



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 048 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 11, 2008

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 11, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1100)

[*English*]

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT

The House resumed from December 11, 2007 consideration of the motion that Bill C-474, An Act to require the development and implementation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy, the reporting of progress against a standard set of environmental indicators and the appointment of an independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development accountable to Parliament, and to adopt specific goals with respect to sustainable development in Canada, and to make consequential amendments to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

[*English*]

BILL C-474—NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on December 11, 2007, concerning the national sustainable development act, Bill C-474, standing in the name of the hon. member for Don Valley West, and its requirement for a royal recommendation. I wish to thank both the hon. parliamentary secretary as well as the member for Don Valley West for their submissions on this matter.

In his intervention, the hon. parliamentary secretary contended that the bill's provisions to establish a new and independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development would not only require new government spending but also represent a change in the conditions and qualifications of the royal recommendation that accompanied the 1995 amendments to the Auditor General Act.

[*Translation*]

He also contended that the establishment of a new Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was similar to the creation of a new government department and that such provisions needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation. He cited a ruling of July 11, 1988 when two report stage motions, the first of which proposed the establishment of a separate department of government and the second a separate commissioner of multiculturalism, were ruled out of order on the basis that they offended the royal recommendation which accompanied that bill.

Finally, citing a ruling of September 19, 2006 on the Development Assistance Accountability Act, Bill C-293, which concluded that a royal recommendation was required for the establishment of an advisory committee for international cooperation, the parliamentary secretary argued that the creation of an advisory council on sustainable development also requires a royal recommendation on the basis that it would result in the expenditure of public funds in a manner and for a purpose not currently authorized.

[*English*]

In his submission on January 31, 2008, the hon. member for Don Valley West conceded that the bill needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation. He indicated that he would work with other members at the committee stage to amend the bill in such a way that any impediments to its progress would be removed. The Chair wishes to commend the hon. member for his constructive approach.

In order to assist the House, the Chair has carefully reviewed the provisions contained in Bill C-474 to identify the provisions that caused concern regarding the royal recommendation while at the same time responding to the point of order raised by the hon. parliamentary secretary .

[*Translation*]

The appointment of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development is currently carried out under section 15.1 of the Auditor General Act. It states:

15.1(1) The Auditor General shall, in accordance with the Public Service Employment Act, appoint a senior officer to be called the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development who shall report directly to the Auditor General.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Bill C-474, on the other hand, would provide for the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to be appointed by the governor in council as an independent commissioner instead of being appointed by and reporting to the Auditor General. Although funds may have already been appropriated for the position of Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development under the Auditor General Act, the Chair agrees with the arguments put forward by the hon. parliamentary secretary to the effect that the provisions contained in Bill C-474 would clearly alter the conditions under which these appropriations were originally authorized.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Bill C-474 also proposes a new mandate for the commissioner. The current mandate is spelled out in section 21.1 of the Auditor General Act. It states: 21.1 The purpose of the Commissioner is to provide sustainable development monitoring and reporting on the progress of category 1 departments towards sustainable development—

[English]

Category I departments are defined in the act as any departments named in Schedule I of the Financial Administration Act, in the schedule to the Auditor General Act or identified by the governor in council under subsection 24(3).

However, clause 13 of Bill C-474 would modify the mandate of this new independent commissioner to require, namely, the development of “a national sustainability monitoring system to assess...the state of the Canadian environment, nationally and by province” as well as “...the national and provincial performance in meeting each sustainable development goal...” listed in the bill.

Goals listed in the bill include “generating genuine wealth, shifting to clean energy, producing healthy food and building sustainable cities”, to quote the bill.

[Translation]

As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* points out, on page 711:

A Royal Recommendation not only fixes the allowable charge, but also its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications.

[English]

The clause 13 requirements would impose additional functions on the commissioner that are substantially different from those foreseen in the current mandate. In the Chair's view, clause 13 thus alters the conditions set out in the original bill to which a royal recommendation was attached.

Finally, the hon. parliamentary secretary argued that the creation of the sustainable development advisory council provided for in Bill C-474 requires a royal recommendation since this would require the expenditure of public funds in a manner and for a purpose not currently authorized.

Clause 7 of the bill provides for the governor in council to appoint 25 representatives to the advisory council. Section 23 of the Interpretation Act makes it clear that the power to appoint includes

the power to pay. As the provision in Bill C-474 is such that the governor in council could choose to pay a salary to these representatives, this involves an appropriation of a part of the public revenue and should be accompanied by a royal recommendation. If the intention of the bill is that these representatives would not be paid, then this should be clearly expressed in the bill.

For all of these reasons, I will decline to put the question on third reading of this bill in its present form unless a royal recommendation is received.

However, debate is currently on the motion for second reading and this motion shall be put to a vote at the close of the second reading debate, of course in conformity with the Standing Orders of the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the House on the second reading of Bill C-474, the proposed National Sustainable Development Act.

As my colleagues have stated previously and as the government recently laid out in the Speech from the Throne, this government is clearly committed to improving environmental sustainability throughout this country.

We are implementing a very ambitious plan to cut greenhouse gases and to cut air pollution. For the first time ever, our government will be regulating the big industrial polluters. It took this government to take those steps to do that.

Among other measures, the government has taken action to protect water quality, which is so important to Canadians, including tough new regulations against the dumping of raw sewage as well as improving raw sewage treatment in municipalities and first nation communities across Canada. We are expanding our capacity to enforce our environmental laws. We are taking the environment very seriously.

We know that protecting and sustaining our natural environment is central to the quality of life of Canadians and this country, to our very prosperity and to the health and well-being of all Canadians. We have also been clear about our commitment to greater accountability in every step of government, especially in the environment, in advancing sustainable development.

When the former minister of the environment tabled the fourth round of sustainable development strategies in December 2007, she stated the need to take action to address the inaction of previous governments and to ensure that Canada become a leader in sustainable development.

Today, we already have the tools to do the job for Canada to become a leader in sustainable development. Canada is one of the very few countries in the world that has enshrined sustainable development in actual legislation. We are proud of that.

The Auditor General Act ensures that federal departments and agencies take action to advance sustainable development within their mandates. Each of these departments and agencies reports every year to Parliament on its progress. That is correct: every year.

The Auditor General Act also ensures that federal progress on the environment and sustainable development is monitored by the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

Over the past 10 years, the commissioner's reports have offered constructive criticism on governments' progress on sustainable development strategies. According to the reports, what has been lacking by past governments is simple: action.

However, that is changing under our Conservative government. Based on the commissioner's most recent report, this government has committed to undertake a thorough review of the current approach in order to achieve major improvements in sustainable development strategies. The commissioner is pleased with our commitment. We have agreed to complete our government-wide review by no later than October 2008.

Bill C-474, the proposed act before us today, does not create a more effective tool and is problematic for a number of reasons.

For example, the bill proposes to establish a role for the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development that is both unworkable and unnecessary. Let me outline a few of these issues.

First, Bill C-474 extends the authorities of the commissioner to that of both advocacy and audit, a clearly unworkable situation. The proposed bill, for example, states that the commissioner shall "provide advice and monitor progress in achieving sustainable development", as is stated in paragraph 13(4)(c).

It is very difficult to be viewed as a non-partisan body if that body both advises on policy and then subsequently audits its implementation. Such a body would be open to accusations of bias given that it would be auditing what it helped to create. It is a clear conflict of interest.

Indeed, in its recently released report, the green ribbon panel established by the Auditor General carefully circumscribed what the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development should advocate about. It warned against an advocacy role related to policy but supported advocacy on best practices and environmental management, which is exactly what we are arguing today.

• (1110)

This is an issue understood by the Office of the Auditor General. Its performance manual, in 2004, stated:

Special care is required when audit findings touch on government policy. As officers of Parliament, we do not want to be seen to be second-guessing the intentions of Parliament when it approves legislation, or of Cabinet when it selects a certain policy direction.

That is an important statement.

Second, Bill C-474 would extend the authority of the commissioner beyond that of federal jurisdiction to that of assessing the state of the environment by province and of reporting annually on

provincial performance in meeting sustainable development goals relative to the performance of other industrialized countries.

This is just the kind of interference in the jurisdiction of provinces and territories that has caused a number of wrangles, and, in the past, one in which we cannot be and should not be a party. A clear interference in provincial jurisdiction; something that the government stands well entrenched again.

Third, Bill C-474 proposes the creation of a commissioner of the environment and sustainable development and such government bodies as a cabinet committee, secretariat and advisory council. The creation of a cabinet committee is clearly the prerogative of the acting prime minister.

The creation of a commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, the secretariat and an advisory council would require, clearly, the government to spend money and, therefore, a royal recommendation would be required as you, Mr. Speaker, have recently ruled. These issues also, clearly, require much further study.

However, it is time to act. The government is taking proactive steps on the environment. Very clearly, this is a government of positive action for Canadians, getting positive results.

Fourth, Bill C-474 would unnecessarily deepen the authority of the commissioner with respect to the current petitions process.

Petitions are letters sent by Canadians to the Auditor General as a way to present their environmental concerns and questions to specific ministers of the federal government. Ministers are required to respond in writing within 120 days.

The commissioner concluded, in his 2007 report, that on balance the petitions process is a good news story. He noted:

Our retrospective study of petitions shows that petitioners value the process, which provides a forum for voicing their concerns and assures them of a formal response.

The commissioner also flagged that the volume and the complexity of petitions has increased significantly in recent years. The current approach to petitions, according to the commissioner himself, is working very well. Let us spend our efforts on what really does need our attention.

That is the proposal of this government: investment where it is necessary and where we are going to get positive results. We are currently taking steps to ensure that implementation of sustainable development is strengthened across the federal government.

As I mentioned earlier, a management review is currently under way that will draw on a decade of experience with the current approach and best practices internationally. That will identify clear means to improve the current approach.

That is what the government is looking forward to doing, and is doing on many other files.

Private Members' Business

In addition, the government has taken steps to ensure greater department accountability for the strategy process. The Federal Accountability Act, which we are all on this side of the House very proud of, ensures that deputy ministers are responsible before Parliament for their management responsibilities, and that includes departmental commitments to sustainable development.

We already have the legislative and regulatory authority to strengthen the sustainable development strategy process and to ensure accountability for Canadians. This government is taking positive steps for Canadians, and we are getting positive results.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to talk about Bill C-474, An Act to require the development and implementation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy, the reporting of progress against a standard set of environmental indicators and the appointment of an independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development accountable to Parliament, and to adopt specific goals with respect to sustainable development in Canada, and to make consequential amendments to another Act.

I would like to begin by expressing our support for Bill C-474, which was introduced by my Liberal colleague, who is also a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. We will vote in favour of the bill in principle. In essence, the bill has two main goals. First, it provides for a sustainable development strategy based on the precautionary principle. Second, it provides for the appointment of an independent commissioner of the environment and sustainable development with the Auditor General's office.

We support the bill's first goal, which would create a sustainable development strategy for Canada. One thing I really like about the bill is that it reminds us of the importance of applying the precautionary principle to every decision made by the federal government. This has not been the case in the past, as we have seen clearly in various environment and sustainable development committees, not to mention with the environment commissioner, in the ten years since I first came to this House.

This principle is recognized internationally and should apply to all sectors and federal departments. That is where the problem is now. On page 29 of her 2003 report, the environment commissioner reminded us that in terms of sustainable development, objectives and related performance expectations need to be clearer, more concrete, and more results-oriented.

Furthermore, results—especially outcomes—need to be more systematically measured. Performance reporting needs to be improved. That was a 2003 report.

I know that the Liberals are introducing this bill today, but the commissioners' reports show that the previous government did not implement a sustainable development strategy. Today, in this House, they can very well brag about introducing a bill on a sustainable development strategy, but there were a number of shortcomings in terms of sustainable development with the previous government.

Once again, these shortcomings were revealed in the report by the Commissioner of the Environment in 2007. On page 39, she said:

In half of the strategies we examined this year, the targets are neither time-bound nor expressed in measurable terms. Most do not refer to a clear deliverable, and the frequent use of words like "promote" and "facilitate" renders many commitments unclear, along with the departments' level of responsibility for accomplishing them.

Neither the previous Liberal government nor the current Conservative government have implemented adequate measures to ensure that sustainable development underlies each federal plan, policy and program. This is the other subject I want to discuss today.

The federal government has a useful tool at its disposal, which is the strategic environmental assessment. This is a useful tool as part of a sustainable development strategy but it has never been implemented here in Canada. For more than 25 years, the Prime Minister's Office has directed that every federal government policy, plan, program and bill—from every department—must be subject to an environmental assessment. These assessments should not be left to just the promoters. They must also be the rule in all federal departments.

• (1120)

It is clear that neither this government nor the previous one ever applied strategic environmental assessment with any real diligence. In fact, a few years ago, in 2004, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development titled a chapter in one of her reports "Greening the tax system: Finance Canada dragging its feet".

In chapter 4 of that report, Ms. Gélinas noted that the federal government could not assure the public that the environmental impacts of new plans, policies or programs bound for Cabinet approval would be assessed systematically. Again using the example of Finance Canada, the commissioner referred to government Bill C-48, which was passed and would eventually entail yearly expenditures of \$260 million primarily benefiting the oil and gas industry. Finance Canada never conducted a strategic environmental assessment on that bill, even though such an assessment is a key component of the department's sustainable development strategy.

I find it ironic that, on the government side, the member who spoke on a sustainable development strategy this morning was our friend from Fort McMurray—Athabasca. That is where the growth in tar sands oil production will be the highest, yet the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca is the one lecturing us about a sustainable development strategy. This goes to show how much the federal government, and this Conservative government in particular, cares about a sustainable development strategy.

I would also like to talk about interference in the provinces' jurisdictions. We support the bill in principle, because it emphasizes applying the precautionary principle by adopting sustainable development strategies, which must be specific to each department. However, Bill C-474 involves a great deal of interference in the provinces' jurisdictions.

A few years ago, Quebec adopted its own sustainable development strategy and appointed its own commissioner of the environment. We are wondering why this bill sets clear medium- and long-term targets in a series of areas. I will give a couple of examples.

Is it the federal government's job to set recycling targets for the provinces and especially for municipalities? Is it the federal government's job to develop a water consumption strategy? I do not think so.

In Quebec especially, we have proven that our water quality is among the best and that we are able to put in place sustainable development strategies based on the precautionary principle. In addition, our environment commissioner has an international reputation. Harvey Mead works as an independent government watchdog to make sure the Government of Quebec is not tempted to ignore the principles of sustainable development, which seek to build a cohesive society through economic, social and environmental development.

In conclusion, we will support Bill C-474 because we believe that each department must have a sustainable development strategy that incorporates the precautionary principle. We also support the appointment of an independent commissioner, as we have often stated in committee. We believe that this commissioner must be independent and must have similar powers to the Commissioner of Official Languages or the Privacy Commissioner. But it is clear that if this bill is referred to committee, we will have no choice but to amend it.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill, which proposes the national sustainable development act, put forward by my colleague from Don Valley West, is an idea whose time has truly come.

We are struggling as a nation, under a new government, to assert the proper integration of the environment, the economy and the social well-being in Canada. This is a struggle that transcends Canada as a single nation state. It is a struggle that the planet is trying to achieve in terms of making progress and moving forward.

Sustainable development for many Canadians is a conundrum. It is a mystery. What do we mean by sustainable development, some might say. In fact, many argue against moving forward in a coherent way, as is proposed by my colleague, because it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to define what sustainable development means.

Sustainable development is not a destination. It is a direction for the way in which we order our affairs in Canada and around the world. It is a direction that looks to this proper integration of the economy, the way we operate in the free market, environmental

integrity and, of course, the social well-being that flows from that appropriate integration.

Sustainable development is a little bit like 50,000 pieces of a puzzle in a puzzle box without a cover picture on the box. Slowly, if we do this right, under a national sustainable development act, we will assemble 50 to 100 to 250 pieces of the puzzle at a time and we will slowly craft a new picture for the future, an idea, as I say, whose time has truly come.

Only a few countries in the world actually have a commissioner for sustainable development and the environment. Our government was perspicacious. It was wise to create this position in Canada in the Auditor General's office.

I am disappointed in the government's conduct around the motion that was passed through committee by all parties but the Conservatives to make truly independent the commissioner for the environment and sustainable development and strengthen that office. However, that is another matter, on which we just heard a ruling from the Speaker, and I am sure will continue to be debated in committee.

There are core principles in the notion of sustainable development. The fact that we cannot necessarily describe what it looks like, what the picture looks like, does not mean that is an excuse for inaction. We know about the precautionary principle, which is increasingly informing our legislation in this country. We understand the polluter pays principle. Many of these principles have been codified through practice, and that is a very good thing.

When it comes to the notion of sustainable development and the strategies in the federal government, which the government is required to prepare, 24 to 25 or 26 line departments and a smattering of agencies, boards and commissions and occasionally crown corporations that prepare these strategies every two years, there are eight cross-cutting themes that cut right across all of these strategies.

However, one of the challenges the government has not addressed whatsoever is the true accountability for performance under these strategies, which is why I so strongly support the bill put forward by my colleague from Don Valley West. In part, one of the things the act would do is ground, locate and make responsible in the very centre of the federal administration, from a machinery of government reform perspective, it would very critically establish a sustainable development secretariat within the Privy Council office.

That is where the buck stops. That is the Prime Minister's own personal department to backstop his political office, the Prime Minister's Office. If there were such a secretariat within the Privy Council office, it would help integrate all these strategies across all the line departments and make them more robust and more accountable for their performance and it would them all together with quantifiable and measurable goals.

• (1130)

The bill also deals with things like making Canada a world leader in living sustainably, reducing our air pollution, changing our production consumption patterns, dealing with water stewardship, which is a critical issue for the future, and the kinds of cities in which we will live as quality of life becomes the defining factor for attracting capital now in our cities.

Private Members' Business

All those questions are neatly tied into the bill put forward by my colleague. For the first time in recent Canadian history, we see a bill that is something we ought to be moving aggressively with as a Parliament going forward.

I am disappointed that the government, in its own approach to the machinery of government issues around sustainable development, appears to be backing off. For example, the national round table on the environment and the economy, which I used to run, ought to be reporting, as it is structured, directly to the Prime Minister and the Privy Council office. Unfortunately, after nine years of such reporting functions, the Prime Minister in his wisdom has decided to shift the national round table out of his office and put it over into the line department called Environment Canada.

Some people would say that seems to be coherent. In fact, it is completely incoherent because it sends a signal to Canada that environmental issues are marginalized issues, that sustainable development issues are only about the environment when they are not. What we are looking to do here through this bill is to fully integrate into our federal government, the nation state, a new approach which integrates right across all the line departments.

In a perfect world, we may not have an environment department in due course because these issues would be treated, as they should be, in each line department at the right level and in the right way. Transport Canada and Agriculture Canada ought to be examining these questions and issues.

Taking this agency and pushing it over and marginalizing it with the Minister of the Environment is in fact a step backwards. We are looking for more integration, not less.

Those are some of the features of the bill that I think Canadians should be aware of that are particularly positive as we look to lead the world.

We have lots to learn. The United Kingdom and Sweden, for example, by law require the production of a national sustainable development strategy with clear goals and objective reporting. Our previous government did two things that would strongly support and buttress this act. We developed eco-efficiency metrics. These are measurements, such as energy intensity measurements, water intensity measurements and materials intensity measurements. We devised these as a previous government with the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants so they could be measurable both in public and in private sectors in those settings.

Second, our previous government designed new environment and sustainable development indicators which ought to be used alongside this bill, this new approach, for national reporting. We would know then how well we were doing as a nation state, how well we were doing when it comes to air quality, water quality or the extent of wetlands in Canada or forest cover.

This is all available, shrink-wrapped as they say, on the shelf for the government to use. Unfortunately, both of those initiatives dealing with eco-efficiency metrics and the environment and sustainable development indicators have been thrown out by the government as it continues to marginalize environmental issues in a line department, while grossly underfunding it.

Those are some of my comments. I am looking forward to seeing this bill arrive in committee. It is an idea whose time has come. I appreciate the fact that this would require a cabinet committee with a constant, unwavering focus on a sustainable development strategy. It reminds me of those folks who golf and who sometimes yell at the golf ball and ask it to sit down on the green somewhere. It is time for sustainable development to sit down on the green and the logical place for it is in PCO, something contemplated in this bill.

I strongly congratulate my colleague from Don Valley West for a terrific and very positive piece of work.

• (1135)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak to the bill put forward by the hon. member for Don Valley West.

I first want to put on the record that the Conservative government believes in sustainable development. We do not just give lip service to it. We have taken some real action in the areas of water, air quality and climate change, which is why we are implementing comprehensive regulations of industrial air emissions. For the first time ever, we will be regulating the big polluters so they do their part as well.

As I said, we are taking action on protecting the water quality across our country, including tough new regulations against the dumping of raw sewage into our lakes, rivers and oceans, and by improving sewage treatment in municipalities. I was kind of taken aback when I realized that we did not have laws in place in respect to that already. It just makes a lot of sense. I think most of the public would be quite appalled or taken aback if they knew that we did not already have laws in place, that 13 long years of Liberal governments had not put something in place or previous governments before that.

Now we are doing that. We also are regulating chemicals that are harmful to human health and to the environment. Our approach to toxic chemicals management leads the world.

It does not end there. We have done our best in terms of protecting Canada's natural heritage. In terms of those protected areas, major expansion is occurring as well.

We are also working on a new approach to sustainable development planning in Canada that builds upon the existing legislative framework, the framework that we already have. Indeed, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development has already made the point that significant improvements to the current process can be made within the existing legislative framework and with the existing tools that we have. All it really takes is the will to act and to move ahead on it.

Private Members' Business

When our Conservative government came into office, federal departments had started into the preparatory process for the fourth round of sustainable development strategies. The government acted to make immediate improvements where possible. The Minister of the Environment, in tabling the fourth round of sustainable development strategies, was clear that there was a lot more to be done in advance of the next round.

This Conservative government recognizes that what is needed is action, not more legislation, more paper and so on, and certainly not more time and money spent on government processes.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and others have recognized Canada's current legislative tool as having a great deal of merit, even if it has suffered from some challenges in terms of its implementation.

It would be shortsighted to repeal what has the potential to be a real contribution to the federal planning process prior to completing a thorough analysis of it to determine how it might be better implemented. We have the tools needed to make substantial improvements for sustainable development and that is fully what we intend to be doing.

The proposed Liberal private member's bill that is before us today is unnecessary and it is problematic on a number of levels. Some of those have been sketched out already but I will draw members' attention to a few more.

First, the scope of the bill is unclear. Although it is called the national sustainable development act, the stated purpose of the legislation is to "...accelerate the elimination of major environmental problems and make environmental decision-making more transparent...".

I am certain that my colleague is fully aware of the fact that the environment and sustainable development are not one and the same. They are not synonymous. To be sure, they are mutually exclusive, but there are some different facets involved.

Second, the bill calls for the government to enshrine a set of sustainable development goals in legislation. The legislation itself, however, contains two rather different sets of sustainable development goals. One is in the text of the bill and another one is in a schedule appended to the bill, the latter of which includes some vague goals that are outside the stated purpose of the bill, as in the preface, one of those being creating genuine wealth.

Third, the bill states in its title that progress would be reported in "against a standard set of environmental indicators". However, those indicators are not mentioned anywhere in the bill, nor is there any mechanism noted for the development of those environmental indicators.

• (1140)

Furthermore, one of the sets of goals in the bill includes goals that are not environmental in nature. If the legislation really does mean for there to be environmental indicators, exactly how non-environmental goals can be measured against a set of environmental indicators is rather unclear.

A fourth point is that clause 13 of the bill calls for the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development to report on the state of the Canadian environment nationally and also by province and to report on progress in meeting each of the listed sustainable development goals nationally and by province on an annual basis relative to the performance of other industrialized nations.

What is troubling about this part is that the bill implicates the provinces in terms of reporting on both the state of the environment and on their progress in achieving the sustainable development goals. However, the bill does not provide for any tools to engage them in acting on the goals, such as by providing new resources, nor on the results of any report findings. This is quite unworkable and amounts to a recipe for conflict with the provinces and our territories.

Fifth, the timeframes associated with this piece of legislation are wholly unworkable. The government would be thrust into an ineffective cycle of continuous planning and preparing with no time left for implementation before the cycle would repeat itself again. The Conservative government believes in action, not just planning for action as the Liberals have sometimes done.

One of the most outstanding examples is in clause 10 which states:

Within 30 days after a National Sustainable Development Strategy is tabled in each House of Parliament, the Minister shall make regulations prescribing the targets and the caps referred to in the National Sustainable Development Strategy and revoke any regulations prescribing targets and caps referred to in the National Sustainable Development Strategy that was tabled previously.

Anyone familiar with the regulatory process, as the member no doubt is, knows that this is completely unworkable. Good pieces of legislation take time to prepare. There are notices and there are various things in that process. They require true and genuine consultations with the stakeholders. They are not something that can be drafted in just a matter of days.

A sixth problem with the bill before us today is that the process outlined for consultation in the bill in reference to the development of the national sustainable development strategy is ineffectual and unnecessarily onerous. It calls for consultations only once a draft of the strategy has already been written. Every guide to meaningful consultations will tell us that consultations need to be started early, well before the approach is decided upon in respect to what we are going to do.

The approach outlined in the legislation before us today only brings in consultations late in the process. It requires an onerous level of ministerial involvement and response, and is a staggering waste of time and resources for an uncertain result.

Regarding the ministerial duty to make regulations, this piece of legislation is highly and unnecessarily prescriptive. It enacts upon the minister a number of duties, leaving no room for ministerial discretion. It is unproductive and does not enable the minister to make effective improvements to the sustainable development planning process. Therefore, such rigidity is a hindrance to the process, not a help.

Private Members' Business

In summary, the bill is unnecessary. Its scope and its intent are unclear. The authorities and processes it describes are not thoughtful and not thought out in a clear and deliberate way.

What is needed to make progress on sustainability is not new legislation. It is the ability to set national federal level objectives in a reasonable manner and within workable timeframes, and to have a clear mechanism for measuring the government's progress. We can do that under existing legislation and with existing tools.

This Conservative government is committed to sustainable development. That is why we are taking concrete action to make improvements rather than spending time and resources on instituting new and unnecessary legislative processes. That is why we will not be supporting the bill. We feel it is flawed on a number of points as we have outlined here.

• (1145)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is critically important that we deal with the issue of having sustainable development. If Canada continues in the way it has been proceeding in the last 30 years, the climate change and greenhouse gas emissions will go sky high.

In the last 20 to 30 years there has been a dramatic increase of greenhouse gas emissions. We have heard a lot of empty promises. I recall in 1993 in the former Liberal government's road map, the red book, there was a promise to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2000. Of course, that did not happen. They went up by 25% instead of going down by 20%. We have lost a lot of time. However, that does not mean we should not take action on the environmental file.

We absolutely have to deal with the oil sands development. We have to look at putting a moratorium on oil sands development so that we can control our greenhouse gas emissions.

It would be totally unfair if our generation and the Conservative government did not take action on the environmental file, because we would leave a terrible environmental legacy for future generations. It would not be fair to our young people in Canada and elsewhere on the planet.

We have to deal with the oil sands development, because the majority of greenhouse gas emissions comes from that development, but we also have to deal with the whole question of the building code.

For years many provinces have been saying that it is really important for Canada to take a leadership role and define what is sustainable development.

In my riding in downtown Toronto a lot of condominiums are being built. Often ordinary Canadians, the folks downtown, ask why these new developments are not state of the art, and energy efficient. They want to know why are we continuing to build buildings that are not energy efficient and why we are not putting in solar panels or wind devices to capture solar and wind energy. The building code is a provincial jurisdiction. If we were to raise the point of energy efficient buildings with the territorial and provincial governments, they would say it is not being done because the federal government

has not determined the guidelines for a green building, a building that is energy efficient.

There is a tremendous amount of buck passing between different levels of government. As a result any of the new housing that is being built is not necessarily energy efficient. There is a great deal of concern and desire among ordinary Canadians to live in buildings that are energy efficient.

There has been a lot of discussion regarding targets and goals. Instead of focusing on this bill, I want to talk about how we can lock the Bali targets into what the government does.

We need to have 80% reduction below the 1990 levels by 2050. We have to develop medium term targets of 25% below the 2020 targets. The world came together at the Bali conference and said that has to be done. We have to find ways to lock the government in, but this bill does not do that, unfortunately.

• (1150)

There is another private member's bill, Bill C-377. I hope the House will debate that bill because it certainly would lock in the government with specific targets.

With respect to targets and transparency, it is important to have a reporting mechanism. A progress report is needed every five years on how the government is performing. Within six months of a bill being passed it is really important that a road map be established. Also, if the government does not meet the targets we have to ensure there are offences and penalties in place. The other aspect that is very important is that there be regular reviews. There need to be independent outside coordinators to say that the government is performing and is on the right track so that the people of Canada know that the government is taking the right route to deal with greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to talk briefly about the importance of sustainable development. I certainly hope that the government focuses on the environment as one of its prime priorities.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing the commentary of the hon. member for Don Valley West on a very important bill, An Act to require the development and implementation of a national sustainable development strategy, the reporting of progress against a standard set of environmental indicators and the appointment of an independent commissioner of the environment and sustainable development accountable to Parliament, and to adopt specific goals with respect to sustainable development in Canada.

Recently the polling firm POLLARA asked Canadians what their priorities were, what were the most important things on their minds in terms of what the Government of Canada and Parliament should address. It came as no surprise that the issue of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions were the top issues to be addressed.

Throughout the debate so far, it is very clear that all parties, except the government, support the proposed legislation. The government continues along the same kind of approach toward climate change issues as it did when Kyoto was the big topic of discussion.

Private Members' Business

I remind the House that our international commitment to achieve targets within certain timeframes was opposed by the government. In fact, it described Kyoto as a money sucking socialist plot. That is the starting point of the Government of Canada with regard to climate change, that it is some sort of a plot to somehow deal with the economic implications to deal with climate change and how it might impact what the government really has in mind.

The government wants the economic benefits to continue to operate at the same and more intense levels than we have today. I must admit it did not surprise me that one of its proposals was to allow the petroleum industry to continue to produce its products at the same level of intensity that created greenhouse gases. There was no reduction. It could continue to increase as long as the net intensity was not greater than today. That is basically a policy of, "Let's do more of nothing. Whatever we have today is acceptable".

All the science before Canadians is very clear. We have a problem and it has to be addressed, not simply left to the next generation to try to deal with the consequences of the failure of the government to address climate change issues. This is the real issue.

Look at the record. Look at what the government has done or what it has not done with regard to climate change. Virtually every program introduced by the previous Liberal government has been cancelled by the current government. Why? Because it does not want any impact on the economy.

The whole concept of having sustainable economic development calls on Canadians, business and individuals, to do their share. It means that when we do things within business and industry, we have to ensure not only do we not make it worse, but we make it better. We have to show progress.

It is not good enough to say that some time in 2050 we will hit some target. I doubt anybody who is currently in the House will still be here come 2050. This is passing off some sort of an undertaking to someone else. It is very clear that by 2050 the trend line we are on right now will have enormous consequences. If we look at poverty groups, like Make Poverty History, they will talk about the implications of not addressing climate change on the international scene.

• (1155)

The economic impacts of doing nothing are going to be much greater than anyone can imagine. It is going to exacerbate the economic deprivation of many countries around the world. It is going to take away important land that people need to earn livelihood.

Canadians have been asked, through established programs, to do their share. If members are interested, they should go to a website called www.carbonfootprint.com, which is a very important site. It gives tips to Canadians as to some of things they can do to make a contribution toward reducing CO₂ emissions. It shows line by line the monthly reduction of CO₂ emissions if we do certain things, like getting a tune-up for our cars or buying energy efficient appliances. I think there are at least a dozen or so examples of what each and every Canadian can do.

Canadians are doing that and they are prepared to do it. They are prepared to buy energy efficient automobiles if the government

would only get it straight as to what the feebates schedule should be. The Conservatives raise programs and suggestions, but never have a plan to follow it through.

I raise these things because the bill has articulated, in a very clear fashion, the extreme importance for us to have a long term sustainable development strategy. It means that we ensure we leave a situation better than when we got it, and to date we have not. To date, we need to have a plan.

Bill C-474 would provide a framework in which Canadians can have some confidence. It would provide us with the feedback mechanism we need, the reporting relationship to Canadians that we have made responsible decisions, taken responsible action and that we have the measurement systems in place to show the progress to Canadians. We need to deliver. It is not enough to talk. The time now is for action, and it is simply not happening.

It is really unfortunate that the government does not want to embrace a commitment to having a national strategy in which Canadians can feel confident. This is very unfortunate for Canada today and tomorrow.

• (1200)

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues who have supported the bill and also the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and the member for Trinity—Spadina for their support. It is quite appropriate that the member for Mississauga South, being an accountant, should be so supportive of something which demands greater accountability.

I thank everybody for participating in the debate and I look forward to meeting people in committee as we get into the fine details.

I will begin with the remarks made by the Speaker on the question of royal recommendation. As I indicated in a reply to him previously, we recognize the difficulty of the royal recommendation in establishing an independent commissioner right now. We support the principle of doing that, but we think this is mostly about a national sustainable development act. Therefore, we will use the existing office of the Commissioner of the Environment and the existing mandate.

We will also no longer require the commissioner to evaluate, in advance, the likelihood of success. We think there is a fair criticism there and we would be better off having the commissioner monitor and then audit the success of a plan developed by the government as envisaged under the bill.

Also, I want to make the point about the advisory committee on sustainable development. We will make it clear that these positions are non-remunerative. Hence, we will avoid the necessity for royal recommendation.

Government Orders

In response to a criticism made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, he says that all the problems can be solved by the existing situation. However, the previous minister of the environment and the current Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment both have been vehement in their criticism of the current arrangement calling for change, and that is what the bill would do.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie raised some problems having to do with provincial jurisdictions.

[*English*]

We will eliminate references to the provinces in the legislation to make it clear that this will be about federal departments and about a national plan.

The cabinet committee, which was referred to by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, does not require royal recommendation. It was never suggested so by the Speaker and his officials. It is a machinery of government issue where there are existing resources.

On the question about the petitions process, we agree that we do not need the section on the petitions process because the existing petitions process will work. Therefore, we recognize that problem and we will remediate through amendments at the committee stage.

Finally, in terms of the suggestion that everything is just fine and that a review by the environment department will solve the problem, this is what the green ribbon panel review committee said, about the very problem we are addressing here, in the report just released within the last month:

This decentralized, department-by-department approach to sustainable development strategies is unique internationally. Many countries have developed national sustainable development strategies and then assigned responsibility to departments for implementing the components.

Over the years, the Government of Canada has made a number of commitments to develop an overall sustainable development strategy, but has not done so. Many of the people we talked with—inside and outside government—view the absence of an overall strategy as a key gap in Canada's efforts to move along a sustainable development path. And the absence of concrete objectives and milestones makes the assessment of progress—a key part of the Commissioner's mandate—more difficult.

In this legislation we are simply responding to the criticism of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, responding to the criticism of the previous minister of the environment, responding to the criticism of the commissioner himself and responding to the criticism of the green ribbon panel.

What we will be doing, within the appropriate scope of a private member's bill, is addressing all these issues. We will eliminate some of the problems, thanking very much both the government for its suggestions and the Speaker, but we will accelerate the process of coming to grips with a real problem, which is there is no legislative framework that allows the commissioner to do the job and the Government of Canada truly to pursue a national sustainable development strategy.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 13, 2008, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME LEGISLATION

Hon. Gerry Ritz (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform) moved:

That, given the Government has declared the passage of Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as a matter of confidence, and, that the bill has already been at the Senate longer than all stages took in the House of Commons, and that all aspects of this bill have already been the subject of extensive committee hearings in Parliament, and that in the opinion of this House, the Senate majority is not providing appropriate priority to the passage of Bill C-2, a message be sent to the Senate calling on the Senate to pass Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, by March 1, 2008.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin this debate in the House of Commons and I am grateful to my colleague, the leader of the government in the House of Commons, the Minister for Democratic Reform, for making this a priority and sending a very clear message on a very important piece of legislation of this government.

To indicate just how important this is, let me reiterate something that I said in the House of Commons when Bill C-2 was introduced for second and third readings. I indicated to the House at that time that the government considered tackling violent crime and the provisions of that particular act so important, that if there were any attempt to sabotage that, derail it or gut that bill, we would consider it a confidence motion.

Government Orders

Again, I was pleased that it passed the House of Commons in November of last year, and then it was on its way to the Senate. Interestingly enough, there were a number of people whom I ran into at the Christmas break who said, "Congratulations, you got your bill through. You must be very happy". I said, "Well, it has gotten through the House of Commons. It has not gotten through the Senate yet. That is not quite the same thing".

Nonetheless, I remained optimistic. I want to see the bill passed. We got to January of 2008 and the bill had been in the Senate since the end of November.

One of the things that got me very nervous was when the Liberal Premier of Ontario, Mr. Dalton McGuinty, approached the Leader of the Opposition and indicated to him that he wanted to see this passed because this was good for the province of Ontario, this kind of thing had support in the province of Ontario, just as it had support right across this country.

When the Leader of the Opposition sort of hummed and hawed, and he was not sure about mandatory jail terms for people who commit serious gun crimes, that is when I started to get very nervous because I had this feeling that the Leader of the Opposition might get the Senate to do the dirty work that he did not want to do in the House of Commons, and I think that is very wrong.

I was prepared the week before last and was scheduled to go before the Senate committee to address the issues, then my appearance before the committee was cancelled. The committee said it could wait an extra week, so I went last Wednesday, but I made it very clear to the committee members that these issues had been around for a long time and that these were important issues for Canadians.

I was quite frank with them, as they were with me. I indicated to them that if this bill could not be passed by the end of this month, if they could not expedite this, if they could not fast-track this bill to get it done by the end of February, that I believed I had no choice except to advise the Prime Minister that I thought this to be a confidence measure and I would leave it in his capable hands.

We have not received the kind of help that we would have liked from the Liberals in the House of Commons, and we are not getting it right now from the Liberals in the Senate, and that is too bad because I think I have been very honest about this bill.

The components of this bill have been before the Senate before. The provisions that would protect 14 and 15 year olds from adult sexual predators have already been before the Senate. I remember when it did not get passed by the Senate last June. I remember speaking to a reporter in my hometown of Niagara Falls and I said I was disappointed that 14 and 15 year olds were not as well protected as they should be from adult sexual predators because this bill did not get past the Senate.

That was in the summer of 2007 and when I went home for Christmas, again the provisions that protect 14 and 15 year olds that are in the tackling violent crime bill were in the Senate, so I had to say the same thing over again, that 14 and 15 year olds were not as well protected in this country as they should be. That is a shame.

Now I hear the humming and hawing from the Leader of the Opposition to his colleague, the Liberal Premier of Ontario. The man is not in the business of trying to help us get our legislation through. He has his own agenda, but is there anybody in this country who thinks that the Liberal Premier of Ontario is intervening just to help out the federal Conservatives? I do not think so. He is doing it because it is the right thing to do.

● (1210)

I say to members of the Liberal Party that they do not have to listen to me. We have made it very clear, the importance we place on this. The Liberals should listen to some of their colleagues. Mr. Chomiak, the Attorney General of Manitoba, has told me on a number of occasions how important these provisions are to him. He has made it very clear. We do not share the same political party, but we share some of the concerns about crime in this country.

As I have said to members of the opposition, fighting crime is not something that takes place when there is a disaster or a murder on the streets of some of our largest cities. That is not when we wake up to the tackling violent crime agenda. It is not something that can just wait until the election comes. We get all kind of support during the election when everybody wants to be tough on crime. I say be tough on crime between elections. That is what I want to see. We should stand up for law-abiding Canadians, for victims, between elections.

That is what I am asking members to do and this is why I am so pleased that my colleague, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, has introduced this very important issue.

We have been very clear throughout this process. We made it a priority since the beginning of 2006. In the very first Speech from the Throne that we presented to Parliament, we said that tackling violent crime was our priority and that victims come first. We want Canadians to know that there are a group of individuals in Parliament who stand up for law-abiding Canadians because people are worried about their communities, worried about safe streets, and worried about the sometimes forgotten individual when crimes take place.

I was very pleased and very proud to introduce the first federal ombudsman for the victims of crime. My colleagues joined with me and others in our government in pushing that initiative. Why? Because there is somebody who speaks for everybody in this town. There are more special interest groups than any of us could count, but my colleagues asked, who is here to stand up for victims of crime, who is that individual, where is he or she?

That office did not exist until this Conservative government created the first office of the ombudsman for the victims of crime and appointed the first ombudsman. That is a tremendous step forward in standing up for those sometimes forgotten individuals.

Government Orders

I believe that Canadians do support the approach that the federal Conservatives are taking, that our government is taking. I have found it more than just passing interesting that within the last week there was a CTV strategic council poll that said that an overwhelming majority of Canadians believed Canada's justice system was too lenient on repeat offenders. This reiterates and underscores what we have been saying on this side of the House, that we have to have a criminal justice system that responds to the legitimate concerns of Canadians.

I indicated when I began my remarks, that the Liberal Premier of Ontario supports us. Mr. Chomiak, the Attorney General from the New Democratic Party in Manitoba supports what we are doing. We have had very good support from the N.S. justice minister, Mr. Murray Scott and his successor. He is very supportive of what we are trying to do. Indeed, right across this country, we have people at the provincial level who have spoken up and who are very interested in seeing legislation of this type passed.

There are many components of the tackling violent crime act, but other individual groups have come forward as well. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, MADD, has come forward. It wants to see the bill passed and become law. The Canadian Police Association, Ottawa Police, the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, the Centre for Substance Abuse Awareness, thousands of Canadians right across this country have written expressing their opinions that they want to see the bill passed.

We are not asking Parliament to do anything that Parliament has not had the opportunity to have a look at in depth. I have pointed out on a number of occasions that every single component of the bill has been before Parliament since 2006, never mind 2007. Every single component of this has been before Parliament since 2006.

• (1215)

The mandatory prison terms for serious gun crimes was one of the first pieces of legislation we introduced. On the age of protection, we recommended changes in 2006. The provisions with respect to dangerous offenders, the impaired driving provisions and the reverse onus on bail for serious gun crimes are all elements that have been before Parliament for quite some time.

This is not something new. People say we are trying to push this through. We are not trying to get the thing through in a hurry. It has been here a long time, too long. This should be the law of the country.

When people ask me why we put it all together, I say it is very simple. We did not get it passed when we had it in five different components. Half of the provisions ended up in the Senate and were lost. Nothing happened. The Senate went home for the summer and these things did not get passed, I think to the detriment of Canadians, and the other couple of bills were here in the House of Commons.

In the fall of 2007, since we did not get any of the five pieces of legislation done, I said, "Let us put them all together and see what our chances are". We underscored the importance of this to our government by indicating that we would consider it a confidence measure if there were any attempt to sabotage the bill.

What is it that we have? What are we asking Canadians to accept? Indeed, Canadians are buying into it, but what are we asking the

House of Commons and the Senate to accept? Let us have a look at some of the things we are saying.

For illegal firearm possession and use by persons involved in criminal gangs, we know that type of activity is increasing. We are saying there will be a mandatory five year sentence if one is in the business of using a gun or associated with gangs. What kind of offences are we talking about? We are talking about attempted murder, sexual assault with a gun, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, robbery, extortion and hostage taking. This is not jaywalking.

I remember standing here when we introduced the bill. I had one opposition member say to me that he did not understand that a lot of the people who commit those crimes do not understand the consequences of their actions. I said, "that is where I want to help".

We want to ensure that any individuals who want to get involved with these serious firearms offences will have the opportunity to focus on the consequences of their actions. We are prepared to do that and any individual who does not get the message after the first five year sentence, we will continue to help by making it a seven year mandatory prison term. This is exactly what the country wants and what the country focuses on.

We hear it when people pick up a paper and read about a drive-by shooting in one of our major cities. They start calling for this type of legislation. I tell them the same thing, that it is already here before the House of Commons and the Parliament of Canada. Our job is to get it passed and that is what we are asking this Parliament to do.

We are going to strengthen the bail provisions with respect to gun offences. We are putting the onus on those alleged criminals to show that they do not pose a threat to public safety and that they will not flee before trial.

Why is it necessary? There are a number of reasons. I think it is only a matter of fairness. If someone wants to get involved with some serious gun crimes, if a person has a pattern of being involved with serious gun crimes, if a person is involved with guns and gangs, particularly in our major cities, what is wrong with putting the onus on such a person to show why he or she should be back out on the street?

There is an interesting product of this particular provision. I have had police officers in both Montreal and Toronto, as well as other law enforcement agencies, who have mentioned something very interesting about that provision. They tell me that this would send out the right message. They say that if individuals who have a pattern of gang-related or serious gun crime offences, if they are back out on the street in a couple of hours, guess what?

Government Orders

•(1220)

That sends out the exact wrong message to the victim. It sends out the wrong message to potential witnesses. Indeed, if that individual is back out on the street, it sends out the wrong message to the neighbourhood. This provision is exactly what we need and it is what this country wants. We are determined to provide it.

I indicated as I began my opening remarks, as I have mentioned on a number of occasions, that one of the important provisions of this bill is that it will raise the age of protection in this country from 14 to 16. Canadians ask why this not been done. I tell people quite honestly that this is not something out of the 20th century; this is something that should have been changed in the 19th century.

That is how long this has been around, and what happens is that it allows adult sexual predators to prey upon individuals as young as 14 and 15 years of age. That is absolutely reprehensible. It is exactly what our party has to take a stand against. That is exactly what we are doing here.

One police officer gave me an example. He told me that they had encountered some character from Texas, about 40 years old, who struck up a correspondence by email with a 14 year old. He comes to Canada and has sexual relations with a 14 year old and the police cannot do anything about it. They cannot do anything.

I have had police officers ask me what they are supposed to tell parents when their 14 year old or 15 year old is being victimized by some of these predators. It is cold comfort to say to parents that we are sorry, it is not the law of Canada and these predators can do that in Canada. That is absolutely wrong and we are absolutely determined to change that.

I appeared before the Senate last Wednesday. I can tell members about some of the feedback I received. Someone said that this would drive youth prostitution underground. I did not know what that was all about. Another point was that this would discourage young people from reporting sexually transmitted diseases. I have no idea where that is coming from.

We are talking about protecting 14 year olds and 15 year olds from sexual predators. This is exactly the kind of law this country should have.

There also are provisions to tighten up and improve Canada's impaired driving laws, providing the framework for the drug recognition expert program to be effective.

An hon. member: C'est bon.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: My colleague says "bon". Yes, you bet.

This is exactly why MADD Canada has come forward and is urging us to get this passed. Again, we are not talking about people who are employed by the Conservative Party. These people are dedicated to the best interests of this country. They have come forward and have asked us to please get these things through. There are improvements there.

There also are improvements to the dangerous offender legislation. How often do we hear about some individual who clearly should have been labelled a dangerous offender, who does not get

that designation, for whatever reason, and who gets back out on the street and is then charged with additional crimes?

Then the cry goes out as to why the government is not tightening up the dangerous offender legislation. We have done that here. That is what Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, does. It does that specifically. It responds to the concerns of Canadians with respect to dangerous offenders.

I think that what we are asking this Parliament to do is infinitely reasonable. As I said, Parliament has had these provisions, all of them, since 2006. We have listened to some of the concerns from the opposition parties. We have made changes to the components of this legislation as it was originally introduced in the House of Commons. We are simply asking Parliament to do something that is reasonable.

At one time the members of the Liberal Party said they would like to fast track justice legislation. That is great. They can get hold of their friends down the aisle and tell them to fast track it, to get it done by the end of February. That is not unreasonable. Let them do it. Let us get it done.

I am absolutely convinced that the people of Canada support what we are trying to do to fight violent crime in this country. My colleagues have made it clear that if the opposition parties, or anybody else, want to make this an issue, go to the Canadian people and say that their soft on crime approach and their delays on these things are justifiable, they can make that case to the people of Canada.

•(1225)

However, I am absolutely convinced that if given the opportunity the people of this country will support what we are doing as a party and as a government, because I firmly believe, and I always have believed, that we are certainly acting in the best interests of all Canadians.

•(1230)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have been much more impressed by the hon. minister's speech had he not first killed his own legislation in order to bring us to this point in the first place. Every element of the bill that is currently before the Senate was in the Senate prior to prorogation.

In 2006 the Liberal Party offered to fast track this legislation, but we were refused. In 2007 we offered to fast track it and again we were refused. The bills passed through the House and were sitting in the Senate and being dealt with in an expeditious manner. Then the government killed its own legislation by prorogation.

So what we have here is a minister telling us to pass this legislation, to pass this legislation because we must have this legislation, and all he is doing is recycling his speeches from last year because he likes to make those speeches. For goodness' sake, the Conservative government has wasted a year and a half on its own legislation and now it has the gall to tell the Senate to hurry up.

My goodness gracious me. It is an extraordinary circumstance in which a minister kills his own legislation through prorogation, then comes back to the House and says he has a new package and he wants us to pass it immediately. That is my number one point.

Government Orders

My number two point is about the further hypocrisy of the government. Two bills, Bill C-292 and Bill C-293, have been sitting in the Senate since March 2007. Conservative senators stonewall them, divert them and do everything but deal with them. Therefore, I wonder if the minister's enthusiasm to have the senators move on his own legislation extends to other bills that this chamber has in fact passed.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, let me get to the last part of the member's question first. Let me tell members that there is nothing before the Senate that is more important than the justice related legislation, whether it be the security certificate legislation or the tackling violent crime legislation. These bills are hugely important.

The hon. member said that all the bills were sitting in the Senate and being dealt with expeditiously in the Senate, but they did not get passed, and that is my point. We went home in June. I told people the truth when they asked me about why this legislation did not get passed. I said that 14 year olds and 15 year olds are not as well protected in this country from sexual predators as they should be and the blame goes right across the aisle.

Here is the beautiful thing about that group sitting across from me. I know that many of them actually agree with what we in this government are doing. It was of more than just passing interest in regard to the original Bill C-10, mandatory penalties for people who commit firearms offences, and people can check the record: there were about five members of the Liberal Party who did not even buy into the approach that the Liberal Party was taking. They stood with the government and I do not blame them, because those five members were right. It was the rest of the Liberals who were wrong.

I know the game those members are playing. It is not just me: they can call their friend Dalton McGuinty down at Queen's Park and ask him why he is pushing for this legislation to be passed so quickly. They can tell him it is once again sitting in the Senate being expeditiously dealt with there. They could tell him that is wonderful and ask if that is not good enough for him. I do not always agree with the premier of Ontario, but I know he would agree with me on this one. He would just tell them to get it passed.

Every so often those members throw out the words "fast track". Great. Fast track it, then, I say, and get it passed by the end of this month. They have seen all these pieces of legislation. We have taken into consideration what opposition members wanted and suggested. We were very reasonable in the package that we put before the House. I am now asking them to do the right thing for this country and get the bill passed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a brief comment.

This morning, we have a rather glaring example of an archaic system. We see a Senate that is no longer relevant. The House of Commons, whose members are elected, is now required to hold a debate today to tell the non-elected members of the Senate to hurry up and study a bill because it urgently needs to be passed. The Bloc Québécois has clearly said that it is in favour of the motion presented by the government this morning.

We voted in favour of the bill and, furthermore, we believe that the Senate should not have any such responsibility. We believe the Senate should no longer even exist.

That said, I do find it somewhat worrisome to see the government take such a stand, as though it were trying to convince the House to pass the bill.

Let us get things straight. The debate was already held in this House. The bill has been in the Senate for months now and the government has suddenly decided it is an urgent matter. I believe this has more to do with an election strategy than reality. However, to avoid playing into the minister's hand, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the motion. We were in favour of the bill and we think the Senate should deal with it as soon as possible.

Can the minister tell us whether this motion is more of an electoral diversion than an attempt at getting the bill through the Senate, where it has been dormant?

• (1235)

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the individual talks about the unelected and unaccountable Liberal Senate. My colleague, the Minister for Democratic Reform, who interestingly enough is also the sponsor of this legislation, has made the point on a couple of occasions that we are prepared to bring in reforms. One is to shorten the term for Senators from 45 years to 8 years. Is that radical? Another is to consult with people directly about who should be a senator in this country. I guess that is another one of those issues that is sitting in the Senate in an expeditious manner. There are couple of those issues sitting there in that expeditious manner as mentioned by the hon. member from the Liberal Party.

I will tell the House what I am worried about. I just do not want the Liberal-dominated Senate to be doing the dirty work for the Liberals in the House of Commons. If they want to defeat these pieces of legislation such as the tackling violent crime act, fine. I indicated that on one of the components there, five of them went against their own party in support of the government.

I am just saying to them to do what other people do. They do not have to take my word for it. They can take the word of those organizations. They can take the word of the people at MADD, or the premier of Ontario, or former attorney general Michael Bryant, who said that the "federal Liberal approach" to fighting crime was something out of "the summer of love". That is not something that I made up. That is something he said and of course I agree with him.

Let me say for the hon. member from the Bloc, yes, we want it passed, but we were very clear when it was in the House of Commons. He and other members will remember me saying that yes, we were prepared to go to the people of the country in regard to any attempt to sabotage that bill because we believe that it is so important for the benefit of this country.

Government Orders

Yes, we were prepared to go to the people of the country. I made that same point when I went to the Senate last Wednesday and said to let us get it done, let us fast track this, and then we will not have to worry about these things, but that if the senators did not, we were prepared to advise the Prime Minister that this is a confidence matter.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his excellent presentation this morning. I am hopeful that the Senate can expedite Bill C-2 through the Senate as soon as possible.

As my colleague mentioned, I do not think there is an issue that resonates more through constituencies across the country, through all 308 ridings, than reforming our justice system. We had a forum in our riding on Friday and yesterday we had a mother calling us. We need to toughen up the legislation and give the tools to our RCMP and police services across the country.

We have a catch and release program with our justice system and I want to help our enforcement agencies. As mentioned, I want to give some help to those who are victims, and also to people who have done wrong, by giving them the ability to have some training within the penal system.

Could the minister briefly update the House on drug impaired driving? How will this change from the present legislation?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would advise the hon. minister that he should be brief. He has 20 seconds.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: My heavens, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you what—

• (1240)

Hon. John McKay: Unanimous consent.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Unanimous consent. We could certainly try that, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly be pleased to continue to talk about this.

I indicated that we will set up a framework for a drug recognition expert program. This is a program that has been involved with a number of the jurisdictions for about the last 25 years.

In the end, do not take my word for it. Take the word of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this morning's debate. Throughout 2007, I was the justice critic for the official opposition. And throughout 2006, I served as deputy House leader of the official opposition, which is also my current role.

Thus, since the Conservative government's Speech from the Throne in 2006, I have been listening to the Conservative rhetoric, which I have weighed against the actions put forward by this government.

[*English*]

The motion we are debating today is:

That, given the government has declared the passage of Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as a matter of confidence, and, that the bill has already been at the Senate longer than all

stages took in the House of Commons, and that all aspects of this bill have already been the subject of extensive committee hearings in Parliament, and that in the opinion of this House the Senate majority is not providing appropriate priority to the passage of Bill C-2, a message be sent to the Senate calling on the Senate to pass Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, by March 1, 2008.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General is applauding. Well, I wonder. The Minister of Justice made a big point about how in the 2006 throne speech the Conservative government made tackling crime a priority. It is one of five priorities of the government. Let us look at the record of the government prior to when it prorogued the session that began in the winter of 2006 after the 2006 election. Let us look at that record.

The Liberal record is that we supported the vast majority of the Conservative government's justice bills. The fact is that the Conservative government has needlessly delayed its own legislation. The fact is there has been no opposition obstruction, not from the official opposition, not from the Bloc Québécois and not from the NDP. The only obstruction has been from the government. Let me give an example.

The government talks about the age of consent legislation. In the previous session, the age of consent legislation was Bill C-22. It is now found in this new tackling crime bill, Bill C-2.

Bill C-22, the age of consent legislation, was originally tabled by the government on June 22, 2006, some four and a half months after the government came to this House and opened Parliament with a throne speech. The House adjourned for the summer months one or two days later. I do not have the exact date with me but at the most, it was two days later. We came back on the third Monday in September 2006.

Did the government then move second reading of the age of consent bill? That is the bill that would raise the legal age of consent from 14 to 16 years. The government had an opportunity, its very first opportunity to move second reading. For Canadians who are listening, no one but the government can move government legislation from one stage to another.

The government tables its bill under parliamentary rules, House of Commons rules. It moves first reading and the motion is automatically deemed to have been adopted. The bill then goes on to the order paper and it stays there until the government moves second reading. We waited through the month of September 2006 and into the month of October 2006. The government did not move second reading.

That is the same government with a Minister of Justice and Attorney General who says that he is concerned, who says that victims, particularly our children who are victims of sexual predators, are among the Conservatives' first and main priority, and the government did not move second reading on the age of consent bill in 2006.

• (1245)

What did the Liberals do? Because that was a bill that we supported unconditionally, our House leader, who speaks on behalf of the official opposition, offered to fast track it.

Government Orders

Again, for those who do not understand the rules of procedure of the House of Commons, and possibly some of the government members who may not understand the rules of procedure of the House of Commons, the Standing Orders, when there is a majority in the House of Commons, whether it be the government only, or the government and another party, the government can fast track a bill.

We offered to fast track the age of consent legislation in October 2006. The government did not take us up on the offer. It ignored our offer. It did not even deign to officially respond to our offer. However, what this did was bring pressure to the government and several days later the government finally moved debate at second reading on the age of consent bill.

For a government, a Prime Minister, a Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, his parliamentary secretary and every single Conservative sitting on the government benches in this House of Commons to say that children, our children, are a priority and then to refuse to fast track the age of consent bill is unconscionable.

That bill could have been law by December 2006. We would have now had 13 months of better protection for our children and that government refused. This is what the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada is not telling the Canadian people. That bill could have been law.

Let us look at another bill that we find in Bill C-2. Let us look at the bill about which the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada attempted to eloquently dis the official opposition. That bill used to be Bill C-35, regarding reverse onus on bail for firearm related offences.

That bill received first reading on November 23, 2006. Guess what? It sat. The government did not move second reading debate through the end of November 2006, the entire month of December 2006 and the entire month of January 2007. That government did not move second reading of the bail reform bill until February 13.

Is it not a coincidence, that is a bill which we offered to fast track. That is a bill that could have been law. It could have been law for over a year now, and that government did not take us up on it.

That is a government that sends ten percenters into ridings of my colleagues in Manitoba, in Ontario, in British Columbia, claiming that the Liberals are obstructing the government's justice agenda. The government obstructed its own agenda.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

I have to ask myself the following question: is this simple incompetence on the part of the government or is this government being wilfully incompetent?

[*English*]

Is that pure incompetence on the part of the government or is it wilful incompetence in delaying its own legislation?

Those are just two things that we find in Bill C-2 which could have been the law for over a year now had the Conservative government actually been truthful to its claim about victims being its main priority. Had that been the truth, the government would have taken the Liberals up on our offer to fast-track the bill and the age of

consent would have been 16 years old December 2006 and reverse onus on bail for firearm related offences would have been the law over a year ago.

However, it gets even better. The government says that the Senate has now had Bill C-2 longer than all stages in the House. The government is counting on the fact that most Canadians will not know the parliamentary agenda and calendar. Bill C-2 was sent to the Senate on December 12, 2007. Parliament adjourned December 14, 2007. Parliament did not resume until Monday, January 28, 2008. The government tabled this motion claiming that the Senate was wilfully obstructing the government's tackling crime agenda.

Had the government been so concerned with Bill C-2 and so concerned about victims and about getting the legislation that it claims is the cornerstone of its priority and agenda, why did it not table a motion last fall for a message to be sent to the Senate informing the Senate that when it receives Bill C-2, we expect it to be reported back to us by x date? The government had all the authority and power to do that last fall but it did not.

Again I must ask whether it was mere incompetence. Is it because the government after two years still does not understand the Standing Orders, which is what we call the rules of this House? Is it wilful incompetence? The government understands full well the authority and powers it has under the House of Commons rules but chooses not to use them in the hopes that most Canadians will not know that it is the government that is actually obstructing its own agenda.

Let us talk about another obstruction. I mentioned how most of the bills, except for Bill C-27, which is the dangerous offender piece of Bill C-2, had already moved through the House and had been referred to the Senate late May, early June, late June of 2007. The Senate only had a couple of days, according to the parliamentary calendar, before Parliament adjourned for the summer. We were scheduled to come back the third Monday of September 2007 but the Prime Minister, in his wisdom, or in his incompetence or in his wilful incompetence decided to prorogue Parliament.

What does that mean? Under the rules and procedures and Standing Orders, it means that every piece of legislation in front of the House of Commons or in front of the Senate automatically dies. The government killed its own age of consent bill, its reverse onus on bail bill and its impaired driving bill, which is interesting because that is the bill we supported wholeheartedly.

Government Orders

●(1255)

I wonder if MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, understands that if the impaired driving bill is not the law today it has absolutely nothing to do with the official opposition or with the Liberal senators, but has everything to do with the government's own decision to obstruct its own legislation, not to move its own legislation through the House of Commons in a timely fashion and then to prorogue and kill its own legislation. That legislation could have been the law for almost a year now had the government not wilfully obstructed its own legislation.

Let us take the dangerous offenders bill. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada talked about how that legislation would ensure that Canadians who commit violent, egregious crimes will not be free on the streets because of the changes that it brought to the dangerous offender system.

One of the things that the government is not telling Canadians is that the way the system worked before the government brought in Bill C-27, the crown prosecutor had full discretion as to whether he or she would apply for a dangerous offender hearing. The government has done absolutely nothing to change that with its tackling crime legislation. The crown will still decide. It does not matter if it is someone who has committed heinous crimes one time, been sent to prison, served the sentence, comes out, does it again, is found guilty and serves another sentence, the crown can still decide whether it will apply for a dangerous offender hearing.

What was the Liberal response to that? The Liberal response was that there should automatically—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, right.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: —be a hearing. I personally proposed that to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to his parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Oh, God.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, there is a member on the government side, I believe from the Ottawa area, who seems to be very active in my discussion and my speech. I suggest that if he knows so much about the issues we are talking about, he might want to explain to his constituents why he approved his own government's obstruction of its own legislation. He should go back to his riding and explain why 14 and 15 year olds are still vulnerable to predators for over a year now. Why? It is because he and his government wilfully obstructed their own legislation.

I suggest that he might want to address that in his own riding rather than attempt to destabilize the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine. He has been here long enough and he should know that I am able to drown out and block out nonsense.

●(1300)

Bill C-27 had one improvement to the dangerous offenders system that we find again in the dangerous offender section of Bill C-2. What was that? It was that somebody who has already been deemed a long term offender and who commits a breach of the conditions ordered by a judge or who commits another serious crime will

automatically go before a judge as a dangerous offender. That was an amendment by the Liberals.

Is it simply that the government is so incompetent that it did not understand how the dangerous offender system and long term offender system actually operated? By the way, the long term offender system was actually brought in by a Liberal government in the late 1990s.

Is the government simply incompetent or is it wilfully incompetent?

[*Translation*]

I repeat, is this government simply incompetent or is it wilfully incompetent?

[*English*]

I talked about the prorogation of Parliament. In proroguing Parliament, the government killed the age of consent bill, the bail reform bill, its mandatory minimums bill, the impaired driving bill and the dangerous offender bill. Then when the government brought Parliament back with the new throne speech, it announced to great trumpeting and chest beating that tackling crime would be a major plank in its policy, its agenda and action plan. What did it do?

The government could have reinstated those bills where they were, which was in the Senate. If the government were so concerned about the Senate possibly taking too long to deal with it, it could have brought in a motion, as it did last Friday, giving a deadline to the Senate for dealing with the age of consent bill, the impaired driving bill, the dangerous offender bill, the mandatory minimums bill and the bail reform bill. It did not do that.

Therefore, one again has to ask if it is sheer incompetence on the part of the government or wilful incompetence.

My parents raised me, and I am sure many people in the House, if not all were raised the same, to give people the benefit of the doubt. However, my grandmother also used to say, "The first time is a mistake. The second time is a bad habit".

The first time the government did not take up the Liberal offer in October 2006 to fast track the age of consent bill, to raise it from 14 to 16 years old, one could say that was a mistake. However, when it again refused to take it up in March 2007, that was no longer a mistake. That was a bad habit.

When the government decided to kill the age of consent bill by proroguing Parliament in the summer of 2007, that was not a mistake. I have come to the conclusion that the government's incompetence is not sheer incompetence, but it is wilful incompetence.

Then that begs the question. What would be the reason, the justification, for a government to be wilfully incompetent? I am not at a point where I can answer that. While I developed the—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Sit down.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I apologize to the hon. member. I want to remind the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board that there will be a question and comment period after the member's speech. If he has anything to ask or anything to say, could he hold off until the end of the speech by the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, let us look at what some of the witnesses had to say at committee. They came before the committee on Bill C-22, age of consent. They came back for the impaired driving bill, Bill C-32. They came back for the reverse onus on bail hearings for firearm related offences bill. They came back for the dangerous offender bill. They came back for the mandatory minimums bill.

Let us hear what a representative from one of these associations had to said. This was on November 14, 2007, on Bill C-2, in front of the House of Commons legislative committee. It was the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. The representative said that quick fixes and band-aids were no longer sufficient, that a comprehensive national but locally focused strategy was required to really tackle crime and that the legislative priority for the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police were guns and gangs, child predators, as two example.

● (1305)

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said that because of its legislative priorities, it had asked and pleaded with the Conservative government for modernization of investigative techniques. The association said that the Modernization of Investigative Techniques Act, also called MITA, under the previous Liberal government, died as a result of the election. The association pleaded with the Conservative government to bring it back. It waited all through 2006. The government did not act. It waited again all through 2007. The government did not act.

It is now February 11, and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is still waiting for the government to bring in the legislation for which it has been begging and pleading, that it says it needs in order to deal effectively with violent crime, gun crime, gang crime, sexual predators and child sexual predators. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has asked the government to bring in legislation modernizing investigative techniques for over two years now. What has the government done? What has the government's response been to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association?

First, the response has been not to bring in any legislation on that. Second, the government has refused to fast track my private member's bill that would do exactly this. I offered the government to take it over if it wanted the credit for it. It is more important to get it into the law and to give our law enforcement officers the investigative tools they need in the 21st century when they try to fight crime committed through our cyberspace. The government again, as it did with the Liberal offer to fast track the age of consent and the bail reform bills, as it did with virtually every attempt on the part of the official opposition to make Parliament be effective and efficient and put Canadians and their safety and security of

Canadians first, turned its head and ignored the opposition. The government acted as though it heard nothing.

The government, through this motion, is trying to put the blame on the Senate. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada continues to say "the Liberal dominated Senate". What he does not say is Bill C-2 only went before the Senate on December 12, 2007. Two days later the House adjourned and only came back on Monday, January 28.

Had the government been serious that Bill C-2 and its elements were of such importance to the government, that it was a matter of confidence and that the government was ready to go to an election because Canadians safety and security was of the utmost importance to the government, then why did it not put forth this kind of motion when it sent Bill C-2 to the Senate? The same power and authority and the same rule that allowed the government to put this motion, which it tabled on February 7, before the House to have it debated and then voted on could have been done last fall.

● (1310)

Again, I have to ask if it is sheer incompetence or wilful incompetence on the part of the Conservative government, the Conservative Prime Minister, the Conservative Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Conservative Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and all parliamentary secretaries who sit on the government side.

The Senate received Bill C-2 on December 12, 2007. The government tabled this motion on February 7. This means the Senate had the bill for two days in 2007, December 13 and 14, and then on January 28, January 29, January 30, January 31, February 1, February 4, February 5, February 6, and February 7, for a total of eight days. On the ninth day the government tabled its motion saying that the Senate majority was not providing appropriate priority to the passage of Bill C-2, when the government in fact was obstructing its own legislation.

All of the bills in Bill C-2 would have been law over a year ago and one of them would have been law for close to two years had the government not obstructed its own legislation either through sheer incompetence or through wilful incompetence.

Let me see how good I am at math. One year is 365 days. Two years would be 730 days, not counting the 31 days in January, 2008. If I go to February 7, when the motion was tabled by the government, that is 31 days plus 7, which is 38 days. The Senate has had the bill for literally eight sitting days. The government obstructed its own legislation for 730 days.

Who did not give appropriate priority to the age of consent legislation? It was Conservative members. Who did not give appropriate priority to the impaired driving bill? It was Conservative members. Who did not give appropriate priority to the dangerous offender bill? It was Conservative members.

Government Orders

• (1315)

[Translation]

Who did not give appropriate priority to the bill concerning conditional releases? It was the Conservative government. It was not the opposition. It was not the Bloc Québécois. It was not the NDP. It was not the official opposition. It was not the Liberals or Liberal senators in the upper house. It was the government itself. Imagine that.

Canadians must ask themselves the same question that I have been asking myself for the past two years: Is this Conservative government simply incompetent or wilfully incompetent? When one looks closely at the facts concerning all these justice related bills, when one looks closely at the actions and decisions that this Conservative government has taken, or has failed to take, one can only conclude that it is either simply incompetent or wilfully incompetent.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of this House for their attention. I would be happy to answer any questions they may have. If I do not have the answer, I will be frank. I will say so and try to address the issue with that member outside the House.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the entire foundation of the Liberal member's remarks is that she and her party would have been delighted to pass this legislation a long time ago. The Liberals claim that they wanted to fast track it.

Let us put aside for a second that such a method of fast tracking is procedurally impossible. Let us just assume that she were telling the truth on that particular point. If they were willing to fast track this legislation then, why are they not willing to pass it now? It is a very simple question.

The legislation has been languishing in the Senate because the senators decided to take all of January off, even though they knew this legislation was itching to be passed. They could have come back at any time in January—they have full authority to do that—to pass the legislation, but the Liberals there refused to do that.

However, it should not matter. The member said that they have had only eight days, but eight days should be too long if we apply her own logic. She claims the Liberals supported this bill for fast tracking months ago, years ago even. We know at the bottom and at the root that is not true.

The Liberals have never supported these tough measures because they were in power for 13 years and did nothing to advance them. They were against raising the age of sexual consent while in government and able to do something about it, and they are still against raising the age of sexual consent.

Let me cite Senator Carstairs, who was on *Mike Duffy Live* on February 6. She said in her comments that raising the age of sexual consent “might put a chill on family life education programs” and “might prevent young women and young men from reporting sexually transmitted diseases”. If that is the position of the Liberal Party, then why does her colleague in the House of Commons claim the contrary? The reality is the Liberals do not support our bills and

they are trying to mask it and cover it up so that they cannot be held accountable for their soft on crime stance.

• (1320)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, it is not a claim that the official opposition on two occasions made formal offers to fast track some of the bills that are found in Bill C-2. That is not a claim; that is a fact. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that the member talked about the Liberals being soft on crime. No, the Liberals are not soft on crime. We attempt to develop, when we were in government and now as the official opposition, Liberal justice policies that are effective on crime, that will actually reduce crime, that are smart on crime. Let me give one very concrete example of that. No, let me give two.

One is the issue of minimum mandatory penalties for gun crimes. Guess which government brought in the first minimum mandatory penalties? It was a Liberal government.

Let us look at the long term offender system. A Liberal government brought that in. People might ask what the difference is between a dangerous offender and a long term offender. As I have to cut my answer short, I would encourage any Canadian who would like to know how the dangerous offender system and the long term offender system work to communicate with my office. The telephone number is 613-995-2251 and the email address is jennim@parl.gc.ca.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because I was so intrigued, I want the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine to finish what she was about to say. Would she be so kind, for the benefit of my constituents, to finish what she was about to say?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, the dangerous offender designation has been in existence for several decades. Basically, when the Liberals came back to power in 1993 the way the system operated was that the Crown in its discretion was not obliged, there was nothing in the law that required the Crown to apply for a dangerous offender hearing once someone had been found guilty of a series of serious egregious violent crimes. However, if the Crown did apply for it, the judge could then send the offender, before sentencing the person, for an expert psychological evaluation. Corrections Canada would also examine the person and produce expert reports. The judge would then decide if the person was so dangerous that he or she should be sent to prison for an indefinite period. The problem was that the judge was reluctant to do so, so the Liberal government brought in the long term offender. That is someone who has already been deemed to have been a dangerous offender.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to my hon. colleague's comments. The claim about the eight days that the bill has been in front of the Senate is simply a fallacy.

Government Orders

If we take a look at the precursor bills to Bill C-2 in the previous Parliament, those being: Bill C-10; Bill C-22, age of protection; Bill C-27, dangerous offenders; Bill C-32, impaired driving; and Bill C-35, reverse onus on bail for gun offences; four of those five bills had already passed through the House and had spent a significant amount of time in the Senate. The only one that had not was Bill C-27, which had been to committee and had been amended.

We were a very accommodating government, I thought. We basically bundled all of that legislation as it appeared in the previous session of Parliament, with the amendments, put it back in a bill, put it before the House and now it is sitting in the Senate.

We are not asking for anything that is extremely onerous.

My colleague also brought up the fact that she wanted to get her numbers right on something. Well, it is very clear from the information that I see, whether it is on TV or through various polls, that 70% of Canadians support tougher legislation against crime.

Is it sheer incompetence of her leader and her party, or wilful incompetence of her leader and her party, that they cannot get the Senate to pass the legislation?

• (1325)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, let us look at some of the facts concerning these bills. The age of consent bill, Bill C-22 in the last Parliament, was introduced by the government on June 22, 2006. The government moved second reading on October 30, 2006, and only sent it to committee on March 21, 2007. That bill, which we offered to fast track in October 2006 and which could have been the law in December 2006, only was adopted at third reading in the House on May 4, 2007. The Senate only received that bill on May 8, 2007.

When the member says that all of the bills had gone through the House and were sitting in the Senate, he is being wilfully incompetent or he is being sheerly incompetent by not giving the actual dates. It is the same thing for Bill C-32, Bill C-35, Bill C-10 and C-27.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Canadians who did not have the opportunity to watch the member's speech to take the time to read it because this was a terrific explanation of what the Conservative agenda is all about.

The Conservative Party claims to be tough on crime, yet the Conservatives have yet to fulfill the promise of putting 2,500 police officers on the ground. Also, the Auditor General told us that under the Conservative government's watch, 20% of those who are identified as dangerous individuals are still crossing the borders without being checked. The Conservative government is doing nothing about it. The Conservative government is not listening to police officers about the gun registry. The Conservatives have yet to explain why they are talking about eight days, but there was a delay of a month caused by the government because of prorogation.

Is this not just another game the Conservatives are playing because they have run out of items for Canadians, to serve as—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are only 30 seconds left for the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, my view is that the government no longer has anything in its cupboard. Its cupboard is bare and it is seeking desperately to bring itself down so that it call an election. It is looking for any subterfuge in order to go to an election.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will not say that I am pleased to take part in this debate because I believe that this is a debate that we could very well have done without.

However, it will give me an opportunity to highlight some elements, including what we expect to see in the budget. In recent days and weeks, we have had the impression that the Conservative government and the Prime Minister have been attempting to blow all issues out of proportion and, if not for the purpose of triggering elections, at least in an attempt to apply pressure on the opposition parties perhaps as an attempt to show in an artificial way, some kind of leadership.

In this regard, I believe that the Bloc Québécois has the responsibility to denounce these manoeuvres that hide the real problems by focusing attention on the motion before us early this afternoon. For those listening, I will repeat the motion:

That, given the government has declared the passage of Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as a matter of confidence, and, that the bill has already been at the Senate longer than all stages took in the House of Commons, and that all aspects of this bill have already been the subject of extensive committee hearings in Parliament, and that in the opinion of this House the Senate majority is not providing appropriate priority to the passage of Bill C-2, a message be sent to the Senate calling on the Senate to pass Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, by March 1, 2008.

I will start by saying that we will support this motion even though, once again, I believe it is merely a diversionary tactic. The Bloc Québécois was in favour of Bill C-2 when it was voted on in this House. I would remind the House that Bill C-2 was an omnibus bill of sorts, since it consisted of five bills from the previous session. We were in favour of four of the five bills, and since the House had already voted and we had lost the vote, we thought the debate was over and the vote in the House was legitimate. Thus, from the beginning, we had expressed our agreement with four of the five bills, even before the government talked about making this a confidence vote.

We were, and still are, uncomfortable with one aspect of the fifth bill, that is, the notion of reverse onus for some repeat offenders. That said, after weighing the advantages and disadvantages, our caucus decided that it would be better to vote in favour of the bill, since it contained more aspects that we were completely comfortable with and that we supported. Bill C-2 does not pose a problem for us.

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As everyone knows, the Bloc Québécois considers any institution associated with the British monarchy to be completely obsolete. In our view, the Senate, as one such mechanism left over from a time when Canada was a British colony, is completely outdated. Clearly, we kept up this British parliamentary tradition—and many among us are attached to it—but, that said, some vestiges need to be abolished. And the Bloc Québécois makes no secret of the fact that, although it is not a priority for us, the abolition of the Senate would not bother us, I can assure this House.

Since it is an institution made up of unelected parliamentarians, we would have no problem with that, since we do not see any legitimacy in that branch of the Parliament of Canada. As I said, given that we do not see any legitimate reason for the institution and that we would like to see it abolished, clearly, for us, voting on it in the House should be the end of the debate, instead of referring the bill, having it passed by a majority of the members of the House of Commons and sending it to an unelected Senate.

I will point out that there is an unelected minister, Mr. Fortier, who, I repeat, promised to run in an election at the first opportunity that came up. But since then, there have been at least three byelections in Quebec, and we would have been very happy to see him step up to the plate in order to truly have democratic legitimacy and to be in a position to make decisions affecting the day-to-day lives of Canadians and Quebecers.

● (1330)

We feel that the Senate has no legitimacy and should be abolished. So we have no problem with the motion. But once again, we find it a bit childish that this is being debated in this House.

The Bloc Québécois will not prolong this debate, nor do we expect the Senate to follow up on this message by March 1, since it is a relatively short deadline. As I said, we are not about to give credibility to this institution inherited from the past.

However, I think there is something more fundamental behind this motion, and that is the government's, the Prime Minister's desire to create a diversion. I would even say that we have the exact same elements in the motion concerning Afghanistan. I do not want to say that the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan is not important, far from it, but I, and a number of observers—including all members of the Bloc and several opposition members, since I seem to recall hearing the Liberals' national defence critic mention that it should not be a confidence issue—believe that the debate on this issue should be as non-partisan as possible.

By making this a confidence motion, the government, the Prime Minister, has decided to use this debate to create a political crisis and to trigger, perhaps indirectly, an election. In any event, it is a tactic to divert attention from the real problems Canadians and Quebecers are currently experiencing.

Among those problems, there is one that the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Industry are being particularly silent about. I am talking about the ongoing situation in the manufacturing and forestry industries. That is what we should be debating today, not some message to the Senate on a bill we all agree on.

To me there seems to be something somewhat unhealthy about the Conservative government and the Prime Minister wanting to dramatize or show us who is boss, even though they are a minority government. They have never understood that and it is not something we should forget. In my opinion, today's debate should have been about improving the aid plan, the first small step announced by the Prime Minister. He tried to use exactly the same tactics there that he is using today and with Afghanistan.

First he tried to make the aid plan, the creation of the community development trust of \$1 billion over three years—which is not very much—conditional on passing the budget, thereby blackmailing the opposition parties. We do not know what will be in the budget. It may contain other completely unacceptable items. I would not be surprised to see such items in the next budget. Making this conditional on the budget puts pressure on the opposition members. But worse yet, the people who are in need of assistance in the regions affected by this crisis in the manufacturing and forestry industries, were also being held hostage by this government.

Fortunately, because of pressure from Quebec, and the consensus among Premier Charest of Quebec and all the opposition parties in the National Assembly, namely the Parti québécois and the Action démocratique du Québec, the unions, who unanimously condemned the tactic, the business community—particularly those currently under pressure in these industries in crisis—editorial writers, a number of observers and the opposition parties here in this House, the Bloc Québécois in particular, the Prime Minister saw the light.

Last Monday, as we all know, we had the opportunity to vote on the first part of this inadequate aid plan. I want to be very clear that this means Quebec will get \$216 million over three years, even though most of the jobs lost in the manufacturing sector in 2007 were lost in Quebec.

● (1335)

Nobody has taken a close look at the specific job loss numbers in some sectors in the Quebec regions. I believe that is true for Ontario too, and for some regions in the Atlantic provinces. It is clear that the Prime Minister's blackmail tactics were reprehensible and that the figures announced were just not enough.

We were hoping that the Prime Minister would take advantage of his meeting this weekend—not with Bonhomme Carnaval, but with the Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest—to announce improvements to the plan. We were hoping that we would be here today to talk about a bill that would fix things. However, that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about Motion No. 3, and I have already said enough about that.

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Nevertheless, I would like to point out that the problem with the \$1 billion over three years is that it is to be distributed per capita, not on the basis of need or jobs lost. Furthermore, there is an additional basic \$10 million envelope per province, regardless of whether that province is Prince Edward Island, Ontario or Quebec, which is just bizarre. I will come back to that in more detail and give some numbers. In the meantime, in case I run out of time, I want to point out that Prince Edward Island will get about \$100 per resident thanks to this Conservative government initiative, while Quebec and Ontario will receive just over \$25 per resident, even though 75% of the manufacturing sector is concentrated in Ontario and Quebec.

Therefore, what the government announced was not an aid package but a very broad-based economic revitalization plan. As we know, Alberta will receive its share. I do not think that anyone in the House seriously believes that Alberta, at this juncture, needs a little boost to reinvigorate its economy. Its problem is an overheated economy, which the government has encouraged. In particular, there were the tax cuts in last November's economic statement. For the time being, they are benefiting very few in the manufacturing sector but many in the oil and gas sector.

I will show just how inadequate this Conservative government's first step is and that it needs to be improved. I will simply mention a few articles that I collected here and there during the past week.

For example, last Monday, the Premier of Quebec, Mr. Charest, said:

More needs to be done, among other things, with respect to taxation,...research and development as well as assistance for older workers.

He was speaking specifically of the assistance plan that needed to be bolstered.

Mr. Benoît Pelletier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, added that Ottawa is awash in surpluses and that the aid given to Quebec, almost \$200 million, represents only 10% of amounts advanced by Quebec.

That is what is written but we know that it amounts to \$216 million.

The Government of Quebec invested almost \$2 billion to help the forestry and manufacturing sectors. I know that this is being debated in Quebec because some feel it is not enough. We are talking about 10% of this aid, approximately \$216 million. Obviously, the financial situation of the Government of Quebec and the federal government are in no way alike. For the Government of Quebec, it is clearly not enough and there has to be more.

The following day, it was the CSN's turn to make its views known. I will read an excerpt from its press release entitled "The Prime Minister must act now and abandon his partisan interests":

—the time for action is now. As it is, the support announced by the Prime Minister reflects neither the seriousness of the situation nor the means at his disposal. In the past four years, more than 15,000 jobs have been lost in the paper and forestry industry, and some 130 sawmills and pulp and paper plants are currently inactive, depriving 31 of 250 municipalities of their main economic activity. Thousands of families in Quebec are in crisis.

The CSN represents 300,000 workers. It is an extremely important labour congress in Quebec and is very well established in the

regions. I know a thing or two about the CSN, because I served as its general secretary for eight years.

I am also very fond of my friends in the FTQ, who weighed in on February 6 in the form of a press release from FTQ president Michel Arsenault, a former head of the steelworkers' union for Canada.

● (1340)

Mr. Arsenault had this to say:

The fact that this government, which is literally awash in our money, with a surplus worth billions of dollars, has given up on tying its measure to the adoption of its next budget does not make the measure any more acceptable.

The despicable blackmail by the government and the Prime Minister had ended, but the president of the FTQ, which has 500,000 members in Quebec and a strong presence in the paper and forestry sector, added this: "Quebec is not getting its fair share. The sectors that are worst off are not getting their fair share—". He was speaking in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and he said, "Abitibi-Témiscamingue is not getting its fair share". I would add that Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is not getting its fair share, Mauricie is not getting its fair share, Gaspé is not getting its fair share, the Lower St. Lawrence is not getting its fair share, northern Lanaudière is not getting its fair share and the Outaouais is not getting its fair share. None of the regions of Quebec is getting its fair share. I will prove this in a moment. I am not finished. Unfortunately for us, groups are still having to exert pressure on this insensitive Conservative federal government.

Last Thursday, the Forest Products Association of Canada announced that it had been very affected by the crisis. It said that there were more than 12,000 jobs lost in Canada in 2007 alone, and that more than 100 mills had shut down. The association called on the federal government to intervene and introduce measures, a number of which were proposed by the Bloc Québécois, the Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. I will give only one, otherwise I will run out of time, but this particular one calls for a refundable tax credit for research and development. When a business, such as a paper mill, is not generating a profit, it does not benefit from the generosity of the Conservative government, which cut taxes for businesses earning a profit, but there is still research and development to be done. If these companies, Tembec, Domtar, AbitibiBowater or whatever, continue to do research and development, they cannot benefit from refundable tax credits because they are not generating a profit. They cannot benefit from the tax cuts announced by the finance minister in the economic statement because they are not generating a profit. They need help to be able to keep investing in research and development, which is essential to innovation and competitiveness, so that once this crisis is over, they can compete in North America and throughout the world.

We have a consensus—in Quebec anyway—and I am sure that in Ontario it is the same thing. The billion dollars in aid announced by the Conservative government is definitely not enough. A lot more money than that is needed immediately and they could use the existing surplus and they know it. The surplus is not being used to help the industries, the regions and the workers who are dealing with the manufacturing crisis, because it is being put toward the federal debt. Some might think that is a good idea, but I would remind them that the Government of Canada's federal debt is the lowest of the G-7 countries. It has not been this low since 1984. Why would anyone insist on paying off their mortgage when they have just lost their job and their children are starving? That is precisely what is happening. Not only is that not enough money, but the allocation of this money defies logic and is completely unfair. Earlier I gave the example of Prince Edward Island, but I could go on.

Take Alberta for example, which represents 7.8% of manufacturing jobs. It will receive 10.4% of the aid, while Quebec, which represents 27.6% of the jobs in the manufacturing industry, will receive just 21.8%. It is essential that this be corrected and the aid allocated according to need.

I will close by reiterating the measures the Bloc Québécois is proposing. We propose investing at least \$500 million in a new Technology Partnerships Canada program, with \$1.5 billion as a repayable contribution for new manufacturing equipment, a forestry economy diversification fund that could very well be the \$1 million from the community development trust, and \$1.5 million for improving employment insurance and the older workers program. To stimulate economic activity in the municipalities—that could be saved for the budget—there could be a \$1 billion increase in the excise tax transfer to the municipalities. What we are asking for right now is \$3.5 billion from the \$10.6 billion surplus projected for March 31. The government can do it and if it does not, it will pay the price in the next election.

• (1345)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member did not talk much about the motion today because he said that it was diversionary. Why does the member think the government is embarrassing itself with this sort of silly diversionary, as he calls it, type of motion? Is it because, after being in its greatest economic position, that it cannot handle the fact that we are getting closer to a recession, which is getting worse and worse? Is it because more and more people are getting furious with the government for the loss in manufacturing and forestry jobs, which, as the member says, are very important issues to discuss? Is it because the Conservatives are the biggest spenders in history and getting us closer to a deficit and they do not want to answer the people on that?

Last week the Bloc member was furious that the government was stonewalling a committee so that it would not discuss the investigations by Elections Canada of a number of members on the election. Is that why the Conservatives are using diversionary actions?

Do the Conservatives not have a lot to answer for to their constituents for stalling these crime bills: the mandatory minimum, the impaired driving, the age of consent, the bail reform with reverse onus and dangerous offenders, many of which, as was explained this

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morning, could have been law already had it not been for the Conservatives stalling?

It was mentioned that one of the bills has been stalled for over two years. The government refused to fast-track the bills as we suggested and refused to bring them forward in a timely manner, as was outlined in great detail this morning. When the Conservatives prorogued Parliament, more time was lost. Finally, the Conservatives brought them all back as one bill at the beginning instead of where they were in the process—

• (1350)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Joliette.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, regarding the first question, I think the hon. member has fully grasped this tactic on the part of the government and the Prime Minister.

We are seeing attempts to divert our attention in order to prevent us, the opposition parties and all of civil society, from forcing a debate on the situation facing the manufacturing and forestry sectors, and on the outlook for the Canadian and Quebec economies.

No one in this House, except the Conservative government, believes that the recession in the service sector—which is not only worsening, but also extends to the United States—will have no impact on the Canadian economy. I would remind the House that 75% of our exports go to the United States.

In the January 2008 edition of *Affaires Plus* magazine, Stephen Jarislawsky wrote: “Canada cannot survive exclusively on the development of the oil sands project in Fort McMurray ... That is completely unrealistic.”

However, this government thinks that, through the magic of oil from that project, an entire economy as diversified as the Canadian and Quebec economy can survive. They are therefore resorting to all sorts of diversion tactics in order to prevent anyone from forcing this debate.

As for the second question, unfortunately, the Speaker is signaling that I am out of time. It will have to wait until next time, my hon. colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I think there is a question of relevance. I suggest that we please focus on the subject of the motion.

Other questions or comments?

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, earlier, our colleague from Joliette said that introducing this motion was a childish tactic. I agree with him.

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Someone just referred to it as a diversion attempt. I am wondering if the member would agree that, more than that, it is a blackmail attempt because the government made it a matter of confidence.

I would also like to know what the use of all this is. Why should we support something that has been described as a diversion or blackmail attempt? At the end of the day, after the vote, what good will it do in practical terms to send this message to the other place?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

My reply is as follows. It is precisely so we do not fall into the trap set by the Prime Minister and the Conservative government.

If this is treated as an important vote, people may be panicked into an election over a motion which, in the end, does not have a great deal of legitimacy. In fact, the Bloc does not believe that the Senate has legitimacy. Furthermore, we voted in favour of Bill C-2.

In our opinion, we should quickly deal with this motion in order to get back to what is really important. For the Bloc Québécois, the best way of neutralizing and dealing with it is to vote for it and not to create a false crisis that will distance us even further from the real debate about the economic situation, which is deteriorating with each passing day.

That is why we will vote in favour of this motion. When there are substantive issues, the Bloc Québécois will be there to force an election, if warranted. However, I remind the House that we were in favour of Bill C-2, even though we were uncomfortable, as stated just now, with reverse onus.

Therefore, in weighing the advantages and disadvantages,—which we must often do in this House—we believe that it is better to vote in favour of Bill C-2 and the motion before us.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member not think that this motion and the process we are following here might arguably be seen by some as subversive of constitutional governance in that this House, if we were to adopt the motion put forward by the government, would be demanding that the Senate complete, within two weeks, matters of business and legislation involving five bills that took this House a year and a half to go through carefully? Does he not think that imposing the will of this House on the Senate is subversive of everything we have done under our Constitution involving two Houses in this Parliament ever since day one?

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I think that depends on your point of view. Because we do not consider the Senate a legitimate political instrument, I certainly do not share the member's view.

That said, I believe that the message the House is sending is respectful of the senators. In my opinion, the Senate is free to act on or ignore the message it receives from the House of Commons. I believe that the House has the right to send this sort of message to the Senate.

If the senators decide to take their sweet time, I will not be offended. In constitutional terms, the House cannot force the Senate to adopt the bill on March 31. We are making a request. If the Senate does not grant that request, we will have passed this motion for nothing.

As I said, we should not fall into the trap. This is a diversionary tactic by this government to avoid discussing real issues like the growing economic problems in Canada and Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member was here in 1993 when I first arrived but he may have arrived a little later than that.

From the period of 1993 on, Alan Rock would not do it, Cauchon would not do it, Anne McLellan would not do it and the past minister of justice would not do it, which was to raise the age of consent. That was being called for continually during all those years by myself, by the member for Calgary Northeast and by Darrel Stinson, the past member for Okanagan—Shuswap.

We were screaming and hollering to get somebody to simply raise the age of consent but for all those years the Liberals said no. Now they are saying yes they support it. They probably have heard the public demand to do just that.

Does the member agree with me that the Liberals really do not believe in being tough on crime? They just want to pass it over to the Senate and ask those good old boys and girls over there to stall it and hold off on it because they really do not want it to happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I would first like to inform my hon. friend that I have only been here since 2000. Time probably seems to go slowly when he is with me. That is fine. I think the Conservatives must feel that time goes slowly with the Bloc Québécois. Once again, the best answer to that is sovereignty for Quebec.

It is important to remember that the opposition improved the bill to raise the age of consent. The bill was unacceptable as it was, because it would have criminalized sexual relations between young people. That is not what we are trying to do. In Quebec, at least, we do not want to criminalize sexual relations between consenting young people. We therefore improved this bill here in this House. We were comfortable with the bill.

I agree with my colleague that the Senate does not have the necessary legitimacy to delay work, but it is not my fault that the Senate has remained as a vestige of British colonialism. We should abolish it and not talk about it any more.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***MOUNT PEARL SPORT ALLIANCE**

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the MP for St. John's South-Mount Pearl, I would like to congratulate each and every person associated with the Mount Pearl Sport Alliance for such a successful year. On February 1 they celebrated at their annual banquet and recognized individuals and team accomplishments. It is great to see that there are so many dedicated individuals who give their time, effort and resources to making sport a fact of life for so many people in their community.

Our government supports an active lifestyle. We were proud to introduce in the 2007 budget a physical fitness tax credit of up to \$500 per child on registration fees and memberships paid for young people under 16 years of age.

Whether they are an athlete, a coach, an official, an executive member or play some other part in the Mount Pearl Sport Alliance, everyone is to be congratulated and applauded for their hard work. Volunteers put in a tremendous amount of work, and that makes a significant difference in the lives of many people.

Once again, congratulations to all of them.

* * *

● (1400)

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, despite the bitter cold and mounds of snow, I, along with members of our concerned community of Richmond Hill came out to voice our concerns regarding the sale of the Dunlap Observatory.

The David Dunlap Observatory has been a research centre for the department of astronomy and astrophysics since 1935. In 1972, the first black hole was discovered by the observatory.

It is a valuable site to our community. My goal is to ensure that it remains a working teaching and educational centre for astronomy.

I recently had a meeting with the president of the University of Toronto, David Naylor, and other key officials to press for an extension until mid-May for the request for proposals. The purpose of the extension is to provide the consultants, Lord Cultural Resources, more time to do a thorough study of the site. I was pleased with the meeting.

The Dunlap site is one of historic significance. My ultimate goal is that the Government of Canada will protect and purchase the site for a national urban park, to preserve its legacy for future generations to enjoy.

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*[Translation]***SOCIAL HOUSING**

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its brief to the Standing Committee on Finance, Quebec's Réseau SOLIDARITÉ Itinérance described the critical shortage of low

income housing in 2007. In 2005, 35,000 households in Quebec were on a waiting list for low cost housing.

Since 1993, the federal funding shortage has denied the homeless and those living in substandard housing nearly 43,000 social housing units in Quebec. Currently, it is estimated that an additional \$2 billion per year is needed to address the need across Canada. That is less than 1% of the federal budget.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended that Canada consider the severe housing shortage to be a national emergency. The government must accept the Bloc Québécois' recommendations immediately and allocate \$1 billion of the CMHC's current \$7 billion surplus—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

* * *

*[English]***PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS**

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister is beating the election drums, the Liberals are silent. On the crucial issues that affect countless ordinary Canadians, the Liberals are still figuring out what they believe. They are busy strategizing their way out of an election that they think they will lose.

Seniors and hard-working families do not deserve to be treated like pawns in this political chess game. They deserve to have their concerns addressed in Parliament.

I asked everyday people in Hamilton Mountain about their priorities for the upcoming budget. Seniors want income security, protected pensions, accessible health care, and drug and dental coverage. These are all things that were included in my seniors charter. It was adopted by this House, yet seniors are still waiting for the government to act.

Working families told me they want decent paying jobs, access to education and training, child care, concrete action on the environment, and property tax relief through federal investments in infrastructure.

None of this is pie in the sky, but just as we are heading into an economic downturn, the cupboard is bare. Last fall's mini-budget gave away over \$6 billion in corporate tax cuts to big business. Unbelievably, the Liberal leader said that he would go deeper on that.

It is time for real leadership. It is time to put the needs of ordinary Canadians first.

* * *

GRAMMY AWARDS

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 50th Annual Grammy Awards show took place on Sunday. This year more Canadians than ever before were nominated for an award. I wish to congratulate the Canadian winners at this year's Grammy Awards. Canadian artists who won an award include:

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Joni Mitchell, best pop instrumental performance for her song, *One Week Last Summer*. Mitchell was also the muse for the winner of the best album of the year and best contemporary jazz album by Herbie Hancock for *River, the Joni Letters*.

James Ehnes, a world-renowned violinist and Brandon, Manitoba native, best soloist with orchestra for his work with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Bramwell Tovey.

Michael Bubl , best traditional pop vocal album for his album, *Call Me Irresponsible*.

The lifetime achievement award was given to The Band, a group made up of almost all Canadians.

Congratulations again to these fine winners. We are proud of them.

* * *

STUDENT DEBT LOAD

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students, representing over 6,000 medical students across Canada, is visiting Parliament today. The students are here to discuss their rising debt load. A first year resident in Ontario has an average debt of \$158,728.

• (1405)

[Translation]

These debts are stressful and interfere with medical residents' ability to serve Canadians well.

Furthermore, this financial situation prevents some young people from going to medical school, discourages medical students from choosing to specialize in family medicine, and makes it more attractive for new graduates in medicine to practice in the United States to pay off their debts.

[English]

As we are facing a doctor shortage crisis in Canada, we should be doing everything we can to support our medical students.

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students is asking the government to take action and provide some relief.

[Translation]

I do not understand why the Minister of Health is refusing to talk about this fundamental issue.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week auto parts supplier NemaK announced it is closing its Essex aluminum plant leaving 600 jobless in 2009. It is difficult news we are concerned about. It is harder to accept when NemaK opened a new plant in China only a few months ago.

If the Liberals and NDP had their way, more closures would be in Windsor's future. They support greenhouse gas emissions targets for Canada post-Kyoto that force our industries into deep reductions, but

give industries in China and South Korea a 20 year pass to belch CO₂ and keep their export costs low at the cost of Canadian jobs.

Our government's approach is based on science, a tough emissions target that is Canada's fair share while ensuring all major emitters take on the share that real science demands.

We cannot change China's low currency or the low wages that give its manufacturers an edge over ours, but we can start to level the playing field with a new global accord that requires its polluting industries to pay more.

While the opposition favours China's manufacturers and workers, this Conservative government will fight climate change and protect Canadian workers.

* * *

[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mrs. Ève-Mary Th  Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, each year, in February, we are invited to celebrate Black History Month. Through the involvement of many community organizations and artists, the people of Quebec will gain a better appreciation of the richness and diversity of Black communities, and the unique contribution of a number of their fellow citizens.

I would especially like to congratulate the Maison de la Famille des Maskoutains, a family support organization which, as part of Black History Month, is hosting in conjunction with the Saint-Hyacinthe school board and the local media a gathering where citizens coming from various countries will talk about life in their country of origin in front of students at Larocque elementary school.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues from the Bloc Qu b cois, I encourage my fellow citizens to take part in the activities marking Black History Month, thus promoting the development of closer ties with that community.

* * *

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to voice my support for a motion on the mission in Afghanistan. The motion reflects the recommendations of the Manley report.

Despite the fact that the Leader of the Opposition was part of the cabinet of the previous government that sent our troops to the most dangerous battlefields of Kandahar, he now wants to handcuff our soldiers. Military specialists have all said that the Liberal position is unrealistic.

The NDP plan is to cut and run. Canada has a proud military history. Imagine if we had decided to cut and run during the Battle of Britain, or at Vimy Ridge, or on Juno Beach.

Canadians are serving bravely and sacrificing for all of us so the Afghan people can have a better future. The choice is clear. It is time to decide. We need to stay and finish the job and help the people of Afghanistan realize their dreams in a free and open democratic society.

I encourage all members to stand with our brave men and women, support this motion and have the courage to stand up for what is right.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throngs of people gathered at the Greater Moncton International Airport last Wednesday to recognize the service and commitment of four servicemen returning from Afghanistan after six months of field duty.

[*Translation*]

These brave men—Corporal Mattieu Jacob, Corporal Joël Richard, Trooper Martin Cormier and Master Corporal Emanuel Gaumont of the 8th Canadian Hussars—have done their province and their country proud. Greater Moncton supports them and all Canadian troops.

As we underscore their courage, let us not forget the sacrifices of those who have fallen in combat and their families.

[*English*]

Let us remember something else. The government has not yet articulated a clear mission statement in Afghanistan even as it puts the flower of Canada's youth in harm's way. It has not bothered to secure the resources necessary to deal with the rising incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder among our servicemen and service-women returning home.

All Canadians, but especially our returning heroes, deserve better.

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[*Translation*]

JOB CREATION

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite my opposition colleagues' dire predictions about how the economy was going to be destabilized, a new Canadian job creation record was set in January.

More than 46,000 new jobs were created in January, which is proof that more Canadians have work thanks to the leadership of our Prime Minister.

The unemployment rate reached its lowest point ever. These new jobs are full-time jobs that pay nearly 5% more than last year, which is twice the rate of inflation.

There is also good news for Quebec. The unemployment rate is at its lowest in 33 years. In January, more than 24,000 full-time jobs were created in Quebec, including 17,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Fortunately, Quebecers are not as negative when it comes to their future as the members of the eternal Bloc opposition. They know

Statements by Members

that the economy will continue to shine as brightly as the north star thanks to our Prime Minister's leadership.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

CREDIT CARD INTEREST RATES

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP wants the government to show leadership and fairness by taking action for working and middle class families.

Hard-working Canadians deserve protection as consumers. The government should be capping credit card interest at no more than 5% above prime. Here are five reasons why credit card rates and the banks should be reined in.

One, today's interest rates are outrageous. Nineteen per cent or higher interest rates unfairly hurt working families.

Two, consumer debt is six times higher than in the 1980s, at \$300 billion, and total household debt driven by high interest debt is over \$1 trillion.

Three, families that used to be able to save 15% to 20% of their income now can only save an average of 2%. That will not be enough to retire on.

Four, the high costs of medications, training and of course child care are driving up the cost of essential items, forcing more hard-working families into debt.

Five, big banks are making record profits and are heading toward another \$20 billion year as they gouge consumers.

The Conservative government has given massive corporate tax cuts that have benefited the big banks. The NDP wants to see the banks reined in, with capped credit card interest rates so that hard-working Canadians can meet the needs of their families.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GRANDMAÎTRE AWARD GALA

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the recipients of the Grandmaitre awards at the 8th annual gala, which was held February 7, 2007. Among the winners were André Brisebois, young person of the year, Jean-François Picher, educator of the year, and Alain Vachon, citizen of the year.

Le Patro d'Ottawa was recognized as organization of the year, an award that has been well earned, as the organization celebrates its 50th anniversary. Congratulations to its executive director, Denis Bédard, and his predecessors.

Dr. Harvey Barkun was recognized as francophile of the year. After a brilliant career in hospital administration, he became a board member of the Montfort Hospital in 1998 and has been actively contributing to its development ever since.

Oral Questions

I would especially like to congratulate Pierre De Blois, a good friend, who was awarded the Grandmaître prize. After over 35 years of activism, we owe him a huge debt of gratitude for the Festival franco-ontarien, homogeneous school boards in Ontario, the important role played by the University of Ottawa in the francophonie, and I could go on.

Bravo, Pierre, and my sincere thanks.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last January, Cabico announced a third wave of staff reductions at its Coaticook plant. This flourishing company once employed just over 800 people. Today, Cabico has only 300 workers.

As it exports 90% of its production to the United States, this kitchen cabinet manufacturer is facing very difficult market conditions given the manufacturing crisis.

The Bloc Québécois believes that the \$1 billion aid package is not enough and should be increased to \$4.5 billion. The Bloc Québécois is proud to have convinced the government that the situation was beyond urgent and that immediate action had to be taken. However, the aid package must be improved and the government has the wherewithal.

The Bloc Québécois will continue to press for assistance for this region and all others affected by this crisis and will continue to defend the interests of workers.

* * *

[English]

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was recently contacted by a constituent who shared a sobering message regarding the current government's increasing neglect of non-profit organizations across this country.

This constituent, who works to promote and support volunteers and volunteerism in her community, said, "It is becoming a real struggle for non-profits. Since the Conservatives have taken over, funding has basically dried up". She went on to express her concern for the continuation of non-profits. She said, "Many volunteer centres across Canada are currently in survival mode".

I do not know why the Prime Minister wants to be remembered as the cruellest ever. Does he not see that volunteers and non-profits across this country are the backbone of a caring society? Will he use the upcoming budget to provide funds to help the non-profit organizations?

I call upon my parliamentary colleagues to join me in expressing our appreciation for the volunteers across this great country.

● (1415)

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME ACT

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the 39th Parliament comes to an end, the member for Wild Rose will retire, sadly, bringing to an end an incredible political career.

The member for Wild Rose has devoted his career to making our streets and communities safer. The age of protection component of Bill C-2 is tribute to his many years of hard work on the justice file.

This brings us to day 74 of Senate obstruction on Bill C-2, the tackling violent crime act. Last week, while our government stepped up the pressure on the unelected, unaccountable Liberal Senate, Liberal senators struck back with stunning defences for their inaction.

Let us consider the comments of Liberal Senator Carstairs, who apparently believes that passing the new age of protection component of the act may force 14-year-old and 15-year-old prostitutes underground, preventing them from getting testing for HIV and STDs.

She should want to stop this sexual exploitation. Bill C-2 does that.

I stand here today and join my government in demanding that the Senate stop obstructing Bill C-2 and in thanking the member for Wild Rose for his tireless efforts.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a year we have said that the government should notify NATO that the timeline of February 2009 must be respected and that NATO should secure a replacement for our troops in Kandahar.

It is only now that the government is seriously engaging NATO, and NATO seems surprised and unprepared for this sudden request from Canada.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that Canada, NATO and Afghanistan would be in a much better position today if he had acted responsibly a year ago?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Liberal leader that no one at NATO was surprised. It has been very engaged with questions of Afghanistan, as are we following on the Manley report.

We are putting a question to Parliament that the House of Commons is going to have to decide. The question is a very simple one: do members support the military mission in Afghanistan or do they wish to see the troops withdrawn?

We know that the NDP has a clear position. It wants the troops withdrawn. We know that the Manley panel and this government have a clear position. We support our troops.

Oral Questions

The time is coming for all parties to pronounce on that question.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the problem. The government did not take the February 2009 deadline seriously. How could we expect NATO to take it seriously and prepare for it?

Will the government admit that it is making the same mistake with its motion and that by announcing a simple change to 2011, and not setting a firm deadline, provided we get another 1,000 troops, that what it is proposing to Canadians is nothing less than getting bogged down in a never-ending mission?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion is clear. It talks about the end of 2011. The question all parties of the House must answer is simple: do they support the combat mission or do they believe the troops must be withdrawn? The NDP position is clear. It wants the troops to be withdrawn.

We support the troops. All the parties will have to vote on this motion.

[*English*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not the wording of the motion. He should read his own motion.

For two years, the Prime Minister and his ministers have used inflammatory language, accusing anybody who questions the mission of being unpatriotic, but recently the government has said that this mission needs to change. Otherwise it must be stopped.

Can the government tell us what has changed to make it change its mind, because we certainly would not suggest that its patriotism has changed?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government looked very seriously at the question of Afghanistan and asked a former Liberal deputy prime minister, John Manley, and a bipartisan panel to engage on the issue and examine with experts the best way forward.

I think the deputy leader of the Liberal Party set the right tone when he said this:

This is the most important thing Canada's done in 50 years. We are anxious to work with the government to find a respectable, honourable compromise that serves the national interest.

I believe the Manley panel has set out the parameters for exactly such a way forward. We hope that all parties will look at this very seriously.

• (1420)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday the government tabled its flawed motion on Afghanistan, but the motion begs a host of questions.

The most important of these is this: when the government speaks of extending Canada's combat role to 2011, is this a withdrawal date or a renewal date? Which is it: a limited mission or an endless war?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again we are quite clear. The motion speaks to a date at the end of 2011 and, over the time up to that date, an effort to train and transition responsibility to the Afghan National Army for security in its own country. Obviously our objective is to achieve that. We are not going to tie the hands of a future Parliament. It will be able to review that, but we believe that is an achievable question.

What we have to decide in this Parliament now is what we do until 2011: do members support the mission in Afghanistan or do they want the troops pulled out now? That is the question we will be deciding.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's motion on Afghanistan does not raise just one question. It raises three.

What is to say that 1,000 soldiers will be enough? When will combat end and training begin, as the government suggests? The third question is more important: when will the mission end? In 2011, will troops be withdrawn or will the never-ending war be renewed?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the person who said this:

We don't know what success looks like in Afghanistan, but we sure know what failure looks like: the Taliban take over, civil war restarts, the girls who are going to school don't go to school, the women who get health care as they deliver their children don't get health care, [and] we slide back. Victory is not clear, but losing this is pretty clear to me, and I don't think we want to lose.

The person who said that is the deputy leader of the Liberal Party. I hope he will provide leadership to his party on that question.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to his press secretary, Premier Jean Charest took advantage of his recent meeting with the Prime Minister to remind him that his aid package for the manufacturing and forestry industries is simply not enough. Not only does the Premier of Quebec find the Prime Minister's aid package inadequate, but the Premier of Ontario, the unions, the industries, workers in the regions and the Bloc Québécois do as well.

Will the Prime Minister finally listen to reason and improve his aid package in order to help the workers and regions affected by the crisis?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend, the leader of the Bloc, knows full well that the government has taken action and has already begun putting measures in place to support Canada's economy. A few weeks ago, the Minister of Finance introduced the economic statement here in this House and managed to get it passed. It contained measures to help businesses in Quebec deal with more complicated situations.

Oral Questions

In addition, I would remind my hon. friend that he voted for the measure last week.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we agreed with putting an end to the despicable blackmail that consisted in tying the aid to the next budget, but that was not our only condition. The government has a \$10.6 billion surplus in relation to the current budget. The economic situation is cause for concern, especially given what is happening in the United States. We agree that some money needs to go to pay down the debt. Three billion dollars would be enough. But putting the full \$10.6 billion on the debt would mean ignoring the needs of workers and the regions.

Could the government not grant another \$3.5 billion, not in the next budget, but out of the current surplus, to help—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have taken action. I have already spoken about the measures in the Minister of Finance's economic statement. We worked on resolving the issue with the community development trust. We also took action on the fiscal imbalance and through the new formula, Quebec received an additional and unexpected \$406 million. This government is concerned about this problem and that is why it is in the process of implementing these measures.

• (1425)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the premiers of Quebec and Ontario denounced not only the inadequacy of the federal assistance, but also its distribution. Indeed, the distribution of assistance based on population rather than based on the number of jobs affected, and \$10 million in base funding for all the provinces regardless of needs—this all means that Prince Edward Island will receive \$99 per resident, while Quebec, which is bearing the brunt of the crisis, will receive only \$28 per resident, barely a quarter of that amount.

How can the Prime Minister or the government justify this distribution, which is so unfair and illogical for Quebec?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Bloc would like to paint the most miserable picture possible of the situation, but I would remind them that, according to the most recently released statistics on employment, Quebec now has the lowest unemployment rate that it has seen in 33 years, namely, 6.8%. For Canada overall, that rate is 5.8%. Those statistics say it all.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when Alberta was hit with the mad cow disease crisis, logically, that is where the bulk of the assistance went. However, when a crisis hits Quebec primarily, the Conservatives opt for a distribution that will give rich Alberta more than Quebec, where the majority of manufacturing jobs have been lost.

How can the government explain that it is so difficult to help Quebec when it needs assistance and so easy to help Alberta, whether it needs help or not?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the formula is quite

straightforward. It is based on population distribution. That formula is fair and reasonable. Passing that legislation even prompted the Premier of Ontario, who rarely gives accolades to this side of the House, to say that the Government of Canada had taken positive action for Ontario.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Minister of Foreign Affairs made a horrible prediction, saying that there will never be democracy as we know it in the western world in Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister has said repeatedly that the purpose of this war was to share Canadian values with the Afghan people. This seems no longer to be the case.

Does the Prime Minister agree with his foreign affairs minister? Does he believe that establishing democracy in Afghanistan is impossible?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan now has a democratic government. Elections have been held and, in my opinion, Afghanistan is a democracy.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when will the government realize, and the official opposition for that matter, that when it comes to Afghanistan, it is not a question of combat or combat light or extending the war with our eyes open or extending it with our eyes closed?

There are two paths in front of us in Afghanistan: one is to prolong the war, the other is to begin to build a path toward peace. There are two choices: war or peace.

Which side will the Prime Minister choose? Which path will he take?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the leader of the NDP that there is a clear choice of two paths. The choices are not the ones he lays out. It is the choice of whether we support a continued military presence and mission in Afghanistan, or whether we wish the troops to be pulled out now. We know where the NDP stands. Those members want the troops out now.

As for peace, we know from experience, and if those members review the Manley report it is quite clear, that we cannot have peace and security in that country until we advance the objectives we have of delivering that peace. Sadly, and unfortunately, sometimes that takes a military commitment.

We are prepared to make that military commitment and Canadians are proud of that military commitment.

Oral Questions

•(1430)

*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has admitted he broke the rules when he issued a \$122,000 untendered contract to a Conservative friend.

In fact, that same friend received another contract worth only \$350 less than the limit for sole sourcing.

Who did the minister hire to write his budget speech this year? Did he play by the rules this time?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget speech is being prepared within my office. It is not quite ready, but I will be pleased to let the member know soon when we will have the opportunity to use the budget speech.

The work was done by Mr. MacPhie and his company. All of the documents were produced. They have been available for examination by all hon. members. Members can have a look at them for themselves. Hon. members can decide on the reasonableness.

This work was done over several months with respect to policy and communications, and there was value for money.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he misses the point. Why does he not apologize for breaking the rules?

An ugly pattern is emerging. First, he breaks the contracting rules without saying he is sorry. Now we see 101 finance contracts, just a tad below the \$25,000 limit for sole sourcing.

Does the Prime Minister want to force an early election before all this dirt that is oozing out of the finance department escalates into a mother of all mudslides?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see this afternoon that the member for Markham—Unionville has slithered out from under his rock once again.

Most of the contracts to which reference is made, and I make the point most of the contracts to which the hon. member refers, were routine departmental contracts in the Department of Finance for photocopying and other services delivered to the Department of Finance. All of it is publicly available for examination.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the dirt keeps on oozing because in order to get untendered communications contracts from the Conservative government, one clearly needs to be a buddy of the finance minister.

There was one untendered contract worth \$122,000 from the finance minister and two other untendered contracts from Industry Canada, all given to Hugh MacPhie. Who is he? A former Mike Harris operative. There was another sole source contract to the vice president of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives.

How many untendered goodies has the finance minister given to his former Mike Harris cronies?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the contracts were awarded in conformity with Treasury Board requirements. The department had two contracts with MacPhie & Company for work completed in 2007. The total invoice for these two contracts was \$19,575.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need an apology because it shows that MacPhie's Industry Canada contracts were to describe the government's strategy on science and technology. That could not have been too much work because if we look at the recent firings and gag orders, one does not have to really believe that the government actually believes in scientific expertise.

The government actually fired Canada's chief science adviser. Will the President of the Treasury Board explain why government rules are being violated, all in an effort to pocket the books of the finance minister's cronies?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be perfectly clear, no rules were violated.

As far as Dr. Carty is concerned, he announced that he would be retiring effective March 2008 as science adviser. The government has been supportive of a motion brought before the industry committee. We will be having Mr. Carty before our committee to answer all questions and we await his appearance.

* * *

•(1435)

*[Translation]***PUBLIC WORKS**

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance awarded an untendered \$122,000 contract to a friend to write a speech. The unelected Minister of Public Works, Michael Fortier, awarded a \$875,000 contract for the installation of a security fence in Montebello, again without obtaining bids. This clearly contravenes Public Works rules that require the use of the tendering process.

How can the government allow its unelected minister to contravene this rule with impunity?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. A contract was awarded to Matériaux Bonhomme Ltée of Gatineau, Quebec, for the installation of a fence to secure the perimeter of Chateau Montebello during the Summit of the Americas. For technical reasons, the RCMP decided that it was the only type of fencing that could meet their needs.

We did our job to provide security and we will do so in future. That is our approach.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is justifying this expense, at four times the market rate, on the basis that the event was to take place shortly. Yet, they knew for months that the summit would be held in Montebello.

Oral Questions

Why does the government hide behind this false pretext to justify its contravention of the basic rule of tendering?

[English]

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rules were followed. The RCMP required the security fence in a timely manner. We did our job. We provided the proper security fence and that is exactly what was required by the RCMP. Rules were followed, the fence was provided, and the summit went forward in a secure manner, just exactly as was required.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has said that he will release information about the transfer of detainees when transfers are once again taking place and when an operational decision concerning this matter has been made.

It would appear that the transfer of detainees is not yet taking place, so will the minister tell us what he is doing with them in the meantime? Where are they?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is misinformed. I never said that it was the government's decision to make. This is clearly an operational decision. As I said again this weekend, if a decision were to be made about resuming the transfer of detainees or increasing the number of detainees transferred by military personnel, it would be a decision, an announcement or an operational call made by senior officers and leaders on the ground in Afghanistan.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told us that he was not involved in building prisons. If he is not involved in building or running prisons, then surely we should ask ourselves where are we putting detainees and what are we doing with them?

Are we subcontracting them to the United States or Great Britain? What are we doing with them? It is high time the government answered these questions. We have been asking about this for weeks now. We would like a clear answer for once.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said last week, we have an agreement in place. The armed forces are responsible for implementing the agreement on the ground at their discretion.

That being said, we are proud of this agreement. Few NATO countries have an agreement as good as ours. It is in place and it is working very well.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parade of untendered contracts and waste by the government continues. On the weekend we learned the government overpaid

\$600,000 for a fence in Montebello. With yet another untendered contract, taxpayers were left on the hook paying four times what the project should have cost. This was a 24 hour fence that cost \$875,000. Now that may only be half the cost of a Conservative budget speech, but to everyone else, it is outrageous waste.

Who is being held accountable for this mess?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as it was once so well put, this is not fair. The security fence was required by the RCMP. It was required to have a secure summit. The contract was given to a firm that could provide the only fence that the RCMP said was required for this operation. The fence was provided, the summit went forward, and there were no security concerns. This was a success in terms of security.

● (1440)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a summit with the presidents of the United States and Mexico does not happen on a whim. It is planned months in advance. George Bush does not just show up even for his good pal, Steve.

Certainly there was more than enough time to find a 24 hour fence that was not \$600,000 over price. Accountability is not just words one pays someone \$100,000 to write a speech, it is about actions taken every day. Day in and day out the government substitutes action for rhetoric, accountability for blame.

I ask again, will the minister hold someone to account, yes or no?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect, I will take the word of the RCMP on Canada's security needs over that of the member for Ajax—Pickering. The RCMP said it needed this fence. It needed it in a timeframe that it provided to this government. We provided the fence. The summit went forward in a secure manner and the job was done by this government.

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering that he would want to be very careful not to refer to other hon. members by name if that is what was happening there.

The hon. member for York West.

*Oral Questions***MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, late Friday afternoon the Conservative government finally admitted that while the Minister of the Environment was in Bali, he instructed his chief of staff to call the head of the OPP anti-racket squad. He called not once, but twice, and the calls were made on the day after the OPP confirmed it was transferring this file to the RCMP. What an odd coincidence.

Why did the minister not just issue his own press release if he was so desperate for clarification?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the Liberals do not like it when the police clear Conservative politicians of any wrongdoing because they cannot get them to clear them of any wrongdoing in the case of the sponsorship scandal.

However, they should stop casting aspersions on the police. The OPP, which I need not remind the House is not a federal agency, issued a news release on December 14. The chief said that the Ontario Provincial Police investigation of and subsequent charges against an elected Ottawa official, who was municipal, was not influenced in any way by federal officials. Commissioner Julian Fantino said today, "The OPP does not permit the media or politics to influence how it undertakes investigations".

I know the Liberal Party does not operate that way but that is how the OPP operates.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. Charges have been laid as a result of this bribery investigation concerning a federal appointment.

The minister has been interviewed twice by the Ontario Provincial Police and will be called to testify in a criminal trial. Confidential informants are waiting to tell more.

OPP evidence suggests that the minister as well as other Conservatives have played a role here. Will the Prime Minister call in the RCMP now to investigate this attempted cover-up?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is one thing the hon. member said that is right: This is a very serious matter. We have a situation where there are charges, a police investigation and a statement by the police clearing individuals who that party continues to smear in public.

The Liberals should accept the word of the police and accept that there is no wrongdoing whatsoever on the part of the government. The leader of the Liberals should get control of his party and stop spending time in the gutter the way they seem to like to do.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past two years, our government has given close to \$190 billion in tax relief to hard-working Canadians.

We delivered on our promise to cut the GST from 7% to 5% and unemployment is at its lowest level in over three decades.

As we approach our next budget, the government has been clear that we will take cautious steps to ensure that our finances are stable and that we will continue to pay down debt.

Would the Minister of Finance please inform the House when he will present the next budget?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a secret. I cannot tell the hon. member what the—yes I can.

[*Translation*]

I would like to say that our government's third budget will be tabled on February 26 at 4 p.m.

* * *

● (1445)

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the rules are clear. Contrary to what we were just told, bids are required for contracts over \$25,000. The Minister of Finance has very clearly violated the rules. No need for an apology. What he has to do is leave. He is no longer qualified to sit here.

Last week, we learned that the Conservatives had spent nearly \$1 million for a fence worth a mere \$200,000. Once again, there is no accountability because the person responsible for spending taxpayers' money that way, Michael Fortier, is hiding in the Senate.

When will the government start following the rules put in place for the public?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are applying the rules. The purchase of the fence was a decision of the RCMP. It expressed the need for this fence, and we provided it with what it needed.

[*English*]

Again in English for my colleague from Outremont, the RCMP set the standards of the fencing it required. We got it in a timely manner. We did our job, which is what Canadians expect.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no clause as an exception to the rules that we can give \$122,000 to our buddies for a 20 page speech and call it value for money. There is no such exception. There is no exception in the rules to pay \$1 million of taxpayer money for a \$200,000 fence because the RCMP told us to do so.

The bidding process, the submissions are required to save taxpayer money. The Conservatives broke the rule. Mr. Ethics, our Prime Minister, where is the sanction?

Oral Questions

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the rules were followed. The RCMP required this fence and it required it in a timely manner. It is our obligation to provide security for Canadians. We followed that obligation to the T.

We did our job. We provided the fence. We did it in a timely manner and the summit went ahead as planned.

* * *

AIRBUS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the story by the former Conservative prime minister, Brian Mulroney, is becoming less believable by the day.

Executives from Thyssen are now denying that Mulroney got the bags of cash to represent them. They say:

He never worked for Thyssen.

I cannot imagine how he could expect to sell something like this to Russia or even to China. It's absolute nonsense.

Does the government still believe this nonsense? Will it start a full public inquiry into the scandal today, or is it waiting for the election to sweep all of this under the rug?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada engaged Professor Johnston to investigate the matter and make recommendations on how to move forward. His report details certain questions that merit investigation in a public inquiry. We will be proceeding with that public inquiry.

However, we are waiting, as Professor Johnston has suggested we wait, until the ethics committee finishes its work so there is no duplication of effort and we can have the most efficient inquiry that deals with all of the relevant questions that are raised in this matter.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Mulroney has stated that he tried to sell armoured vehicles to China, but Canada's ambassador to China at the time does not believe that these activities ever took place. No one ever discussed this with the ambassador.

Such sales would have violated the international rules prohibiting arms sales to China, rules that Mr. Mulroney himself proposed.

How long is the government going to postpone holding a public inquiry into this scandal?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government asked Professor Johnston to undertake a third-party review of the matter and to make recommendations concerning a public inquiry and its mandate. Professor Johnston suggested that a limited public inquiry be conducted based on witness statements made during sittings of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Therefore, it makes sense for the committee to finish its work before the public inquiry begins. We are following Professor Johnston's recommendation.

[*English*]

ELECTION FINANCING

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the dishonest and corrupt government continues to stall and stonewall the procedure and House affairs committee's investigation of the in and out scam.

The Conservative Party broke election spending limits by one million bucks and pocketed \$700,000 in illegal subsidies from taxpayers.

Is this hypocritical government so desperate for an election because it is afraid of being caught in more scandals, or does it plan to exceed spending limits again in the next election?

● (1450)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all our practices follow the election laws. We have been quite clear about that as a party. I know it is dramatically different from what the Liberal Party did with the sponsorship scandal and other matters.

In terms of the questions being studied by the procedure and House affairs committee, our position is quite simple. Let us examine all parties. All parties engage in identical practices so there is no reason to look at only one party and not the others.

We want to know why the other parties will not allow a full and complete study. What do they have to hide? Why does the Liberal Party want to keep its books closed?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are just more obstacles. These are not answers. The truth is that Elections Canada is saying that only the Conservatives broke the law. By blocking the committee, the Conservatives are passing the buck and shirking their responsibilities.

When will the government bring its members into line, put an end to their obstructionist tactics and allow the committee to study the allegations against the Conservatives?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that if there were any reason the Liberals had nothing to fear, they would be quite happy to support a full, balanced, fair examination of the practices of all parties.

We have nothing to hide. We just think everybody should be treated in the same way because, guess what? Everybody did the exact same thing. Everybody engages in the exact same approach to financing.

However, there is one area where the Liberal Party could have handled things very differently and that was the question of the sponsorship scandal where \$40 million of Canadian taxpayer money went missing, a lot of it into Liberal Party coffers and cash-filled envelopes to run campaigns in restaurants in Quebec.

* * *

[Translation]

AIRBUS

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 3, Karlheinz Schreiber sent the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics a letter in which he contradicted the testimony Brian Mulroney gave in December on the nature of the services for which he received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the businessman.

Does this new revelation not prove the need for a public inquiry with a much broader mandate than the Prime Minister wanted and prove the urgency to appoint someone to head up the inquiry before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics finishes its work?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are following Professor Johnston's recommendations. It only makes sense to finish this work before a public inquiry begins. I would encourage the opposition parties to wrap up the committee work quickly so that we can move on to a public inquiry.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, having two overlapping investigations is not very likely. Last time, seven months went by between the appointment of Justice Gomery and the beginning of the public hearings. What is more, Mr. Mulroney said that the money paid by Mr. Schreiber was an honorarium for promoting Thyssen products. However, Thyssen is saying that is not true.

Is that not another good reason to begin the public inquiry immediately, with as broad a mandate as possible, before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics finishes its work?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I said.

[English]

We are doing exactly what Professor Johnston suggested, and that is proceeding. We are awaiting the outcome of the testimony from the ethics committee.

It would not make sense to have a multiplicity of processes. As we have seen from the evidence of that committee in the past week, we know why it would be dangerous to do that.

We wish to follow the recommendations of Professor Johnston who I think has provided very good advice. We will continue to do that as he moves forward to develop the ultimate terms of reference for the public inquiry as soon as the opposition parties are ready to proceed with it.

Oral Questions

HEALTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is silent on wait times, one of the Conservatives' so-called priorities.

Canadians are still waiting for tests, waiting for care and three million are still waiting to find a family doctor.

The Canadian Medical Association says that we need more doctors. The Canadian Federation of Medical Students says that we need more doctors but the average medical student cannot afford the staggering \$158,000 debt that he or she faces.

Will the government fix the student loan program so more Canadians can become doctors and ease the problem of wait times?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a delight to stand and talk a little about our wait time strategy.

As the hon. member might recall, last year we announced funding for wait times reductions through our patient wait time guarantee with the 10 provinces and 3 territories.

I would remind the hon. member, if she has not seen the media on this, that I was in Halifax this past Friday announcing additional wait times guarantee projects with the Government of Nova Scotia. That will roll out across the country as well.

* * *

• (1455)

TAXATION

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader is fond of making promises and concocting schemes that make absolutely no sense to average Canadians but he is not fond of explaining how he plans to pay for all his schemes and promises.

Will the Liberal leader raise taxes, including the GST? Will he push our country back into deficit? He even said that the Liberals will take away the universal child care tax credit. There is not a tax they did not like and a tax they would not hike.

Could the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development please explain how raising the GST and taking away—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. We will have a little order, please, so we can hear the answer.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Liberal plan to raise the GST will not help people who are struggling to get by. The GST is the only tax that many Canadians pay.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, I think they are saying that I look very handsome today.

The Liberal leader has also promised to scrap the universal child care benefit, something that would plunge 24,000 families into poverty by his own definition. I fail to see how that would help Canadians.

We have stepped up to the plate by providing a universal child care benefit, the working income tax benefit, more investment on training than any government in history and more investment in affordable housing than any government in history. We are getting the job done.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the health minister has done nothing of substance to deal with wait times in this country, except break his government's promise in the last election.

The government has ignored the good advice of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students that says that Canada needs more resident spaces, that post-graduate programs must be transferable and that nurse practitioners must be trained and used properly.

At a bare minimum, will the government tell Canada's future doctors that their student loans do not have to be paid back while they are still learning and training as residents?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a serious issue. The government pledged in the last budget to undertake a student loan review. We have done that. We have received submissions from across the country.

The member knows we will be announcing the results of that review in the upcoming budget, which apparently is on February 26. I am really looking forward to it.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, middle class and working families are being gouged from all sides: out of control cable bills, outrageous ATM fees, out of control gas prices and now massive cellphone contract charges.

Imagine a family trying to deal with a layoff or having a new baby on the way. It needs to save some money, so it cancels its cellphone. Rogers charges them \$400, Telus charges \$700 and Bell another \$700.

Will the government finally step up and extend a helping hand to working families with cellphone charges?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Competition Bureau reviews all complaints. It is an arm's length organization. It is its responsibility to review these things, and I am sure that everything works fine.

CANADA POST

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities issued a memo to Canada Post, which is causing the elimination of individual mail delivery in rural Canada.

Costing \$600 million nationwide, the review in P.E.I. is eliminating individual delivery, forcing more cars on to the roads and putting islanders' safety at risk.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has a responsibility for the safety of all Canadians. Will he order that safety issues be settled between individuals, the postal driver and the local postmaster, and will the minister order Canada Post to cease and desist in its harassment of Prince Edward Islanders?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members will recall, Parliament passed a motion in which we supported rural mail delivery. Parliament determined and instructed Canada Post to ensure that rural mail delivery would be something on which Canadians could count.

Following that motion, Canada Post did act and has acted in the interest of Canadians to ensure that job gets done.

* * *

● (1500)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that, as a northern country, Canada is particularly vulnerable when it comes to a changing climate.

Over the weekend, the Minister of the Environment was in Canada's northern regions, where the effects of climate change are becoming more apparent. For example, the melting of the permafrost in the north has destabilized the foundations of homes and schools.

Could the Minister of the Environment please tell the House how the government is taking action to help Canadians adapt to a changing climate?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with a good number of Inuit leaders and aboriginal leaders in the north and representatives from the Nunavut territory.

I was able to tell them some good news on two fronts. First, finally Canada's government is acting where it did not act for 10 long years on a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to fight global warming. I also told them that we were spending \$85 million on adaptations funding.

They have been waiting for action for so long. Over the last two years, finally the government has been giving it on the environment.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, supply-managed farmers are worried. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that he truly does want to safeguard supply management. But in negotiations, farmers have noticed a clear reduction in the safeguards offered by supply management.

Is the government committed to strongly opposing an increase in tariff quotas and to saying no to a tariff reduction, and will it go so far as to refuse to sign any agreement that goes against this commitment?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that just last week, my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced special safeguards that Canada will bring before the WTO. This is the first piece of good news and there is more.

WTO negotiations have always been conducted in accordance with the motion adopted unanimously in this House. That is action. It is not blah, blah, blah, which we have heard for too long from the Bloc.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Gazprom in Russia just cancelled a major liquefied—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Speaker: We are finished with that question and answer. We have started over.

[English]

The hon. member for Western Arctic has the floor.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, Gazprom in Russia just cancelled a major liquefied natural gas supply that was to service Quebec's needs. This action points out the short-sighted and foolhardy nature of the government's energy policies.

According to the National Energy Board energy outlook of November 2007, our natural gas supply in Canada is moving to a crisis and people soon are going to be without secure sources of heat for their homes.

Why does the Prime Minister turn his back on a Canada first energy security strategy and continue to leave our future in doubt?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our energy policy is based on free and competitive principles, respect for provincial jurisdiction, as well as targeted environmental initiatives.

Under the International Energy Agency, Canada fulfills all of its obligations. With those obligations also come the benefits from the other member countries of their strategic reserves.

I am proud to tell the House of Commons that there is no shortage and we do not anticipate anything. Canada's energy is very secure across the country.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Marian Horne, Minister of Justice for Yukon.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1505)

[English]

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to table the national child benefit progress report for 2005.

The reports show that we are making progress in reducing child poverty in Canada and they demonstrate the need for the federal, provincial and territorial governments to continue to work together in advancing this goal. We want to make it easier for families to become self-sufficient.

The national child benefit has three goals: to help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty; to promote attachment to the labour market by assuring families are better off through working; and to harmonize program objectives and benefits through simplified administration.

* * *

[Translation]

MUSEUMS ACT

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Museums Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference of Tuesday, December 4, 2007, your committee has considered Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act, the Pilotage Act and other Acts in consequence and agreed, on Thursday, February 7, to report it with an amendment.

* * *

NUNAVIK INUIT LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENT ACT

(Bill C-11. On the Order: Government Orders:)

February 8, 2008—That the amendment made by the Senate to Bill C-11, An Act to give effect to the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be now read a second time and concurred in—The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

[Translation]

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of this House, the Government motion in response to amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-11, An Act to give effect to the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be deemed adopted.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition from a number of people in Ontario and Alberta, people who remember the Prime Minister boasting about his commitment to transparency and accountability when he said “The greatest fraud is a promise not kept”.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he never indicated that he would tax income trusts. In fact, he said he would not. However, he recklessly broke that promise, imposing a 31.5% punitive tax, which wiped out \$25 billion from hard-earned retirement savings, hurting particularly Canadian seniors.

They therefore call upon the government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions. They call for the Prime Minister and the government to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed and to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

● (1510)

CANADA POST BOOK RATE

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are certainly paying attention to one of the bills currently in the House, Bill C-458, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), which would protect and support the library book rate and extend it to include audiovisual materials.

I am pleased to present a petition signed by many of the people of the constituency of Grande Prairie.

KENYA

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House and submit a petition on behalf of a group of youths from Runnymede United Church in my riding. They have received hundreds of signatures in support of their petition. These youths have been to Kenya where they have done a great deal of work with the people there. They have seen the terrible violence that occurred following the elections in Kenya.

The petitioners are requesting that Canada send emergency aid relief to displaced refugees in Kenya and that the Canadian government join or lead an international effort to end the current political crisis and prevent corruption in future elections. The petitioners would like to think that their initiative in fact encouraged the government to take action in offering assistance to Kenya. The petitioners also request that the money be spent with NGOs such as UNICEF and the Red Cross, not the government; that the Minister of Foreign Affairs take active steps to find a peaceful resolution; and that Canada follow Britain's lead in not recognizing the Kibaki presidency.

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition that is one of a number of petitions I have presented, possibly coming up to around 2,000 signatures now, in regard to the current plan by the Canadian Pacific Railway corporation to construct a rail yard in the village of Ayr, which is in my riding.

The petitioners are asking that it be made known to the government that the protection of underground gas and pipelines is insufficient; that the Canadian Pacific Railway is not taking seriously the environmental hazards to the pristine Nith River; that there are no appropriate sound barriers; that there is no promise that idling engines that pollute our air will be stopped; and there is no safe and secure plan for access of emergency vehicles. This goes on and on and is an absolutely terrible lack of corporate responsibility. The petitioners are also asking that the government consider reviewing the legislation concerning our national rail system so this cannot happen in other communities.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of Mr. Jordan Foster from my riding of Mississauga South and a large number of people in the same community. The petitioners want to remind the Prime Minister about his accountability commitment, but also that he said the greatest fraud is “a promise not kept”. The petitioners want to remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax, which wiped out \$25 billion of the hard-earned savings of over two million Canadians, most of whom were seniors.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Conservative minority government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, as verified by the finance committee; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

SUDAN

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because today at five o'clock there is a Yukon reception at the press club to which we are inviting everyone, I would like to take this opportunity to present two petitions from many Yukoners.

The first petition calls on the government to provide more military and financial assistance to the joint UN-African mission in Sudan; to establish a UN presence in Chad; to increase diplomatic efforts with the rebel groups; to press leaders in the Sudanese government and Janjaweed to be tried before the International Court for crimes against humanity; to lobby nations to increase funding for UN refugee agencies and humanitarian organizations in Darfur; to demand from the government of Sudan full and safe access for all displaced persons, refugees and other needy people in the region; to lobby for the enforcement of UN resolutions that have already been passed, including enforcement of the no fly zone, the arms embargo, and the disarmament of the murderous Janjaweed militia; to encourage all nations to put diplomatic pressure on China, Sudan's largest trading partner; and to demand that support from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund be conditional on the government ceasing its mass atrocities in Darfur.

• (1515)

NORTHERN RESIDENTS TAX DEDUCTION

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a second petition to present today on behalf of Yukoners.

The petitioners would like the government to know that people in the north face the highest cost of living of all Canadians and that the northern residents tax deduction was instituted to help offset these high costs. The residence portion deduction has not been increased since its inception 20 years ago, while the cost of living for northern Canadians has continued to increase.

The petitioners would like the government to know that whereas the cost in lost tax revenue to the Government of Canada would be insignificant while the economic benefits to the north would be substantial, they would like the Minister of Finance to increase the

Points of Order

residence portion of the northern residents tax deduction by 50% and also ask that this portion of the tax deduction be indexed to keep pace with inflation based upon the northern inflation measurement.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 4

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order because I want to bring to your attention what I believe are flaws in government Motion No. 4, which is on today's notice paper. While I would certainly submit that the subject of the motion is very important to this House, and indeed the country, I am making this point of order with the intention that the motion in terms of how it is written needs to be clarified, and for no other reason.

I would like to submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the motion on notice is in fact not a motion at all, but really more like a speech disguised as a motion. You are aware that *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Form* sixth edition, in citation 565, states:

A motion should be neither argumentative, nor in the style of a speech, nor contain unnecessary provisions or objectionable words. It is usually expressed in the affirmative, even when its purpose and effect are negative.

In addition, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Marleau and Montpetit states on page 449:

Examples may be found of motions with preambles, but this is considered out of keeping with usual practice...A motion should not contain any objectionable or irregular wording. It should not be argumentative or written in the style of a speech.

I believe that government Motion No. 4 on today's notice paper fails to meet these standards. It has not been the practice of this House that a motion becomes a motion simply by taking a press release and putting the word “that” in front of it. The government motion on notice contains eight clauses that all start with a “whereas”, all of which would be totally appropriate for the debate on the motion but really amount to outlining the reasons to support the question. In other words, these clauses are an argument and therefore should not have any place in the wording of a motion on notice.

I would request that the government agree to withdraw this motion, reword it and replace it with an appropriate motion that constitutes neither a speech nor an argument. I would further submit that if the government fails to indicate that it will do this, then I would ask you to rule that this motion is not in order for debate and allow the government time to replace this flawed motion.

Government Orders

We know that the government is capable of putting a clear motion before the House on important matters. I would draw your attention to the one that we dealt with on Norad in May 2006, when the government motion basically said: "That this House support the government's ratification of the North American Aerospace Defense...agreement".

We also dealt with a motion later on in May 2006, which also dealt with the extension of the mission in Afghanistan. That was Motion No. 7 in our first session. I am not going to read out that motion because it did have some whereases, but I would point out that in regard to the motion it was never put on notice and it in fact was adopted by unanimous consent as receivable. Therefore, the decision about the nature of the motion was really out of your hands, Mr. Speaker.

What I remember from that motion, Mr. Speaker, was that the government basically put a proposition to Parliament and said to take it or leave it. It was not on the notice paper so we actually had no opportunity to debate the motion in terms of whether it was in its proper form.

I would like to make two points about this motion. First, because the House agreed to waive the notice of this motion by unanimous consent, the House did not set a precedent about the admissibility of this kind of motion. I would remind you, Mr. Speaker, of what Marleau and Montpetit say on page 502: "Nothing done by unanimous consent constitutes a precedent".

I would also further suggest that the motion of May 2006, the first motion on Afghanistan that we dealt with, was in fact a clearer proposition than the one that is now before us. The May 2006 motion contained less than 150 words and only one question that was put to the House on the extension of the mission.

The motion that is before us today, Motion No. 4, contains 560 words, including eight paragraphs of whereas clauses, which I submit are argumentative, and it contains two conditions that, as we see when we read them, are clearly outside of the control of the House and upon which support for the extension of the motion is predicated.

● (1520)

The previous question we had was fairly straightforward. The one before us today includes conditions and is certainly argumentative, and therefore, we believe, should not be seen as a proper motion before the House.

On matters as important as this, I believe the government has a responsibility to give the House a clear and straightforward question that can be debated and decided upon. Motion No. 4 has failed to do that. Therefore, we ask the government to voluntarily agree to rewrite it so that it does fit the usual standards and practice. Failing that, Mr. Speaker, you should rule on this question.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree fully with the previous speaker. In the way that it is presented to the House, the motion effectively lays out the recommendations of the Manley panel. It is very clear that all of the preamble is in fact argument which would normally be made during debate.

The only thing I can add to the argument already provided by the hon. member who just spoke, Mr. Speaker, is that the Journals Branch has been very vigilant and very rigid on the question of whereases in terms of motions. I think you will see, Mr. Speaker, that of the hundreds of motions that have been placed by members in this place, I do not believe I even recall seeing any of them include a whereas. In fact, the Journals Branch is very judicious in eliminating them and asking the members to rewrite their motions so that they get to the objective, the result that is being sought by the motion being put.

Mr. Speaker, I raise this only from the standpoint that should you allow this motion to stand in the same fashion that it is written right now, it would then serve as a precedent for all hon. members to make the full argument with regard to any and all motions that they care to bring before this place, ultimately bringing the order of the debate and the clarity of motions into some measure of confusion.

I think the question raised by the hon. member should be looked at very carefully with regard to the precedent setting that it appears to be causing.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Not surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the views expressed by my hon. colleagues. In fact, my hon. colleague from Mississauga South has talked about precedents, and I believe if you examined precedents you would find that many motions have been extremely broad in scope, as is this one.

I think back perhaps to a motion discussing the distinct society, Mr. Speaker. I think you would find that it also was extremely broad in its scope. I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this motion as presented in its present form is entirely appropriate. I would look for a favourable ruling in this regard.

● (1525)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. members for Vancouver East and Mississauga South and the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader for their submissions on this point. I will examine the matter and return to the House in due course with a decision.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME LEGISLATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this motion by the government is unprecedented in the history of Canada. We can go back through almost 141 years of Confederation and we have never had a motion like this one in front of the House.

In substance, the motion says to the Senate, "We are telling you from the House of Commons if you do not pass Bill C-2 by the end of March 2008, we are going to bring down the government". The Minister of Justice was on his feet in the House repeating in his speech this afternoon exactly the same threat.

Government Orders

I want to start with the height of hypocrisy that this motion represents on behalf of the government. Before I do that, I want to deal with the basic lack of logic of this motion.

What are we hearing? We heard from the Prime Minister in the fall when Bill C-2 was put before the House, and I will come back to some of the history leading up to Bill C-2, that he was going to bring the government down if this bill was not passed. It was passed in the House and now the government is doing the same thing in the Senate.

The logic escapes me because behind the threats, the bombast and the macho image the government is trying to portray on crime is a totally illogical position, which is that we need this legislation right now, that we needed it years ago. That is what we hear from the government. There is some validity to that in the case of a number of parts of Bill C-2, particularly those that the NDP supported as a political party and which the Liberal government in previous administrations would not pursue.

The Conservatives are saying, "We need it right now, we are way overdue on a number of these amendments and provisions, but we are going to go to an election". They threatened it last fall and now they are threatening it again.

This resolution from the House has absolutely no impact on the Senate. We do not have the ability constitutionally to deal with this. It is totally illogical. If it comes to fruition, that is, if the government falls, or brings itself down is a better analysis of what is going on here, over this issue, Bill C-2 will die on the order paper. It will not get through the House of Commons or the Senate until the end of 2008.

Where is the logic behind this? Although it is a rhetorical question, the obvious answer is there is no logic. This is not about dealing reasonably, realistically and effectively with crime in this country. This is all about political posturing and nothing else on the part of the government.

Why are the Conservatives pushing it right now? The answer to that is very obvious. They lost the agenda on making crime the primary issue they want to run on in an election. The Conservatives think that is where they have their best chance of gaining support in the country. I think it is an analysis that is faulty, but that is where the Conservative Party and the Conservative government is coming from.

What has happened in the last several months is that the Conservatives' agenda around the crime issues has been completely pushed aside because we passed that bill before the House recessed at the end of last year. Any number of other issues that have been before the House and the country have taken prominence, issues that the government is very afraid of. Let me mention a few of them.

Obviously, at the top of the list right now would be the economic straits we are in, in particular in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, compelling the government, in spite of the blackmail it tried to pull on the House, to move \$1 billion into those sectors and communities in order to deal with the dire economic crises that a number of those communities are facing. That pushed it off its agenda.

● (1530)

Obviously, the Afghanistan war, and in particular, the way Canada is handling detainees in Afghanistan, has pushed the Conservatives off their agenda in that regard. The firing of the head of the nuclear safety commission has pushed them off. Of course, there is always the Schreiber-Mulroney scandal. In the last couple of weeks, there has been the issue of the finance minister not following the rules of the Treasury Board with regard to letting contracts. There is the in and out scandal on the part of the Conservative government, the only party in the House that has been charged by Elections Canada with having in effect breached the election financing law.

There are all of those issues, none of which are favourable to the government. We are seeing, as a result of all of these issues, that the government is falling in the polls. The Conservatives believe that they can hijack the agenda in this country by trying to get back on to the crime agenda.

Let us look at what the Conservatives have done historically in the last 12 months or so. Last spring, just before we broke for the summer, three of the five bills that comprised Bill C-2 had passed this House and were in the Senate. I say without any hesitation that by the end of 2007, had the government not done what it proceeded to subsequently do, those bills would have passed the Senate. I say that on the basis of the way the Senate has handled other crime bills since the Conservative government has been in power. The bills would have passed. I assume, if the government were really serious about doing anything about crime, the bills would have received royal assent and they would have been law.

All three of the bills would have been law by January 1, 2008, if not earlier. Those three parts of Bill C-2, the mandatory minimums on serious violent gun crimes, the age of consent, and the impaired driving bill, all three of those have been through this House. Let me correct that. The impaired driving bill was the one that had not gotten through. It was at report stage. It would have had third reading. It would have passed the House in the third or fourth week of September, when we were supposed to come back. The third one was the bill on the reverse onus on bail hearings which was to keep people in custody if they were facing serious charges involving guns.

Those three bills, the age of consent, the mandatory minimums, the reverse onus, would have been law by now. I believe, quite frankly, the impaired driving bill would have been law by now, because it would have passed the Senate quite quickly in late September or early October, but for the action of the government.

I guess we all know that what the Conservatives did is they did not have enough to do, that is, they did not have their political agenda. They thought they would have fallen as a government, as they probably should have, before the fall of 2007, so they prorogued Parliament. All of the bills on the order paper died. We had to start all over again. All of these bills were off, including the ones in the Senate.

Government Orders

I want to be very clear on this. All of the opposition parties were prepared in the fall when we came back in October after a month's delay to reinstate all of those bills at the same stage they had been, that is, three in the Senate and one here for a quick passage because there was the consent of all of the parties.

Again, with just a little bit of luck, we would have had all of those bills through the Senate by the end of the year, that is, before the year-end break, and if not, we would have had them in the first few weeks of January or February of this year, all of them. Instead, we have had this lengthy delay caused by the Conservative government, not by the Senate.

As members well know, my party and I are not supporters of the Senate. Regularly and consistently since the existence of our political party back in the 1940s, we have been calling for the abolition of the Senate. I am not here to defend members of the other place. We saw last week the kind of delay on Bill C-13, the meddling they do all the time. It is an unelected, unrepresentative, and I think oftentimes an irresponsible body. I am not here to defend them, but by the same token, at this period of time the delay for this legislation lies squarely, entirely in the lap of the government.

• (1535)

If the government were really serious about fighting crime as opposed to, as Lawrence Martin said in the *Globe and Mail* this morning, using it for, to quote him, "cheap politics", if the Conservatives were not doing it for that purpose, if they were really serious about the need to deal with serious violent crime in particular and some of these other issues around impaired driving and the age of consent, if they were not seeing it just as a methodology to try to get re-elected, we would have moved quite a bit further along. It is to their eternal shame that we are at the stage we are. Let us look at that stage.

It was interesting in the early and middle part of last week. The government, in the speeches its members were giving in the House, and in some of the addresses they were making to the media, began to sound almost desperate for an election. In that regard, if we have an election, we are going to be in the same situation. The bill is going to die, as all the others will that are on the order paper, and we will not see any of this legislation in place for the use of our police officers and judiciary across the country to apply and fight the various aspects of criminal activity that the bill would allow them to do.

The Conservatives are pushing that button, not because they are really serious about fighting crime. That is not their primary motivation. Their primary motivation is to use this as a political tool to try to save their seats, to try to get re-elected as a government. It is probably a faulty assumption on their part that it is going to work, but that is what their motivation is, not the best interests of the country and not the victims of crime. It is the Conservative political party that this is all about in trying to save their skins in the next election.

If we look at history, it is the height of hypocrisy for them to stand in the House and argue that they are tough on crime. It is simply not the reality when one looks at it.

The other point that I want to make is that if they were really serious about being effectively tough on crime, they would not have broken their promise with regard to the 2,500 police officers that they promised in the last election, and on which they have not delivered. In fact they misled Canadians in the last election. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, the former minister of justice, all of them across the country were trumpeting the 2,500 additional police officers they would see put in place.

What has happened? Number one, they did not tell the Canadian people that they were expecting the provinces to pick up most of the tab for those 2,500 police officers, money which the provinces do not have. To some degree, at least a number of the provinces have already moved on with regard to promises they made in elections to increase the number of police officers. They have already put some money into it and now the federal government is coming to them, johnny-come-lately, and saying, "Oh, by the way, although we promised this in the last election and we didn't tell the Canadian people we were going to do this, we want you, the provinces, to pay a big chunk, in most cases at least 50%". That is not within the financial capabilities of most of the provinces, nor should it be their responsibilities when the promise was made without that condition by the government.

It is a full two years after the election and this broken promise is still hanging over their heads. If the Conservatives were serious about it, they would not be bringing this kind of useless motion in front of the House. They would be moving a motion in the House to see to it that money was put in place, that a budgetary item was put in place. We should have seen this last fall, we should have seen it in the budget in February and we should have seen it in the budget in the previous February.

• (1540)

Today we hear that the next budget is coming. Let me assure the House that there will be nothing in the budget for those 2,500 police officers. The Conservatives are going to break that promise on an ongoing basis and they are not going to fulfill their commitment to the Canadian people.

With regard to that, whenever we look at dealing with crime effectively, we have to look at it from three perspectives.

First, we have legislation, as we see with Bill C-2, that deals with specific problems under our Criminal Code and other legislation. We are working on that against the delays caused by the government because it wants to keep it as a hot button item. It does not want the legislation passed because then it will be behind us. Therefore, we have done that to a great extent. There is still more that needs to be done.

Government Orders

The other two legs of that three-legged stool, if I can use that analogy, is prevention. The big item there is to move programs into our local communities, funded by the federal government. Again, the provinces do not have the taxing power or the revenue capability to fulfill all this. However, we literally have to move \$100 million a year to the provinces and the municipal local levels of government, to provide programming that will keep young people, in particular, out of the youth gangs and generally fight the drug culture and keep them out of those parts of our communities that advocate the use of drugs. That money needs to be spent. There is absolutely nothing beyond a very inconsequential amount that the government has done in this regard. It is minuscule. In fact, most of the time the government does not know what to do with it.

I come back to those 2,500 police officers. We know that in those areas of our cities where we have seriously violent crimes, we need to put more police officers on the street. We simply cannot deal with that in any effective ways, even if it is in an interim measure, for the next number of years. We need more police officers on the streets fighting that kind of crime, street level crime, particularly in the youth gangs where so much of the gun crime resides at the present time. The government has done nothing on that and it has done a minuscule amount on the prevention side.

Therefore, if the government were really serious, we would see that. We would not see the sham that this motion represents in the House at the present time. We would see concrete action. Most of this is looking at programming that would be successful. There are all kinds of examples of it in Canada and in other communities across the globe that we can look to and adopt, but we have to fund them. The government has been refusing to do that, just as it is refusing to fund those 2,500 police officers, as it promised in the last election.

Where are we at? On a silly waste of time today debating this motion. It is going to have absolutely no effect. The government, whether it is over this, or over the budget or over Afghanistan, is looking desperately to bring itself down, to force the opposition parties to bring it down.

However, in this case it is not even asking the opposition parties in effect. It is saying that we should pass the motion and then if the Senate does not move, it will go to the Governor General and say that it does not have the confidence of the House, even if the motion passes. That is the stupid part of the motion. Even if the House passes it, and it looks like perhaps the Liberals and the Bloc appear as if they will support it, the government would still come down at the end of March, if the Senate, the other house over which we have no control, decides will not pass Bill C-2 by March 31.

It is absolutely silly. It is the height of hypocrisy. It is really the height of demagoguery as well when we look at what has gone on in the House over the last few months around Bill C-2. It is a shame. The government members should really bow their heads and apologize to the Canadian people for it.

• (1545)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a question of the gentleman who just spoke. I have served with him on the justice committee for a number of months

and years. I am not too sure how long he has been there or when he came on the scene. I know I have been there about 15 years.

I do not have a crystal ball like the member has. He must have a crystal ball of some sort if he can say that if this would have happened, that would have happened, or that those bills would have become law if we had left them in the Senate and had not prorogued. His crystal ball is much brighter than mine.

I will stick to what I do know. Over the years many of being in this party, I, the member for Calgary-Northeast and Darrel Stinson, the member for Okanagan-Shuswap, visited with previous justice ministers, starting with Allan Rock. We went to Cowichan. We went to Anne MacLellan. We went to the previous Liberal minister, who is still in the House of Commons. They all said no to us when we requested, over and over again during that period of time, that they raise the age of consent. For the safety of our children, we said that we had to do this.

All those years, those ministers would not do it. Finally, one day the member from Lethbridge brought forward a private member's bill to raise the age of consent. Guess who voted against it? All the Liberals.

Therefore, would the member agree with me that the Liberal party never supported the bill in the very beginning? Now the Liberals realize the public really wants to see it, they are passing it to the Senate, saying not to pass the bill because they have not agree with it right from the word go? He must agree with me that this is indeed a fact. In the over 15 years I have been here, the Liberal Party never did anything about that bill because it did not want it to happen.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member for Wild Rose is accurate to a degree.

I was at one of the Chinese New Year's dinners on the weekend at which I heard something about a partial omission of truth was like a full lie.

Not that I am accusing him of misleading the House, but historically, if we study what happened around the age of consent issue, repeated bills came from the Reform-Alliance and then the Conservatives to raise the age of consent. However, they never put in the near age defence, which allowed people in the same age group to engage in sexual contact without criminalizing that sexual contact.

I remember sitting on a panel with a Conservative member who had sponsored one of the private member's bills. I asked him if he understood that he was about to criminalize 100,000 youth who were 15 and 16 years of age by the bill he had introduced. That was always the problem with it.

I have to take some personal credit. I convinced the former justice minister, when he was in opposition, to support the NDP in saying that we needed to raise the age of consent, but that we needed to put in the near age defence. Then when the Conservatives formed the government, for the first time that showed up in legislation, and it was passed.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought the member for Windsor-Tecumseh was very direct, as he always is. If there is anybody's counsel in the House I respect, it is his.

Government Orders

He said that the delay was really caused by the Conservative government itself, not by the Senate. I heard the remarks of the member for Wild Rose. Yes, there are differences of opinion in terms of the various bills, but the fact is several of these bills were to the Senate before. The debate was held in here and passed with the approval of the House of Commons.

There is no reason in the world why these bills had to be pulled back and then regurgitated into one single bill, named tackling violent crime, other than for political purposes. I think that is what the member was pointing out. Would the member agree with that comment?

Part of the motion today reads, “and that in the opinion of this House, the Senate majority is not providing appropriate priority to the passage of Bill C-2”. Whether one agrees or disagrees that there be a Senate, that wording is an attack on reality. We were adjourned for most of the time, yet the government talks about the number of days since the House adjourned for the Christmas break. Could the member comment on that as well?

• (1550)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the assertions the member for Malpeque made at the beginning of his question. In my address to the House, I said that the delay was on the part of the government. There was no reason at all for the Conservatives to back this up, prorogue and then not allow the bills to go back to the same stage, as the three opposition parties proposed.

Despite the fact that I do not have a crystal ball, I have done an analysis of how crime bills have gone through the House under the current government and under the previous Liberal administration. Three of the five in Bill C-2 would be through and I think the fourth one would be as well. Only the dangerous offender bill would probably still be before the Senate at this point in time. Since that bill went to the Senate, for most of the time the Senate has not sat and neither has the House.

I will make one final point with regard to the Senate and the government. If the government were really serious, it would not be this motion before the House. The government would have a motion something similar to, “we call on all the senators to resign and we call on the Conservative government to initiate a process of constitutional reform to abolish the Senate for the future”.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh for his precise analysis of this debate.

I would appreciate it if he would comment on where Bill C-16 fits into all this. Bill C-16 is about fixed election dates. I sat on the committee and the government said that it would never use it. At the committee, we tried to put in caveats around fixed election dates to ensure no government, this government or any other government, could use fixed election dates for its own benefit.

It seems to me the government is breaking that promise and using fixed election dates when it needs to. When the Conservatives do not like something, they will go outside and use the option of bringing down the House on their own.

I would appreciate hearing from my colleague on that.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my friend brings up a very good point. I can assure my colleague from Ottawa Centre that we are currently looking up all the promises the Prime Minister in particular made about Bill C-16, that he would not use the traditional methodology of bringing his government down at the whim of the government, but that he would abide by the spirit of Bill C-16 and fixed election dates. It is a concept that we have supported.

However, we are ready. If the Conservatives go ahead with this motion and the Senate does not meet their deadline by March 1, we will be ready to tell Canadians that the Prime Minister has misled them once again.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member from the NDP is clear on how his party would govern. It appears that 2,500 RCMP officers are supposed to appear suddenly with the wave of a magic wand. We know that is not reality. It takes time to train these officers, hire them and get them in the field. Indeed, the government is working on that.

My question for the member is in relation to the bill itself. Those members keep talking about politics. They have talked about Afghanistan and a lot of things today in relation to this bill. However, the bill is about politics at the local level.

What I have heard from my constituents in northern Alberta is that they want the bill to pass. These constituents want these bills to come into law because right now our streets are not safe from random gun crimes. Our children are being preyed upon by sexual predators. Repeat violent criminals are on our streets and continually let go in a rotating system.

When I was a lawyer in northern Alberta, I was ashamed sometimes to represent individuals who appeared eight or nine times before the court and who were let off with a 30 day or 90 day sentence for impaired driving. It was embarrassing.

Since some of these bills date back to May 4, 2006, and I think the last one is November 23, 2006, would the member agree that this is enough time to talk about these bills in this place and in the Senate? When can we get on to the business of answering what Canadians want, and that is being tough on criminals?

• (1555)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from northern Alberta misses the point. I have a delegation from MADD coming to my office tomorrow. What am I going to say to it? I am going to say that the government had no answer when I asked why it had delayed the bills by two or three months. There was absolutely no reason for it other than the government's political agenda.

What do I say to a mother whose daughter has been sexually abused by someone who is 45 or 50 years of age? I will tell her that we do not have legislation to deal with it because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

Government Orders

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the compelling nature of the tackling violent crime act is illustrated more clearly by the fact that every party in this House is pretending to support it today. This party has always supported the contents of the tackling violent crime act. The Liberals have always opposed it, as have the Bloc and the NDP.

However, they know that their constituents profoundly support the principles contained inside that bill and, as such, have twisted themselves into knots today to pretend that they, too, support the Conservative tackling crime agenda. However, let us review their records before we give them a free ride.

In opposition, our party continually fought to raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 to protect teenagers from adult sexual predators. The Liberals consistently, over 13 years, blocked those changes while in government. The NDP were of no help, I will mention by the way, during that time either.

On the issue of mandatory minimum penalties, the Liberals opposed those in government, opposed them even in opposition, but are pretending to support them now in order to try to pacify the immense public sympathy that exists for the provision. On dangerous offender status, the Liberals and the rest of the opposition have opposed our initiatives.

The bill, as well, addresses issues such as impaired driving and reverse onus on bail.

I am going to go through the elements of this bill one by one, but I am going to begin by making a very clear procedural point.

The Liberals claim that they were willing to fast track all of this legislation long ago. Even if they were telling the truth, and they are not, why is it that the Liberal Senate will not pass the legislation today?

Once again, if they were willing to fast track the legislation months ago, surely, they would be willing to adopt the legislation today, but they are not.

Let us examine, piece by piece, what it is that the Liberals have been obstructing for so many months. Let us start with mandatory minimum penalties for firearms offences.

To begin with, this legislation was introduced as its own bill in May 2006, almost two years ago. Now, the Liberals claim that they were just about to get around to passing that bill through the Senate when the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament some months ago. However, if they were really interested in passing that legislation, why did they not do it months before, given that it had been introduced almost two years earlier? The reason is they do not support our toughened measures to crack down on gun criminals.

On the issue of age of protection, this member sitting right next to me, the member for Wild Rose, pleaded with the then Liberal government to increase the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. The Liberal government consistently blocked all of those efforts because the Liberal Party believed that 14 was old enough.

On the issue of dangerous offenders, Liberals stood in the House of Commons and said that our tough new measures to designate

three-time violent or sexual criminals as dangerous offenders and then put them away indefinitely would violate the constitutional rights of the criminal. That is what Liberals argued. That is what many Liberals continue to argue. Now, they claim that they supported the bill. They cannot have it both ways.

Let me return to mandatory jail time for gun criminals. I would just turn the House's attention to the fact that while the Liberals claim that they support that legislation now, the vast majority of them, in fact, almost all of them, voted against mandatory jail for gun criminals. The Liberals consistently opposed Bill C-10, the then mandatory jail time bill. So, now they claim that they are in favour of it in order to mask the soft on crime position that they have historically taken. That is intellectually dishonest.

• (1600)

Mandatory jail time provisions that are now in the tackling violent crime act would guarantee that a gun criminal would have five years in jail for his first offence and seven years for the second offence. The bill would take the most violent and dangerous gun criminals off the street and ensure that they cannot wreak havoc on our communities any longer.

I would remind the House that the bill in its previous form sat before Parliament for almost two years before prorogation. It had been blocked in the Senate for months upon months when finally the Prime Minister did the responsible thing and bundled it in with other legislation that is also tough on crime and forced it through the chamber.

On the issue of the age of sexual consent, Liberals now claim that they are in favour of raising the age of sexual consent after 13 years of opposing that change.

However, there was a little problem in the Senate. Senator Carstairs apparently did not get the memo. She thought that Liberals were still being honest about their view on the age of sexual consent. She thought that she could tell people what she really thought and her real belief on the issue of the age of sexual consent. She did not hear from the Liberal leader that she was meant to perform a spectacular reversal and hide her real thoughts. She said this on *Mike Duffy Live* just recently: "The other issue is the whole age of consent issue. I am concerned that this may prevent young women and young men from reporting sexually transmitted diseases. I am concerned that it might put a chill on family life education programs. I am concerned that young prostitutes will be driven underground by this legislation".

Government Orders

To begin with, prostitution, the last time I checked, is already illegal, so it is already driven underground. Second, I have no idea what Liberal Senator Carstairs means when she suggests that somehow raising the age of sexual consent to prevent adult pedophiles from targeting young kids will cause greater transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. I have no idea what she could possibly mean by that.

However, she removed the veil. She admitted that she opposes the Conservative effort to raise the age of sexual consent. She revealed where Liberals have always stood. The Liberals believe that the age of sexual consent should be 14. We believe it should be 16. That is why our government has been forced to make this a confidence issue.

The Liberal strategy on crime has been quite an interesting one. It has been to privately and procedurally oppose the tough new measures without publicly admitting those intentions. In fact, on the one hand while Liberals oppose the tackling violent crime act procedurally, they storm around pretending publicly that they are in favour of it.

We will not let them get away with that any longer. The Prime Minister packaged together the tackling violent crime act and shone the spotlight on Liberal hypocrisy on crime. All of a sudden, we have them moving over there. We have struck a hornet's nest because members of the Liberal caucus are now scattered around the House of Commons trying to convince the whole world that they always supported the Conservative agenda on crime, that they never really opposed it, and that their delays never really occurred.

I hope that this backtracking in the Liberal Party will take itself all the way up to the Senate. One thing is for sure, if the Liberal Senate will not bring the tackling violent crime act back to the House of Commons unamended by the end of the month, members of the Liberal Party will have to explain their behaviour on crime to voters in an imminent election. That is the simple reality. Does everyone know what that is called? It is called accountability.

• (1605)

If Liberals want to be soft on crime in a free country, it is their right to take that wrong-headed position. They have the right to their wrong opinion. However, it is the right of the Canadian voter to hold them accountable for that position and accountable they will be. More importantly, I believe that the Liberal Senate will back down and pass the bill because it is the right thing to do and Canadians are forcing the Liberal Party to change on crime.

Let us review the contents of this legislation. First, there would be mandatory jail time for gun criminals. This provision in the tackling violent crime act would guarantee that offenders convicted of gun crimes would go to jail for five years the first time and seven years the second time.

It would create new offences: attempted murder, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, robbery, extortion, hostage taking and discharging a firearm with intent. All of these are new firearms offences that augment existing offences in the Criminal Code. These new offences would guarantee that criminals are held to account for their gun crimes.

This legislation has the support of the chiefs of police, police associations, and it even has the support of the Liberal Premier of Ontario. The only one who does not support it is the Liberal leader and the vast majority of his caucus who voted against it when it came before the House of Commons. The Liberal Party has never supported these measures, but we are changing that by putting the spotlight on it.

Changing the age of protection and the age of sexual consent is responding to the call of parents right across this country who want us to help them protect their kids from sexual predators. In my constituency, numerous police officers have approached me and said that this tool would help them protect local Nepean—Carleton kids against Internet child predators.

The appeals that police officers, like Ray Lamarre of Nepean, have made to me has caused me to summon all of my energy in order to achieve that change to our Criminal Code. I have been collecting petitions in my constituency. I even launched an essay writing contest for young people to participate in to explain the ideas they had to protect other kids from the scourge of Internet pedophilia.

However, the one change in our Criminal Code that experts all across this country, and by experts I refer to police officers and parents not sociology professors and defence lawyers, all of the real experts want the age of sexual consent raised from 14 to 16.

That might not accord with the values of the Liberal Party. The Liberal leader has a history of believing in strange academic theories that flow from his time as an aloof sociology professor and all of that is very interesting in some strange academic circle, but among everyday people, and we know the folks I am talking about, those who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules, raising the age of sexual consent is basic common sense.

I am very proud to support the tackling violent crime act. Given that most of this legislation has been before the House of Commons and Senate for months, and some of it has been here for years, there is no reason for any more delay. At this point, now that we have illustrated the necessity of passing the tackling violent crime act, let us get to the unfortunate political obstacle that sits in front of us.

We have a Liberal Party that secretly opposes the bill and is asking its friends in the Senate to do its dirty work. Liberals claim that they were willing to fast track all of this legislation months ago in a procedural stunt that the Speaker has indicated never would have been allowed.

• (1610)

However, let us assume for a moment that they were sincere about fast-tracking this legislation. If they really wanted to fast-track our tackling violent crime legislation seven or eight months ago, clearly they should have no problem fast-tracking it today. Why do they not? Why does Liberal Senator Carstairs, who is part of the radical left of the Liberal Party, stomp her feet, scream and holler that she cannot possibly do her job between now and March because it is not enough time, if her party claimed it was willing to fast-track all this legislation seven or eight months ago?

Government Orders

There is a logical inconsistency here and that speaks to the nature of the Liberal Party saying one thing in public and playing a different game in the dark halls of the Senate. These games they are playing will not go unnoticed by crime victims. They have not gone unnoticed by voters. Voters see that the Liberals are using the radical wing of their party through Liberal Senator Carstairs to block the tackling violent crime legislation and to oppose its measures from coming into effect.

A Liberal Senator has argued that raising the age of sexual consent would somehow cause sexually transmitted diseases to spread all across the country. That is Liberal Senator Carstairs. That woman could not be elected dog catcher, which is why she is in the Liberal Senate. She has absolutely no popular appeal among ordinary folks and yet—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. That is an unreasonable attack on a person in the other place. The lady the member talks about was elected leader of the Liberal Party in Manitoba for a number of years. She sat in that house and the member should withdraw those words and issue an apology to the other place and to Senator Carstairs.

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I remember that senator who, before she was appointed, railed against the Senate until the Liberals gave her an appointment in the Senate. Then she said that she would reform the Senate from within.

We have seen how little she has done. The only thing she has done is block necessary legislation to protect children in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The subject of the motion has nothing to do with any member of the other House. It has to do with a piece of government legislation. I would ask all members to stay within the relevance of the motion.

The hon. member has about three minutes left for his remarks.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I seem to have struck a nerve over there. Do members know what caused that outburst? There was a panicked anxiety attack on that side of the House when I removed the veil.

The Liberals have played a game on crime for years where they pretend to be tough on crime during elections and in front of the public and then in this place they do absolutely everything in their power to block tough on crime legislation from being enacted. I removed a veil in this speech and standing there disrobed was the real Liberal agenda on crime. Nothing terrifies Liberals more than the truth coming out about their position on crime.

I quoted the words of one of the most senior and most radically left wing senators in the Liberal caucus, someone who is from the left wing of the Liberal Party in concert with the views of a very left leaning Liberal leader. They together opposed raising the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. She said so herself. She said that raising the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 would lead to a pandemic of sexually transmitted diseases travelling across this country. Those are the radical views of Liberal senators and the Liberal Party claims that these same senators are interested in passing the legislation.

I do not apologize for pointing out when Liberal senators with radically extreme left wing positions use the unaccountable chamber

in which they reside as a refuge against the accountability of voters and as a staging ground to protect criminals against the tackling violent crime legislation.

I will stand in this place to represent the normal working people, folks who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules, folks in Nepean—Carleton and communities like Barrhaven, Manotick and Riverside South, the people who, thankfully, voted for me in the last election, 40,000 of them. I am very proud to represent them and I am proud to stand here in the House of Commons to defend their interests and to advance the cause of tackling violent crime by advancing this legislation.

●(1615)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I arrived here just over two years ago and my introduction to the House was Bill C-2 which dealt with accountability. I became used to that member's empty, misleading rhetoric to the Canadian public after he said that the government would have an accountability act with regulations and with teeth. It is now two years later and there is still no teeth in the legislation. It is the same thing.

I want to ask him some questions on his tackling violent crime speech today. If there is a Juno award for the best role in a dramatic fictional series, he should get it because he is a tremendous actor.

If the close in age exemption had been part of the legislation proposed by the member for Wild Rose, red rose or any rose whatsoever in the past 13 years, is it not true that there would have been consent from that party down there and from this party here? Is it not true that we would have a sensible age of consent law? It is absolutely the truth. I defy him to tell the Canadian public that the Liberal Party and that party over there would not have passed it along with his party sitting over there.

Why did he and his government lump Bill C-27 in with this tackling crime bill, which is patently unconstitutional, along with other bills that everybody consented to? Why did the Conservatives put a poison pill in their own bill? It is because they do not want this bill to pass. They did not want the last ones to pass so they pulled the plug on Parliament because they were afraid of the environment. Those members are afraid.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That member did not get the memo either, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the talking points his party handed out today told the Liberals that they were supposed to support the tackling violent crime legislation. His colleague from the Montreal area earlier today claimed that they were solidly in support of every aspect of the bill. That member just stood up and admitted the truth.

Those members do not support our dangerous offender legislation because they believe it violates the charter rights of criminals. They believe that the dangerous offender provisions in the tackling violent crime legislation violate the charter rights of three time, violent sexual offenders. They were not supposed to admit that today. They have been trying to cover that up all day long.

Government Orders

I would like to congratulate the member for the rare candour that he has demonstrated over there. He joins Ms. Carstairs in the Senate who has also been honest in indicating that she opposes raising the age of sexual consent.

The truth is that all Liberals oppose the entire tackling violent crime legislation. They have done their best to cover that up but he just blew the lid off and we have heard the truth.

• (1620)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his clear and forthright explanation of the bill that is before the Senate at this particular point.

I, like the member opposite, am a new member. I have been a member for two years. Much has been said about fast-tracking and the fact that this government was not in favour of this legislation, the proof being that it could have fast-tracked the legislation. There was a bit of an illusion as to what was taking place.

I wonder if the hon. member could explain what this fast-tracking, which the Liberals are saying that they would have been glad to move on, would entail, because I know that if I am confused about this, then Canadians must be confused as well.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the reason so many people are confused about the Liberal position on crime is that they are confused themselves. They have used procedural complexity as their refuge on this issue, claiming that they wanted to fast-track all of these bills months ago. The problem is that the Chair indicated that was procedurally impossible because it violated the rules of the House of Commons.

However, let us assume for a moment that they were telling the truth. I know it is a strange exercise to engage in but let us do it for hypothetical reasons. If the Liberals really were prepared to fast-track our legislation on crime months ago, why not now?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the member but I must background it because of the games that the government plays.

On October 26, 2006, the Liberals made the first offer to fast-track a package of justice bills through the House. This offer effectively guaranteed the Conservatives a majority in the House to pass this legislation.

On March 21, 2007, we attempted to use an opposition day motion that if passed would have immediately results in the passage at all stages of four justice bills: Bill C-18, Bill C-22, Bill C-23 and Bill C-35.

Incredibly, the Conservative House leader raised a procedural point of order to block the motion. In other words, the Conservatives fought the Liberal attempt to pass the four Conservative justice bills. Why? They wanted to get to the attacking violent crime bill where they could try to confuse Canadians and try to blame the Liberals that they did not pass them.

Would the member for once withdraw from his fantasyland, be honest in this House and admit to the facts that I just outlined to him?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, that member understands the procedural absurdity of what he just said. The Liberals know there is no way to pass legislation through an opposition day motion.

However, let us not engage in procedural complexities. Let us just ask a simple question. The Liberals claim that they were willing to fast-track raising the age of sexual consent to 16 years old. If that is the case, why not now? They claim that they were willing to pass Conservative legislation for mandatory jail time on gun crimes. If that is the case, why not now? They claim that they were willing to support reverse onus for those accused of gun crimes. If they were willing to do that then, why not now? The reality is that they were never committed to passing this legislation. They were never willing to consider fast-tracking it because if they were then they would be now.

• (1625)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the Liberal member for Malpeque used the term “in this House”. I think most Canadians, as I did not before I came to this place about four years ago, do not understand that there is another place, the Senate and, indeed, an unelected body of approximately 100 people who are blocking legislation from the elected people of Canada.

I wonder if the member could spend a moment to explain to Canadians how the Senate, especially with the number of senators, is blocking this legislation.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, there is an old principle that government should not govern without the consent of the governed. That place is a kingdom of Liberal entitlement.

The bottom line is that the Liberals claim that they wanted to fast-track our tackling violent crime initiatives. The real question is: Why not now? If they were willing to do it eight months ago or seven months ago, or whatever it is they claim in their convoluted procedural narrative, why would they not be willing to do it today? Why not now?

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the hon. member's speech he mentioned the principle of the thing. I want to mention the fact that I was in the education system for 30 years and over those years I saw a number of 14 and 15 year olds who got themselves into real messes because nothing stopped them from making some very poor choices because of a law that existed. That was one of the reasons why, in 1993 when I came here, I wanted to get that changed.

By the way, I did not come from a coloured rose, to get my friend over there from the Liberal Party straightened out. It is not a pink, blue or white rose. It is a Wild Rose and I am dadgum wild about this one and I hope—

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I am afraid I will have to cut off the hon. member to give the hon. parliamentary secretary a chance to reply. There is just not enough time to cover the rest of his question, so maybe if the hon. parliamentary secretary could keep his remarks to under 20 seconds please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I think we would all agree that this is a real wild rose, a real proud prairie boy who has come to Ottawa to do great things for his people. One of those things is raising the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. He is doing it for all the right reasons. When this legislation finally passes through that palace of patronage over there, it will be because of the hard work of this member of Parliament and all that he has done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

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

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred until Tuesday, February 11 at 3 p.m.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

(Bill C-29. On the Order: Government Orders:)

December 5, 2007—Report stage of Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans) as deemed reported by a committee with amendments—Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There have been consultations among all parties concerning additional report stage amendments to Bill C-29.

These amendments are necessary to ensure that other provisions of the Canada Elections Act are consistent with amendments that

have been made to the bill by the procedure and House affairs committee.

Although report stage debate of the bill has already begun, and many of the amendments that have been under discussion are beyond the scope of Bill C-29, Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following six amendments.

I would ask for the indulgence of the House, as these amendments are lengthy. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-29 be amended by adding after line 13 on page 1 the following:

2.1 Subsection 403.34(1) of the Act is replaced by the following:

403.34(1) An unpaid claim mentioned in a return referred to in subsection 403.35 (1) is deemed to be a contribution of the unpaid amount to the registered association made as of the day on which the expense was incurred or the loan was made, as the case may be, if the claim remains unpaid in whole or in part

(a) 18 months after the end of the fiscal period to which the return relates, in the case of a claim to be paid for an expense; or

(b) three years after the day on which the amount is due according to the terms of the loan, in the case of a claim for a loan made to the registered association under section 405.5.

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-29 be amended by adding after line 15 on page 6 the following:

7.1 Subsection 423.1(1) of the Act is replaced by the following:

423.1(1) An unpaid claim mentioned in the financial transactions return referred to in subsection 424(1) or in an election expenses return referred to in subsection 429 (1) is deemed to be a contribution to the registered party of the unpaid amount on the day on which the expense was incurred or the loan was made, as the case may be, if the claim remains unpaid in whole or in part

(a) 18 months after the end of the fiscal period to which the return relates or in which the polling day fell, as the case may be, in the case of a claim to be paid for on expense; or

(b) three years after the end of that fiscal period in the case of a claim for a loan made to the registered party under section 405.5

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-29, in clause 10, be amended by:

(a) replacing line 1 on page 7 with the following:

10.(1) Subsection 435.24(1) of the Act is

(b) adding after line 8 on page 7 the following:

(2) The portion of subsection 435.24(2) of the Act before paragraph (a) is replaced by the following:

(2) The requirement to pay a claim within three years does not apply to a claim in respect of which

435.29(1) An unpaid claim mentioned in a return referred to in subsection 435.3 (1) is deemed to be a contribution of the unpaid amount to the leadership contestant made as of the day on which the expense was incurred if the claim remains unpaid, in whole or in part, three years after the end of the leadership contest.

● (1630)

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the house, Bill C-29 be amended by adding after line 28 on page 8 the following:

13.1 Subsection 435.29(1) of the Act is replaced by the following:

435.29(1) An unpaid claim mentioned in a return referred to in subsection 435.3 (1) is deemed to be a contribution of the unpaid amount to the leadership contestant made as of the day on which the expense was incurred if the claim remains unpaid, in whole or in part, three years after the end of the leadership contest.

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-29 be amended by adding after line 41 on page 10 the following:

19.1 Subsection 450(1) of the Act is replaced by the following:

450.(1) An unpaid claim mentioned in a return referred to in subsection 451(1) is deemed to be a contribution of the unpaid amount to the candidate made as of the day on which the expense was incurred or the loan was made, as the case may be, if the claim remains unpaid in whole or in part

Government Orders

- (a) 18 months after polling day for the election to which the return relates, in the case of a claim to be paid for a candidate's electoral campaign expense; or
 (b) three years after that polling day, in the case of a claim for a loan made to the candidate under section 405.5.

● (1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I want to let the hon. parliamentary secretary know that apparently there is a bit of an issue with translation. If he would slow down a little bit.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Finally, I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-29 be amended by adding after line 3 on page 13 the following:

25.1 Subsection 478.22(1) of the Act is replaced by the following:

478.22(1) An unpaid claim mentioned in a return referred to in subsection 478.23(1) is deemed to be a contribution of the unpaid amount to the nomination contestant made as of the day on which the expense was incurred or the loan was made, as the case may be, if the claim remains unpaid in whole or in part

(a) 18 months after the selection date—or in the case referred to in subsection 478.23(7), after the polling day—in the case of a claim to be paid for a nomination contestant's nomination campaign expense; or

(b) three years and one day after the selection date—or in the case referred to in subsection 478.23(7), after the polling day—in the case of a claim for a loan made to the nomination contestant under section 405.5.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and all members for their indulgence in this matter.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, as much as I trust my hon. colleague and as much as we want to cooperate, there is a bit of a discrepancy in amendment No. 3, not in the sense that we do not agree with the wording that he has just read. It is just that we do not have that wording.

If you want to bear with us, Mr. Speaker, within the next few minutes we can check with our hon. colleague from the government side to take notice of amendment No. 3 and we can then get back to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the hon. member suggesting that we proceed to the adopting of the other amendments? We will reserve amendment No. 3 and allow for the House leaders to chat and we can then reintroduce it. Is that the suggestion?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, either that or we can look at everything together in a few minutes.

My hon. colleague, who was proposing these amendments, as you will recall, had trouble finding his way in his different papers. We do not have those papers. You can imagine the trouble that we are having. If my colleague wants to hold off for a few minutes and let us check the wording on amendment No. 3, then we will come back within minutes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my hon. colleague. We are attempting to get all of Amendment No. 3 from our lobby.

Again, I will gladly read it into the record. The hon. member is quite correct that there was some confusion there. One of the pages required to follow up on the completion of Amendment No. 3 was not here. We will attempt to get that in a matter of moments. Then, with the indulgence of the House, I could refer to Amendment No. 3 and read it completely into the record. Then we could deal with the entire amendment package as whole, if that would satisfy my hon. colleague.

● (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It seems that is the will of the House at the moment.

Does the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer have anything else to say?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So do I understand that we will hold off on all of the amendments until we get Amendment No. 3 and then give our consent to the whole list of amendments?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Yes, I think that is what the agreement would be.

Before we go on to orders of the day, 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 Richmond Hill, Tourist Industry; the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Manufacturing and Forestry Industries.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from December 5, 2007 consideration of Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans), as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): When Bill C-29 was last being debated, the hon. member for Halton had the floor, but since he is not able to finish his speech, we will move on.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, we will give members the entire copy of all the amendments in their package in hard copy format. I believe the hon. members' lobby has seen the hard copy, hence the unanimous consent that was granted by all parties, informally, before I read these amendments into the record.

I see my hon. colleagues opposite indicating that they do not have it. I will reserve reading it into the record until we ensure that members opposite have copies in front of them.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that when it comes to the political financing, the Bloc Québécois is very proud of its record.

When the Bloc first entered the House of Commons in 1993, there were some issues that were very important to us. We spoke, for example, about abolishing the other place. I must say in passing that I have heard a lot of my colleagues talk about the Senate. Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought it was against the rules to use that word here. We have to say the other chamber. So I will speak about the other chamber, as prescribed in the House practices and procedures.

Government Orders

We said at the time that the other chamber should be abolished, and people nearly called us crazy. It was the same story with regard to the creation of an institute to work toward making the U.S. dollar the currency used throughout North America. We did not say we wanted to do that, just that we wanted an institute to study the question. Once again, everybody said, "Oh, those people are crazy".

One of our most important concerns was political financing. In Quebec, we had already cleaned up the way things were done. The great René Lévesque of the Parti Québécois introduced a bill to this effect in the National Assembly more than 30 years ago. Since then, political funding has been cleaned up in Quebec. In other words, political parties can no longer accept contributions from big companies or big unions. There are also limits on individual contributions.

It was only natural, therefore, that when we came to Ottawa, we would want things here done the same way. Even though there are laws and regulations, I still see people trying to circumvent them, and loans to individuals are one of the ways.

The Conservatives are partly right when they say that the people in the Liberal leadership race took out some very large loans. We can certainly say that it was not proper and not in keeping with the spirit of the law. I have in front of me the contributions made to Bob Rae, and included among the \$705,000 in loans are \$580,000 from his brother, John Rae.

We obviously cannot just let this kind of thing go. The opposition leader himself borrowed \$655,000 and there are some very important people who loaned him money: Mamdouh Stephanos, \$150,000; Marc de la Bruyere, \$100,000; Stephen Bronfman, \$50,000; Roderick Bryden, \$50,000; Christopher Hoffman, \$25,000.

We know what that means, in other words, exactly what it meant back in the days when big companies and individuals could donate money without any control. Politicians were in the clutches of their big contributors. Could someone speak directly to the opposition leader if he gave the Liberal Party \$5? I do not think so. But someone who had given \$150 or \$250 at the time could probably have contacted a minister's or even the premier's office directly.

The Conservatives have their theory. I think, though, that they are a bit quick to play innocent because they too have serious problems with transparency. We in the Bloc Québécois would like to know, among other things, how much the current Prime Minister's leadership campaign cost back in 2002 and who financed it. He has never been willing to reveal this completely. He unveiled part of the list but never all of it.

I said they play innocent. It is easy to cast the blame on the Liberal Party, but they too are hardly blameless. They see the mote in their adversary's eye but not the beam in their own that is even worse. There is, for instance, all the cronyism between politicians' offices and the big lobbying firms. The best example of this is certainly the former defence minister who worked for a lobbying firm for many years and then was one of the first to award big contracts to the entire industry, including his former clients. There is a certain problem with this and a certain decency that is wanting.

We could talk about contracts for friends of the party in power. People have been talking about this again just recently.

● (1645)

The Minister of Finance awarded a \$122,000 contract directly to one of his friends, violating all the regulations.

Why is this allowed? It happens here in the House of Commons. I see the Conservatives acting shocked in front of the Liberals, but they are no better about using public money for partisan purposes. When the Conservatives were the official opposition, I remember very well hearing them tell the government that what it was doing with public money was appalling, that it was using public money to conduct surveys for the party, which it then used for elections or bills in order to be in line with public opinion.

Since the Conservatives have been in power, it has been even worse. The Conservatives have some things to be ashamed of, including their handbook on how to stall the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. In fact, I think that the member who just spoke about amendments talked for seven or eight hours in order to stall the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Why? Because 67 of these members overrode the Canada Elections Act. They are lecturing us, telling us what to do to correct the injustices of the system. They should take a look in the mirror. I think they will see at least 10 members from Quebec, including three Conservative ministers. But they continue to waste the time of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, perhaps waiting for the next election. Maybe then the same thing will start up again, especially if Elections Canada has not rendered a decision.

There are also all the partisan appointments: Jim Gouk, whom we all know as a former Conservative MP, was appointed to the NAV Canada board of directors—the government controls three seats on the NAV Canada board of directors; Gwyn Morgan, a big Conservative fundraiser, was appointed chairperson of the Public Appointments Commission; and Kevin Gaudet, a Conservative organizer who worked on the leadership race, was appointed to the Canada Pension Plan Review Tribunal. I could go on, but I do not want to waste too much time because I have only 10 minutes. We have a complete list of partisan political appointments. This is absolutely unacceptable, and the problems persist. We want to change things.

When the Conservatives were in opposition, I often heard one of them say that it had to be made easier for whistleblowers to do their job, so that someone who witnessed something truly unfair would report it. We are still waiting. I believe that whistleblowers are paid \$1,500 for legal expenses, but if it costs more, they have to cover it. We are not giving whistleblowers the tools and instruments they need, so that they can report situations when they notice anomalies and things that are unacceptable in the system.

Government Orders

In terms of access to information, I myself have never, in 14 years, seen a government as secretive as this one, and we see the evidence of this every day. For weeks, we have been asking what is happening with prisoners, but we are unable to find out. If we request a document under the Access to Information Act, not only are they going to exceed the time allowed outrageously, but in addition the documents delivered to us will be completely censored. Whole pages are censored.

As a final point regarding the amendments, we do not like the one that makes the political party liable if a candidate does not repay a large loan. We would like that to be amended.

So we are proud of our achievements. The Bloc Québécois brought order to public finances in Quebec, and has succeeded in bringing order to the funding of political parties in the House of Commons. We will now make sure that this continues, because for us, this is a fundamental concept of democracy.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, if I may, for the record, I truly thank all of my colleagues for their indulgent cooperation. I did not want to interrupt my hon. colleague's speech. I would like to get Amendment No. 3 read into the record officially. This will be the amendment of the package on the point of order that I read a few moments ago, Amendment No. 3.

Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent to adopt the following amendment. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-29, in clause 10, be amended by:

(a) replacing line 1 on page 7 with the following:

10.(1) Subsection 435.24(1) of the Act is

(b) adding after line 8 on page 7 the following:

(2) The portion of subsection 435.24(2) of the Act before paragraph (a) is replaced by the following:

(2) The requirement to pay a claim within three years does not apply to a claim in respect of which

Once again, I am thankful for the cooperation of all members on this matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will now deal with the package of amendments, including Amendment No. 3 which has now been clarified by the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the amendments?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendments No. 1 to 6 agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to the hon. member for Saint-Jean. I listened to his speech and, indeed, I really wonder about the

Conservative government's philosophy and way of doing, or not doing, things. We have two more examples, namely the \$875,000 fence, under a contract that raises some serious questions, and also the recent contract awarded for drafting the budget. We do not know what is going to happen in the case of the February 26 budget.

This raises suspicion. In his speech, our colleague illustrated why we have some very serious questions about the government's real intentions. As history shows—and this is particularly true with René Lévesque—the transparency of a government is very important, but so too is its integrity. I wonder if our colleague could elaborate on the recent events that now raise very real suspicion.

• (1655)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. I did try, in my 10-minute speech, to show that there was a problem. It is all well and fine to pass legislation and for the Conservative Party to accuse the opposition of attempting to circumvent the laws, but as I said earlier, they see the mote in their adversary's eye but not the beam in their own.

Reference was made to a fence and to the infamous budget speech prepared at a cost of \$45 a word. There is much more however. The purchase of \$20 billion worth of military equipment is going totally unnoticed. That is a major problem. Do members know how much \$20 billion is? That is 20,000 millions of dollars. Hardly any parliamentary oversight over such expenditure.

Besides the fence and the budget speech, there are also the bids and military procurement. This government is keeping us in the dark in that case as in many others. It is a secretive government; there is no escaping it.

It is a good thing that the opposition is there to denounce such actions. Not only does the Bloc Québécois denounce them, but it sometimes manages to counter them. In addition, the Bloc Québécois was the opposition party that introduced in the House the rules governing political party financing. We are doing a fine job and we will continue to ensure that contributions and taxpayers' money are managed properly, and in a transparent manner.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I had a little surgery last week and rise a bit more slowly, but do not worry because I will be ready for the next election and fast on my feet.

I have a question for my colleague from Saint-Jean, who gave a very interesting speech in 10 minutes, as he himself said. He was not able to cover the entire issue, but never mind, there will be several Bloc speeches on Bill C-29.

I wanted to ask my colleague what he thinks about the fact that the opposition parties made some very interesting suggestions in committee to improve this bill. It is up to us now in the House. The government brought three motions forward, of which two are totally unacceptable. I would like my colleague to tell us more about one of them. It says that when candidates incur debts, their political party is responsible for them. The Conservative government is keen on this and I would like to know what my colleague from Saint-Jean thinks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Saint-Jean has less than a minute left.

Government Orders

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

As I said in winding up my speech, this is just another way of getting around the rules. Insofar as transparency and democracy are concerned, the Conservative Party could go over it again because the motions it brought before the House were rejected in committee.

The Bloc Québécois said it was not right that if someone took out a bank loan and failed to pay it back or had problems, his political party would be held responsible by default for paying to clean up the mess.

That is not how things work when a loan is taken out. Someone has to be the guarantor. A political group or pressure group cannot be told that its candidate borrowed money but failed to pay it back and now it is up to the group to do so in his stead.

That does not make sense. We therefore want this motion withdrawn.

● (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I had the time for a question I certainly would want to enquire about some of the current cases before Parliament.

Bill C-29 aims to establish a system of improved accountability for candidates to report loans taken out during election campaigns. Its key elements include creating a uniform and transparent reporting regime for all loans to political parties, including mandatory disclosure of terms and the identity of all lenders and loan guarantors; ensuring that total loans, loan guarantees and contributions by individuals should not exceed the annual contribution limit for individuals established in the Canada Elections Act; and allowing only financial institutions and other political entities the capacity to make loans beyond the annual contribution limit for individuals and only at commercial rates of interest.

Tightening rules for the treatment of unpaid loans is also important to ensure candidates cannot walk away from unpaid loans by ultimately holding riding associations responsible for unpaid loans taken out by their candidates.

The bill was first presented to the House during the first session of Parliament as Bill C-54 and reintroduced in November of last year with essentially the same content as Bill C-54. The bill was very seriously examined during meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Members worked hard and agreed upon different elements, not the least of which was a significant improvement which now calls for unpaid amounts of the loan to be considered contributions after three years after the day on which it was made. The original government proposal was to make that period only 18 months. Now the government House leader is presenting motions that would completely disregard the other amendments that were passed at committee.

Government Motion No. 1 would delete the Liberal amendment to allow for annual contributions to a leadership candidate. Under this motion, for example, a person would be allowed to donate \$1,000 to a leadership candidate in each calendar year until the leadership candidate paid his or her campaign debt and formally closed his or her leadership campaign.

Government Motion No. 2 would make it necessary for loans to be repaid annually rather than at the point when the loan becomes due. Effectively, this would prevent candidates from taking extended repayment loans. It makes no sense to set up an artificial limit on repayment.

Considering the fact that elections can be called at different times during the year, whether it be January, April or October, it is unreasonable for someone to be asked to pay off a loan before the time limit established by the loan contract. We see that the government is pushing hard on its perception of accountability.

Furthermore, as members of Parliament will know, once we are elected our focus shifts to doing our job, not to running in elections or raising money for elections. It, therefore, would be an absolute hindrance for anyone to have to focus on repaying by the end of a fiscal year if that is not the date that was agreed upon with the lender.

Government Motion No. 3 would delete the Bloc amendment that would have removed liability from registered political parties for loans taken by candidates. This motion would set up a system or a responsibility for registered political parties and riding associations, regardless of whether or not they are aware that the candidate has taken out a loan. Making one entity responsible for the personal debt of an individual does not sound responsible under any criteria.

The government waited for the original version of this bill to die with prorogation so that it could present new motions to completely obliterate the changes that had already been agreed upon democratically at committee.

There are some five bills in Bill C-2, many of which had progressed substantially through the legislative process. In fact, many of those bills would have been law today had the government taken the opportunity it had to reintroduce those bills at the same stage they were at when prorogation occurred.

● (1705)

As a consequence, we now find Bill C-2 as an issue of debate in this place simply because the government suggests that it should happen quicker. However, it engineered the delay in those pieces of legislation. Therefore, it is very similar to what has happened with regard to this bill.

Through this tactic, Canadians have seen that the government is clearly not interested in really working with the other parties to come up with sound legislation. It is only interested in continuing to pursue a philosophy of "my way or the highway" kind of legislative process. It is only interested in presenting political jabs disguised as draft legislation, and we have seen that time and time again on many bills.

While the government continues to repeat that Bill C-29 will finally stop the undue influence of wealthy contributors who were supposedly skirting Elections Act donation limits through the use of personal loans, the bill is clearly designed to disadvantage the Liberal Party of Canada financially and to limit access to the political process for many Canadians.

Government Orders

The fact is our party has demonstrated, in good faith, that we want to work to improve election laws. After all, our party was the one that passed the bill to limit the role of corporations and unions in election financing in Bill C-24 in 2003.

Our party also initiated the most significant contribution limit reduction in Canadian history. Furthermore, during our last leadership campaign, all candidates publicly disclosed all loans made to their campaigns and went above and beyond the requirement set out in the Canada Elections Act in this regard.

The Prime Minister still refuses to fully disclose the complete scope of financing of his own 2002 leadership campaign. Clearly the government is running a “Do as I say, not as I do” kind of operation. How can Canadians believe a government that does not want to practise what it preaches. The Liberal Party supports measures to make Canadians more confident in their politicians by seeking to improve the accountability of the electoral process.

We support the bill, as amended by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which includes the measures that were approved democratically by all of the parties.

Let me refer also to the activity within the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to which many important issues are referred and is represented by all parties. What happens is it is sometimes very dysfunctional in terms of deciding to do things or not to do things. In the case of the so-called in and out scandal, a filibuster has been going on since late October or early November on the ruling by the Chief Electoral Officer that the Conservative Party had breached the Canada Elections Act by transferring loans into and then out of candidates accounts. This kind of issue is very serious and the Chief Electoral Officer found that it was improper. The issue still is not out of procedure and House affairs committee. It is still not progressing because the government is filibustering.

For those who may be watching, a filibuster occurs when a party decides that it will continue to talk. There are no limits on talking when a motion is made. If the chair of that committee permits it to get too broad, effectively what we can do is continue to talk. When one member is finished, another member can get up and continue to talk. Therefore, we have a filibuster whereby the question before the committee never gets voted on and no action is ever taken.

We have seen that time and time again as a tactic. As members know, the government members were given a binder for their committees on how to disrupt the business of committees. Amendments were made to the bill at committee. Now they are being changed. There are all kinds of tactics, which I think Canadians would find very distasteful, with regard to respect for the rule of parliamentary procedures and law and how matters are handled.

● (1710)

I believe parliamentarians on committee, in reviewing the matter before us, did their job. They agreed upon the amendments. These have been tampered with yet again by the government to show bad faith in terms of respecting the fact that this is a minority government. It is important that we move now to make good laws and wise decisions. It does not include the changes proposed by the government.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with rapt attention to my hon. colleague. I am absolutely flabbergasted that the member of the House of Commons would dare talk about filibustering in a negative fashion.

I do not believe there is anybody in the House of Commons who speaks more often on more legislation, more motions, more points of order and more than the member. I think he has written the book on filibustering and wasting the time of the House on any number of issues. Anybody who happens to watch the parliamentary channel on television would be well acquainted with the member. It is a bit rich when he talks about filibustering and suggests that our members should not utilize that completely legitimate parliamentary tactic when necessary to make a point.

As to the issue before the procedure and House affairs committee, to which he referred, whereby the Liberal Party of Canada wants to ensure that the procedure and House affairs committee only looks at the Conservative Party of Canada's election expenses and not its own, why does the Liberal Party not want to open up its books?

We are more than willing to open up our books and have a complete review of everything we did during the last election campaign. All we are asking, and we have been asking it for months, is that the other three political parties do the same. Let us just treat all political parties equally.

I think all Canadians would be in favour of that and would be supportive of it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the hon. member's two areas of questions.

First, the member is quite right with regard to the first item. I do speak a fair bit in the House. In the last Parliament I spoke more than any other member in this place. I probably have had the same level of activity in the current Parliament.

However, it is not something that gets announced as what we do, but as a parliamentarian and a member of the Liberal team, we all have roles to play. We all have responsibilities.

The member will know that in the last Parliament and in this Parliament I have been designated as the permanent House duty officer, which means I am responsible for being in the place to participate in debate as necessary, to raise points of order, to ensure there are members in their places and to generally coordinate the activities. It does mean I speak a lot. It is not because I like to speak. I am doing my job.

I very much appreciate the kind words that members often give me when I have spoken. They know I do my homework and they know I do not waste the time of the House.

The second matter the member raised was with regard to looking at all parties with regard to the in and out scandal. The answer is very clear. The only reason the item is before the procedure and House affairs committee now is because the Conservative Party is the only party that has been charged with breaches under the Canada Elections Act by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Government Orders

•(1715)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason the member and his party are afraid to have their books investigated before the committee is because very imminently it will become public that their party is seeking ways to attract corporate money and big donations that exceed the limits and break the rules. How does he explain the Liberal Party's hiding its electoral finances?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how the member could know something about what somebody may do. It is not a fact. The fact is the Conservative Party has been found in breach of the Canada Elections Act by the Chief Electoral Officer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take the floor too often, for too long, in a pleasant fashion or otherwise, but I believe that, in this House, we must absolutely—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, but the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton wants to rise on a point of order, to which I will listen carefully.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, as members know, matters of law are of great importance and require precision in the House under the Standing Orders. This is why it was with deep regret when we heard the member across say that the Conservative Party had been charged by Elections Canada. There has been no such charge made. In fact, the Conservative Party is the plaintiff, taking Elections Canada to court, and that is a key point.

Mr. Paul Szabo: That's debate, not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jay Hill: Tell the truth about it. Tell the truth, that's the point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Will the chief government whip please note the Speaker is rising.

As far as the point of order raised by the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton, whether it is a valid point or not, it is a point of debate and not a point of order.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, let us go at it again.

What is interesting in this House is that some debates often look like they are going to be calm affairs but then, all of a sudden, people's tempers are flaring. When we talk about the crux of the matter in an election, namely money, people often tend to get carried away.

I just understood what the Liberal Party member said, through the questions of the hon. whip from the other side, and I realize that the Conservative Party is extremely fragile and sensitive. It is even a

little too sensitive when we talk about monetary issues during election campaigns.

After a 30-year legal career, I can say that the single most important quality that we want from a judge when we address the bench is neutrality, the appearance of neutrality. The judge must be above the fray.

The problem for MPs, for elected members in Canada and in Quebec, but particularly outside Quebec, is that we are now realizing that a number of members do not comply with the Elections Act. In Quebec, thanks to René Lévesque, the Quebec Elections Act, which was passed in 1977, improved the election process.

We would like it to be the same on the federal scene. Unfortunately, it is not always the case and some political parties—the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, not to mention this country's two oldest political parties—would really like nothing to change in that regard.

It has to stop, however, because the credibility of the elected representatives from those parties is at stake. I will likely be taking part in my third electoral campaign within a few weeks. I can assure the House that election expenses probably account for the largest part of our spending in an election. They must therefore be clear and transparent, and that should apply to every elected member of this House. Election expenses should be clear and transparent, and we should never hesitate to answer questions about our election expenses. That is unfortunately not the case.

We in the Bloc Québécois are in favour of a return to rules that are smarter and more respectful of those who elected us.

My comments will focus on Motion No. 3, which would make the parties responsible for any debt incurred by their candidates, whether they know about it or not. In any legal system, to be a party to an action, one has to have been invited to take part, have been convicted and, more importantly, have been called upon by the court to defend himself or herself.

Through a motion, we would like to restore an amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois that we feel is absolutely essential: a political party cannot be held responsible for expenses incurred by a candidate, especially when it is not aware of such expenses. It seems pretty clear to me, and the same idea could be expressed both in French and in English: one cannot be responsible for a debt they know nothing about.

The government would like to come and impose upon the political parties the responsibility for debts that their candidates refuse or are unable to pay back.

•(1720)

I do not know about the other parties, but the Bloc Québécois always makes sure that it has reliable, sincere candidates who are capable of fulfilling their obligations. Election expenses have to be monitored carefully, not only by the candidate but also by the candidate's financial agent, who should be there at all times to oversee and supervise election spending.

Government Orders

How can we assign liability to a political party when one of its candidates starts spending money that the political party does not even know about? That seems to us to be completely absurd and completely contrary to all of the laws in Canada, and in particular in Quebec, where the law says that no one can be a party to an action if he or she is not responsible for the damage caused or did not sign the contract.

If a political party is not aware of the money spent by its candidate, how can it be held liable for it? It seems to us to be absolute nonsense to require candidates not to pay. If you agree to a debt, you have to pay it, but we think it is nonsense for a party to be liable for a debt that it did not agree to.

The government would like to do something totally unacceptable: require a political party to be responsible for all debts that a candidate might incur during an election. That seems to us to be completely absurd and that is why the Bloc Québécois introduced an amendment that was agreed to by the committee. Suddenly, the government is making another attempt and once again wants the party to be responsible for a debt incurred by a candidate.

For example, if a candidate goes on a wild spending spree amounting to \$50,000 or \$60,000 or \$70,000, would the political party that he or she is representing be liable for it? That seems to us to be completely illogical and irrational, and most importantly contrary to the law in force in Quebec and Canada, under which, in order for someone to be a party to a contract, that person must have signed it, must be a party to it and must have set his or her hand to it or given approval for such a contract.

Obviously we are going to invite the House to rethink Motion No. 3 seriously so it can be defeated and we can come back to the amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois in committee. We are therefore calling for Motion No. 3 to be rejected.

• (1725)

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for addressing this problem so clearly.

I would like to know what he thinks. He talked about a person who could take out a loan on behalf of a candidate or a candidate who could do so himself. Would it be possible for a candidate who planned on using such a law to make his political party pay back the loan to get loans himself from several people, and assume that, either way, he will never have to pay them back since the party will?

In the House, we know the parties that have a lot of money and that could say this is no problem, they would pay later and settle it all in three years. I would like to know whether my colleague thinks this could also be a possibility.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's competence is clearly reflected through his excellent question. I also happen to believe that he is absolutely right.

Some candidates could run in an election and spend money while thinking there will not be any problems. They were asked to run for a party, and since they are doing so, that party will foot the bill. It is as if someone went to a restaurant and told everyone that it is an open bar and that, in any case, he is not the one paying. It is the party that is paying.

This is totally unacceptable, and I think the hon. member is absolutely right. I believe, and I maintain that a candidate who runs in an election must be personally responsible for his expenditures. It is not up to the party to foot the bill at the end of the day, but to the candidate who ran. This would ensure that the candidate acts much more responsibly and is much more cautious with money, because he would be responsible for making sure that he is spending money properly and adequately. He would then be able to account for his expenditures before the House, which may not be the case for some candidates who ran under the Conservative banner in the last election.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague just finished answering the question of the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi about these election expenses that pose a problem to Elections Canada. The Conservative Party is suing Elections Canada. I think the purpose of this suit is to keep the lid on something that is looking increasingly like a scandal, for as long as possible.

I would like my colleague to comment on a statement made by the second in command at Elections Canada, Janice Vézina, in this dispute between Elections Canada and the Conservative Party. In a written statement, Ms. Vézina argued that the Conservative Party failed to comply with the Elections Act by making its local candidates share in the cost of its national advertising, which, of course, allowed the party to spend more than permitted by law. As a result, the Conservative Party exceeded its spending limit by more than \$1 billion.

Does this whole saga not show how the old political parties act instinctively? This is taking us back to the days when some parties had dead people voting for them. Once again, all sorts of tricks are being used to achieve their own ends and exceed the limit on election expenses.

• (1730)

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's question is an insightful one.

It is obvious that there is a problem. That is why I am saying that individual candidates should be responsible for the expenses they incur during an election campaign. There is one word all of us in this House must remember and that is transparency.

We should never be afraid of expenses incurred in an election campaign. More importantly, we should never be afraid to answer questions designed to determine whether or not our election expenses were permissible and, more importantly, legally permitted, which does not seem to be the case here.

The poor woman must be on the verge of losing her job. We know of others who have been removed by the Conservative government.

[*English*]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on the topic of Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

I know that many members of this House have worked hard on improving this bill at the committee stage and I certainly know that we all appreciate their hard work.

Government Orders

Let me begin by pointing out that many parts of this bill are based on recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer in his report to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

In the report, the Chief Electoral Officer found that when loans are given to a political candidate by a person who is not regularly in the business of lending money, it could be perceived by some as a means to influence the political process with money.

As we in this House know, even the perception of influence peddling can be just as damaging to Canadians' views of the political process as unabashed influence peddling.

Some of the recommendations made in his report include ensuring that all loans from lending institutions be granted to a candidate at the going commercial rate. Another of his recommendations was to establish a limit on loans made by individuals that would be equal to their annual political contribution amount. For 2007 that amount was \$1,100. Both of these recommendations found their way into the bill.

Now, corporations and unions would be prevented from making loans to political candidates and parties, just as they have been prevented from making campaign contributions. Individuals would be limited in the sum total of their contributions and loans for a given year. Both a loan and a contribution would now count toward their maximum annual limit.

Another important recommendation made by the Chief Electoral Officer was that the information surrounding any loans be made public in order to mitigate the chances of a perceived conflict of interest. According to the report, the information to be disclosed should include the identity of the lender, interest rates, and a repayment schedule for the loan.

I was pleased to see that during the Liberal Party's last leadership race, our candidates went above and beyond the call of duty to disclose this type of information. I believe it is an excellent idea that the other parties in this House be brought under the same type of scrutiny. There are still some people in this House, not least and most specifically the Prime Minister, who have not revealed the names of the people and organizations which contributed to his leadership campaign in 2002. This kind of secrecy is what leads many Canadians to become distrustful of the political process.

I encourage my colleagues on the Conservative side of the House to urge their leader to disclose those contributions as soon as possible. It could be a good subject to raise in this week's caucus two days from now.

I would now like to provide some background that will illustrate how we have arrived at the current set of laws governing political financing in this country.

The Liberal Party in fact has been at the forefront of the movement toward a more open and transparent process for political donations.

In 2003 the previous Liberal government introduced the first annual limits on individual contributions to a political party and/or candidate. In that same bill, it also limited contributions from corporations and unions to political parties. These changes stand

today as the most significant ones that have been made to political financing laws in decades.

I was happy to support these changes in 2003 and I am happy to support Bill C-29 today, providing that the amendments made at committee are kept in place.

There is a danger that sometimes in our zeal to make things better we actually make things worse through a variety of unintended consequences. That is why I am glad to see that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs made some very well-intentioned and sensible amendments to Bill C-29 during its review of the bill this past December. The government itself brought forward some of these amendments.

Principally, they altered the bill to ensure that if a person makes a \$1,100 loan to a candidate in a given year, say 2008, and that candidate repays the loan in that same year, then the donor would be able to make another \$1,100 loan without going over his or her annual contribution limit. I think this was supported by all parties at committee stage.

There were some amendments which the government did not agree with, which I understand we will be voting on again here at report stage.

• (1735)

One such amendment has to do with who is liable for loans that go unpaid. The NDP, Bloc and Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs were concerned that the wording of the original bill could have made political parties responsible for loans that their candidates took without even knowing that their candidates had secured them.

If, for instance, a candidate were to take out a \$20,000 loan without informing the central party that he or she had done so, the candidate could conceivably then declare bankruptcy after the election, forcing the registered political party to assume liability for the loan, despite the fact that the party had not authorized, approved, or even been aware of the loan in the first place.

For the parties that have representation in the House, this would certainly be an irritant, but it would by no means be catastrophic for them. The parties that this would really hurt are the ones not represented in the House, such as the Green Party and others like it, that field candidates in all regions of the country. For those parties, the possibility of assuming responsibility for a series of loans that their central parties were not even aware of would be extremely damaging to their future viability, and this of course would not be good for democracy.

A third amendment, which the government has tabled a motion to remove from the bill, has to do with loans to candidates when the campaign stretches across the January 1 new year.

Government Orders

Originally the bill only allowed for a single loan to a candidate during the course of the campaign valued at the maximum annual contribution limit. At committee stage it was agreed that should a campaign cross the new year divide, another loan could be made up to the annual contribution limit by an individual in the second year. I do not think I need to illustrate that. It is a clear point and I cannot see the problem the government has with that. We very recently had an election that spanned across the new year, and I think this is a sensible amendment. It is also important for all of our parties' future leadership races which might often run from one year into the next.

Without this amendment, a person who lends \$1,100 to a candidate in December would be able to make a similar size donation to that candidate come January, but he would not be able to enter into a second loan agreement.

While this may seem like a trivial amendment to my colleagues over on that side of the House, I would suggest it is a common sense amendment, and I hope they will consider keeping it in the bill.

I could not speak to Bill C-29 without mentioning some of the concerns that have been raised in some quarters about the limits imposed by this bill.

First, there has been some concern raised by several financial institutions that this bill would, to a significant degree, give them some control over who has the ability to run for federal office or for leadership of a political party in this country. If a candidate is not able to meet the requirements of his or her bank to secure a loan, then that candidate will be severely handicapped in the early stages of his or her campaign.

I have the sense that banks are not worried so much about actually denying someone a loan in order to run for office. After all, they are professionals and will base their decisions on to whom to lend money on sound financial principles. The problem for them would be an apparent conflict of interest if one or several candidates from a particular party are denied loans while other parties do not seem to have any trouble.

I do not believe that these waters are unnavigable for the banks. I believe that in terms of provincial political loans some provinces already have in place measures similar to this one and the banks appear to have done fine in that respect. It is, however, something that we in the House must be mindful of and continue to monitor as we move forward.

There has also been some concern raised in some circles that this bill would severely disadvantage Canadians who are less well off and yet wish to run for political office. If a candidate has not built up sufficient equity or maintained a strong enough credit rating, he or she will be prevented from securing the loans that might help launch their political careers. I know that the National Women's Liberal Commission made a submission to the procedure and House affairs committee that outlined such a concern.

As I said earlier, I will be supporting Bill C-29 with its current amendments, but I would hope that if in the future it became evident that these types of problems were occurring, the House would be willing to reopen the issue and ensure that the problems were resolved.

● (1740)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the hon. member congratulated the procedure and House affairs committee for all its work, although I guess in some weird way I should thank the member for all the work because we have been trying to close the holes that the Liberals found to get contributions in very tricky ways. I remember when there were \$5,000 dinners and we had to close that loophole. Then there were donations from kids for \$5,000 and we had to close that loophole.

The latest one in this act is really a good one. Let us say that a party that we might call the L party had a candidate running for leadership, and let us just call that candidate D. He borrows \$800,000 from the bank, which is guaranteed by, let us say, his brother. Then he defaults on that \$800,000 loan, making his brother pay it. The banks are happy, but the brother happened to make an \$800,000 contribution, which is completely against the intent of the law. There are a number of members on that side, most of them sitting on the frontbench, who did exactly that.

I would like to ask the member if he intends to endorse that kind of a policy, or is the member actually going to encourage members of his party to follow the law's intent and stop making the procedure and House affairs committee work so hard?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me this mysterious person that the hon. member was referring to is perhaps the member for Mississauga—Streetsville. Some of the characteristics he described may fit that case. I am not sure if that is true, but it was a rather mysterious person he was describing.

The other point I would make, however, is that the member, as a member of the committee, has a bit of nerve to stand in his place and make criticisms of others when it is in fact his party which is conducting a reprehensible filibuster in order to get out of the \$1 million in and out scandal that his party is facing today.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his participation in this important bill, which I think all hon. members would like to see move forward, but with the amendments of the committee, not with the kinds of shenanigans that the government is playing.

During the debate, the chief government whip wanted to talk about the so-called in and out scandal. I am pretty sure that most Canadians are not familiar with what exactly happened and the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer initially found the Conservative Party to be in breach of the Canada Elections Act with regard to this activity, which has subsequently been sustained.

I wonder if the member could inform the House and all Canadians about the seriousness of the matter that has been debated in the House.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I think all Canadians would agree that it is reprehensible behaviour on the part of any political party to disobey and break the law. This is what Elections Canada has charged with regard to the Conservative Party in terms of \$1 million of misspending during the election campaign.

Government Orders

I might add, and this is a point that seems to elude the Conservatives, that no other party in the House or in this country has been charged the way the Conservatives have by Elections Canada. It is only the Conservative Party behaviour that has been criticized.

• (1745)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Found in breach.

Hon. John McCallum: Found in breach. I take that back, Mr. Speaker, found in breach. I will accept that correction.

Only one party, and now my facts are correct, has been found in breach and that party begins with the letter C, the Conservative Party. One cannot help avoid the impression that this is one of the reasons that the Conservative Party is trying to provoke an early election, so that this and many other scandals, such as the one including the finance minister, will be swept under the carpet in the midst of a general election campaign.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to Bill C-29, especially since this bill is an Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans).

The Canada Elections Act has come into question in recent weeks. It always makes me smile to hear the Conservatives in the House boasting about how they have amended the Canada Elections Act. It is very disturbing, and that is why, when the Conservatives introduce a bill like this one, we have to look at it once, twice, three times, four times and go through it with a fine-tooth comb.

As we speak, more than 60 Conservative members still have not received their rebate from the Chief Electoral Officer. They are the only members of the House who have not been reimbursed for their election expenses since the last campaign. They will try and tell us that everything is fine, but there is a good reason they decided to filibuster in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. They do not want to be asked about the errors and omissions the Chief Electoral Officer has found. More than 60 members have not been reimbursed for their latest election expenses, including two ministers from Quebec: the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

When people—citizens, Quebecers—read or hear things like this in the media, it does not reflect well on the political elite, particularly seeing as the members of the Bloc Québécois have all been reimbursed and have therefore not been reprimanded by the Chief Electoral Officer. We have to protect that reputation because in the previous Parliament, the Liberals marred politicians' reputation far too often.

Now the Conservatives are making the rest of us look bad. That is what comes of being in power, I suppose. They say that it takes absolute power, but often, as some here know, power can make people crazy, and the Conservatives are verging on it. It is coming. It is getting closer. It started with election spending. They tried to cook the books so they could get more money for the next election campaign. They want to get as much money as possible. They understand how it works, and their actions are based on the premise that the more money one has, the more seats one wins. That is the

Conservative way of doing things. The more money you accumulate, the better your chances of coming to power.

We in Quebec are proud that in every election since 1993, we have had a majority, and not thanks to money. We spend as much as the law allows, and not a penny more, because we collect our money \$5 at a time. That has always been our way of doing things.

I should point out that Canada adopted its political party financing legislation based on Quebec's, which was brought in by René Lévesque, leader of the Parti Québécois and the sovereignty movement for many years, who cleaned house in Quebec. Canada also cleaned house a few years ago, but some Conservatives got caught yet again, even though they just cleaned house. People have to understand that that's what it means to be a federalist—they have to do everything they can to collect money because that is how elections are won.

Of course we saw that with Option Canada. Maybe, at the time of the last referendum in Quebec, they took money to which they were not entitled. We know that an investigation has revealed that millions of dollars were spent, which was not allowed under the Quebec legislation respecting elections and referendums. But what is done is done. Federalists tell us that what is done is done but that it should not happen the next time. Maybe we should ask the UN to oversee the next referendum in Quebec because it is the only way to stop these people who have no qualms about using public funds to try to win an election.

That is why we have Bill C-29 before us, or should I say before us again. There are three motions in amendment. This bill is the reincarnation of Bill C-54, which was amended by the committee in the previous session. Let us not forget that there was a throne speech. In an attempt to improve their image, the Conservatives presented a new Speech from the Throne. Consequently, certain bills had to be reintroduced, and Bill C-29 is the same as former Bill C-54.

• (1750)

The government is bringing forward three motions to try to counter three amendments made by opposition parties in committee in the last session. I will take the time to explain these three motions. For the Bloc Québécois, two of them are totally unacceptable; there is one however—a minor change—that we will support. It has to be understood that one of these motions deals with expenses, that is the amounts that an individual can contribute to a leadership campaign.

Under the current legislation an individual can contribute \$1,000 a year to political parties during a leadership campaign. That amount has been changed to \$1,100, but in the legislation it is \$1,000. We thought that the bill could contain provisions allowing for annual contributions to a leadership race, as the Canada Elections Act does. The Bloc Québécois enjoys stability, but the other parties in this House often change leaders. We want to give them a chance to raise money for changing their leader instead of for running an election campaign. After the next election, few of these leaders will still be here. I can assure you of that. We are giving them a chance to collect \$1,000 a year, pursuant to the current legislation, which, as I was saying, allows individuals to contribute \$1,100 a year to election campaigns.

Government Orders

The Conservatives have decided that these contributions can be made once every leadership race instead of once a year. All we are asking for is some logic. We have electoral legislation that allows individual contributions of \$1,100 a year. An annual contribution to leadership races should be allowed in order to provide more money for self-promotion and avoid using taxpayer dollars at election time.

This will allow candidates to run their race within their party and to show their true colours. They hide because they do not have the money for a party leadership race. Then, the public discovers them once they come into power and they need taxpayer dollars in order to win the election. That is what the Conservatives do: they try to buy their way in with all sorts of tricks. They must be copying the U.S. model, where we see highly publicized campaigns. Instead of letting us get to know the individuals, prefabricated images are projected in lovely ad campaigns. The candidate, or the leader, is not presented, their image is. That is the new way of doing things. In any event, they will be judged during the next election campaign.

The second motion proposes that a loan become a contribution if it has not been repaid after three years. Obviously, the law does not allow any more time. As was mentioned earlier, the limit is \$1,100 a year. Clearly, the law allows loans, but when someone lends another person money, that person must repay the loan at some point. As well, people cannot be allowed to do indirectly what they cannot do directly. We cannot say that we need money, but we need more than \$1,100, because we do not have enough friends to give us money. This is often what happens in the other parties. Candidates have enough friends to raise the money they need, but their friends do not have enough money, so the candidates lend themselves money. They take money and lend it to themselves. Once the election campaign is over, these loans have to be repaid.

Candidates cannot use their own money to get elected, because that would be too easy. The Conservatives and Liberals have often used this tactic in recent years to try to get elected. They used their own money to fund their election campaigns. But that is not how things work. After three years, the loan must become a contribution. Because the money has not been repaid, it becomes a contribution, and if that contribution exceeds the \$1,100 annual limit—for example, if the loan is for \$10,000—then it violates the law. We allowed this minor change.

The last motion proposes that the government reject the amendment introduced by the Bloc Québécois. The government wants to make political parties liable for their candidates' debts. Clearly, if a candidate goes to see his banker because he has no money, but the party does have money, the candidate will be able to fund his election campaign. But if the candidate cannot repay his debts, the party will have to do so.

It makes no sense to adopt this bill in its current form. Candidates must have credibility. If they have to borrow to fund a line of credit until the money comes in, then they should borrow against their own personal assets. That is what Bloc Québécois candidates have always done. We find a way to fund our campaigns, and when we do not have enough money, we take out loans, which we sign for and guarantee ourselves, until we raise enough money. The party does not guarantee our loans, we do. In that way, we may—

● (1755)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry but I have to interrupt the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

The member for Trois-Rivières has the floor.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech.

I am very troubled by the part of the third motion where the government wants to make the party responsible for debts incurred by its candidates. I find that truly unacceptable. In fact, it is as if I went shopping with my credit card and then asked the party to pay the bill. It seems to me that candidates should have enough self-confidence to invest in their own campaign and believe in their ability to win without a party, which is a highly democratic political organization, having to be responsible for debts incurred by anyone who decides to run in an election.

Why a government would propose such a motion is beyond me.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right.

In any event, the law allows us to spend a maximum amount on our campaign. If we wish to exceed the allowable limit, we have to obtain loans from banks and guarantee the repayment of the campaign debt until we find the money through public funding to be in a position to repay the loan.

If we decide that the party will guarantee the debt, that means that everyone who does not have the requisite credibility to obtain support or financing can become candidates. That changes the way of doing things and the selection of candidates.

Personally, I hope we will find a balance. Quebec's rule is as follows: we have to be able to guarantee the debts incurred in our own election campaign. The legislation states that, after three years, the debt becomes a contribution—both guaranteed debts and loans become contributions. If we wish to obey the law, we have to be able to find the necessary money, have a line of credit and provide our own security for the line of credit, since it is our election campaign. If we decide not to, that means that we no longer need the credibility. What does that tell citizens about the candidate? We have to be able to guarantee the expenses of our own campaign election.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives introduced this bill claiming that several Liberal candidates, during the last leadership race, took out large loans in order to circumvent the contribution limits.

In this context, would the Conservative motion to ensure that expenses are repaid by the party solve the problems created by the Liberals during the last leadership race?

● (1800)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Government Orders

In response I would say that it will not solve them at all. First of all, if it involves a bank loan, a credit analysis must be conducted. I am therefore much more comfortable with a candidate who has to go to a bank to obtain financing for his expenses. Some contributions could come in later to help reduce his or her campaign debts.

If the bank gets fleeced, it is the bank's problem and Liberal candidates would not be able to do business with the banks during the next election campaign.

The other possibility is that an individual loans a candidate some money. In such cases, that individual cannot be reimbursed. However, according to the amendments, the law would be clear: after three years, that loan would become a contribution. Anyone who contributes more than the \$1,000 allowed by law would be in violation of the Elections Act and face penalties, including possible imprisonment.

I prefer the existing system, because the loan will automatically become a contribution. If someone advances \$100,000 to a candidate who does not pay that money back, and that person says "no problem" and cancels the debt, that means that after three years, if he or she is not paid back, that amount becomes a contribution to the election campaign, which is no longer lawful. That becomes a violation of the Elections Act, punishable by law, including prosecution.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of commenting on this bill. I would first like to remind the House that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this bill. We have been speaking a great deal about the motions, but we agree completely with the substance of the bill. We believe that it is necessary to regulate loans in order to prevent financing limits from being circumvented.

These limits were established after a long debate with the Bloc Québécois, which wanted to put an end to corporate funding and to limit individual contributions, as Quebec did 30 years ago.

I believe that Quebec, in this regard, can truly provide an important and valuable example. We have a problem with the motions, particularly Motion No. 3.

The government wants to make political parties responsible for the debt incurred by their candidates.

My colleagues spoke about this earlier, but I would like to take it one step further. I believe that adopting this motion would lead to some very significant abuses, to the point that a political party could find itself with a great deal of money in its coffers. That could be the case for some political parties, or at least for one we know.

These political parties could tell their candidates to go into debt, that someone or another could lend them some money and that, in any case, three years later, the party would advance the money. They do not need to feel responsible because the party will pay back the money. That means that the candidates would have a millstone around their necks and that they would be chained to their party. They would not have the freedom to say that they felt responsible for their own election campaign because, in any event, the party will pay for them if they do not repay their debt.

These things can be planned. That is why I am saying that things can go farther than my colleagues have acknowledged. People will

be able to plan things and borrow money from multiple sources because the party will pay it back in three years. The party has the money.

The Bloc Québécois finds this way of thinking outrageous. We think that candidates have to have a modicum of freedom in their ridings to get themselves elected democratically by their supporters.

We do not dictate who can run for our party. It is important for candidates chosen by their supporters and by people in their ridings to be responsible for their own election campaigns and the money they spend. As a result, our candidates have much closer ties to their communities and are more connected to the voters in their ridings.

We can pretty much eliminate parachuting people into a riding. Parachuting people in is easy. Some people, a week before the election, have never campaigned. This happened in Quebec in the last election, especially with the Conservatives. There were candidates who had never been involved in politics, not at all. At the last minute, the party found some people and told them not to worry because with the three-year legislation, they would not have to pay back the money they borrowed.

Imagine what being told in advance that the debt will be paid off in three years can do to a candidate's accountability. A party can parachute in any candidate at all. The candidate is not accountable and is not even chosen by supporters. We are well aware—experience has shown—that there were candidates who did not even have supporters.

It is much easier for a party to go into a riding and convince people to run if it promises to pay off their debts later.

● (1805)

This motion is truly unacceptable. The government wants to hold the political parties responsible for their candidate's debts. That is unacceptable and I would say it is bordering on immoral. In our capitalist system every individual is responsible for their own debt. Under the new plan, an individual is no longer responsible for his or her debt, but a third party, an entity, in short, a political party is. The party would become responsible for an individual's debt. That makes absolutely no sense.

What is more, five or six lenders could be identified. They could even come from outside the riding and be reimbursed in three years. See how complicated this becomes? The lender would no longer ask for a guarantee. When the Bloc Québécois candidates borrowed money—at one time we needed to do so, but fortunately that is no longer the case since things are going well—they went to the bank and were responsible for the debt. This is fundamental. It gives candidates the chance to be responsible to the electors and to hold their heads high after the election whether they won or not. They do not owe anyone anything and they will settle their debts.

Government Orders

This necessarily forces people to work together, to collaborate and create a much greater sense of belonging within the riding. A candidate has to work with the people who are there to help. This takes many \$1,100 contributions and there are not many people who donate that kind of money. In my riding, there are very few people who give \$1,100. As my colleague was saying earlier, we collect donations of \$5, \$10 or \$20 and that is what we use for our election campaign. This creates a democratic link with the people in our riding and that is what really counts. If we no longer have that and can borrow \$80,000 in one shot—as we saw a candidate do and then switch parties—without paying it back, this becomes institutionalized and there is no longer any need to pay money back because the party will take care of it. That does not make any sense. It is wrong and we cannot accept it.

The first amendment made in committee makes sense to us since all the contribution limits currently in the Canada Elections Act are annual, except in the case of candidates for party leadership. Contributions should be annual and should not be contributions for a leadership campaign. It is a well-known and perfectly correct old habit that every January, in the new year, people can once again give money to the political parties. Why would it not be the same for leadership campaigns, which do last from one year to the next? This would let anyone who wants to support a candidate give again after the year ends. One year is long enough to assume people would be able to give again.

We think that Motion No. 1 is very important and we want to keep it that way. We are not against the idea of the annual contribution, but against the fact that parties would be responsible for contributions that come from personal loans. This could lead to dishonesty. We could end up with such a law in a few years and we could plan out all the loans taken by a candidate. This is completely unacceptable. We are against this motion and will keep voting against it.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member has raised some very interesting points in regard to some of the things that have happened, particularly in the Conservative Party with the loan situation in regard to the member for Mississauga—Streetsville. I think that is a very disturbing situation that has occurred.

In debate we have spent a fair bit of time talking about the filibuster in the procedure and House affairs committee with regard to what is called the in-and-out scam, whereby the Conservative Party transferred moneys to individual candidates and then the candidates would give it back to the party. They then would claim the expense as advertising. As the Chief Electoral Officer has found, the Conservatives in fact are in breach of the Canada Elections Act, it amounts to about \$1 million, and it means that they have overspent.

I wonder if the member can tell the House whether, in the Bloc's experience in the procedure and House affairs committee, the government is prepared to stand up and be accountable for what it did and what the Conservative Party in fact was found in breach of with regard to the swapping of money—or it looks like money

laundering—in order to get additional advantage for the Conservative Party in a democratic system.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that my Liberal colleague has raised this point. Indeed, it seems that a piece of legislation can generally be circumvented. That is the case at this time. Although the Canada Elections Act has a relatively rigid framework, we see that it can be circumvented. In any case, some people try to do so.

Instead of allowing more gaps in Bill C-29, we should instead try to make it impossible to take out any money using the Conservative tactic, in other words, by taking money from the central fund to pay for things in the ridings. Greater attention needs to be paid to this.

We get the impression that the federal government made the Canada Elections Act more rigid, but now wants it to be relaxed, because it was made a little too strict. The Bloc Québécois believes that the more rigid the legislation, the greater the chances of people being honest.

• (1815)

[English]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member a question about loans. We have heard allegations and we have heard some talk today about loans that were made, loans that were made as a way to circumvent, but loans are a legitimate means of providing funds. However, when loans are not paid back, suddenly they become a disguised contribution.

Now we know that in the past this has been a practice used by certain parties. We will not name those parties. I think everybody knows which party that is. However, I would ask the hon. member this question: why do we not ban loans entirely? How does the member feel about that?

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question, but I do not think loans should be eliminated entirely.

We must bear in mind that some candidates come from areas where they are not popular, but they want to go into politics anyway. They will not necessarily borrow lots of money. Some parties raised very little money and could not even receive rebates from the Chief Electoral Officer.

It is practical for this person to take out a loan in his or her name. If it is not paid back, that individual's credit rating alone would be affected. I think that is the existing system and, generally speaking, that is how people should pay back their loans. If they do not pay them back, they are the ones who will suffer.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans). The Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill. However, the government has brought back some measures that we had already amended in committee.

The Bloc Québécois reserves its decision regarding the final vote on this legislation. I will be brief in dealing with its content.

Government Orders

The bill provides that all loans to political entities, including mandatory disclosure of terms, and the identity of all lenders and loan guarantors, must be uniform and transparent. Also, unions and corporations, save for some exceptions, would be prohibited from making contributions under the Federal Accountability Act, and also from lending money. The amount of loans, loan guarantees and contributions that individuals can make cannot exceed the limit prescribed in the Federal Accountability Act, namely \$1,100. Finally, only financial institutions and political entities would be allowed to make loans beyond the contribution limit, and only at commercial rates of interest. The rules for the treatment of unpaid loans to ensure candidates cannot walk away from unpaid loans would be tightened. The bill also provides that loans that remain unpaid after 18 months would be considered political contributions.

The problem is with the last point. Riding associations—or, in the absence thereof, the party itself—would be responsible for paying back debts that their candidates fail to reimburse. Several of my colleagues here in the House, particularly my Bloc Québécois colleagues, have said how absurd that is. In fact, the government introduced this motion, as well as two others, to counter three amendments made by the opposition parties in committee. By putting this motion forward, the Conservative government is rejecting the Bloc Québécois amendment.

Political parties—and I think we have heard this several times now—would become responsible for debts contracted by their candidates. The problem with the governing party's motion is that political parties are not really involved in contracts between candidates and their financial institutions. In Quebec, that is between the candidate and his or her bank or credit union. Political parties do not get involved in that aspect of their candidates' election campaigns.

With this motion, the government is trying to make parties responsible for their candidates' debts, which is completely illogical because parties cannot limit their candidates' spending. There is a limit, a cap, but candidates may borrow money for their own campaigns at their own discretion or that of their organizations. The party is not involved in the transaction.

A candidate can therefore go into debt. Say a candidate borrows \$60,000 from a bank or credit union. The party cannot stop candidates from doing this. Legally, candidates can do this. The party would then end up with that candidate's debt, as well as that of other candidates who, unfortunately, cannot or will not pay the money back. This is akin to a law allowing someone to borrow money without informing the guarantor. When the credit union manager asks for the name of the guarantor, the borrower could say that it is his neighbour. The neighbour would then be responsible for the debt if the borrower did not pay it back. That makes no sense at all.

Of course, it would be wrong to assume that all the candidates in an election are dishonest. On the contrary, I hope that the vast majority are honest. But we are opening the door to a situation where someone runs for election, goes deeply into debt and does not win a seat. He knows that if he cannot repay his debts, the party will be saddled with the debt. A political party would be in serious difficulty if even a few people could not or would not shoulder that debt.

When I fought my first election campaign, the Bloc Québécois in Richmond—Arthabaska did not have much money in its coffers. I was chosen as the candidate on the day the 2000 election was called. I had to borrow money. I took out a loan to fund my election campaign, and I knew what I was getting into.

• (1820)

I knew that after the election, I would be in debt. I hoped to get elected so that I would be able to repay my debt fairly quickly, but I lost by about 300 votes that time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. André Bellavance: I thank my colleagues for their expressions of sympathy, but it was just a temporary setback, Mr. Speaker. I won my seat in 2004.

To make a long story short, after the election campaign, I no longer had a job, and I was in a lot of debt. As any responsible person would do, I made sure I repaid that debt. It never occurred to me that my party should take on that responsibility.

Of course, I had received an election rebate, because my expenses were in order, but I had still borrowed money, because in our riding, the party did not have much money at the time. Things have changed a great deal since then. There must not be very many cases where candidates, at least Bloc Québécois candidates, do not repay their debts. If a party were saddled with all its candidates' debts, the party supporters would not be very happy.

Earlier, one of my colleagues was saying that in his riding—and it is that way for the most part in Bloc Québécois ridings—supporters quite often give small amounts of money. We have a multitude of supporters who take part in fundraising activities. They organize spaghetti nights at \$10, \$20 or \$25 a head as a fundraiser because in our culture, we do not rely on big companies, even though the legislation has now changed for the better—thankfully.

I remember a time when the former prime minister, during a leadership race that was more like a coronation, received \$100,000 from the Irving Oil Corporation. I can assure you that I have never received that kind of money, even when the legislation allowed it. Where I come from our supporters would be insulted if they were told that all the money they raised was going to be used to pay off a candidate's debt, if the candidate defaulted, because it was the party's responsibility to do so.

Bill C-29 is not a bad bill, since it corrects some of the shortcomings in the Accountability Act, the former Bill C-2, which the government wanted to pass so quickly that it unwittingly, or not—I am not sure—forgot the ethical problems.

Adjournment Proceedings

That was at a time when the Conservative government probably thought, as many analysts did, that their mandate would last a year or a year and a half. They presented a few priorities—I believe there were five at first—saying they would start with that. In the two years the government has been in place, it has not seemed sure what direction to take. Nonetheless, I believe it does know: it wants to go back to the polls because it does not have any plans that would enable it to go on much longer.

The government thought it would not last long. It wanted to quickly fulfill its so-called promises, but in its haste it left out some parts. That is why we now have Bill C-29: to fill the gaps.

Bill C-29 seeks to prevent individuals from bypassing campaign financing rules.

Since I am being signalled that I have only two minutes left, I will be brief.

The Bloc Québécois believes it is necessary to regulate loans in order to prevent people from getting around the financing limits. In fact, it is ironic that this government is presenting such a bill, since the Conservative Party is currently being investigated by Elections Canada, which is refusing to rebate the campaign expenses for 67 Conservative candidates who ran during the last election campaign. There are nine members from Quebec, two ministers from Quebec and a secretary of state from Quebec. The latter is not really a minister, although he has a limousine. A secretary of state is not considered a real minister. Those people are among that group.

Here is how they do it: money is transferred to the ridings for advertising. It was supposed to be for local advertising, but in reality, it was used for national advertising. The candidate who received the money never once saw his face on television or in the media. It really was for national advertising. The riding associations sent money back to the national level to pay for the advertising.

This strategy allowed the party to raise its limits for campaign spending by \$1.2 million. That is a considerable sum, which is why it is so important at this time, on the eve of a possible election campaign, to avoid this kind of ploy, and ensure that the Conservative Party cannot repeat the same gimmick, which allowed them to have higher spending limits for campaign advertising than any other party normally would have.

● (1825)

I would like to point out that the Conservative Party accused the NDP and the Liberals of doing the same thing. However, Elections Canada said that those parties really gave their candidates an opportunity to have local advertising. That is the difference.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talking about how loans can be used in such a way that can distort the political process and why it is so important that we bring forward Bill C-29, I just thought the hon. member would find it interesting to look at something, which we cannot fix because we did not make the legislation retroactive, and that would be some of the outstanding loans from the Liberal leadership race.

The member for Kings—Hants has a \$200,000 loan, over 35% of his campaign funding was based on loans; the member for York

Centre has a \$300,000 loan, over 59% of his funding was based on loans; Bob Rae has \$845,000 in loans; and the Leader of the Opposition has \$455,000 in loans. Whether these loans were ever repaid is something that is of great importance to all of us here and why Bill C-29 is so important.

I would ask the member to comment on those huge loans.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, as I said, that is why we support the principle of Bill C-29. The government introduced this bill supposedly because several candidates in the Liberal Party of Canada leadership race borrowed large sums of money in order to circumvent the limits on contributions. What the government is not telling in all this is that its own leader, the Prime Minister himself, failed to make complete disclosure of contributions for the 2002 leadership race.

On October 2, 2002, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the Prime Minister had spent \$1.1 million on his race for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance. It stated further that he had published an incomplete list of contributions.

We on this side of the House would be very interested to know what the total amount of these contributions is exactly. Who were the contributors for that leadership race? This government wants an election to be called. It ran in the last election on a platform of openness and transparency. It should do the same in the next campaign. We would like to know.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska will have two minutes left in his time for debate when Bill C-29 comes back before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1830)

[English]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss in the House the question I raised on December 12 of last year, which had to do with approved destination status. It is extremely important when it comes to the issue of promoting and advertising tour groups both in Canada and in China.

In 2005 the previous Liberal government had an agreement in principle to deal with this issue. This is a very important issue in terms of advertising, because 134 countries have approved destination status and it is absolutely critical for us as a country in order to be able to promote tourism. In particular, there is the fact that the Chinese have over 120 million foreign trips a year. On average, they spend about \$1,800, it is assumed, when it comes to hotels, shopping and so on.

Adjournment Proceedings

We need to tap into that huge market, but as we know, the government's relations with China have not been very good, to say the least, or to be charitable. The fact is that when the government came in, it talked about a thousand Chinese spies in Canada and it waited about a year to have a meeting with the ambassador here. Generally, it has been a very rocky road.

Therefore, what has happened is that this agreement in principle has fallen off the table. We need to have this agreement in place because it will give us the opportunity for our agencies to send groups to Canada and allow Canada to advertise itself in China as a preferred destination. We need to get that opportunity.

Unfortunately, the relationship is one in which there has been no agreement. In fact, we had the government threatening to take China to the WTO, and there are other moves that have not been beneficial.

This is important for our tourism industry. It is important for our tourist agencies. In this country, many people of Chinese descent would love to see this, as well as others, but the failure of the government to move on this issue has been and continues to be a very sore point.

We see the booming economies of China, India and others. The fact is that this is an opportunity that at the moment has been lost. We cannot have that happen. We need to have this.

The previous Liberal government saw the opportunity in China and Southeast Asia. We moved very quickly on that. We moved Canadian tourism's headquarters to Vancouver. We see Asia as an important opportunity for us, yet we are looking at a situation in which an estimated 700,000 Chinese tourists or more could come to Canada and, unless we have this ADS agreement, we will miss out.

Therefore, I urged the government to get back to the table, to cut down on the rhetoric with the Chinese and to come up with an agreement in the interests of both parties. In particular, for our tourist industry this is critical, as we are talking about a potential 700,000 tourists. We are talking about an average of \$1,800 being spent by people coming here. It is a tremendous market.

We are looking at the Australians and others who have these agreements and we see where the tourists are going. They are not coming here. We need to get this done. I have urged the government to do so.

I would hope that the parliamentary secretary either will have some good news tonight or will at least indicate to me that we will get back to talking, because in the end this is not a partisan issue. This is a Canadian issue. We are pushing it because on this side of the House we believe that it is in our national interest to push something that others are taking advantage of.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the question asked by the hon. member for Richmond Hill, regarding Canada's negotiations with China to achieve an operational approved destination status.

The government has committed to finalizing approved destination status or ADS. ADS would provide a significant boost in tourism between Canada and China, a boost that would benefit Canada's

important tourism sector. That is why the government has raised this issue directly with senior Chinese officials at every opportunity.

The Minister of International Trade travelled to China this past January. The minister met with his new Chinese counterpart, Minister Chen Deming. The two had a series of meetings where the full range of Canada-China bilateral commercial relations were discussed.

The ministers talked about ongoing progress in the negotiation of a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement, the latest developments in the Asia-Pacific gateway and corridor initiative, improving two way investment flows and deepening commercial operation. Let me assure the hon. member that the Canada-China relationship has a solid foundation, one that was clearly evident by the warm reception the minister received when he visited China.

We made it clear that Canada was looking to advance this file. The issue has been in play for several years now. Canada would like to move ADS along in a meaningful way. Canada would like to see this end in a win-win negotiated arrangement, whereby both countries would stand to benefit from the increased people to people ties that ADS would help facilitate, especially with China and Canada being back to back hosts for the Olympic Games. Therefore, we continue to pursue this objective with the Chinese at every single opportunity.

The Government of Canada recognizes that the tourism industry is a vital part of Canada's economy. Tourism generates \$60 billion of revenue in Canada. It contributes to the economy of every region. China is an important tourism market for Canada and is one of our target markets. The Canadian Tourism Commission has an office in Beijing, has launched a Mandarin website and has participated in various tourism fairs in China.

Members can be assured that the government will continue to press the Chinese for progress on ADS. However, the hon. member must also be aware that ADS and tourism is but one component of our expansive commercial ties with China, which include bilateral trade, innovation cooperation and two way investments.

The Canada-China relationship will continue to grow and, in the meanwhile, individual Chinese visitors continue to come to Canada even without ADS. Preliminary estimates show that 146,000 overnight visitors came to Canada in 2007, the fourth straight year of growth. Canada has seen growth of about 12% in Chinese visitors since 2000.

• (1835)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member. What I am concerned about is the Minister of International Trade went to China last month and threatened the Chinese by saying that he would drag them before the WTO in order to get this approved destination status. If that is in fact supposed to be a love-in, I would hate to see what is not. In this case, threatening them with the WTO did not advance our case.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Liberal Party is prepared to repair Canada's relations with China. It is prepared to get back the agreement we had in principle, move forward and sign the deal. If the parliamentary secretary is suggesting that there was a new opening with regard to the Chinese, another question would be this. Why did the minister threaten to drag the Chinese before the WTO?

I encourage the government to stop the rhetoric, get to the table and work out an agreement the way others have done. In the end, what the member said is correct—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I find the hypocrisy of the member opposite astonishing. Not a single time in government did the member raise this issue publicly about approved destination status for Chinese travellers to Canada. The record will show that the Liberal government did not deliver and failed to open approved destination status with China.

The Conservative government is sitting down with the Chinese government trying to negotiate a deal to better Canadian tourism. The most the member can do is play petty politics. We are at the table. We are pushing forward. We are getting the job done.

[*Translation*]

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on January 29, I rose in the House during question period to ask the Prime Minister to separate the budget vote from the vote on the trust for regional economic diversification. Members will recall that when he made his announcement in New Brunswick, the Prime Minister said that it absolutely had to be passed together with the budget.

That was on January 29. The Bloc brought up the issue every day thereafter, and finally achieved satisfaction. The government decided to separate the vote on the trust from the budget. That was a good decision. We asked for it over and over.

Therefore, I was stunned to read in the weekend papers that the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who is the Secretary of State for Agriculture, had criticized me for asking for this. On February 9, he said, "If Mr. Crête wants to make himself useful, he should start by convincing his leader to"—

• (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup is a seasoned veteran of this House. He is seated in the front row. He knows to not refer to a member by name, himself included.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, please excuse me.

The Secretary of State (Agriculture) was hoping that I was beginning to convince my leader to support the next federal budget so that the community development trust would see the light of day. The secretary of state was a week late because the Prime Minister sided with us the week before. He told us that the trust money would be separate from the budget. The Secretary of State for Agriculture likes to boast that the Bloc Québécois does not have any power;

however, the Bloc won this one. The secretary is not up to date. A week after the fact, he was still going on about it.

Having said that, one important issue remains. On the weekend, the Premier of Quebec, Mr. Jean Charest, again raised it with the Prime Minister of Canada. He told him that it was a good idea to separate the money, that he himself had asked for that and that it agreed with the Quebec consensus that the votes should be separate. He also told him one more thing: that more money is needed. One billion dollars is not enough. More money is needed.

Last fall, the Bloc Québécois presented a \$3.5 billion action plan, with \$2 billion for the manufacturing industry, \$1 billion for the forestry industry and \$1.5 billion for employment insurance. That is a total of \$4 billion. \$1 billion has been put into the trust and the remaining \$3.5 billion remains to be disbursed.

Will the government go ahead and respond to the second requirement of the Quebec consensus and agree to allocate the money, from this year's \$10 billion surplus, as follows: \$3 billion to the debt, \$3.5 billion to recovery and \$3 billion to help seniors? Is this not the right decision, which the government should make public as soon as possible?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am once again pleased to inform my friend from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup of the extensive support that our government is delivering for the manufacturing and forestry sectors, especially through the community development trust.

With the community development trust, our government intends to make a concrete difference for communities and workers who are adjusting to a shifting global economic landscape.

While Canada's economy is very strong overall, we know that global economic volatility has put pressure on particular communities and workers, especially those communities that rely on a single sector or company that is being challenged. That is why we will be investing \$1 billion in the community development trust to support provincial and territorial initiatives that help these communities and workers weather the economic storms facing them.

This initiative has been widely praised by key organizations and provincial leaders. For instance, Shawn Graham, the Liberal premier of New Brunswick, remarked that his government was "pleased that the Prime Minister and his government have made this commitment". The Federation of Canadian Municipalities declared that it "applauds the federal government's decision to help Canadian communities hit by economic upheaval". The fund "is more than welcome".

Indeed, communities told us that they need to receive this assistance in a timely fashion. That is why we introduced Bill C-41 to rapidly implement the trust. That is why that legislation received unanimous all-party support in this House, including support from the Bloc.

As Bill C-41 has now received royal assent, we are currently working as quickly as possible with each province and territory to identify priority areas for action and to seek their public commitment to support communities consistent with the objectives of the trust.

This trust builds on the significant actions we have already taken to strengthen the economy and improve the business environment, enabling businesses in all sectors to become more competitive and invest for the future.

We have brought in significant tax reductions and are on our way toward the lowest business tax regime in the major industrialized economies.

We have invested in skills development and education so that Canada can have the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world.

We have provided unprecedented funding for infrastructure, totalling \$33 billion over seven years, to ensure that we have the critical and up to date infrastructure that drives a modern economy.

We have acted to reduce the burden of government so that these businesses can focus on what they do best: investing, producing value and creating jobs for Canadians.

Our government is committed to providing the conditions for economic success, and the community development trust demonstrates that.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. It is a real storm that has hit the manufacturing and forestry industries in Canada, but particularly in Quebec and Ontario.

The problem is that the allocation among provinces is unacceptable. Although there are two provinces that are very affected, all the provinces will receive money. I have nothing against Prince Edward Island, but \$99 per person, while Quebec will receive \$22? That is completely unacceptable.

Adjournment Proceedings

There are also agreements with provinces, which is interesting. But I will conclude by asking my colleague whether he will inform the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food that he wrote to people in my riding, a week late, to say that we were voting on this at the same time as the budget.

He should have been aware of the situation and admitted that the Bloc Québécois succeeded in getting the government to act, and that it was better for everyone for the \$1 billion to be available as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, while we share the member's concern with the volatility facing manufacturing and the forestry sectors in his province, we note that the larger Quebec economy remains very healthy, with the unemployment rate at a 33 year low of 6.8%. This January alone, 7,200 new jobs, mostly full time, were created in that province.

As McGill University economics professor, Tom Velk, pointed out in *The Montreal Gazette*, he said that most of those new jobs were from the private sector and outside of export dominated industries.

Indeed, some sectors in Quebec are even facing skills shortages.

As John Simonetti, the president of a Montreal employment agency, recently noted, finding people to fill vacancies in many industries is an increasingly difficult challenge. He said, "We can't find people, that's the problem. There is a shortage of skilled, experienced people in certain fields".

Clearly, Quebec and Canada still have solid economic fundamentals as demonstrated through our robust labour market, fundamentals that we will build on to ensure Canada remains well positioned to face any volatility.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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