indictable offence route. Given the state of the courts in the provinces my concern is that with indictable offence we would see our courts further clogged.

The access to information legislation is under review by the Treasury Board and by the Department of Justice. I hope they take into consideration as part of the review the issues I have raised and most particularly the issue raised by my colleague from Brampton West—Mississauga.

There should be an offence for the destruction of documents. As a result of this debate and the support in principle I would have for the legislation I hope we see changes to make our Access to Information Act better so that the people of Canada and the public interest could be well served. I compliment my colleague.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to Bill C-216, an act to amend the Access to Information Act and specifically crown corporations. I certainly commend my colleague from Nanaimo—Alberni who presented the bill to the House. He has shown leadership. I also commend to Theresa Stele who has done an enormous amount of work on the issue.

Bill C-216 is long overdue. Repeatedly in the House the issue has come up. In fact it has been debated ad nauseam. But have we found any changes? No, we have not. Why? Because this government and government before it have repeatedly demonstrated a lack of any political will and therefore integrity in their desire to make crown corporations more transparent.

As we can see today from the widespread acceptance we have in the House, the nature of the bill has found acceptance among members of Parliament across party lines and among members of the public. The public wants value for money in part by making sure that the money it gives to government to spend on its behalf is going where it should be going.

The bill will help to do that by ensuring that one will be able to see behind the veil that surrounds crown corporations currently and ensure that access to information exists.

The Access to Information Act applies to many other aspects of government. It is a cornerstone of democracy. It is as unfathomable to me as it is to other members of the House to know why access to information has not been applied to crown corporations.

• (1810)

There are a litany of crown corporations, everything from Canada Post Corporation to the Canadian Development and Invest-

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ment Corporation, the Canadian National Railway, the Export Development Corporation—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like some clarification. This debate is on Bill C-208 and I heard the hon. member mention Bill C-216.

Could I have some clarification as it is not really germane to Bill C-208?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): We will continue the debate on Bill C-208.

Mr. Keith Martin: Bill C-208 it is, Madam Speaker. The nature of the subject matter has not changed. Just the number of the bill.

As I was saying, the public demands a window into crown corporations. Some of them are operating efficiently. Some are not. The public has a right to know which are and which are not. Also the employees who work long and hard in these crown corporations have a right to know that they are working in an organization that can be as efficient as it can be. They have a right to know that their organization can perhaps be operating more efficiently and to know where waste is occurring.

If we bring that about, the government must clearly understand that everybody will win. The public will win. The employees will win. The House will win. We will be enabled to rectify problems before they get out of hand and improve the efficiency of these corporations. It begs the larger question as to why some crown corporations are not privatized, but that we shall leave for another day.

Access to information should also be occurring in a timely fashion. According to the rules of the House and the access to information in our system, the government and the institution in question have an obligation to answer within 30 days. However, I would venture to say that if government members have the same frustration we have the 30 days do not occur. In fact repeated stonewalling takes place time and time again.

I will mention one particularly egregious situation within the ministry of aboriginal affairs. Members from aboriginal communities come to us as members of Parliament, asking us to investigate situations on their reserves that at times are extremely serious. We have an obligation and a desire to ensure that moneys are spent where they are supposed to and that moneys go to where they are intended, particularly in aboriginal communities where moneys are allocated for counsellors, teachers, health, medication and schools. Anybody in the public would want to make sure moneys go where they are supposed to go.

When questions arise concerning moneys not going to where they are supposed to go, aboriginal grassroots people come to us if they are unable to get information from the leaderships in their communities. We ask for information but the information is rarely

forthcoming in a timely fashion and sometimes does not get to us at all.

Who pays the price, I would venture to say, to protect some people? Who pays the price for the failure to investigate these situations? It is the grassroots people who we are trying to help, the people who are in need.

I cannot understand for a moment why ministers would fail to answer a request for information made with the intent of trying to help the people most in need. They should take it as a clue that there may be problems and want to investigate it with the most vigour they can.

• (1815)

Instead of addressing these problems and investigating with the greatest amount of vigour, we see subterfuge, we see obfuscation, we see a lack of answers. This process is an injustice to the people who need the answers. It is an injustice to this House and the Canadian public.

I can only ask that this government for once demonstrate leadership that other governments have failed to do on this issue. In doing so it will clearly demonstrate to the Canadian public a strong desire and commitment to improve crown corporations, to make them more efficient, to show an intense responsibility to the Canadian taxpayer and for the taxpayer's money.

The government will win by adopting Bill C-208. It will demonstrate to all members in this House a desire to finally listen to the backbenchers, to finally listen to the good ideas that come from members across this House and across party lines that this country can be a better place for all Canadians.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this important debate.

Bill C-208 is an act to amend the Access to Information Act. Incidentally, it makes no reference to crown corporations. The intent of these amendments is to provide sanctions against anyone who improperly destroys or falsifies government records in an attempt to deny access to information under the Access to Information Act.

I wish to congratulate the hon. member for Brampton West—Mississauga for her efforts in putting this bill forward. This caucus agrees with the sentiments expressed in the bill.

The Access to Information Act was proclaimed 15 years ago. In an earlier speech the hon. member for Brampton West—Mississauga said "in the 14 years since its inception, government bureaucracy has been sabotaging the intent of the act".

As I reviewed the files in preparation for my remarks today, I came across a yellowed document from 13 years ago. It is a copy of a presentation made to a national forum on access to information by Ken Rubin from Ottawa. He is extremely well known for his efforts regarding access to information. An Order of Canada

should be struck for him someday because he has played a very important role in the history of access to information. Mr. Rubin worked to get the Access to Information Act which he has used very well to ferret out information from government departments.

In his remarks Mr. Rubin said "Users of access to information must suffer for this rare privilege by being put through all kinds of hurdles and rules that emphasize information hide and seek". I have other clippings that document the frustration that our information commissioners have had in trying to pry public information out of unwilling government departments and agencies.

These cases of departmental stonewalling and obstructions are one thing but recently the situation has become more serious. It is by now completely obvious that certain government departments and agencies have both destroyed and falsified information covered by the Access to Information Act.

Canadians know that defence department officials have altered documents relating to the Somalia inquiry. We also know that health officials have destroyed records on the tainted blood tragedy. This is clearly intolerable in our democracy.

The current information officer, Mr. John Grace, has called on the federal government to punish civil servants who intentionally destroy documents to avoid telling the truth to the public. This is the intention of the bill as we understand it.

I want to make it clear that I am not saying that many, most or all civil servants have been involved in any kind of document tampering or destruction. I also understand that in the Somalia case this destruction of documents occurred because senior officials ordered it done. But there certainly have been incidents.

We must admit that information which is the property ultimately of the people of Canada, information that they have paid for and continue to pay for through their taxes, information that they have the right to see has been wantonly destroyed.

• (1820)

In conclusion, we wish to make it clear that this practice should not be tolerated any further and that the hon. member's bill is an important step in that direction.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Madam Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure to rise today on the act to amend the Access to Information Act, Bill C-208.

I am sure that this is one of the most important tools we have to work with as members of Parliament to help us access information which is not readily available in other circumstances, not only us,

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but corporations and individuals throughout the country. It is the key to the confidence in our system and it also is the key to checks and balances which are so important in a Parliament like this one where government does have an awful lot of control over all information and can hold it back should it decide to. This gives us access to it.

Speaking of access to information, I tried to find out to whom the access to information officer reports and I could not get access to the information. It was kind of interesting. I called several offices and I could not find out to whom he answers. Finally I did find out from the Library of Parliament and also a very helpful official in the access to information office that the access to information commissioner actually reports to the President of the Treasury Board and then through the Speaker to Parliament.

I was really concerned about that because recently I tried to access information. I tried to use the services of the ethics commissioner. When I went to a meeting with the ethics commissioner, the first question I asked the commissioner was "What is your term of office and how are you hired?" He said "I am here at the pleasure of the Prime Minister". I think the results of his conclusions on the question that I asked put him in a conflict of interest because he only keeps his job at the pleasure of the Prime Minister.

I was pleased to learn that at least the access to information commissioner is actually hired by Parliament and voted on. So it is very helpful and gives me a great deal of confidence in the commissioner, as opposed to perhaps the little less confidence I have in the ethics commissioner.

Anyway, back to Bill C-208. It is the shortest bill I have ever seen. The point is very simple. Up until now the access to information bill has had no punishment, it has had no sanction. It has had no way to punish people if they have destroyed, denied access or altered documents or anything. There was no teeth. There was no enforcement.

Bill C-208 provides that deterrent, that enforcement tool. It makes denying information, destroying information or altering information a criminal offence with a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment or a \$10,000 fine. That is a pretty serious deterrent compared to what is there now. There is no deterrent if an official destroys information or refuses access to someone. There is no sanction. There is no punishment.

This is very timely. We can be sure that if somebody, as they approach the shredder with the document that they should not be shredding, thinks of the five years and the \$10,000 penalty, they will think twice about it. It is a very important tool. It does provide us in Parliament with the tools to make sure that the government is accountable, and it gives people confidence in government.

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A further amendment that we would like to see, although we are supporting this in the Conservative Party, is an amendment that gives at least limited access to documents of the Privy Council. I realize there are some documents that should not be available and we could not have total access to everything, but there are documents that we would really think are appropriate to have access to through the access to information office.

However, all things considered, the Progressive Conservative Party strongly supports Bill C-208. We congratulate the drafters of this bill. We hope those same people will now move over to the code of ethics amendments and will draft amendments to ensure that the ethics commissioner also has to answer to Parliament instead of having his job at the pleasure of the Prime Minister.

I conclude my remarks by saying that the Conservative Party supports this bill entirely and we will be voting in favour of it.

• (1825)

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to begin my comments by stating that I clearly support the general goal of the bill. I commend my colleague, the hon. member for Brampton West—Mississauga, for introducing it but have a couple of concerns about it.

I have a bit of concern for what the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester said. I admire him to a point, that point being that he does a little research. He made a few calls. Unfortunately the hon. member did not dig far enough.

He alleges that there are no penalties for this kind of action when access to information documents are destroyed. He is correct that there is certainly no argument that events, say Somalia or the blood inquiry, have drawn public attention to the fact that the Access to Information Act contains no penalty and that there is clearly a need for an infraction in the Access to Information Act.

However I went one step further than the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester. I went to the Criminal Code to find out if anything could be done. I had a look at the Criminal Code, specifically section 126, and this is what it states:

Everyone who, without lawful excuse, contravenes an Act of Parliament by wilfully doing anything that it forbids or by wilfully omitting to do anything that it requires to be done is, unless a punishment is expressly provided by law, guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

In other words, section 126 of the Criminal Code might apply to the situation of someone deliberately destroying a document in order to thwart the Access to Information Act, in so far as the

destruction would result in the person “wilfully omitting to do anything that it requires to be done”.

Let us have a look for a moment at what my colleague from Brampton West—Mississauga is proposing in Bill C-208 which would amend the Access to Information Act to add an infraction to the act. Specifically the bill states that a person who, with the intent to deny a right of access under this act, destroys or alters a record, or falsifies a record, or makes a false entry in a record, or does not keep required records is guilty of an indictable offence and may be imprisoned for up to five years or fined up to \$10,000 or both.

That brings me to my main concern with respect to my colleague's bill. Section 126 creates an indictable offence, which is the most serious type of offence in the Criminal Code. Section 126 often carries a maximum penalty of two years. The seriousness of an indictable offence in section 126 is one of the reasons it might be necessary to add a specific offence to the Access to Information Act. In this case the specific offence of deliberately destroying documents subject to the Access to Information Act should not be quite as serious as an indictable offence with a maximum of two years imprisonment.

That is not what my colleague's bill proposes. It proposes to create a specific offence in the Access to Information Act. This specific offence not only would not carry a lesser maximum penalty than the one attached to the offence in section 126 of which I spoke. It would carry a heavier maximum penalty of five years.

It is important to outline that the Criminal Code slices offences up into three different categories. There are summary convictions, indictable offences and hybrid offences that the crown can elect to prosecute either as an indictable offence or as a summary conviction offence.

Summary conviction offences carry the lightest penalties and indictable offences carry the heaviest. With the hybrid offences the attached penalty depends on the procedure selected by the crown. An important point is that when an accused is prosecuted by indictment, he or she can choose to be tried before a judge and jury, which can be a very slow process. In addition, the accused is entitled to a preliminary inquiry when the offence is indictable.

• (1830)

I understand the hon. member wants to mark the seriousness of the offence by making it an indictable offence, but I would have to ask my colleague if it might also be counterproductive if—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): I am sorry. The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[English]

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

TRANSPORT

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate this opportunity in this extended question period to bring up a subject I brought up on December the 4 about responsibility, about accountability and about obligations, that is the federal government's obligation with respect to certain federal-provincial agreements to do with highways in Nova Scotia. It has now extended to New Brunswick since I brought this up in December.

The federal government and the provincial governments sign agreements. When the provincial governments do not honour them, when I raise it in the House, the hon. minister replies all highways are a provincial issue, ask the province. But the fact is this is not about highways. This is about specific federal-provincial agreements.

With respect to this multimillion dollar agreement, it says a management committee shall be established as of the date of execution of this agreement and shall consist of two members, one member appointed by the federal minister, one member appointed by the provincial minister. The management committee will be responsible for administration and management of this agreement. They will review and approve all projects. They will change any projects on schedule B. Annual reports will be approved. Approval of the proposed contracts and their modifications where they affect the financial commitment of the present agreement relating to any projects included in schedule B. It says the decisions of the management committee shall be in writing and shall be acted on only if taken unanimously.

So the management committee is one member from the federal minister's department and one from the province, and all decisions must be unanimous. That means the federal government in this case is responsible on these issues, and again this is a question about accountability, responsibility and obligations.

Since I brought that up in December, the same thing has happened in New Brunswick, and it is exactly the same agreement with the same words. The federal government must acknowledge and must realize its obligation to police this.

In this case, the federal government said it will put 50% of the money into a highway if the province puts 50% in, and it agreed to do that. Now the province has taken its 50% out, which means that

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100% of the money provided by government is from the federal government. That changes all the ratios. It changes everything.

I recently got a report from the Department of Transport, the federal department. It says \$32,474,270 has been paid on a specific piece of highway between Moncton and Petitcodiac, New Brunswick. That was before the end of March last year. This year they have projected to spend another \$5.7 million. That is \$38,174,270, and it says right here the money was paid out to somebody to build that highway, but the provincial minister says there is no taxpayer money in it, the highway has never been paid for.

The provincial minister says the money did not go to pay for the highway. He says the highway is not paid for. The federal minister's report card says they paid \$38 million to somebody.

Under the terms of this agreement the federal minister is responsible to answer to where the \$38 million has disappeared. There is \$38 million disappeared. The feds say it went to build the road. The province says it did not go to build the road. But this \$38 million cheque went to somebody and we would like the federal minister to take up his obligation in accordance with this agreement which is very clear. He is a member of the management committee. There are only two on it. All decisions must be unanimous and in writing.

So, if \$38 million is going to go somewhere—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Order. The time has expired. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

• (1835)

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is really unfortunate that the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester does not recognize a dead end sign when he sees one. In fact, he has not recognized this dead end sign and he smacked right into it a couple of times.

As the minister has stated to the hon. member on this very issue, under the Constitution of Canada the responsibility for provincial highways, including highway 104 in Nova Scotia, falls under provincial jurisdiction.

Transport Canada's only involvement in highway 104 is to match, as the hon. member has stated, dollar for dollar, \$55 million with the province. That, for the hon. member's information, is \$27.5 million each.

The highway 104 western alignment project is one of a few projects funded through the Transport Canada-Nova Scotia strategic highway improvement program agreement signed in 1993. This agreement makes provisions for both the federal government and the province to each set aside about \$70 million for a total of \$140 million for highway improvements in Nova Scotia.

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I want to repeat for the hon. member, and it is important for the hon. member to recognize this, that this is where Transport Canada's involvement in the highway 104 project ends. The province of Nova Scotia is the responsible authority for this project. It is the province that decides on the alignment, the design, the construction standards, the tendering process and how to finance the construction costs of the provincial system.

Nova Scotia chose to use a public-private partnership concept, and good for it, as a means to construct and finance highway 104 and agreed to allow the developer to charge tolls to the users of the new highway. The federal government is neither a party to nor responsible for Nova Scotia's public-private agreement with the developer. As I stated earlier, the government's only involvement—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

FISHERIES

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.): Madam Speaker, in October I asked the minister about the Liberals' failed Atlantic groundfish strategy or TAGS program.

Canadians had better hope the TAGS program is not typical of Liberal strategic brilliance because if our well-being were to rest on that kind of strategy, we would be in bad shape.

The TAGS program failed miserably to provide a meaningful future for Atlantic fishers. Now just released is the government's post-TAGS review report.

Mr. Harrigan and his team have provided a comprehensive and forthright report. It contains no praise for the government. The report clearly reinforces the scathing comments of Canada's auditor general on the terrible mismanagement of the TAGS program. It also confirms what Canadians in Atlantic Canada have been trying to get through to this government for years. After four years of so-called government assistance, and after spending nearly \$2 billion, there remain the same problems today as four years ago, only now with a couple of new ones thrown in.

First, there was supposed to be job training so that fishers could get into new areas of employment. Very little, nearly not as much as was promised, was spent on this job training. In fact, the job training that was done was not linked to any realistic employment opportunities.

Second, there was supposed to be a license buyout to remove capacity from the industry. Virtually none of that was accomplished. Now we have thousands of people dependent on TAGS for income support. We have income support that was promised suddenly being pulled so that people who had planned and had done their financial forecasts on this income are being left in the

lurch by a government saying sorry, we know we promised that this program would stay on but now we are not going to do it.

We have a situation where people on TAGS who want to leave the industry to find meaningful work cannot do that. We are not giving any meaningful assistance. The community development projects that were supposed to be funded lacked any kind of realism and failed to use the talents and expertise from the community.

We have a real issue of government ineptness and gross mismanagement not only in the past of the government fishery, but now a lack of vision for meaningful alternatives for those who were affected by the government's incompetence. Here we have both Liberal and past Tory governments politicizing all their decisions and resulting only in waste, inefficiency, personal hardship and loss of personal independence by reducing people to rely on government handouts when they would rather work.

• (1840)

After months to reflect on their failed policies and programs following the loss of the Atlantic fisheries critical resource base, I ask the government whether it has any idea what people's lives are going to look like after the TAGS program is over?

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Atlantic groundfish strategy was designed to cope with an extraordinary situation, a crisis of major proportions. It had to be implemented within very tight time frames at a time when the government was facing severe fiscal constraints.

Under the circumstances, the Minister of Human Resources Development's first priority was to ensure that basic human needs were met, so we directed our efforts at ensuring that individuals who had lost their livelihood and source of income received income support.

On this score TAGS has been successful. More than 40,000 clients were able to count on Human Resources Development Canada to provide them with income support in a timely matter.

Having said that, it is very clear that TAGS was far from a perfect program. With the benefit of hindsight, many things could have been done differently but TAGS has helped Atlantic fishery workers. Some 14,800 TAGS clients have adjusted outside the groundfish fishery and found employment outside the industry. Over 16,000 TAGS clients received job counselling and over 10,000 TAGS clients had the opportunity to improve their job skills through various types of training, including literacy and basic skills improvement.

TAGS is expected to end in August 1998 and the Minister of Human Resources Development has just received a post-TAGS review report prepared by Mr. Harrigan. The objective of Mr. Harrigan's report was to get a sense of how the end of the TAGS program would impact on individuals, families and communities.

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This is a very good report that brings out a number of important factors. For instance, it confirms that we cannot have a one size fits all solution. The end of TAGS will have a great impact on some families but very little on others.

As I said, the report gives the government a useful basis for discussion. We look forward to the discussion with the stakeholders in order to come up with a solution for the long term.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 6.42 p.m.)

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