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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 17, 1997

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 17, 1997

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Paul Zed (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 22 petitions.

* * *

[English]

BANFF NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Banff National Park management plan.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Hon. Roger Simmons (Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Health.

• (1005)

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), your committee has agreed to adopt the report on preventive strategies for healthy children. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests a comprehensive response to this report within 150 days.

In presenting the report let me acknowledge the fine work of all members of the committee, representing all three parties in this House and thank them sincerely for their diligence in what we believe to be an important contribution to the issue entitled "Towards Well-Being: Strategies for Healthy Children".

[Translation]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I have the honour to present the eighth report of that committee.

Pursuant to order made Thursday, February 20, 1997, the committee has considered Vote 30 under Finance in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998 and reports the same. A copy of the relevant minutes of proceedings, which includes this report, is being tabled.

* * *

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Herb Gray (for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-95, an act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal organizations) and to amend other acts in consequence.

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

* * *

[Translation]

COASTAL FISHERIES PROTECTION ACT

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-96, an Act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act and the Canada Shipping Act in order to implement the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 Relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

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

Routine Proceedings

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Labour and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-97, an act to amend the Labour Code (Part II) in respect of occupational health and safety and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-406, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Immigration Act, to provide for new offences relative to the spread of HIV and AIDS and to require mandatory testing of inmates of a penitentiary and immigrants for sexually transmitted diseases in order to reduce the spread of the disease.

He said: Mr. Speaker, every bill I present in the House starts with a sad story and my criminal transmission and mandatory testing for HIV and AIDS bill is really no different.

● (1010)

In September 1992, Margot Blackburn from Dunham, Quebec was raped in a church by a convict who was on a day pass from a prison.

In 1994 Mrs. Blackburn presented a 50,000 signature petition to the justice minister who responded by putting criminal rights ahead of victims rights and refused to amend the law to force rapists to undergo AIDS tests. Mrs. Blackburn has described the last five years as hell on earth.

My bill should give Mrs. Blackburn and all victims some hope that this travesty of justice can be reversed. It introduces a number of measures to help control the spread of HIV, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases by creating new offences for the criminal transmission of HIV and AIDS, introducing mandatory HIV tests for 13 designated criminal offences, requiring regular HIV testing of prison inmates, creating a health focused prison for inmates who test positive and, by adding HIV and AIDS to the tests required by immigrants and refugees.

The bill puts the rights of victims ahead of criminal rights. It places the health and safety of prison guards ahead of prisoners' rights. It also will stop the spread of HIV and AIDS, improve the health and safety of Canadian citizens and save lives.

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

PETITIONS**PAY EQUITY**

Ms. Shaughnessy Cohen (Windsor—St. Clair, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of constituents in the county of Essex, the county of Kent, the county of Lambton and of course, the city of Windsor.

The petition is with respect to the issue of pay equity in the federal public service.

PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

The first petition comes from St. John's, Newfoundland. The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that police officers and firefighters place their lives at risk on a daily basis as they serve the emergency needs of all Canadians. They also state that on many occasions the families of police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty are often left without sufficient financial means to meet their obligations.

The petitioners therefore pray and call on Parliament to establish a public safety officers compensation fund to receive gifts and bequests for the benefit of the families of police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty.

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that managing the family home and caring for preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society.

The petitioners therefore pray and call on Parliament to pursue initiatives to assist families who choose to provide care in the home for preschool children, the chronically ill, the aged or the disabled.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Cummins (Delta, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition prepared by the students at the alternate high school in Ladner, British Columbia. I applaud them for their interest in the affairs of this House.

The petition states: "We the residents of the municipality of Delta, British Columbia draw the attention of the House to the following: that there is escalating youth unemployment and alienation leading to more crime and suicide each day; that there is a lack of motivation largely due to youth unemployment leading to more drug and alcohol abuse; and that job finding programs which exist are either not easily accessible, not readily available to high school youth or overly directed at a select group of participants.

Therefore your petitioners call on Parliament to support community based job finding programs for youth like Delta Youth Services”.

HOUSING

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by 87 citizens of Guelph—Wellington.

These constituents call on the government, particularly the minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, to immediately suspend negotiations on social housing with the province of Ontario and to resume negotiations only if the minister proceeds under publicly declared principles established with the input of co-operative housing stakeholders.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of petitions I would like to present this morning. One is signed by thousands of residents of my hometown of North Bay, Ontario.

The people of North Bay humbly pray and call on Parliament that there be no further downsizing after 242 jobs are lost over the next 18 months at 22 Wing. Also, the petitioners request that 22 Wing and Squadrons 21 and 51 stay in North Bay, that the government announces the retention of the air base before the next election, that the prototype computer system for air surveillance comes to North Bay in 1998, that the permanent Canadian location site for the new surveillance system remains in North Bay, and there be greater community consultation before any further assets or jobs are terminated, including the underground site.

• (1015)

LABOUR RELATIONS

Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the pleasure to present a petition.

Members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada in my riding of Nipissing humbly pray and ask the government to guarantee that Treasury Board representing the employer negotiates in good faith, including open and honest bargaining practices; to guarantee that it does not abuse its power by legislating any part of the collective agreement negotiated and signed by both Treasury Board representing the employer and the Public Service Alliance of Canada representing the employees; to guarantee that the pay equity issue be resolved before the next election; and to guarantee that this settlement will not result in further job cuts.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners request that the petition be read and supported by a democratically elected member of Parliament in the House of Commons prior to the next federal election.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions to the House.

The first one is signed by 99 of my constituents. The petitioners call upon Parliament to maintain the present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada which prohibit assisted suicide and to vigorously enforce those provisions.

They also request that Parliament not change the law in any way which would allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by 52 of my constituents. The petitioners call upon Parliament to urge the federal government to join with the provincial governments to make national highway system upgrading possible, as is being done in the United States and Mexico.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by approximately 100 citizens of my riding of Algoma, mostly from Elliot Lake and Blind River.

The petitioners are concerned that 30,000 nuclear weapons exist on earth at the present time. They quote former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as follows:

The most safe, sure and swift way to deal with the threat of nuclear arms is to do away with them in every regard.

Inasmuch as Canada is a part of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons agreement, the petitioners believe that we should pursue negotiations in good faith and take effective measures that will lead to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament altogether.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CRIMINAL CODE**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-46, an act to amend the Criminal Code (production of records in sexual offence proceedings), as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (for the Minister of Justice, Lib.) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Gagliano (for the Minister of Justice) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Are we moving to the vote on Bill C-46 at third reading?

The Deputy Speaker: We are now at third reading stage.

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we understood the government was to make a few remarks in opening the debate and our speaker was to follow. We do not have a number of speakers but there are some remarks we would like to make on the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: It might be easier if the parliamentary secretary spoke and then members of the Reform Party.

• (1020)

Mr. Gordon Kirkby (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise to speak in support of Bill C-46, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding the production of records in sexual offence proceedings.

I have outlined the specific amendments proposed and have described the problems the amendments seek to rectify when I addressed the House on February 4.

I applaud the efforts of the justice minister in crafting progressive reforms to Canada's sexual offence laws, reforms that reflect the charter guarantee of equal protection and benefit of the law.

As a society we do not tolerate abhorrent behaviour. We rely on our criminal law for protection. We rely on our criminal law to prosecute vigorously those who contravene the law.

Sexual offences are unlike other offences. They are the most invasive, violative and degrading offences that a person could experience. Any one of us could become a victim of crime, but we

all know it is more likely that a woman or a child will be the victim of a sexual offence.

Outdated attitudes in sexual offences and the women who are victimized by sexual offences are changing but are changing slowly. Many myths and stereotypes persist in society and within the criminal justice system in relation to sexual offences.

This creates a climate that undermines our confidence in the justice system designed to be fair and just. As has been pointed out, sexual offences are unique in the sense that there are rarely any witnesses.

Consent and credibility are the central issues in the prosecution. There appears to be more of a stigma associated with being a victim of a sexual offence than being charged with a sexual offence. The complainant's credibility and character are under a microscope.

Sexual assaults and other sexual offences are grossly underreported. The true rate of sexual assaults can only be estimated through victimization surveys but police statistics provide some indication. Approximately 110 sexual assaults were reported annually per 100,000 population, but only about 10 per cent of all sexual assaults are reported.

We should not be proud of these statistics. That so many sexual assaults occur in a year is shocking. That so few are reported is even more shocking.

I am proud to be part of a government committed to improving the criminal justice system, committed to enhancing public safety and committed to removing many of the barriers that impede a victim's access to the justice system.

The plundering by the accused of some of the most personal and private records of the complainant is more than simply embarrassing. It is an assault on the complainant's dignity, personal autonomy and integrity.

I want to be able to say with confidence that the law will protect us from crime and that the law will provide for the prosecution of offences consistent with the principles of fundamental justice which are fair to both accused persons and victims. The amendments proposed in Bill C-46 go a long way to meeting this goal.

The legislation will ensure that relevance is the basis for demands for records. In all other criminal proceedings courts seem to have no difficulty in determining whether evidence is relevant or whether materials requested for production or disclosure are relevant.

In sexual offence proceedings it appears that false statements by defence counsel about why they apparently need certain records are enough to warrant a violation of the complainant's privacy. We cannot seem to rid our society of these attitudes.

Government Orders

I welcome the proposed legislation which will guide the courts in determining whether the records are relevant and in ensuring that only the relevant parts of such records will be produced to the accused.

I would like to focus on a few significant features of the bill. The bill includes a preamble which has become a fairly familiar feature in new legislation. A preamble is an effective way to assist the courts in interpreting legislation and to clearly state Parliament's intention in bringing forward these amendments.

The preamble in Bill C-46 refers to our concerns regarding violence against women and children and the need to ensure and promote the charter rights of all people. It recognizes the impact that compelled production of private and confidential records has on complainants and witnesses. In other words, it squarely addresses the mischief the amendments seek to rectify.

• (1025)

The preamble notes the need to ensure that requests for the production of such records is carefully scrutinized and determined with regard to the charter rights of both the accused and the complainant or the witness.

The Supreme Court of Canada has emphasized that there is no hierarchy among charter rights. Competing or conflicting charter rights must be accommodated and reconciled to the greatest extent possible. The amendments proposed reflect the goal of accommodating charter rights that may come into conflict.

The minister has emphasized that the amendments are narrow in their focus. While they require the accused to demonstrate the likely relevance of the records and require the court to carefully scrutinize applications for records in accordance with detailed substantive and procedural provisions, the new production regime applies only to sexual offences.

The extensive consultation process the Minister of Justice and his officials followed has revealed that the overwhelming majority of applications for records occur in sexual offence proceedings. The case law bears this out. A wide range of personal records is sought in sexual offence proceedings that is simply not requested in other prosecutions. Therefore this type of production regime appears not to be necessary or warranted to govern the production of records in other criminal proceedings.

While the amendments apply only in sexual offence proceedings and are carefully drafted and tailored to sexual offences, they will protect a broad range of records. The legislation will define a record generally as any form of record that contains personal information for which there is a reasonable expectation of privacy. The definition is capable of encompassing a variety of records in any form and adapting to new situations that present themselves in the future.

In addition, the definition specifically includes certain records to ensure that there is no doubt in anyone's mind that they are captured by the production regime.

I commend the Minister of Justice for his initiatives. Bill C-46 reflects a fair and balanced approach to a difficult problem. In developing the legislation, the minister has listened attentively to the views of those most affected by the production of records: victim service providers, equality seeking women's groups, crown attorneys and the defence bar. The legislation has benefited from their participation. Yet no one view has dominated.

In conclusion, Bill C-46 is an excellent example of a law which puts into practice the values we promote as parliamentarians: fairness and equality. I would appreciate the support of all members in the House for Bill C-46.

[Translation]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak in a debate on legislation whose purpose is to make some contribution towards reducing violence against women.

The subject is of particular interest to me, as the official opposition critic for the status of women. The purpose of Bill C-46 is to regulate the production of records of victims of sexual assault, most of whom are, unfortunately, women and children. This bill became necessary following a judgment handed down in December 1995 by the Supreme Court of Canada in the O'Connor case.

This was a case of sexual assault in which a man accused of sexually assaulting four young girls demanded access to the school, medical and counselling records of the complainants. In a majority decision, the Supreme Court ruled that, in some cases, the accused had the right to access the complainant's records.

We should see this in the context that existed at the time. For a number of years, victims of sexual assault had been protected by new provisions in the Criminal Code which provide that the accused cannot attack the reputation of the victim, especially the victim's sexual reputation. You will recall that these provisions were adopted following decades of abuse of victims by the accused. The latter could, and most often did, try to tarnish the credibility of their victims by putting the latter's sexual past on the public record. Thus the myth was maintained that a woman who was no longer a virgin deserved to be raped.

• (1030)

Times have changed. Women have gradually acquired equal rights, including the right to sexual freedom. The battle has been long and arduous, and it is not necessarily over. We see this regularly when certain judges publicly vent their private thoughts about women.

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Women had won a measure of judicial protection. This protection is important because it provides an incentive for women who are victims of sexual assault to press charges. It is also an incentive to persevere, once the initial charge has been laid. Legal protection also allows victims to minimize, to the extent possible, the impact of the aggression against them, by encouraging them to find help within the community and from professionals.

This context of legal protection is vital to the women's struggle and explains the importance of having laws that afford the accused a full and complete defence but also protect the victims' access to the courts. This access guarantees equal rights for men and women. How can we talk of equality between men and women, when men can continue to sexually assault women with impunity, because the women refuse to report the assault for fear of having their private lives dragged out for all to see?

If we want a society where men and women are equal, we must take every means at our disposal to ensure they enjoy the same right to integrity and security. The best guarantee of these rights, despite its imperfections, continues to be the legal system.

On the subject of rights protection, I will address the first bone of contention: that of the balance between the rights of the accused and those of the victim. The bill, in its preamble, refers to the accused's right to a full and complete defence and the victim's right to privacy and equality. It also mentions that a balance must be struck between these rights to the extent possible.

These last words and the notion of balance underlie the arguments of the parties opposing this bill. On the one hand, defence lawyers want greater access to victims' files, basing this request on the fact that the accused has an absolute right to make a full answer and defence. The philosophy behind this is that it is better to let 1,000 guilty individuals be set free than to have one innocent person sentenced unfairly.

On the other hand, according to those speaking on behalf of the traditional victims of sexual assault, that is to say, women, hardly any lawsuits are instigated on the basis of false accusations, and the right of women to privacy and to not be assaulted demands that access to records be strictly forbidden. Where is the middle ground between these two extreme positions? How can a balance be struck between the rights of the accused and those of the victim? At present, it would appear that the rights of the accused are better protected. Let me explain.

As we all know, the right of the accused to a full defence has been entrenched in the Constitution since 1982. But this right was already afforded enough protection by the courts before the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted. As I said earlier, it is already part of our judicial standard to protect the innocent against wrongful conviction at any cost. Indeed, especially since passage of the charter, the courts have developed a whole slew of rules and criteria to provide even greater protection for the

right to a full defence. A whole series of rulings have been made on this provision of the charter, with still more to come.

But much less known is the right to privacy and the right to personal safety, which have not yet made it into our legal and popular culture. Because fewer judicial decisions having a strong impact have been made on this subject, it is wrongly viewed as less important, when in fact, both rights are mentioned in the charter and nowhere does it say that they are less important. Why is this? I think this is, unfortunately, a reflection of the lesser prominence traditionally given to women's rights.

As *Toronto Star* journalist Michele Landsberg pointed out, have we ever heard of a police officer testifying at a trial and being required to disclose his medical records or to talk about his sex life in order to establish his credibility as a witness? In fact, a number of witnesses who appeared before the committee made the same comment.

• (1035)

Why have women traditionally been subjected to such humiliation, if not because they were not given the same credibility? Yet, as this journalist noted, there is no such invasion of the victims' privacy in other criminal cases. Whenever women and sexuality are involved, our society has always felt the need to impose constraints on women. Yet, their right to privacy is protected under the charter.

Now that I have raised this issue, I want to deal specifically with the justice minister's bill. Through this legislation, the minister wants to strike a balance between the rights of the accused and those of the victim. Under the existing legislation, an accused can ask for a wide variety of records, simply on the grounds that such records might be relevant. The existing legislation is also silent on several issues. For example, what records are involved, what conditions can be set for their production, what information must be included in the subpoena, and what must be done with the records while waiting for the appeal process?

Bill C-46 seeks to deal with all these issues. Under the bill, the accused will be required to specify the reasons why he feels that a given record might be useful for his defence. In other words, the bill seeks to prevent an accused from going fishing.

I know that a number of witnesses representing sexual assault victims groups, including victims consultants, were hoping that an accused would not be given access to any confidential records. However, we all know that this is very difficult to achieve because, according to some experts, such a provision would not pass the charter test.

Therefore, the production of records could potentially violate women's right to have access to social and health services that are essential to their physical and psychological well-being. Indeed, the possibility that the content of a session between a woman and her therapist might be disclosed to the judge and the defence lawyer may prevent many women from getting the care and support they need to overcome the consequences of a sexual assault. This

view was shared by all the witnesses who appeared before the committee.

They all said that women would seek certain therapeutic services less frequently.

Given what is at stake for victims of sexual assault and given the fact that the information contained in records will very likely not be relevant to the accused's defence, I think that the defence should be required to show that access to confidential records is probably necessary for a full defence of the accused, and that the benefits of producing records substantially outweigh the prejudice to the complainant's constitutional rights.

Like many of the groups that appeared, I would have liked to see a number of amendments to this bill. I introduced several in committee. You will not be surprised to hear that they were all rejected by the largely Liberal committee. Does that surprise you, Mr. Speaker?

I sincerely believe, however, that these amendments were very realistic and, more to the point, that they reflected the suggestions made by witnesses, by those who very often accompany the victims of sexual abuse.

One of the first amendments sought was inclusion of the preamble in the body of the bill. The groups that made these recommendations include the Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, the Ontario action group to combat violence against women, the legal action and education fund for women, and METRAC.

Several of these witnesses told us that certain judges are only too ready to express their true feelings about women publicly.

• (1040)

That is why it would have been desirable to include the preamble in the body of the bill, in order to counteract these sexist myths and prejudices which are still clearly present in our judiciary system. For a clearer understanding of the message of this preamble, I am going to read it. It is worded as follows:

Whereas the Parliament of Canada continues to be gravely concerned about the incidence of sexual violence and abuse in Canadian society and, in particular, the prevalence of sexual violence against women and children;

Whereas the Parliament of Canada recognizes that violence has a particularly disadvantageous impact on the equal participation of women and children in society and on the rights of women and children to security of the person, privacy and equal benefit of the law as guaranteed by sections 7, 8, 15 and 28 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;

Whereas the Parliament of Canada intends to promote and help to ensure the full protection of the rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms for

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all, including those who are accused of, and those who are or may be victims of, sexual violence or abuse;

Whereas the rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are guaranteed equally to all and, in the event of a conflict, those rights are to be accommodated and reconciled to the greatest extent possible;

Whereas the Parliament of Canada wishes to encourage the reporting of incidents of sexual violence and abuse and to provide for the prosecution of offenses within a framework of laws that are consistent with the principles of fundamental justice and that are fair to complainants as well as to accused persons;

Whereas the Parliament of Canada recognizes that the compelled production of personal information may deter complainants of sexual offenses from reporting the offence to the police and may deter complainants from seeking necessary treatment, counselling or advice;

Whereas the Parliament of Canada recognizes that the work of those who provide services and assistance to complainants of sexual offenses is detrimentally affected by the compelled production of records and by the process to compel that production;

And whereas the Parliament of Canada recognizes that, while production to the court and to the accused of personal information regarding any person may be necessary in order for an accused to make a full answer and defence, that production may breach the person's right to privacy and equality and therefore the determination as to whether to order production should be subject to careful scrutiny.

You can see then, from reading this preamble and the reason it was included in the Criminal Code as introduction to Part VIII on crimes against persons, that it is hard to understand why the committee rejected the recommendations made by a number of witnesses and by the Bloc Québécois.

I understand very well that the Criminal Code must not be unduly burdened, and that many of the principles are covered in the general provisions, that being the argument that is normally used. However, considering that the objective was to change attitudes, it would have been preferable to accept this amendment.

A preamble was included in the case of the young offenders bill. So why not do the same in the case of this bill? Does this mean that attitudes are harder to change where women are concerned? Does it?

Including this preamble in Bill C-46 would be a major step. The preamble not only has great educational value for the legal profession and the general public but would also have been very helpful in the case of court challenges by counsel for the defence, because the preamble could have been invoked to guarantee an interpretation that considers the constitutional rights of women as well as those of the accused.

The purpose of including this preamble in the Criminal Code was to recognize the negative impact the production of confidential records has on the lives of women and the importance of guaranteeing respect and support for their constitutional rights.

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A second amendment would also have been desirable to limit access to the victim's confidential records. This amendment would have required the accused to prove that access to confidential records was "probably essential" instead of "likely relevant", the term used in the bill. The burden of proof would have been better served by the concept of the balance of probability than by the principle of likely relevance.

• (1045)

The balance of probability is a legal concept that increases the onus on the person who wishes to obtain the record to provide specific proof. However, I admit I am pleased that the government has agreed to review the impact of this bill in three years' time. The amendment was welcomed by all members of the committee. It was proposed by the Bloc Québécois, and I know that a Liberal colleague tabled a similar amendment. The committee was unanimous because the amendment reflected the preferences of the majority of those who appeared before the committee.

We will be able to check whether certain fears about the enforcement of this legislation were founded. I will name a few: a reluctance to have personal journals and diaries included in the definition of "records". Including it would lead the courts to permit access to other personal documents written by the victim, unlike institutional records. This is one fear expressed by the various witnesses heard.

There is also the fear that victims would have less contact with groups or individuals that exist to help them, that women should not have to choose between justice and therapy. There is the fear that, once a subpoena has been issued, counsellors or therapists will lose contact with the victim, their client, and that this will serve to further isolate the victim. There is the fear that judges examining records will be insensitive. It is felt that personal and psychological records are not relevant in a trial and the reasons given for examining them are often trivial and are intended to further intimidate the victim.

There is also the fear that women will not lay charges more often for fear of having their private life made public. There is the fear that the defence will try to obtain psychological or personal records to show that the complainant had reason to lie about the sexual assault, that she entertained malicious intent with respect to the accused or that she had already wrongly charged him.

The evaluation, after the law has been in effect for three years, will provide the means of assessing its impact on victims and the various consultants in the community.

In Quebec, there are far fewer requests for access to victims' files than in other provinces. However, there is some concern about the phenomenon and people are keeping an eye on the potential catch up that could occur in Quebec in this practice. This is why

passage of this bill will significantly limit access to the victim's records—and this concern came out during committee hearings—although we would have liked to further restrict access to certain records.

Parliament should have set up without further delay a legal and procedural framework to create a real balance between the right of women to security, integrity and privacy and the right of the accused to a full and complete defence. Bill C-46 is attempting to partially close a door that never should have been opened.

This is why we will support the principle of this bill. However, we will be watchful and keeping a sharp eye on the bill's implementation so we can assess the concerns expressed to the justice committee. I am sure that passage of this bill represents a major step forward, because the situation was not desirable for the victims of sexual violence.

[English]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is debate on third reading of Bill C-46. This is a bill intended to strengthen the protection of privacy and equality rights of complainants in prosecution for a variety of sexual offences. This added protection is gained through restricting defence lawyers' ability to apply for production and disclosure of private documents such as medical, counselling and therapeutic records.

The bill's proposed amendments to the Criminal Code would permit applications for a complainant's records only at trial stage and then in a two step process.

• (1050)

First, the accused would have to establish the likely relevance of the records to an issue at trial or a witness' competence to testify. If the accused did establish that the records were likely to be relevant, the records would be ordered to be produced to the trial judge. The judge at that first stage would be the only person who would see the records.

In the second stage the judge would review the records in private, taking into account their likely relevance and the charter rights of both the complainant and the accused. The judge's decision would determine the extent to which the accused would have access to the records. The determination would not affect the test for admissibility of any matters that the accused sought to introduce as evidence in the trial.

The job of the opposition is to scrutinize government measures and government proposals that are brought forward, to hold the government accountable for the measures that are brought forward and to act as a watchdog, a check and balance on the power of government as it brings forward legislation that will affect citizens, their rights and their lives. We take our responsibility as opposition very seriously.

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I said in my remarks at second reading of this bill before it went to committee I would be watching carefully to see what evidence came forward at committee, what concerns were raised and how the bill was viewed by those most affected.

In principle the Reform Party supports very strongly legislation that provides increased protection to law-abiding citizens and victims of crime. We have made a very strong case for increased protection for victims rights. On April 9 we had an example of an individual who was affected in this type of instance. I refer to a case in Edmonton where a 13-year old girl's counselling records were directed to be given to the 27-year old man accused of sexually assaulting her.

The mother of the girl said: "My daughter was invaded a year and a half ago and now it starts again. It just feels that as victims we don't have rights".

Reform has urged the House and the justice minister repeatedly to enact a victims bill of rights and we have given a substantive draft of the measures such a bill should contain. So far the government and the justice minister have not taken those urgings to heart and have not put into place a victims bill of rights which would give legal standing and protection to all victims, not just victims in sexual assault cases.

It is very clear that there is real concern from people who have been sexually assaulted about continued victimization by the justice system which can force the opening of very private matters. As a corollary to their first victimization a second one takes place.

The unfortunate consideration, though, is that not all complainants are victims. Sometimes accused individuals are victims because they are wrongfully accused and are put into a situation where they need to prove their innocence. I do not think I need to belabour the fact that for a man who is wrongfully accused of sexual assault and sexual misconduct the affect on that individual, his life and also the lives of his family members and those who are close to him is very serious.

• (1055)

We must be very careful that we balance in the legislation, as I have said before in discussing the bill, the interests of the right to privacy and the right to equality of victims of sexual assault with the right to liberty of the person and the right to make a full and fair defence of individuals who are wrongfully accused of these actions and who are really the victims.

That makes for a difficult balance. I am sure all members of the House, the justice committee and the justice minister are very anxious to have a proper balance in this situation.

The bill includes a preamble emphasizing Parliament's concern about sexual violence against women and children. I think there would be very few people in the country who would not be

wholeheartedly in favour of providing protection for women and children against the kinds of terrible violence we have talked about in the House over the last few days. I am not going to repeat some of the situations that innocent citizens and innocent women have had to face.

Bill C-55 could have allowed violent offenders who have perpetrated sexual assaults and sexual crimes on women and children to be designated as dangerous offenders and to be kept out of society indefinitely.

For reasons which mystify me, this bill omitted sexual predators and sexual offenders from the list of individuals who could be designated as dangerous offenders. Again, I would urge the government to rectify what I think is a very serious omission and which is very much at odds and variance with its purported concern for the safety of women and children.

I would now like to make a couple of comments about the committee hearings on this bill. One thing that did concern me is that there was only one submission on the bill from the viewpoint of those representing accused persons. There were many excellent submissions from groups and individuals concerned about the rights and protection of complainants and victims of sexual assault. These submissions came from individuals and groups that have gone to tremendous lengths and have a tremendous depth of caring and compassion in a very practical way, particularly for women and children who have been victimized by sexual assault and very personal invasion.

I commend these individuals, as I think do all members of the committee, for the work they are doing to encourage, support and assist victims of sexual assault in these life shattering situations. We appreciated the submissions, there was only one submission expressing concern about the right to a full and fair defence of individuals who may be wrongfully accused of these terrible crimes. I would point out that I am not entirely satisfied with the kind of analysis and viewpoints of the bill on this side which we need.

There was an amendment to this bill at committee stage which also troubled me. Not only would a record have to be applied for in a procedurally correct manner and not only would the record have to be shown as relevant, but a third test was added by amendment which said that the production of a record, even if relevant, would be ordered only if in the best interests of justice.

It seems to me that if a record is relevant in a judicial proceeding, surely it would be in the best interests of justice that it be produced. That is a matter that leaves the bill open to a charter challenge.

• (1100)

I was concerned about that. I raised it at committee. The department officials responsible for drafting the bill pointed out that they wanted to tie the application for records back to some of

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the balancing concerns and balancing rights that are the whole reason for the bill. I accept that explanation.

I am a little concerned, though, that the way the bill is drafted leaves an argument open that if a document is relevant but still withheld in a judicial proceeding, withholding it would be improper. The defence counsels I have talked to about this have a similar concern.

The department officials were very anxious and very careful to make a good balance in this bill. I was satisfied that they did a very excellent job and consulted widely. I was very impressed with the care, the concern and the ability they demonstrated in drafting this bill. They are to be commended and the minister and his department are to be commended for this.

A couple of other concerns about the bill are that there are major cost implications because not only the complainant but the record holder or agency that has dealt with a complainant is entitled to be represented by counsel at hearings into the production of records.

The question is who will pay for that counsel. That was raised. The department had thought through that and had some suggestions. That is a practical matter that is really up in the air regarding how that will really take place in practice and who will cover that area.

There is also a concern that these cases will be extended considerably because of the extra hearings and the extra provisions in these kinds of cases for examining records and making applications and that sort of thing.

Senior counsels who might be prepared to take on these cases on a legal aid basis would be more inclined to withdraw because of the time commitment, leaving only more junior counsels to represent complainants, going up against senior crown counsels.

These are some practical things that were raised, and rightly so. On balance the intent of the bill is appropriate. The bill is as carefully balanced as the officials and the drafters could make it.

It is appropriate to raise some of the concerns that I just talked about. Defence counsel and the criminal bar are very unhappy with how far this bill takes us in putting barriers up to the production of material that could be relevant in a full and fair defence.

It is fair that it is mentioned, but the one thing that does give us some help is the amendment that was put in by committee to review the bill after three years. We will be watching very closely how this bill operates in the real world. Then we will be prepared to push strongly for changes if we see the need.

On balance, after committee hearings and after speaking to a number of people directly concerned by this legislation, my party will be supporting this bill. We will be watching to see how it works out in effect.

We want to make sure that the balance is appropriate but we should let this go ahead to see whether it does give the protections needed to innocent victims of a very terrible crime.

• (1105)

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING PROGRAMS ACT

Hon. Ron Irwin (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food) moved that Bill C-34, an act to establish programs for the marketing of agricultural products, to repeal the Agricultural Products Board Act, the Agricultural Products Cooperative Marketing Act, the Advance Payments for Crops Act and the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ): He said: Mr. Speaker, once again I rise to address Bill C-34. I am pleased to reiterate my support and that of the Bloc Québécois for this bill, which the agricultural sector has been anxiously waiting. However, the official opposition's support should not be viewed by the government as an unconditional endorsement.

I want to make it clear: We support the principle of this bill, and most of its provisions, but we still have reservations about the budget allocation.

Therefore, I want to explain our reservations. The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food spent a long time discussing the benefits, and particularly the gains that could be achieved by the agricultural industry, both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada.

The major irritant at the root of the Bloc Québécois' opposition, or at least its reservations, had to do with the budget allocation. The development of the advanced payments program is a major aspect of Bill C-34.

Since I do not know, Mr. Speaker, whether you are aware of the situation in the agricultural sector, I will try to shed some light on the issue. Bill C-34 provides that \$120 million will be allocated to the advance payments program, in equal parts, over the next three years.

Needless to say, these funds are absolutely necessary to ensure the survival, or at least the financial viability, of farm operations.

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In many cases, the final payment for a given crop can take weeks or even months to get to farmers while payments for costs associated with operating the farm get to them in no time.

At this point, I would like to give you a specific example. Take maple syrup producers for instance. The sap runs for two, three or four weeks maximum. Of course, producers must invest large amounts of money before and during this short period. As we know, preparations often start right after New Year's day, and this involves tapping the trees and getting the tubing ready, along with all the other equipment that will be used in the sugar bush.

• (1110)

During these tree or four weeks of intense work, maple syrup producers must invest large amounts. A portion of the production will be sold at retail to people visiting the sugar bush. But for the most part the crop is sold wholesale, in barrels, and often maple syrup producers have to wait for months, if not years, to receive final payment.

With this advance payment scheme, producers will be receiving a reasonable payment on the fair value of the syrup. This also means that advance payments for crops provide balance in the financial management of farm operations. Need I point out also that, in many cases, this represents the operations' lifeline? It is the difference between an anxiety ridden operation and a prosperous one and the profitability of farms, which are the pride of rural areas.

You can see that a farmer has to be able to count on a higher authority to guarantee the investments required to run a farm.

From a strictly analytical and non-partisan point of view, the bill introduced by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is certainly very laudable and full of good will, but certain features of the bill leave me wondering about the minister's real intentions and motivations with respect to the main idea behind marketing these agricultural products.

As I pointed out in my speech last June 17, just before the House rose for the summer, there is a rather obvious inconsistency in the way the government markets these crops. Let me explain.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will use huge sums of money to facilitate the marketing of annual crops, but this money already comes from the income protection programs envelope. This is a rather huge inconsistency. In my humble opinion, the government is trying to hide the cuts it is forcing on a category of taxpayers, who are already in a precarious financial position.

This brings me to the agriculture department's unfair treatment of farmers, particularly dairy producers. I remind you that on

August 1, 1995 we cut the price paid for a hectolitre of industrial milk by 81 cents. On August 1, 1996, the same thing: another 81 cents cut per hectolitre, with another 76 cents to come next August 1—in a few months—until it is all used up, or in other words until August 1, 2001, when there will be no milk subsidy left, when it was \$5.43 per hectolitre to begin with.

I will give you the example of an average Quebec farm, since Quebec alone produces 47 per cent of industrial milk in Canada. An average farm, a family farming operation, producing 1,900 hectolitres of industrial milk yearly, will lose \$1,500 a year, or over the five year period of regular cuts, an average of \$7,500. That represents a drop in income of between 5 and 5.5 per cent.

• (1115)

Often, that 5 per cent in question is the only net income that is left in the dairy farmer's pocket at the end of the year, with which he can treat himself to a little outing, a little trip.

Unfortunately, the government across the way is taking care not to speak of this cut. For instance, between 1994 and 1995, when the subsidy was \$5.43 a hectolitre—a hectolitre being 100 litres—that meant that the government was paying about 5.5 cents per litre in industrial milk subsidies. As of August 1, 2001, that figure will be down to zero.

Do you know what this means for the dairy producers of Quebec, the 26,000 dairy producers of Quebec? It means a cut of \$108 million, for Quebec alone. For all of Canada, \$228 million. Since Quebec produces 48 per cent, you will see that, first and foremost, it is the Quebec dairy farmers who are being penalized most heavily.

The Minister of Finance has made more cuts in the Department of Agriculture than in all of the other departments. Between the 1994-95 budget and next year's 1998 budget, cuts in agriculture will be 35.5 per cent, close to three eighths of the total cuts. In Bill C-34, the principle of interconnectedness is being used, linking what has been forecast as revenue and what will be given in anticipated payments, to what must be guaranteed as income if the crop should fail.

In other words, it is a question of robbing Peter to pay Paul. There is no fresh money, no new money. Together with the cuts in subsidies for producers of industrial milk, this will inevitably lead to a price increase for the processors.

I want dairy producers to listen carefully to these figures. According to a study, every time we increase the price of butter by 10 per cent, and butter costs more than \$3 a pound today, the price goes up 30 cents. Will people eat more butter? No. It means a 7 per cent drop in sales.

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The problem in Quebec is not that we have trouble supplying the processing plants, on the contrary. Every dairy producer would be delighted to keep an extra cow or two. Of course he would, but if we raise the price of industrial milk, instead of keeping an extra cow he will have to get rid of one, which means a difference of two cows. As you know, not the first cow in the herd but the last one makes money. The last cow is pure profit. Thanks to her, the farmer can buy a few extras, like other skilled workers in our country.

I have another example which concerns cheese. The same thing will happen if we increase the price of cheese by 10 per cent. I see the parliamentary secretary to the minister of agriculture who is being very attentive, and I suggest that he get in touch with me if he does not understand the figures and also that he listen carefully.

• (1120)

So in the case of cheese, if we increase the price by 10 per cent, there will be 4 per cent drop in sales. Here again, increasing the price will mean be a drop in sales. Mr. Speaker, you do not seem to care about the problems facing dairy producers, and I think that is very unfortunate, because these people do not work five but seven days a week.

The morning milking and evening milking and taking care of the livestock goes on week in, week out, even on Sundays, even New Year's Day, Christmas and Easter. Farmers cannot afford to lose, and we have no right to make them lose, 5.5 per cent of their income. We have no right unilaterally to cut subsidies that were introduced by the central government in the first place in the early 70s.

I think this is an important point, and if the parliamentary secretary does not agree, let him argue otherwise: on average, the overall budget of the Department of Agriculture invested only 9 per cent last year in Quebec. The current average would seem to be 11 per cent. One year when the department was particularly generous farmers in Quebec, it invested up to 17 per cent in purchasing goods and services or setting up research stations, 5 or 6 of which were closed two years ago. That was the best it did.

However, Quebec's agricultural activity represents 17 per cent of total gross agricultural activity in this country. However, when processing plants—which is where value is added, that is the value added in the processing of cheese, yogurt, butter and ice cream—are included, Quebec contributes 24 per cent to Canada's agricultural economy. Yet, only a meagre 9 per cent is invested in Quebec, while the average elsewhere is 11 per cent. It is shameful, a scandal.

When I meet the producers in my riding, I regularly explain the unfair treatment we have been getting, not just once in a while, but

every decade. I would go so far to say that it dates back to the supposed union of Upper and Lower Canada, which took place in 1841 and predates Confederation in 1867; at that time, the debts of Upper and Lower Canada were combined. Upper Canada is Ontario today, Lower Canada is Quebec. The debts were combined, and everyone was made to pay.

Ontario, Upper Canada, had 12 times the debt of Quebec, and, obviously, its infrastructures, its port in Toronto, roads and railways were also 12 times more developed than in Quebec. The situation could be likened to that of a wolf whelping four cubs. As you already know, the first cub to suckle will be the strongest, the most vigilant and the most vigorous of the entire pack. By 1841, Ontario was already ahead and has retained the lead.

Another example of unfairness occurred two years ago when the government in Ottawa did away with the WGTA in the west. When the subsidy to industrial milk producers was cut here, it was cut, and of course no compensation was paid. However, when the WGTA, the Western Grain Transportation Act, was eliminated to permit savings of \$860 million a year, the government invested \$2.9 billion, not \$2.9 million, in order to save \$860 million.

• (1125)

This amount of \$2.9 billion was divided in three. First, \$1.6 billion was allocated to grain producers, based on the size of their farms, the number of bushels sold the previous year and so on, depending on the geographical location of the farm, if it were close to this or that. A cheque for \$1.6 billion was issued but, listen to this, no TP4 or T4 was issued. This means it was tax free, clear, which is rather unusual. It takes some doing, does it not?

The federal government paid out substantial amounts without those at the receiving end having to include them in their income tax return. That is what I call money paid under the blanket.

In addition, \$300 million in adaptation funds have been earmarked for upgrading roads and railways, silo construction, rentals and so on. A \$1 billion loan guarantee has also been established to help certain foreign countries that may want to buy western grain but cannot afford to do so. This all adds up to \$2.9 billion.

As you can see, once again, Agriculture Canada has created inequity between farm producers in the west and the east, not just in Quebec, but also in the maritimes and, of course, in Ontario.

In a sense, Bill C-34 will benefit those producers who have to do without an income for extended periods because the money comes in all at once, come harvest time. I gave the best possible example, the easiest one to understand, since we are now at the very end of the maple syrup season. A maple syrup producer can try to sell all the production at once, but maple products will be on the market throughout the year.

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In conclusion, while this government may be trying to improve things, it has a weakness, and I will remind the public of that weakness in my speeches during the upcoming election campaign. That weakness is a lack of fairness. The government does not seem to know about fairness.

As André Pratte, from the daily *La Presse*, wrote so well in his book entitled *Le syndrome de Pinocchio*, Canadians politicians have unfortunately lost all credibility, because they have abused voters' confidence for too long.

A poll conducted a while ago by a specialized magazine showed that, out of some 30 professions in Canada, politicians came next to last at the bottom of the list, just before used car dealers. Doctors and police officers were at the top of the list. Lawyers, because their job is often rather difficult, came pretty close to politicians. Come to think of it, a number of members here are lawyers by training. So, politicians were very low on the list, just before used car dealers. Incidentally, new car dealers did relatively well.

Granted, a Ford salesman will extol the virtues of that make, at the expense of Chrysler and so on. But the bottom line is that politicians did very poorly. Unfortunately, I became one by accident, but I will do my best to avoid catching the Pinocchio syndrome. My children often tell me: "Daddy, someone else in the House of Commons has the same name as you". I tell them: "Listen, he is the king and his Deputy Prime Minister is the queen when it comes to that syndrome". We saw this with the GST, when they promised to scrap it. To us, scrapping something means throwing it out, destroying it, sending it to the scrap heap.

• (1130)

So, when the Prime Minister said he was going to scrap the GST, we understood that he was going to abolish it and perhaps find another clever way of coming up with the \$19 billion that the GST brings into the federal coffers. Remember what he said he meant: "If you understood that I was going to scrap it, you misunderstood, and if you did not understand, you were not listening. And if you do not understand, you are idiots". This was the answer given by the Prime Minister over Christmas when questioned by several members of the public chosen at random from across Canada.

So, not surprisingly, politicians do not rate very high with the public, and yet an election campaign is going to be launched in a few days. There will be more and more of these distortions of the truth. The President of the Treasury Board, who visited Thetford Mines in my region on the eve of the 1995 referendum, said he was giving Quebec much more money than this province was paying. Year after year, we pay \$30 billion in taxes of one sort or another to this institution called the federal government. And the President of the Treasury Board tried to make us believe he was giving us too much. If we are costing this government, this Treasury Board, this minister, too much, they should let us leave, for heaven's sake. I

have never seen anyone so anxious to hang on to something that was costing him so much.

I am sure that, when you look at the figures for each department, Quebec is not receiving its fair share. I just gave the example of the Department of Agriculture, which is giving us 9 per cent compared to an 11 per cent average. Last year, Quebec received 9 per cent of the overall envelope of the Department of Agriculture, when it represents 24 or 25 per cent of the population, pays 24 per cent of taxes and generates 17 per cent of direct agricultural activity. When you include processing plants, it is easily 24 per cent. We could come up with more examples of such unfairness if we took the trouble to look for them.

When all is said and done, we are going to vote in favour of Bill C-34. We will support it, although it is not a perfect bill. I told you how they came up with \$120 million by taking it from somewhere else. This is not new money. They take it out of another envelope, the one for farmers, and invest it to generate advance payments. However, as requested by many farmers and farmers associations which called my office to ask us to support Bill C-34, we will go along with the consensus that exists among farmers across Canada. Because after all, there are some good things in this bill.

The government could have ended up with a far better bill if it had bothered to accept the amendments proposed by the Bloc Québécois. These were very sound amendments, as the parliamentary secretary may recall, we moved in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. However, if they do not initiate it, it is no good, and if they do, it is.

I remember this week that when we were discussing Bill C-72, we were talking about the majority of grain producers to be elected to the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. A majority, that is what it said in the bill.

• (1135)

I said: "Listen, let us write down a number. Out of 15 members, they could elect nine. That is a majority, nine out of 15. Or we could put eight, which is still a majority. To avoid any misunderstanding, we will set a figure". I set the limit at 12. I presented an amendment to the amendment. The Reform Party agreed with the Bloc Québécois; the Liberal Party, all eight members, including the parliamentary secretary, voted against it because it was not their idea. Thirty-six hours later, unanimous consent was requested to present an amendment that would set the majority at 10 out of 15, which is what it says now in Bill C-72: 10 out of 15 to be elected by the grain producers.

This is an improvement, but 36 hours earlier, it was the Bloc Québécois that came up with this idea, and even my colleague from Malpeque voted against it, to the eternal shame of the farmers of Prince Edward Island. But 36 hours later, the Liberals came back, sweet as you please, and suggested 10. So 10 out of 15, 66 per cent. I said: "Let us see whether our colleagues opposite have any

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guts. Sixty-six per cent, 12 out of 15, 75 per cent, let us split the difference, and I presented an amendment to the amendment: 11.

The Canadian Wheat Board, I should point out, was not established 60 years ago, during the Depression, for eastern farmers, to please the members of this House, for consumers or for tractor sellers—there were none then, or very few. The Canadian Wheat Board was established during a Depression in the 1930s, to support grain growers who were declaring bankruptcy one after another and to ensure their grain was properly marketed. It was for them. Since it was for them, they should have control. The government, however, sees it as an opportunity to make three or four political appointments.

I proposed 12. Thirty-six hours later they came back with 10. The next day, during deliberations I proposed 11. We looked each other squarely in the face, and my Liberal colleagues voted against it. My Reform Party colleagues joined with the Bloc, and agreed on 11. However, as the Liberals have total control, and committees often being nothing more than a charade, time wasted, it was a good thing in this case, because we at least made them aware with our arguments and ended up with 10 in the bill, which is none too many.

If the Liberal Party paid more attention to the official opposition, bills would often be more acceptable and would have a better impact on the farming community.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address Bill C-34, the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act.

To refresh the memory of those who are watching, this bill combines four separate agricultural acts and one program into a single act. The Agricultural Marketing Programs Act will provide for the marketing of agricultural products.

The four acts it combines are the Advance Payments for Crops Act, the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act, the Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act and the Agricultural Products Board Act. The program is the cash flow enhancement program.

I would like to review the three main parts of the bill before I address some of the things that we, as Reformers, would like to recommend. The new act incorporates the existing provisions of the current Advance Payments for Crops Act and also the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act into the advance payments program. That will guarantee interest free loans. The new program will now include adjustments and a phase-in period to allow producers marketing wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board to be eligible as well.

• (1140)

The second part of the bill is the price pooling program. The new act incorporates the existing provisions of the current Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act that provides for price guarantees for agricultural products marketed by a co-op. Also the new program's administration and approval process will be clarified, modernized and streamlined since approval is now the minister's responsibility rather than that of cabinet and Treasury Board.

The third part of the bill is the government purchases program. The new program incorporates the current provisions of the Agricultural Products Board Act which offers government purchases, sales and importation of agricultural products and abolishes the agricultural products board.

The new act also provides for the recovery of administrative costs, creates offences, requires reports to Parliament and makes consequential amendments to other acts. There will be a mandatory legislative review of the act five years following enactment, which is a good idea for all legislation.

The Reform Party agricultural policy supports maintaining the advanced payment for crops program since the program has been shown to have a stabilizing influence on the marketplace, while at the same time maintaining an acceptable level of default exposure to taxpayers.

Reformers agree that the three different pieces of cash advance legislation should be consolidated into one to save administrative costs. We have proposed amendments that include, first, entrenching the limit on the government's contingent liability in the act or allowing the agricultural standing committee to review any increases; second, allowing farmers to access emergency advances of an interest free basis but only as part of the overall \$50,000 interest free portion; third, eliminating the government purchases program because it is incompatible with the competitive market driven, modern, Canadian agricultural economy; and fourth, treating all agricultural organizations equally in terms of defaulted advances by not allowing the Canadian Wheat Board a special two-year exemption.

Unfortunately the Liberals have only kept about 25 per cent of the election promises that they made on agriculture in the 1993 campaign. I have gone through the red book and it is very difficult to even find them buried in all of the other 100 and some pages of rhetoric. One of their promises was to provide interest free cash advances. By voting against Reform's amendments, the Liberals are voting against their own promise.

I just listened to my colleague from the Bloc talking about the committee process and the amendments that are often brought to improve legislation. Very often these suggestions are not accepted because they do not come from the government side. That is unfortunate because the Liberals promised to allow committees

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more say in legislation. That has really not happened which is again another broken election promise.

All of Reform's amendments were voted down in committee, even though the reason for sending the bill to committee before second reading was to allow MPs to make substantive changes. The Liberals' red book promise of giving MPs a greater role in drafting legislation has really become a hollow promise. The red book at pages 91 and 92 states the promise to allow MPs a greater role in drafting legislation. It was a very hollow promise. It has not happened in 3.5 years.

• (1145)

If the Liberals on the committee were truly committed to the red book they would have voted for some of Reform's amendments to make substantive changes, in particular the amendment in which we actually do what the Liberals claimed they would do in their red book.

Having kept only 25 per cent of their promises on agriculture in the 1993 campaign is very serious. We have to take everything together, but let me give an example of what they said in the red book at page 15:

Governments have little room to find new revenues from the tax side; indeed, the long term objective of all governments must be to reduce the tax burden.

The fact is the government has collected \$24 billion more in tax revenue. Unfortunately that is a very serious broken promise.

Let me turn to page 57 where the Liberals buried a few of their promises with regard to agriculture. They said they would develop new domestic and international markets for Canadian food products. They were to reduce input costs to make farming more viable and to introduce a whole farm income stabilization program.

I am quite familiar with the area of reducing input costs. I live on a farm and have close ties to the farm community. I listen on almost a daily basis to the concerns of farmers. One of their very critical or serious concerns is the high input costs they experience. Many input costs have taxes built right into them.

For example, fertilizer is made from natural gas and natural gas has a high tax component. A very high tax component is built right into the product they must use to produce their product. Instead of reducing costs and the size of government, government taxes to support big government.

The high cost of transportation is another serious concern of farmers. I have looked through the red book and I have yet to find anywhere any indication that the Liberals were to remove the Crow subsidy as soon as they were elected. I believe this was a shock to farmers. Very often it was not just the promises they made but the

things they did once they got into power that people had no idea they would do. That is very serious.

The Bloc member talked about the cynical attitude of the public has toward politicians. I agree. We have to be held accountable. There must be some mechanism built into our democratic structure whereby the constituents may hold their MP more accountable. That is a very key change Reformers will make when we form government.

I will now talk about some of our amendments. We propose a limiting of the governments contingent liability. The government is increasingly allowing the review of government policies, regulations, expenditures and contingent liabilities by bureaucrats rather than elected officials.

I asked a question of the Library of Parliament dealing with how much legislation has come before the House in the last while that has taken away power from the elected people and given it to bureaucrats. It is a question that had not been asked previously. The people doing the research were shocked and amazed as they began to go through the legislation to find that routinely legislation before the House was taking away the power of those elected to run the affairs of the country and giving it to bureaucrats.

• (1150)

The bill before us does the same thing. That is a very serious matter. That was one of our concerns with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board. There is no reason farmers cannot completely control their own affairs. It does not have to be under the thumb of the agriculture minister where he appoints the CEO and control the affairs of the wheat board completely. It should be run from Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba, those most affected by it.

The standing committee with all its expertise should review any increase in the contingent liability under the cash advance program. The agriculture minister would simply have to notify the committee of his intention to raise the amount well before it may be needed and hearings could be held to quickly determine whether an increase is actually needed.

Reformers would like to comment on allowing interest free advances. The Liberals voted against a Reform amendment in committee to provide interest free spring advances. It was one of their own election promises. They have not fulfilled it. Nor do they agree with Reform's amendment.

Let me now deal with the aspect concerning the limiting of the government purchases program. The government purchases program provides the minister with a wide ranging authority to buy, sell or import agricultural products to stabilize domestic market conditions or to conclude sales to other governments or government agencies.

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Although there are no resources budgeted to the program the government has been unable to adequately justify extending or continuing it by entrenching it in new legislation. The extensive powers encompassed by the program have not been used since 1985 and have only been used a couple of times in the past 20 years. Most important, the intent of this type of program is incompatible with the competitive market driven modern Canadian agricultural economy.

For instance, exactly what are the unusual market conditions for perishable crops as specified in the government's literature as grounds for using the program? The government should fully explain its rationale of continuing to have a potentially controlling hand over Canada's agricultural economy.

Let me now deal with the treating of all producer organizations equally. Under the new act the portion of each defaulted advance that will be the responsibility of the program administrator or producer organization will be based on the historical defaults of the organization. The liability amount will vary from 1 per cent to 15 per cent depending on past performance.

Reform supports this change but opposes the two-year delay for the Canadian Wheat Board. Although the government claims the Canadian Wheat Board needs time to make the necessary administrative adjustments, the principles of equity and fiscal responsibility should be respected.

I wonder if some of the political tactics the government is using is to deflect attention away from its more controversial bills. I often look at what has happened in the last few weeks as we prepare for the next election. We have seen a sudden increase in spending by the government in certain areas. Is this spending increase a way of deflecting attention away from what it has done previously, especially in Saskatchewan? The gun control bill has been of concern to many people. Also there is the gay rights amendment.

Some of so-called good news bills the agriculture minister announced are maybe an attempt to make people forget what has happened over the past 3.5 years. If there is anything Canadians really want it is more control over their own affairs. They want us to work together as MPs to improve legislation and to make sure it is effective. That really has not happened.

My greatest concern is that agriculture has had a lower priority with the government. Very little was done to help farmers. The removal of the crow rate subsidy without any warning, without any opportunity for adjustments to be made in the transportation area, has been a very serious blow to farmers. It will have a devastating effect on the farm economy. The government should have done what was necessary to bring down the input costs of farmers before it made some of these other moves.

• (1155)

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to bring forth the government's concerns on Bill C-34 during this debate.

Bill C-34 will establish the agriculture marketing programs act. It is a major piece of legislation put forward by the government to help Canadian farmers compete in the global marketplace by modernizing Canadian cash advance and price pooling systems.

The new act is intended to replace the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act, the Advance Payments for Crops Act, the Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act and the Agricultural Products Board Act. The four acts were created at different times to meet different marketing needs. They were however all designed for the same purpose: to support and encourage the efficient and orderly marketing of agricultural commodities.

The bill will fulfil a red book promise to restore a statutory, interest free cash advance program for agriculture that was discontinued by the previous government. Although the cash advances were reimplemented each year on an ad hoc basis by cabinet, cash strapped producers could never be sure in advance whether the provisions would be renewed or whether farmers would be left high and dry.

The reinstatement of the statutory interest free cash advance program is important because farmers do not have the luxury of choosing when they plant or harvest their crops. Sometimes they cannot control when they have to sell. They may be forced by financial pressures to sell their products immediately after harvest, at a time when prices are often at their lowest.

With the legislation the government is helping to alleviate some of the financial pressures farmers face, as well as the actual uncertainty caused by waiting for a government to announce whether interest free cash provisions will be temporarily reinstated.

In the spring of 1995 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada started the process of reinstatement by initiating consultations with more than 160 producer groups on advance payments and orderly marketing legislation. We held further consultations in the winter and summer of 1996. The department wanted to have all stakeholder concerns about the bill and the concerns that financial programs would act in favour of and help farmers do what they intended to do.

The consultations produced many good suggestions which the government has incorporated including the idea of combining four programs into one. The producers said that they found four different acts too confusing. They also said that the four existing acts did not treat all producers equally and that some commodities were not covered at all. The new legislation eliminates those inequities and anomalies.

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Farming is a risky enterprise. Success depends a lot on different conditions over which the farmer has no control. The agricultural marketing programs act will bring a little more certainty to Canadian producers at risk. It will give them a measure of control and flexibility which would otherwise not be there. It will keep them competitive with their international counterparts.

The new legislation represents real progress for taxpayers and a more effective use of their tax dollars. It will also mean progress for farmers who will get a more stable environment as we restore a statutory interest free cash advance system. It will give them a measure of control and flexibility they have been without since the late eighties.

The bill will help farmers to be competitive in international circuits with their counterparts. It will be good news for all of Canada because the more Canadians farmers succeed, the more jobs are created for Canadians in agriculture and the agri-food sector as well as industry across the country.

I will be voting for the bill. I urge all members of the House to vote for it as well.

• (1200)

Mr. Jake E. Hooppner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we saw that the pilotage issue was not addressed in the marine bill. I know farmers would have appreciated very much if that issue had been resolved and they could have expected lower costs in shipping their grain.

How does the parliamentary secretary feel about these exorbitant charges by pilots when they are really not needed these days with the global technology and the positioning technology that we have that can be used instead of them? It is still on the shoulders of farmers to pay \$53,000 per trip, an average of \$5,200 a day per pilot. Those are things that farmers would appreciate having resolved, giving them a break and reducing to some extent the costs of their shipping charges.

Mr. Pickard: Mr. Speaker, clearly this government has stood for doing what it can in order to make our input costs, costs of transportation and other costs as reasonable and equitable as possible for the farm community.

There is absolutely no question that if costs are exorbitant that issue has to be examined and dealt with in a reasonable way. The premise that costs are not fair is one that is not necessarily agreed to by everyone in this country. However, where those costs are unfair we certainly have looked at it, examined issues and tried to bring our costs in line with where they should be.

However, that question really does relate to another piece of legislation. At this point in time the focus is on cash advance payments and the restructuring of four bills which will treat all

people, all the farm communities on an equal and fair basis. That is a really critical issue.

I know that after the consultations that have gone on across this country almost everyone is united. Bill C-34 is a very important bill to all of us and it is one that we must have in place in order to be fair to all Canadians on an international competitive basis as well as on an agricultural competitive basis within the country.

Mr. Jake E. Hooppner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today and address this issue. We have looked at different types of legislation and I know that a lot of the farm problems are not just in one or two of the bills. The problems we have tried to address are in at least six, seven or eight acts that the minister of agriculture has jurisdiction over. We have to take into account that just by addressing a few of the acts does not resolve the problems that farmers have.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned this act more or less amalgamates three acts, the Advance Payments for Crops Act, the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act and the Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act. Amalgamating these four programs is going in the right direction. There is no doubt about that. If we can take the bureaucracy out of farm acts or out of farm legislation it is only going to be a benefit for farmers.

The Reform Party is very much in favour of reducing the costs of administration, reducing the bureaucracy and the red tape that farmers have to deal with when they conduct their business. I think I made it clear yesterday in committee that harmonization of chemical registration and food inspection is a very important issue as well as these acts.

It is only fair to show how unfair sometimes our legislation deals with farmers. When I look at the millers' testimony before the standing committee here just a few days ago they were allowed to import U.S. grain without wheat board control and as far as milling or processing their product was concerned. But when farmers find a market for their American unlicensed grains they are growing in the U.S. at \$2 a bushel higher than in Canada, they are thrown in jail.

• (1205)

That is not a fair way to treat one sector of our economy. We allow one thing to happen that is beneficial to the value added industry but then the producers of the raw product who are trying to capture the market are denied access to that market. Those are things that farmers object to and those are things that farmers will take into consideration when they go to the polls in the next election.

We support maintaining the advanced payments for crop programs since they are shown to be a stabilizing influence on the marketplace while maintaining an acceptable level of default

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exposure for taxpayers. Farmers are pretty honest generally and try to do their very best to keep their end of the bargain.

We see that the Liberal government is very short on keeping promises. It is very easy to make quick promises but to implement them is a little harder to do. One of those promises was there would be a spring cash advance which should be interest free. I know the member for Malpeque argued for it strongly but being a Liberal backbencher he does not seem to have that much clout in having his own government listen to him.

We in the Reform Party were supporters of that issue, saying it should be increased at least to \$50,000 and included in the other advance programs so that farmers were treated equally. There are some Liberal backbenchers who do get the right idea sometimes but because there is not a democracy on the government side of the House they have very little clout or impact.

We saw that happen on the backtracking issue when every member on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food said that it should be stopped and it was costing us millions and millions of dollars. We wasted something like \$60 million of taxpayer money by backtracking grain before it finally was done away with by scrapping the western grain transportation act.

Those are things that farmers would appreciate action being taken on when brought before the House, and not just a quick promise before the next election that we will look at this in the September sitting of the House or in the new Parliament, which is what I heard yesterday when I was talking about the pilotage fees that were charged to grain transportation.

The Reform Party proposed some amendments to this bill which would have ensured a more responsible implementation of the bill. One dealt with regulations made by governor in council that dealt with government contingency liability in the legislation. We see that it is the direction this government seems to want to take, that more things should be done by order in council rather than by the House itself. This is a very bad direction in which we are going. In the next election taxpayers and voters will make that message very clear to this government.

We wanted to have the regulations presented to the House of Commons, but no one would listen. No one seems to care. The attitude is "we are the government and we do as we please".

We wanted farmers to have access to that emergency advance but no, as we heard, the government would not allow it. We wanted the government to eliminate the purchases program and treat all agriculture organizations equally.

When I look at certain issues that have come before the House it astounds me that at times we just look at one of the industries and forget that it is affecting the other industries.

• (1210)

When we saw offshore beef coming here a year or so ago, increased from the GATT allocations of something like 75,000 tonnes to 115,000 tonnes, we forgot how many jobs that took away. Our farmers had to export their cows into the U.S. to get them slaughtered. That took away at least three jobs to every one we created by bringing in this extra offshore beef.

Not only that, the countries that were shipping this beef into our country have an export balance that is positive. We had to borrow that money to finance these imports. To me that is not the way to run a business or a country.

When we look at running this country, it should be run on the basis of a business. If it is not going to show a bottom line that is in the positive then we should scrap it.

Also one of the Reform amendments was voted down because it was not really very advantageous politically at that time. It may be different now.

This shows that the Liberal red book promise to give MPs a greater role in drafting legislation is a hollow promise and one more broken promise that Liberals will have to explain to the electorate.

We wanted to have the committee become more democratic. We wanted to have the committee read the red book and then implement the promises. The record is there. It will be of real advantage to us on the campaign trail to once in a while wave it and say here are the promises, see how they were kept.

It will be a pleasure to have the back-up material that we will really need in this next election. Sometimes these promises, if they are put down in writing, have a disadvantage for people later.

I have to admire my colleague from Yorkton—Melville when he started mentioning a few things on the wheat board issue. We see again that in the last six months or so we have a real problem in getting our grain moved.

The wheat board blames it on the railways. The railways blame it on the weather and the Liberals probably blame it on God, the last one who seems to get blamed by this government when there is no other excuse.

Where we will wind up, who will take the responsibility remains to be seen. It was astounding that in the last year, in the spring of 1996, the Canadian Wheat Board cancelled the C quota on barley because it said that there was a shortage of grain, that there was nothing to sell.

We had thousands of hopper cars sitting empty on sidings, not knowing what to do with them. All of a sudden when a new crop comes in we find out we have a record carry over of feed grains, a record carry over of durum. We have had all these empty hopper cars sitting around doing nothing and nobody taking any action.

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We were promised when the WGTA was done away with that the Liberals would guarantee our grain would be moved. They would keep track of the situation and they would put on certain regulations or rules that the railways would comply with.

It has not happened. Reading the latest report from one of the railway companies, it says that in the last month it shipped around or backtracked 2,000 empty hopper cars from terminals that were never loaded in the first place.

We can see what a mess the whole transportation system really is in. This government is failing to correct it. We are trying to correct some of the problems with these bills. We will have a partial success but I do not think it is nearly what farmers desire or what is needed in the industry.

• (1215)

We now have a situation where the transportation system is not working. Canadian farmers who are within trucking distance of the U.S. could have a viable market opportunity there but it is denied them because we have a monopoly that does not want to co-operate when certain situations are run into or when market conditions develop during the year.

I know for a fact there is a tremendous demand for our feed grains in the U.S. In my little area of Morden-Winkler, over 200,000 bushels have gone into the U.S. by truck in the last week or two because of a market that was found by a few farmers. They have developed that market to a point where it is becoming quite lucrative.

This is the type of farm policy we need, where farmers take control of the situation and direct the government to provide through regulation the guidelines that make it fair to everyone. That has not been happening. Again I point to the witness we heard from just recently, the millers. They can import their grains from the U.S. without any restrictions while farmers do not have that freedom because they have to go through the buyback program. As we heard at the standing committee hearings, the buyback program is not what farmers want. It is not fair to all farmers and should be changed.

It is really sad how much farmers distrust government and bureaucrats. It is very hard for them to believe what is happening in the House. A very humorous incident happened on April 1. I do not know if the House has heard about the story in *Grainews* which stated that the agriculture minister had announced a new bio-diesel initiative and created a government crown corporation called Petro Canola.

I received a number of calls from my constituents wondering whether this could have really happened in Ottawa. When I first

heard about it I thought it had to be crazy. I wondered why anybody would even believe something like that.

I will read a few comments from that article so members have an idea how the farm community feels about Ottawa and how much trust they have in politicians. The article states that the Prime Minister has a better plan than the old national energy program from the early 1980s. "We are setting up refineries near Ottawa on both sides of the Ontario and Quebec border to provide a balanced industry. The western farmers get the benefit of growing canola and eastern Canadians get the value added benefit of a new industry. It is an everybody win situation".

It really sounds like it could be something that is viable, something some bureaucrat or politician dreamed up. The article then goes on to say: "The PCB"—which is this new Petro Canola crown corporation—"will buy canola from western Canadian farmers at an average of 15 per cent below the world price but they will have the benefit of a guaranteed market". I guess after having been tied to a monopoly under the Canadian Wheat Board farmers really believe that they will be asked to sell their products under lower than world market prices.

I could see them maybe falling for that bit of bait but the article then goes on to state: "The board will then ship the canola east at the subsidized magpie rate, refine it and sell it back to western farmers and other users of diesel fuel". On reading that everyone should have realized that it just could not happen and, if it did, I am sure that we would have more provinces wanting to separate.

However, this is the kind of problem that we as farmers have been living with for a lot of years. I just want to make it clear to the parliamentary secretary and to members in western Canada especially that the farming industry is still the industry that drives the whole economy.

• (1220)

Once we lose the farmers and the farming industry there will not be much left to save in the western provinces, or probably in the whole country. That is why it is very important that we start to work as a unit in the House to protect farmers, food processors and marketing agencies in a manner which will put more money into the pockets of farmers.

The cash advance program, as far as interest free loans on certain amounts are concerned, in my opinion, is the right direction. But when a farmer has a disaster and is probably in dire need of some cash in the spring, to make him pay interest on the first \$50,000 to me is totally ridiculous. I do not think that is what farmers really want or that it will benefit the farming industry as a whole.

The Reform Party is very strong on making agriculture a very viable, market driven industry and farmers should be paid for their labour and should get a fair price for what they produce.

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When I see the cost of producing a bushel of grain today and I see how much more efficient farmers have become and how their production has increased every year and their increased capability of feeding the world population and then they get hammered at every corner by government or by regulations, things must change.

One example I brought forward yesterday was past management and the harmonization of rules and regulations between the U.S. and Canada. Last year I noticed an article in one of the farm papers which said that Ontario farmers illegally brought into the country about \$11 million worth of chemicals to use on their corn production and a blind eye was turned to that. It did not seem to bother law enforcement officers or government officials that this was happening.

Then another farm paper stated that farmers went to jail to try and get an extra dollar for a bushel of grain. Something is wrong in this country.

Bureaucrats and politicians have been doing this for a lot of years. In 1992, before I was elected to the House, I know Grandin wheat was being smuggled into the Canadian system. Some farmers were for it and others were against it, but a blind eye was turned to the breaking of the law.

When customs officers wanted to intervene and uphold the law because some farmers were not just breaking the law but probably making huge profits, they were told by Ag Canada and by other officials in government to just turn a blind eye to the issue. "We will not prosecute".

I came to the House to make sure that it was run in a fashion that upheld the laws of the country. When I see certain issues such as that one not being addressed and issues such as advanced payments again nailing the farmer who has had a disaster in his production cycle, we need a different government in Ottawa. Over the past 25 or 30 years we have discovered that Tories and Liberals are the same. They are only concerned about getting the bucks into the east. The west might as well disappear.

That is why 52 Reformers are here. The slogan was: "The west wants in". We are here and we are going to stay here.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's comments, as I always do. He is very knowledgeable about agriculture and the agriculture legislation that comes before this place.

Of the 50 Reform MPs that were elected this term, seven are still actively farming or were active farmers prior to being elected to this place. A number of Reform MPs speak with a certain amount of knowledge about agricultural issues and the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette is one of them.

• (1225)

In the few minutes I have I would like to relay something which happened to me as the member of Parliament for Prince George—Peace River recently in connection with the Canadian Wheat Board. I will relate the story to my colleague and ask him to comment because I know he has done a lot of research and has taken some strong positions with respect to reform of the Canadian Wheat Board.

There was a bill before the House, which for some mysterious reason has not come back since the Easter break, called Bill C-72. I wanted to ascertain if there was a consensus of the farmers in my riding so that I could speak with authority in the House of Commons and vote accordingly.

I approached the Canadian Wheat Board. I had about 10 questions which I wanted to ask specifically about the bill. I wanted to ask those questions of Canadian Wheat Board permit book holders. Obviously, as anyone who has done polling or surveying will know, you do not want to dilute the results on an issue such as this by surveying ranchers or dairymen or other people who would not be in the business of exporting grain. It was key to having the most accurate results possible for my survey to target Canadian Wheat Board permit book holders.

I called the office of the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg and explained to them that I wanted the mailing list for all Canadian Wheat Board permit book holders in the B.C. Peace region, for both north and south Peace. They explained to me that they could not give out the mailing list under any circumstances. It had to be kept secret.

I explained who I was. I faxed them a copy of my questionnaire. I was not trying to hide anything. I was not trying to ask loaded questions or anything like that. They still would not help me, as the elected member of the people of that region.

I then said: "Out of my member's operating budget I will send you the questionnaire, pre-sealed, in envelopes. All you have to do is print out the labels, put the labels on the envelopes and send them out. I will pay someone at the Canadian Wheat Board office in Winnipeg for however many hours it takes to print out the labels, affix them to the envelopes and mail them out". They still refused to provide that service, even if I was going to cover their costs. Therefore I could not accurately poll the permit book holders in my riding on the issue.

I find it very deeply troubling that an organization such as the Canadian Wheat Board, which is supposedly there for the betterment of farmers, would not allow a member of Parliament, regardless of political stripe, the opportunity to accurately survey constituents on such an important issue.

That is the story of one of my experiences with the Canadian Wheat Board. It is very secretive. It is well known that the

Canadian Wheat Board, like CSIS, does not have to comply with access to information requests. Farmers and Canadians are becoming increasingly troubled by that.

I want to ask my colleague if he has had the similar experience of running up against a brick wall with the Canadian Wheat Board and not being able to access a mailing list so that he could properly survey constituents.

Mr. Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

As the House probably knows, I have been a critic of the Canadian Wheat Board, not because it is the Canadian Wheat Board and that it has a job to do, but because it is such a closed shop. It does not give farmers the right to direct its affairs. It does not give farmers the right to really look into its books to see what is going on.

I would like to point out to my colleague that about a year and a half ago, when I was serving on the subcommittee on transportation, we had the advisory board appear before us. At that time barley was being shipped to Thunder Bay, put in boxcars and shipped to California to fulfil some prearranged contract sales. It was very foolish to ship it all the way to Thunder Bay and then by rail to California instead of going through Vancouver and down the coastline. A lot of money could have been saved for the Canadian farmer.

• (1230)

I saw the article and phoned the Canadian Wheat Board after the advisory board was before us. It mentioned that boxcars were going from Thunder Bay to California. According to our transportation policy boxcars were supposed to be going to Churchill and not to Thunder Bay. The hopper cars were supposed to be going to Thunder Bay.

I had my researcher contact the Canadian Wheat Board on the issue. I wanted to find out how many boxcars were being tied up in shipping grain to California instead of going to Churchill where there was a need for them. My researcher was informed that the information was not to be divulged to the public. It was none of my business. As a member of Parliament I was trying to reorganize the transportation system and trying to make government agencies such as the wheat board accountable to the producers, the people who really depend on it. I was told that the information was not for my perusal. It could indicate something was going on that should not be going on.

The port of Churchill was in desperate need of grain. We could ship grain through that port for \$35 a tonne cheaper than we could do it through Thunder Bay. That is the way the ball bounces for

farmers. I am getting disturbed over those issues. They will be looked at in the next election.

We have had 25 or 30 years of Tory and Liberal governments that have neglected farm organizations and farmers. They have more or less directed their focus on eastern interests. The St. Lawrence seaway cannot function without grain going through it. There is no interest on the part of the government to produce the grain as efficiently as it can or transport it out of the country as cost effectively as it can to compete on the world market. All it is interested in is buying votes for the next election. I think that will change. I thank my colleague for the question.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-34. We will support the bill because enough in it should be presented to farmers.

Why is the bill coming before the House now for final debate? It has been around at least two years. For some time farmers have been calling for the legislation to pass. It has been let sit. It was not of particular interest to the government to deal with it in spite of a very light legislative load before the House.

The government has debated very little of importance since Parliament was called. Very little of importance has passed. In spite of that these pieces of legislation, Bill C-34 and Bill C-38, were forgotten somewhere in a stack on the parliamentary secretary's desk or something. That is unacceptable.

The government has shown a lack of caring and a lack of interest when it comes to farmers. We will raise its record with farmers across the country. They can compare it to what we have proposed, pushed for and presented in our agriculture policy sheet since the last election. We have presented many ideas. Farmers will see the choice is very simple to make and will choose Reform.

• (1235)

Why was the legislation brought forward now? Why was it forgotten on the parliamentary secretary's desk? I cannot answer the questions. There is a rumour that I find difficult to believe, but it could be true there is to be an election. I would not expect it because there are still six months before the four-year mandate is up. I suspect the election will be called between six months and a year and a half from now. That is what normally happens.

A government only calls an election early, especially this early after only 3.5 years, if it is afraid of holding off a little longer. The government has a lot of reason to be afraid of calling the election after four years, as is normal. It was given a five-year mandate. Calling an election after 3.5 years would mean an extra election over a 10-year period and extra cost. What does an election cost? Maybe \$400 million, with all the costs to taxpayers. It is somewhere in that range. There will be an extra \$400 million spent over a 10-year period and for that reason I doubt the rumour is true.

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Let us say that the rumour is true and an election is called in the next few months, or maybe even the next few weeks. I have even heard that rumour. Why would it be that the government held off on the legislation until now? Why would that be?

Could it be that the government is absolutely terrified farmers will reject them en masse because of Bill C-68, the gun control legislation? It has been widely rejected across the country by farmers and by many people in cities and small towns. It is a bad piece of legislation. Farmers will be considering that piece of legislation very carefully when they go to the polls in rural areas.

Could the legislation have been forgotten on the parliamentary secretary's desk deliberately? Not caring about the situation it could put farmers in, it was put aside on the minister's desk to be kept until just before an election call to try to make farmers forget that the \$120 million figure that comes the legislation. That is not what it will mean to farmers but it is the political figure that will be thrown around. Could this have been saved until just before election time to cover up for Bill C-68?

Or, could it have been left and forgotten on the parliamentary secretary's desk because farmers remember Bill C-33, the legislation that gives special rights to homosexuals? We now have to pay benefits for any of my staff who claim they are in a same sex relationship. This is what Bill C-33 led to. This was widely rejected right across the country and very strongly in rural areas.

Could the bill have been left on the parliamentary secretary's desk, on the bottom of the pile in the dark, until just now? Surely the government would not be so blatantly willing to cost Canadians an extra \$400 million for an election that should not be held until after four years. However, let us say that it is the case. Is the legislation being used to cover up some very bad pieces of legislation rural areas would rather the government had forgotten? That is the reason it was been left on his desk.

I will talk a bit about the bill. Later I will talk about some related issues. Most Reform MPs will support the legislation. We have some very grave concerns about it that I will talk about. Some members have already spoken about the bill and what it deals with regarding advance payments and so on. They have also talked about what it is not.

• (1240)

The concerns of the Reform Party and the changes we tried to make were in four main areas. First, we say a limit should be entrenched on government contingent liability instead of just an open ended liability. Most taxpayers do not accept an open ended liability. An upper limit should be entrenched in the legislation, or the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food should review any increases in the legislation on a

regular basis rather than just having orders in council. Orders in council have the power to act on their own. Under the legislation the minister has the power to determine an acceptable liability without it ever coming to Parliament. That fits in with the lack of democratic process the government has shown over the 3.5 years it has been in power.

Second, farmers should be allowed access to emergency advances on an interest free basis but only within part of the existing \$50,000 interest free portion. That did not happen either.

Third, we have pushed the government to eliminate the government purchases program which allows government under certain completely unspecified circumstances and with unspecified crops to buy crops. This supposedly helps farmers out of serious situations. It has not been used since 1985 and we really do not know what it is to be used for. It has not been defined in any way. It is bad legislation when it has no guidelines.

Fourth, we pushed throughout the process for all agricultural organizations to be treated the same with regard to this legislation. That has not happened. Which body was given a two-year reprieve from enactment of the legislation? The Canadian Wheat Board. Why would I be surprised by that?

Wheat board commissioners run the board. Farmers have absolutely no say in what happens with the board. We do not even know what is going on inside the wheat board. Everything is kept top secret, a level of secrecy equal to CSIS and the privy council. It is unbelievable. It is the only organization given a two-year reprieve from the legislation. It is no surprise. Government members are in bed with wheat board commissioners.

The wheat board serves a very useful purpose for Canadian farmers. I have always supported it as a marketing agency. However farmers accountability. They want to know what goes on inside the wheat board. They want some answers when they have questions. They want the auditor general to have access to what goes on inside the board. For Pete's sake, the auditor general cannot even get at it. We get no answers.

Only through a leaked document did we find out that commissioners who are fired or choose to leave are paid a severance package of up to \$290,000. It is unbelievable.

Why was that the only organization the government decided to give a two-year reprieve in the enactment of the legislation? It is no surprise but it is not acceptable either. Those are the changes we have pushed for regarding Bill C-34.

• (1245)

Again we support this legislation because it is something that farmers want. We believe that the advanced payments do provide

some stability in the whole grain marketing industry. We believe that is required and it has been our policy all along. We support it for that reason but it is unfortunate that the changes we proposed were not dealt with.

I have already talked a bit about why this has come up now. Of course I cannot say why and I would not want in any way to guess at motives. However, the timing is really strange. Could it be that this government is really concerned with the problems in other areas of agriculture which have been brought about directly as a result of its action and inaction?

For example, we have a problem in the grain industry right now. I have neighbours who right now should have all of their supplies on hand for seeding. They should be starting to seed two to three weeks down the road. However, they do not have the money to do that because they have not been able to move their grain. Why can they not move their grain? This government, in the three pieces of legislation that dealt with grain marketing, has failed miserably.

An example is the elimination by this government of the Crow benefit, the Crow subsidy as it was called, which the Reform Party supported. However, our policy was that it should go into a trade distortion adjustment program so that it would be there to help fight the trade battles such as those provided by the European Economic Community and the export enhancement program in the United States. That was our policy that we ran on before the last election. We said that the money should go into that but we recognized that the Crow subsidy was doing a lot of damage moving grain out to central Canada so that all the value added took place in central Canada or in fact encouraged exports through a subsidy so that processing would take place outside the country. That does not make any sense, so eliminating it made sense.

However, there were changes that had to take place before this move was made and they just did not happen.

The same types of changes should have been made when CN was privatized. The same types of changes should have been made with the new Canadian transportation act. Those changes are changes which would have made the transportation system much more effective. It would have brought competition into the system and allowed for competition. It would have dealt with the car allocation problem which just has not been dealt with in any way after 3.5 years of this government knowing when it first came that it was a huge problem. It knew car allocation was not working. We had a special subcommittee set up to deal with that but it just did not happen. Therefore the car allocation system is failing dismally. The wheat board as too much control over car allocation. That is a big part of the reason why we do not have grain moving properly now.

As a result of action and inaction on the part of this government, I have neighbours who just are not going to have the money to buy

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the inputs to seed this year's crop. They go hat in hand to the banks. Some banks in some cases will lend the money. In other cases, because of the drought situation that we have had for many years in our part of the country, there are many bankers who will not lend the money to farmers. We are going to have farmers who will not be able to seed their crops this year. For many of them it is going to mean the end of their farming careers and the loss of their family farms in many cases.

Why? This government did nothing to allow competition in the system. It did not put in a series of incentives and penalties so that railways and grain companies would perform. It would not put in place, as we recommended, a system of final offer arbitration to deal with disputes with captive shippers. We talked about it under the new Canada transportation act and the privatization of CN and the legislation that eliminated the Crow or the debate around that issue.

● (1250)

We proposed this. We said let us do it. At the committee we proposed the changes that would have given captive shippers the power to deal with the railways and with grain handling companies when they did not perform. Unfortunately those changes were not made.

We have a system that predictably is not working. We predicted that this system would not work with the changes that this government put in place. It was predictable, unfortunately. It has happened.

Now we have grain farmers in a very serious situation where their grain is left, in some cases, in piles on the ground and will spoil. In other cases the bins are full but they cannot get money to seed the crops.

Of course, the wheat board did not help this situation out with its price forecast set extremely high when farmers went into planting last year. Of course, now we are finding that the actual price that farmers are getting for their grain has dropped off to such a low level that it certainly has not helped the problem.

That is the problem and it is the reason that this government brought this legislation up now. It wants to cover up for its inaction and in some cases for its actions since the last election.

Do the Liberals want to cover up that they have delivered on less than 25 per cent of the promises they made in the area of agriculture? That is the case.

While I support this legislation I want farmers to recognize, as I am sure they do, that this is an election ploy. They were left in the lurch for I do not know how long. It seems to me it has been two years since the legislation was proposed. Farmers will recognize that is why this legislation has been held off the table for so long.

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Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, that presentation by my hon. colleague from Vegreville was very informative. I cannot believe how much information he packed into a short 20 minute presentation to the House of Commons today.

I notice the rapt attention from the Liberal members opposite. I hope it was not just an act, that they were really paying attention and drawing in the expertise and the knowledge this hon. member has on these important topics.

As I indicated earlier, the reality is that in the Reform Party we have quite a number in our caucus who were actively farming and who know the difference between a bushel of wheat and a potato.

I am not sure that there are some on the other side who know the difference or even for that matter care that much about the difference. They try to talk about how much they care about the plight of the western farmer but I really do not see it being brought forward in any substantive legislation.

As my hon. colleagues have said, we are supporting this piece of legislation even though it does not go near even far enough to address the real issues that are out there in the farm community, the farm community in western Canada and the grain producers of western Canada specifically.

Since my colleague has gone to such trouble to very eloquently articulate his concerns not only about this piece of legislation but about the situation facing grain farmers in particular, I would certainly like to hear more.

He made some reference during his speech that he would not really want to imply why the government is bringing forward this legislation presumably at the 11th hour. He did remark that there are rumours rampant that we are going to go into an election when there is really no need to at this point.

The government has no pressing concern why we could not have extended the legislative agenda to ensure that all proper avenues were taken to properly debate and bring forward amendments on legislation and improve it. Instead it waits and waits and then just before an impending election it will rush ahead with this bill as well as with a few others.

• (1255)

I would ask my hon. colleague if he could expound a bit further on what he suspects are the possible motives for the government's inaction for so long. Now all of a sudden it has hurried its legislative agenda in the last week or two.

Mr. Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I am not in any way going to try to guess the motives. Look at the situation and the rumours that an election will be called in less than six months. Some say it will be called on April 27. That has been mentioned a lot. But that is early and I think Canadians are going to punish the government if it does

call an election six months before the earliest acceptable date of four years. Farmers are also going to punish them if the government does that.

I am wondering why the government is raising this now, why it has been put ahead of a lot of other legislation which it stated is very important to it. I would guess that the reason is the Liberals want to deal with the negative reaction to their so-called gun control bill. It is really a bill that imposes penalties on law-abiding gun owners and makes things extremely difficult for them. It overrides normally accepted judicial principles. The legislation puts in place gun registration which will cost by some estimates at least \$500 million. That is money that is not available for health care or other things that are really important to Canadians.

Maybe the Liberals are trying to get people to forget about that. Maybe they are trying to get farmers to forget about other legislation that has hurt them very dramatically, legislation such as on transportation which was a dismal failure.

We called for changes to that transportation legislation which would have made things better for farmers. Unfortunately it was not put in place.

The government says it puts agriculture at a high priority. There are two other pieces of legislation which really affect farmers quite dramatically and which are on the table right now. One is Bill C-65, the endangered species legislation. It is another piece of legislation that if it is rammed through before the election is called it will really put farmers in a very awkward situation. I am mentioning farmers because we are talking about an agricultural bill right now. Any land user or owner could be put in a very awkward situation by this endangered species legislation which allows government to mandate that land users, land owners will have to spend money to fence off an area to protect an endangered species or lose the use of their land completely without compensation. That is the key. There will be no compensation for losing the use of their land. There will be nothing to help pay for the cost of fencing the land.

This will not only affect farmers. Think of someone who intends to build a business in an industrial park and a habitat for an endangered species is found in the park. The endangered species legislation can require that the land will never be used for development. The value of the land could be lost almost entirely. Would they be compensated for that? No.

That is another piece of legislation that maybe the Liberals want farmers to forget about. Or could it be the wheat board legislation? I did polls in my constituency and there was one done in the constituency of Beaver River concerning the wheat board. I tabled the results with the agriculture committee of the survey done by Tele Research out of Edmonton. In Beaver River 92 per cent of farmers wanted a choice in marketing grain. They want the wheat board to remain but they want the monopoly removed. They want

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what many call a dual marketing system. They want choice in marketing.

• (1300)

Bill C-72 does not give them that choice. The plebiscite that the government held on barley marketing did not even have the option of choice on the ballot. Farmers either have to market their barley through the board in a monopoly situation, or the board would be abolished. That was the choice.

Maybe with this legislation the government is trying to cover up Bill C-72 which is not supported by farmers. It will not give farmers any substantial control over the wheat board. It will make it more difficult for farmers to change the board and to remove the monopoly.

Bill C-72 was rammed through committee. It is a very complex bill. It deals with the Canadian Wheat Board, which is a very complex and secretive organization. I did not feel that I was given enough time to look at each clause as we were going through the bill. I examined the clauses ahead of time and was prepared, but I do not believe the proper amount of time was given at committee to go through the clauses and lay out arguments. The legislation is being rammed through. Farmers do not want it. Maybe the government is trying to cover it up with this bill.

It is not that this bill is a big deal for farmers. Advance payments have been around for many years. This is not putting anything new in place, it is just changing the legislation to ensure that advance payments will not be eliminated.

My best guess why this legislation has come up now is because, according to the rumours in the media, an election will be called some time in the very near future, some time like Sunday, April 27 at one o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate today on Bill C-34, which will establish the agricultural marketing programs act. The bill will consolidate a number of programs. I believe the consolidation which the government has undertaken is good. It will cut out some of the bureaucracy in the department of agriculture. Specifically it deals with the advance payments program which I would like to address in detail and give some background on to explain why the advance payments are necessary and how they have developed over the years.

Many farmers take advantage of the cash advances program. I did so myself. For those farmers who want to pool their product and continue to use the Canadian Wheat Board, it is a useful tool for the future.

The Canadian Wheat Board does not always move product in a timely manner. It does not always suit individual needs. There is a reason for the cash advances program. I know that farmers take

advantage of it so they do not have to worry about marketing their grain early in the fall when they need cash flow. There are those people who are happy to have the Canadian Wheat Board do their marketing for them. One of the tools which they use to manage their cash flow is the cash advances program.

However, a number of farmers in western Canada are not happy with the Canadian Wheat Board. In fact they have used other methods to find ways of getting around marketing their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board. Some grow commodities that the wheat board does not handle. They want out of the system. They want choice. They want to be able to sell their grain when it best suits them. They do not want to be part of the cash advances program and they would not use it.

The chair of the agriculture committee was in the House earlier. I believe he will be speaking on the bill at some point. He was in Grand Prairie with the agriculture committee to discuss Bill C-72. One of the farmers on one of the panels during that morning said that only one-third of his income came from Canadian Wheat Board crops and that it was becoming less and less over the years.

• (1305)

A neighbouring farmer to me, Terry Balisky, is a big farmer in the area. He is well known for managing a good operation. He went on to say that over the years he is getting out of crops that the Canadian Wheat Board administers or controls gradually and is getting into crops over which he has more management.

The chair of the committee asked him a very good question: "You are not growing crops under the Canadian Wheat Board. Is it because those crops are just not doing well in the world market or are there other reasons?" Terry did not have answer for him.

I asked him about that when we were having coffee later and he said: "I was thinking about that and I really did not answer that question properly. It is really all about timing". In his view the Canadian Wheat Board does not serve his needs because of the untimely manner in which it moves crops. It is not just the cash flow. Sometimes he has grain in the bins on his farm and that grain is carried over for more than one year. He finds that he can manage his operation far better by going to non-Canadian Wheat Board crops. It does not serve him well. I have heard other farmers say that as well.

When the western grain marketing panel was in Edmonton I listened to farmers making representation. The marketing panel travelled across western Canada at the behest of the minister of agriculture to find out what farmers wanted in terms of grain marketing in the future. I believe at this point that farmers want leadership. We were hoping that we would get that kind of leadership from the grain marketing panel in its recommendations to the minister of agriculture. Then he could act on the recommendations once the panel had listened to farmers from across western Canada in the Canadian Wheat Board designated marketing area. It

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would give him its recommendations after listening and the minister would act.

One farmer I listened to was from the riding next to mine, Prince George—Peace River, B.C. His name is Gary Scott and he is another good farmer from that area. He was telling the panel that he basically grows no product now that requires Canadian Wheat Board control. I will summarize what he said.

He did not say that the Canadian Wheat Board does not function well for his neighbour. Many farmers want to use the Canadian Wheat Board. He was not telling the panel that the board should not be there. For his operation—and I know this is a big farmer and does a good job—the board does not serve him well. Different operations have different needs.

He said he might have a situation where he needed cash flow to make a payment in October and there are limits on how much can come out of the cash advances program. He might need to move some product at that time and even if he had to take a little bit less for it he was paying down a payment. One of his neighbours down the road has been in business for 35 years, has everything paid for and he does not have the same need. Therefore there are different needs in the farming community.

He was trying to say that there needs to be choice in grain marketing, a choice that reflects the different needs of farmers. My son and I and our families farm 1,500 acres in the Peace River country of Alberta. In my situation I would be happy to let the Canadian Wheat Board market my product but my 30-year-old son does not want that option. He wants to be able to go out and market his crops. He is a university graduate with some marketing skills. I wonder, what is wrong with that? There is something wrong with this picture when we will not allow that to happen. Surely we live in a free country and choice should be what this is all about.

In fact, we have choice in probably 97 per cent of the economy. We have a \$750 billion plus GDP of this country. How much of it is under a monopoly situation? Not very much.

In the areas where there are monopolies such as public utilities or private utilities, where there is no competition, governments have done a fairly good job of putting in a public utilities board. Some avenue for redress has been put in for the public. That is not the case in grain marketing on exports sales of wheat and barley.

• (1310)

Just as my neighbours are using the board less and less, the board does not handle all the product that my son and I produce on our farm. We grow canola. It is a major crop. In fact it competes head to head with wheat in western Canada as to which has the highest

sales volume per year. We grow fescue which is a lawn seed product. We grow rye from time to time. We grow peas and clovers. Farmers in western Canada are growing many commodities that are not marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board. We seem to be doing a pretty good job of handling those. In fact, I am glad of that choice and I think that those farmers who want to also market wheat and barley should be allowed to do so.

To get back to the history of what has been happening in western Canada, we need to look back just a bit beyond that. I would go back to the Uruguay round of the GATT. It took some eight or nine years to finally conclude the negotiations in 1992 when agriculture was brought under trade rules for the first time.

We have had trade rules for industrial products, goods and merchandise for a long time. After the second world war Canada was instrumental in working at the general agreement on tariffs and trade to establish trade rules. It was in our interest. After all in this last year 40 per cent of our gross domestic product was derived from exports. It is growing. Canada is a trading nation and we need some trade rules to work by.

I was glad when we finally reached an agreement under the Uruguay round of the GATT and agriculture was brought under trade rules for the first time. In fact we had a massive trade war in agriculture products raging at that time. Canada was devastated in that process.

While I believe that our agriculture producers can match or better anybody else in the world in terms of production, I know quite well that we cannot match their treasuries, especially the treasury of the European Union and the treasury of the United States. While our governments made a valiant effort to support farmers during that time, which was greatly needed and appreciated, we know that the long term solution was to have some phase down of that trade war and some rules in agriculture.

After the signing of the GATT, agriculture was brought under trade rules. Because it was the first step in that process we were not able to accomplish everything we wanted to do. It was a step in the right direction. Canada's border closures in the area of supply management were changed to tariffs. In other areas of agriculture, we were asked to phase down subsidies and tariffs over a scheduled period of time at a scheduled rate in concert at the same rate as all the other member countries that signed the GATT.

This was a phase down of tariffs and a phase down of subsidies world wide and I applaud that. Almost immediately following the introduction of trade rules in the GATT the trade war that had been raging in agriculture products pretty well came to an end. The export enhancement program in the United States is basically not

used. Canada in fact moved faster than anybody else. We phased out the GRIP program. We got out of the subsidy in transportation, the Crow rate. We were the model student in that whole program of the GATT. We phased down faster than anybody else.

I do not personally have a problem with that, although I guess some people would have said that we should have matched our phase down to that of other member countries.

We had already benefited from the old free trade agreement with the United States in the area of beef. In the 10 years of the free trade agreement with the United States the beef market is now continental, with a North American price. Exports have risen about 50 per cent in the beef industry. It is just a perfect example of a market driven industry and the beef producers in western Canada are saying: "Please don't give us any subsidies. Don't give us any programs that might attract the Americans' attention to us to say that our industry is subsidized and therefore they have some reason not to deal with us".

• (1315)

Things have improved greatly with trade rules in agriculture, but the one area for which I fault the Conservative government of the day in 1992 is supply management. It defended article 11 of supply management which was border closures. It did not want it converted to tariffs.

The Liberal government elected in 1993 continued with that and found that it was isolated at the GATT discussions in Geneva along with Japan and Korea. I believe it was a deliberate move. It could go there to argue that it would not give in to anybody else and that it would keep border closures. However it knew all along that it could not win the argument. It looked good at home politically but it knew it would be hit with tariffs, which is exactly what happened.

When I talk about leadership I believe the same thing is happening this time around. We have a built in agenda for work on the second phase of agriculture that will take place at the World Trade Organization in 1999. There is a working agenda. The Canadian government is playing the same game this time. It is playing the game of knowing there will be massive reductions in the tariffs on supply management. It knows that state trading enterprises such as the Canadian Wheat Board will be reviewed. It is not just on the agenda for Canada. It is on the agenda for a number of member countries such as the United States. These issues will be raised during the talks.

I am concerned the Canadian government is saying there will be no changes at all when it knows that state trading enterprises such

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as the Canadian Wheat Board will probably be hit, because there is no competition and they are monopolies, with having to be transparent. That is the trade-off to not having any competition.

People say that Cargill in the United States or Cargill in Canada does not have to show its books. That is true but there is competition. We do not have to deal with Cargill. There are a number of grain companies we can deal with. The Canadian Wheat Board has a very closed system and quite frankly cannot stand up to transparency.

I would suggest a proactive approach, showing some leadership and giving 10 per cent of farmers who want to market their grain outside the board the ability to do so. What is wrong with that?

A letter published in the last edition of *Maclean's* magazine from a farmer in western Canada essentially said the same thing. It was from Ken Motiuk of Mundare, Alberta. It appears on the guest page under "The Road Ahead". He wrote:

Western Canadian farmers are preparing to seed another crop.

Farmers fight the elements annually. They own and operate sophisticated farm equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. They have adopted new technologies. They manage annual cash flows that approach millions of dollars on larger operations. But they are not considered smart enough to market their own wheat and barley.

Farmers must cede that responsibility to the bureaucrats at the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg—government employees with no investment in the business, people who have never bottom-lined a business, people who don't manage their own pensions because the government even does that for them. In the consummate wisdom of our political masters in Ottawa, those people are more capable than we are of selling our wheat and barley. If we see a better price across the border, it is inaccessible. We can only long for it, like an adolescent with a forbidden magazine. Only the chosen ones in Winnipeg are able to access that market for us—after all appropriate deductions, of course.

And dare not cross the line with your own grain, for Ottawa will spare no cost or effort to hunt you down and see that justice is served. For the heinous crime of selling your grain across the border, you can expect to have law enforcement officers bust into your home in the early hours of the morning, scare your wife and children, seize your property, manacle you in handcuffs and leg-irons and put you behind bars. This is justice. For you have broken the law.

The gentleman continued:

My grandfather left Ukraine because the Czar's soldiers would imprison peasants for hiding wheat.

Does that not sound sort of similar to what we are talking about here? He wrote:

One hundred years later, here in Canada, we are being imprisoned for not turning our wheat over to the government for sale.

Don't get me wrong. This is a great country, and we have chosen it as a place to raise our family and run our business. But if we don't speak up, the bloated egos of Ottawa and Winnipeg bureaucrats will continue to confiscate our rights and freedoms.

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• (1320)

That is a pretty powerful statement. The debate that is taking place in western Canada is all about choice. The minister of agriculture has not categorized this debate right. He is saying that there are those who want to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board and those who want to keep it. That is baloney.

The people I have listened to in my riding and the people who appeared before the committee on Bill C-72 as it travelled across the country did not want to destroy the board. They wanted choice for those who wanted to market through the board, pool their product and accept an average price. By all means those farmers could use it, but they did not want to be condemned to the same fate if they do not want to use it. I remind members that we have a \$750 billion economy. Most of it runs on a free market principle, so what is wrong with that idea?

I hear Liberal members tell us what is good for us farmers in western Canada. My colleague from Lisgar—Marquette, my colleague from Vegreville and I run farm operations. I have been under the Canadian Wheat Board designated area. I say that we should let the board exist for those who want to use it but do not maintain that farmers who want choice cannot have another choice.

Members on that side do not know what they are talking about. There is only one member over there who has any credibility in the matter. Most of them are lawyers, supply management operators or a potato farmer from Prince Edward Island who have never been under the Canadian Wheat Board system. They have no credibility in the matter.

Farmers want leadership. They want to be proactive. They want to function well and to participate in the economy that will take us into the 21st century. They recognize the trade rules in agriculture have been a good thing for Canada. They also recognize that there will be further agricultural reform in the World Trade Organization. We could benefit from it. We do not have to hide. We do not have to be afraid of the change that is taking place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Milliken): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed, bill read the third time and passed.)

FARM DEBT MEDIATION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-38, an act to provide for mediation between insolvent farmers and their creditors, to amend the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act and to repeal the Farm Debt Review Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Hon. Ron Irwin (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in and read the second time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Milliken): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the second time.)

• (1325)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Milliken): When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce Bill C-38, the farm debt mediation act for third reading.

The bill will create a new strengthened farm debt mediation service to replace farm debt review boards. It will maintain the essential features of the old legislation including the stay of proceedings and a review of the mediation process. It will be coupled with and simultaneously implemented with a new farm debt consultation service.

The legislation reflects the views of farmers, their creditors and provincial governments across the country. We had many consultations with all groups. The bill was forged through some 18 months of consultations with farm organizations, leading institutions, farm debt review boards, panel members, financial experts, provincial government officials and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. They all took part in our consultation process.

It is a prime example of the government making good on promises to give members of Parliament and parliamentary committees more influence in drafting legislation.

Standing committee deliberations included MPs from all sides and a host of informed and experienced witnesses from both inside and outside government. The result is that we have before us today legislation to replace the existing Farm Debt Review Act with a new, simplified mediation service for insolvent farmers that still brings the same benefits as before and adds several others. The new

act, along with the consultation service, means reduced overlap and duplication, streamlined administration of financial mediation and consultation services, and a broader range of advisory and counselling options.

The bill recognizes that farmers and creditors are generally comfortable with the current process that allows mediation with a view to resolving the debt situations of farmers. It also reflects a demand for flexibility, an effective and streamlined process that is immune to the realities of farmers today. It will help creditors. It will help provincial governments deal with the realities of financial problems in the overall picture of operating farm debt problems. We are looking for resolutions that will be helpful to farmers and creditors.

As recommended by producer organizations, we will have an act that provides a new appeal mechanism not provided by an old law. It will give farmers and creditors an impartial review of decisions related to stay of proceedings. We will have an act that will allow farmers to engage their financial advisers for the preparation and recovery plan.

The new farm debt mediation act and complementary farm consultation service will be funded through the Canadian adaptation and rural development program or CARD. Funds for those purposes will help agriculture and agri-food sectors be more efficient, self-reliant and competitive.

There is one point I would like to underline. The new farm consultation service provides farmers in financial difficulty with the same and probably a broader financial review and consulting service than was ever provided in the preceding acts.

• (1330)

This new service will be more proactive. It will help farmers to find sources of advice and one on one counselling very early on in the stage before serious difficulties develop. It will provide non-farm assessment and diagnostic review for farmers already in financial difficulty, including three year operational plans which will be a key to financial recovery for many. In essence it will provide more extensive services than those farmers get under section 16 of the act.

I would now like to focus on the administration of the mediation process. Ten years ago the Farm Debt Review Act responded to severe debt problems of farmers by establishing farm debt review boards in every province. They were to assist farmers and creditors in finding mutually satisfactory financial arrangements.

There are currently some 32 review board members appointed at the discretion of the minister and by order in council. These OIC appointees participate in panel meetings between farmers and creditors and facilitate discussions leading to an arrangement to be finalized. Under the new debt farm mediation act there will be no OIC appointments. Mediators who have specific mediation exper-

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tise and experience in agriculture and finance may apply and compete to be on a list of standing offers to provide the mediation service under the act.

The existing act also requires that at every meeting with the farmers and creditors there be a three person panel, a mediator and two panel members, regardless of whether they are needed. This often results in unwanted expenses, including per diems, travel and room and board. The new act does away with this requirement, allowing experts to be brought into the case only when circumstances warrant.

I am pleased that we have reached this stage of consideration of Bill C-38 with the quality input from so many organizations and individuals. I am pleased that together we have fashioned an act which preserves what was valued most in the past and builds on a relevant new approach to the future.

I know that many will welcome the more efficient, more friendly service we are providing today. It will assist farmers in improving their financial circumstance and it will promote growth and prosperity in Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector.

I therefore submit to every member of the House that the bill is great for Canadian farmers. I hope all members will support the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-38 immediately after the parliamentary secretary.

As mentioned earlier, this is an act to provide for the mediation between insolvent farmers and their creditors, to amend the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act and to repeal the Farm Debt Review Act.

Before drafting Bill C-38, the Minister of Agriculture should have given some thought as to why many farmers experience serious financial difficulties. Some of them may have a hard time when they go through a divorce or a separation. This can cause financial difficulties, and so could, for example, an illness. Nowadays, the agricultural world has very little to do with the popular television series currently being rerun on Radio-Canada, *Le Temps d'une paix*.

• (1335)

Today, farmers must be good administrators, since they manage small businesses. The invested capital often approaches or exceeds \$1 million. But could it be that these financial problems are also directly related to the federal government, to its lack of vision concerning agriculture in Canada and in Quebec?

After watching for almost four years this government mishandle agricultural issues, it is no surprise to see that, every year, hundreds of farmers run into serious problems and must declare bankruptcy.

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Just before I rose, I was reading the classified ads in the most widely read newspaper in French Canada, in Quebec, *La Terre de chez nous*. When you see so many auctions and liquidations being held in April, it means there is a problem. That problem is not just the result of bad management, family problems, or illness: it is also the result of the terrible conditions being imposed on farmers by the government, month after month.

Let me give you an example of the problems experienced by our producers, with the exception of course of those who are in a supply-managed sector such as dairy, poultry and egg producers, who are lucky enough to be protected, at last. Still, later on I will discuss price fluctuations in the dairy industry.

Take, for example, feeder calves. Three years ago, we could expect to get \$1.15 or \$1.20 per pound, in the fall, for our veal calves. One year ago, or seven months to be exact, last fall, it was possible to buy very fine calves at 50 per cent of what they were worth two years ago. A farmer hoping to get \$700 for his calf got \$350 or \$360. We are no longer talking about a drop of 2 or 3 per cent, but of 50 per cent.

You will reply that cow and calf stabilization insurance is needed. You are right, but you know how insurance works: the more you use it, the more premiums go up. Since the government is also getting ready to cut its share of funding for the farm income stabilization program, we can expect a large increase in premiums there too, as well as a decrease in services.

Take maple syrup. This year, the run seems much inferior in quality and quantity to what it was last year. Prices will therefore rise slightly, but the maple syrup producer will not receive a fair wage. Pork production is fine, but reform is another matter entirely. In the case of softwood lumber, with the agreement the federal government negotiated with our neighbours to the south, when the export quota is reached, it will be the same story there as well.

The Canadian Wheat Board, which one of my Reform colleagues brought up earlier in connection with Bill C-72, and which has a monopoly, of course, is trying to get the best prices, except that western grain producers are not free to sell directly to their neighbours across the border at prices very often higher than what they could get from the Board.

• (1340)

With the exception of producers who operate under a supply management system, dairy, poultry and egg producers face uncertainty as a result of fluctuating prices.

Which reminds me, I wonder whether this government will have the guts to defend supply management at the WTO, since the American foreign trade representative has sworn she would not accept the tariffs imposed in the course of negotiations approved in December 1993 by GATT, now the WTO. She said she would fight

to the death, if necessary, to win her case. The United States seems determined to go before a WTO panel.

I asked the Minister of Agriculture whether he would defend our tariffs with equal vigour. We shall see if the government is able to defend our interests. Of course we have only a few sitting days left. We will have to run again in our respective ridings. So we do not know who will be in a position to defend us. Will we have a minority or a majority government? As for who will form the next government, your guess is as good as mine.

This also brings us to examine the role that could be played by the Farm Credit Corporation. I hope that when the FCC evaluates the solvency of a farmer and approves a loan of \$300,000 or \$400,000, it does a very thorough evaluation. If approving the loan is too risky, the right thing to do would be for FCC representatives to consolidate the loan or simply refuse it.

So in several respects, farmers are like skilled workers or the owner of a factory, except they should not expect to work only 40 hours, five days a week. A dairy farmer has to milk cows twice a day, seven times a week. If he leaves Friday evening, there will be no scabs on his farm. He will have to find a replacement or make arrangements with his neighbour, and next time he will have to return the favour, because, as I pointed out earlier, there are no scabs.

So a farmer has to work seven days a week and often 60 or 70 hours a week. Unfortunately, in many cases his income is less than that of a skilled worker who only has to work 40 hours a week for five days, and in many cases, a little less than 40 hours in four days. The farmer therefore has to devote a great deal of time to the operation, often along with his wife and children, in order to make ends meet.

Recently, this government made its cuts and the agricultural sector got it in the neck. Taking the example of a dairy farmer producing industrial milk, the government has found the trick of reducing his income by an average 5.5 per cent, for the past two years and the coming three. Then the government wonders why dairy farmers have to give up their farms, or even declare bankruptcy.

• (1345)

Their income is cut and then they are told what poor managers they are. You know as well as I that, for a dairy farmer, it is not the first cow in the barn that brings him profit, but the last ones. His electricity costs the same, regardless of the number of cows, and more cows of course require more feed and more hay, but the last ones you milk will be nothing but profit.

The Bloc Québécois, like the Reform Party, was vigorously opposed, while this government, including some of its members who are involved in the dairy industry, such as the hon. member for

Government Orders

Malpèque on Prince Edward Island, voted in favour of cutting the milk subsidy. This is an out and out scandal.

In a few weeks, however, the member in question will be doing the rounds of his beautiful riding of Malpèque, and he will forget all about this. He will, as André Pratte so aptly described it, be playing Pinocchio, hiding or falsifying the fact that he voted against the dairy farmers in his riding and in favour of cutting back to zero the milk subsidy, which was \$5.43, or 5.5 cents a litre. For an average farm, such as my colleague from Malpèque himself has, 5.5 cents a litre represents a loss of \$7,500.

It is not surprising that the dairy farmers, while not necessarily going bankrupt, will be announcing farm auctions on such and such a day at such and such a time, in order to get rid of all their stock and equipment. They are opting for retirement before they are forced into it. The worst thing is that 48 per cent of dairy farmers are located in Quebec. So this government is following its usual practice of going after Quebec first and foremost, which is forcing our dairy farmers to take a \$108 million loss as a result of the elimination of this subsidy. And so, once again, Quebec pays the highest price.

The worst of it is that, if milk producers want to get as much money for their milk, the price of industrial milk will have to be raised, and that decision rests with the Canadian Dairy Commission. You do not have to be a lawyer to see that raising the price of industrial milk will raise the price of butter, cheese and all other dairy products.

According to a study ordered by the dairy producers of Canada, a 10 per cent increase in the price of butter results in a 7 per cent decrease in its consumption. When I said, Mr. Speaker, that the last cow is the most profitable, you seemed to agree with me. So, if consumption now drops by 7 or 14 per cent, you cannot even keep one or two extra, but may have to lose a couple. This sort of situation will bring hard financial times to the farming community.

According to the same study, raising the price of cheese by 10 per cent lowers consumption by 4 per cent and further reduces the size of your herd. The worst is that, when you look at Agriculture Canada's overall budget, Quebec gets only 9 per cent of what it invested last year in Canada. In a good year, the figure goes up to 16 per cent.

Quebec alone generates some 17 per cent of direct agricultural activity. Add to that the processing of such things as cheese, butter and ham, and our share climbs to 24 per cent. We pay 24 per cent of federal taxes, or \$30 billion. But we are getting barely 9 or 10 per cent back year after year. That is appalling.

• (1350)

I will be waiting for you, my Liberal friends, when you visit the riding of Frontenac in the next election campaign and tell the people of my riding, as the President of the Treasury Board did in

the referendum, that, while Quebec pays \$30 billion, it receives \$31 billion or \$32 billion. Why is it so important to you that we remain a part of your Canadian federation if we are costing you so much?

Mr. Speaker, we must look at who, in this country, got the first break. We will recall that, in 1841, when Upper and Lower Canada were joined—Upper Canada corresponding to what is now known as Ontario, and Lower Canada to Quebec—so were their respective debts. Upper Canada's debt was 1.195 million pounds, as compared to a mere 200,000 pounds for Lower Canada. How were the debts handled? They were simply added up. Living together meant paying off our debts together. So the French Canadians had to pay up. At the time, they were referred to as the Canadians, while the others were called the English. That is how it was at the beginning of the colony.

When this government abolished the WGTA, the Western Grain Transportation Act, two years ago, the yearly cost was—I would be much obliged to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture to look me straight in the eye. The yearly cost to the government was \$860 million. What did you do to sugarcoat it in western Canada, to make this cut more palatable to western producers? You gave them \$1.6 billion. Worse yet, you gave this money under the table. Farmers were not required to claim it on their income tax returns. This is appalling.

You have established a \$300 million fund to finance adjustment measures, road upgrading, silo construction and the upgrading and construction of new railway lines. One million dollars was used to establish a loan guarantee fund to help certain foreign countries buy Canadian grain. All this adds up to \$2.9 billion. Where is the equity in all this? For western grain producers, the government is prepared to pay \$2.9 billion to save \$860 million. But when the dairy producers subsidy was cut by \$228 million, how much was paid in compensation? Not a penny.

Mister Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, 48 per cent of all Canadian milk is produced in Quebec. That is what your notion of equity is all about. You and I can debate this in my riding of Frontenac.

The Speaker: I remind the hon. member that he must always address the Chair and everything will be fine.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely right. I got carried away in the heat of the moment. Through the Chair, I am sending an invitation to the parliamentary secretary to come to the riding of Frontenac and debate the issue of his government's fairness—it will also be an opportunity for him to meet franco-phones.

In conclusion, since it is 1.55 p.m. and question period is fast approaching, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-38. Of course, I hope our farm producers never have to use Bill C-38. It would be better if they had a decent income, even though I am well

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aware that a bad manager can have problems making the best use of a loan and paying it off.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like you to convey to the parliamentary secretary has to do with the appointment of mediators. For example, look at what is going on in my riding. Who was appointed to the employment insurance board of referees? Nathalie. Who will be the Liberal Party candidate? Manon. You see, everything makes sense. In small communities, people all know each other. These are partisan appointments. This week, I got quite a shock when I asked a witness about the salaries of the five Canadian Wheat Board commissioners. My colleagues and friends from the Reform Party were just as surprised as I was to learn that the commissioners' salaries range from \$114,000 to \$144,000 annually.

Occasionally a member of Parliament is appointed to one of these boards after giving up his or her seat, to make room for someone who will eventually become minister. The federal government did that in two Quebec byelections, by bringing in newcomers who respectively became Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. It seems the government is about to do the same in the riding of Beauce, to make room for its candidate.

In the end, who pays for this? The answer is always the same: the taxpayers. Mr. Speaker, I am co-operating with you by concluding my speech and confirming that, in the interest of our farmers, we will support Bill C-38.

The Speaker: It being now almost 2 p.m., we will resume debate after oral question period. We will now proceed to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. John Finlay (Oxford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month I introduced into the House Bill C-391, which would seek to amend the Criminal Code to increase the maximum sentence for child sex offenders to a life sentence with no possibility of parole for 25 years.

While it seems doubtful that this bill will pass before this Parliament completes its work, I want to assure my constituents that I remain committed to this issue. We must send a strong message to those who prey on our children that their actions will result in a life behind bars. A maximum penalty at present of ten years is simply not enough for someone who steals and manipulates the innocence of youth.

To my colleagues in the House and to the people of Oxford I will continue to pursue this issue in the future.

SCHOOLREACH

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend my hometown of Ponoka played host to the Alberta SchoolReach provincial championships. I want to congratulate the winners representing Leduc Composite High School: Joanne Brownlee, Neil Jackie, Danny Jackson, Colin McIntrye, Taeed Quaddusi and Evan Saumer, along with their coaches Sandy Ogrodnick and Mrs. Senio.

Competition was fierce as teams vied for provincial honours. As one of the judges, I was impressed with the depth of knowledge, the spirit of competitiveness and the ability of the participants to articulate their responses. These students are a reflection of parents who care enough to instil in their children a quest for knowledge and fair play.

The commitment and confidence shown by these young people prove that our future is in good hands.

Good luck to the Leduc Composite Reach team in the national finals. I know they will prove to be a formidable force in Vancouver but, win or lose, they have made their parents, school-mates and communities proud.

* * *

• (1400)

VOLUNTEERS

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April 13 to 19 is national volunteer week, when communities across the country will pay tribute to their volunteers and reflect on the countless ways in which they help individuals, organizations and causes.

Volunteering is a prime example of active citizenship. It helps build a sense of community, of belonging, of being a part of this great country. As outstanding citizens whose efforts improve the quality of life for all of us, volunteers are a crucial component of every community.

The Department of Canadian Heritage works with a wide network of volunteer centres and other voluntary organizations to promote national volunteer week, an integral part of the department's mandate, to help ensure the growth, diversity and vitality of the Canadian volunteer sector.

I congratulate all the volunteers in Lambton—Middlesex, soon to be Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, and throughout Canada for all the good work they do in our communities.

* * *

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our youth volunteers will shape the next millennium.

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Today I rise to salute a young man from Tatamagouche, Angus Bonnyman, who is being honoured this week as the youth volunteer of the year for the province of Nova Scotia. Angus has volunteered at the seniors nursing home, the school cafeteria, student organizations and has organized environmental clean-ups. He was the Truro Rotary Club delegate last year to Ottawa for Adventures in Canadian Citizenship.

This is the second year that a student from North Colchester High School has won this prestigious award and I would like to congratulate the principal and staff for their leadership and community spirit which they continue to demonstrate to their students.

Congratulations to Angus and to all volunteers who so generously serve their communities across Canada.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Georgette Sheridan (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April 17 is international hemophilia day.

In this year's budget the finance minister affirmed: "Our commitment to the principles contained in the Canada Health Act is unequivocal. These principles will be maintained". This echoed the Prime Minister's promise in the throne speech to ensure the future of our publicly financed health care system.

Since then the opposition parties have been tripping over each other to pay lip service to health care. It is one thing to make grand statements about the importance of medicare but what really matters is making sure we have the plan to pay for it.

Through good money management our government has provided the means to preserve and strengthen our social programs. By meeting and beating our deficit targets every year since taking office we have been able to put words into practice, committing some \$300 million over the next three years to promote health care in Canada.

Health Canada supports the outstanding work of the Canadian Hemophilia Society in improving treatment for bleeding disorders and ensuring a safe blood supply for all Canadians. Happy international hemophilia day.

* * *

THE REFORM PARTY

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the 1950s and 1960s were good years for Canadians. We had the opportunity for employment of choice, more earnings were in our pockets and we respected our justice system, and so on.

Since the early 1970s the traditional parties have applied their Liberal and Conservative political philosophies in such a manner

causing Canadians to lose ground in their day to day lifestyles. For example, these parties have passed legislation that has eroded the opportunity for employment of choice to almost none, reduced the amount of money that we retain in our pockets and so on.

The United Nations may have said that Canada is the best country to live in but the majority of Canadians are saying even best can be better. We have been there and we can get there again. We have the resources and after 20 years of traditional party mismanagement we have the motivation.

It is time to change our direction and make a fresh start. The Reform Party has the plan.

* * *

ABORIGINAL POLICING

Mr. Elijah Harper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise that the Liberal government recently signed the 100th tripartite policing agreement under the First Nations policing policy with the Shoal Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan. The First Nations policing policy provides First Nations policing services that are professional, effective and accountable to the community.

This policy represents the federal government's commitment to working with First Nations. But in Manitoba only one of these agreements has been signed and that was with the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council. Many First Nations in my riding are ready to talk seriously with the Manitoba government about tripartite policing agreements but they are getting nowhere.

It is time for the Manitoba government to get on with the program.

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[Translation]

LINGUISTIC SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I condemn the attitude of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and that of the Prime Minister, who are lecturing the Government of Quebec on what they think should constitute a consensus in Quebec in the linguistic school boards issue.

• (1405)

This is what 1982 produced: a federal government that treats provincial legislatures as if they were irresponsible, even in sectors where they have exclusive jurisdiction.

I therefore have no hesitation in condemning the federal government's attitude in this matter. There is only one way for the people of Quebec to achieve their destiny without Ottawa pulling a fast one: they must choose sovereignty.

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QUEBEC PREMIER

Mr. Nick Discepolo (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the headline "Federal campaign Bouchard's priority in May", *La Presse* informed us yesterday morning that the premier of Quebec intended to give the Bloc Quebecois a hand in the upcoming federal election. This was confirmed by his press secretary, who said, and I quote; "We are waiting to see what the Bloc Quebecois would like and we will accommodate them".

As a Quebecer, I think Lucien Bouchard has incredible nerve abandoning his responsibilities as premier of Quebec for over one month in order to volunteer his services to help the Bloc Quebecois campaign.

In light of the very difficult social and economic situation in which Quebec finds itself, the premier perhaps has better things to do than warm up crowds for the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. Is this how they govern? Or, better yet, if the members of the Bloc Quebecois are looking for a good slogan for the next election, I could suggest this one: "I have a passion for Quebec but Canada is paying my pension".

* * *

BLOC QUEBECOIS

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the voting yesterday afternoon, some of us seated on this side clearly heard comments of "traitor" "turncoat" and "scum" from the Bloc Quebecois benches, when the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs rose to vote.

Intolerance and personal insults of this type are unacceptable in an open and democratic society. These labels are all the more unacceptable coming from a sector of this House dedicated to destroying the very country those members have a mandate to represent.

[English]

Personal insults are the stuff of bullies and have no place here. The Bloc Quebecois should look at itself in the mirror for the traitors and sellouts there are. It is certainly not the minister. He was only calling for democratic hearings that the separatist Government of Quebec had denied its citizens.

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K.D. LANG

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate Consort, Alberta's very own singer-songwriter K.D. Lang on her decoration yesterday as an Officer of the Order of Canada.

My first introduction to K.D. Lang came back in 1985. Playing for the members of the Alberta legislature, she delivered a high

spirited, foot stomping performance that soon became her trademark.

Since then she has gone on to build a magnificent career in the music business, winning numerous awards and honours, including the Canadian country music awards entertainer of the year in 1989 and album of the year in 1990 for "Twang".

A household name across North America, K.D. Lang is just one of a long line of Canadian entertainers who have not shied from the challenge of succeeding on the world stage. She is living proof that Canadian musicians can and do compete with anybody anywhere, not because of government assistance or policy but because of doing what they are good at.

To K.D. Lang a hearty congratulations on being named to the Order of Canada.

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[Translation]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is a day of mourning, two weeks before an election may be called. The people of Quebec must remember that the present Prime Minister was the one responsible for the isolation of Quebec during the night of the long knives in April 1982. The Constitution, which does not acknowledge Quebec and restricts its powers, was unanimously rejected by the National Assembly of the day.

The people of Quebec must remember that the present Prime Minister was the one who made a promise in the last referendum debate to recognize distinct society in the Constitution, a veto for Quebec, and respect for areas of jurisdiction. That same Prime Minister reneged on his promises as soon as the referendum threat was past.

Whether in the next election or the next referendum, the people of Quebec must remember that the Liberal Party of Canada has but one goal: to annihilate Quebec's distinctiveness.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOM

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom is about human dignity. Indeed its preamble states: "Whereas Canada is founded upon the principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law". I am therefore honoured and privileged to rise today to mark its 15th anniversary.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms reflects our unique Canadian identity. It enshrines a balance between citizens individual rights and societal responsibilities and between citizens

and governments. It enshrines a balance between the power of parliaments and the power of the courts. It enshrines a system of checks and balances that safeguards against the abuse of power.

The charter is a milestone in Canadian history and a tribute to the ingenuity of our people. Truly we can all take pride in our charter which reflects the soul of our Canadian citizenship.

* * *

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know the challenges facing youth today as they make the transition from their education to employment. We now have at the federal level a number of programs, funding for those programs and services available to assist these young people in meeting their challenges.

In London West we co-operatively organized a youth information fair that showcased these programs and services offered and provided young Londoners with valuable work experience.

Held at the Junior Achievement Centre in London West, the fair brought together representative youth with potential partners and organizers of the various programs. Information was provided in areas of entrepreneurship, service and internship, employment opportunities and partnering team activities with a group in the London area called Team London for Youth, a partnership between business, government, non-government service clubs and the boards of education.

Throughout the info fair I was really struck by the level of commitment from those input organizations and their commitment to helping our youth at the community—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend I attended the NDP convention in Regina as an observer. Tommy Douglas would not be pleased to see that special interest groups and unions have hijacked the agenda of the party he created.

A recurring theme at the convention was that the NDP exists not to form government but to lobby the Liberals to spend more on big government programs. The cost to the taxpayer of all the resolutions passed was never a topic of discussion.

Not only was there a lack of effective debate on the issues discussed at the convention, there was a complete absence of debate on other major issues that face Canadians. Where was the

debate on justice issues like the Young Offenders Act, criminal justice and prison reform and gun registration?

Where was the debate on democratic issues like giving people more control over their MPs between elections, making Parliament work better and giving Canadians a direct say in the affairs of their country? And for a federal political party to remain silent on national unity during the entire convention was a serious oversight indeed.

The federal NDP has evolved into something that acts more like a pressure group—

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[Translation]

BLOC QUEBECOIS

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago, on April 17, 1982, the Government of Canada unilaterally patriated the Canadian constitution, in spite of the unanimous opposition of all the political parties in Quebec.

At the time, 73 of the 75 members of Parliament representing Quebec let their province down and supported the current Prime Minister and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who said: "From now on, fate will favour the Canadian government. Even a united front by the ten provinces cannot force the Canadian government to move. By achieving a creative balance between the provinces and the central government, the federation will last 1,000 years".

Unfortunately, the Bloc Quebecois did not exist at the time. But now, there is, at the federal level, a party whose mandate is to protect the rights and interests of Quebecers.

Fortunately, the Bloc Quebecois is here today.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw to the attention of members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Martin C.M. Lee, member of Parliament and Chairman of the Democratic Party of Hong Kong.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1415)

[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, exactly 15 years ago, in 1982, the present Prime Minister

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was in Ottawa, and the Canadian government patriated the Constitution against the wishes of the Government of Quebec, the Quebec National Assembly and the vast majority of Quebecers.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister or the Acting Prime Minister the following question: How can he say the Constitution of 1982 is legitimate, when Quebec, when no government in Quebec, whether headed by sovereignists or federalists, ever recognized this Constitution?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Constitution Act, 1982 has been in effect for 15 years, we can now judge the tree by its fruits.

This Constitution brought us the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and is popular throughout Canada, including Quebec. It has reinforced the control of provinces over their natural resources; it has strengthened the position of French across Canada in its rights and freedoms—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Dion: —it has enshrined equalization, nearly half of which goes to Quebec, and has also provided for a bilateral amending process, when necessary, involving the Parliament of Canada and a provincial legislature.

That is not bad. Of course there is room for improvement. For instance, we could have a better amending formula, better recognition of Quebec. There is always room for improvement, but on the whole, it is quite an achievement.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is rather sad to see members from Quebec applaud the Constitution of 1982, and I think of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who was part of a government that never recognized this Constitution, and the Minister of Human Resources Development, a former assistant to Claude Ryan, who condemned this Constitution. This is what happens to some Quebecers when they become ministers in Ottawa.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, I assume, is the Acting Prime Minister today. I agree, we must judge the tree by its fruits. Does the minister want us to forget the past, the role his own leader, the Prime Minister, has played for 30 years? Does he want us to forget that the Prime Minister's entire career was marked by his systematic opposition to Quebec? Does he want us to forget that this Prime Minister spent his entire career trying to put Quebec down and put it in its place? How can the minister expect Quebecers to be proud of what the Liberal Party of Canada perpetrated in 1982?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I think the sarcastic remarks we just heard are irresponsible. I will simply say that we owe this Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the Minister of Justice at the time.

I may also recall that, at that time, Quebecers were more inclined to support the Prime Minister of Canada, as was borne out by the polls. There has been a lot of mythologizing in this respect. I think that some day we should have a substantive debate on the Constitution Act, 1982, and the ensuing benefits for Canada, including Quebec. I wish they would stop demonizing the current Prime Minister and that some day we could have an intelligent debate on the future of Quebec within Canada. It is very difficult to have one now, considering what was said by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to have this debate with the Prime Minister on this very day, 15 years after the patriation of the Constitution. I would have liked that very much.

• (1420)

If the minister wants this debate, is he willing to let federal Liberal members go to every riding in Quebec, and sign this Constitution on behalf of Quebecers and defend it against Quebec sovereignists and federalists who never accepted this Constitution?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are demonizing the Constitution. They are incapable of discussing this calmly to see what exactly is so appalling. If we showed it to the UN, would they say: "Good heavens, this Constitution is unacceptable from the human rights point of view".

Of course not. They could not do that, nor could they say that the province of Quebec does not have very broad responsibilities, compared with what we see in other federations. They could never say the federation has not been decentralized since 1982. It has been decentralized in several areas and we are clarifying the roles of the various levels of government. Only yesterday, in the case of British Columbia, we signed an agreement clarifying the roles of governments in fisheries.

Good federalism is clarifying roles with respect to manpower, the environment and social housing. But of course the opposition is not interested in such a debate. They only want to demonize what has been done by the present Prime Minister.

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 15 years after the Constitution was unilaterally patriated, after two abortive attempts at constitutional reform, after a series of unkept promises made on the eve of the 1995 referendum, the federal government has nothing more to offer Quebecers. It has therefore decided to take the hard line and fight the Quebecers' right to self determination.

Oral Questions

I would like to ask the Prime Minister or whomever is replacing him whether he acknowledges that there is a constitutional problem given that no government in Quebec, federalist or sovereigntist, has wanted to recognize the Canadian Constitution in the past 15 years?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would indeed be desirable to reach an agreement that would enable a Quebec government that believed in Canada to return to the constitutional fold. There is no disagreement on that point.

The disagreement is as follows: Do we judge Canada and its blessings solely on a dispute over certain aspects of the Constitution? In my opinion, this would be a serious mistake. Instead, we should look at what Quebecers and Canadians have accomplished together, at how the country we built together is the envy of billions of people, and ask ourselves how we got here. We should look especially at what giving up the solidarity uniting them in a great federation means to Quebecers and Canadians.

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is rather surprising to hear the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs say that neither Bourassa nor Johnson believed in Canada. It is very surprising indeed.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mrs. Venne: Does the person replacing the Prime Minister acknowledge that it is the current Prime Minister who is guilty of going against the wishes of Quebecers in 1982, that all attempts to rectify the situation since have failed and that the only solution this government accepts is to ensure that Quebec no longer has the means to decide its own future?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think I already answered all those questions.

I will have to repeat what I said, but I realize that it is impossible to find out from the Bloc Québécois exactly what it is they do not like in the Constitution Act, 1982.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Dion: We have said that we would prefer an amending formula giving a veto to all the major regions in the country and ensuring stronger recognition of Quebec in the Constitution.

We are in fact trying to convince all Canadians of this. Generally speaking, however, the Constitution is a good one. That does not preclude our moving forward and enjoying a quality of life that is among the highest in the world. It does not preclude our recognizing that we can reach the point where the OECD says we are one of the countries in the best economic health to face the new century.

Would we have all this if we did not help each other as Canadians? This is the real issue, and we are prevented from debating it with the people whose sole focus is to demonize the Prime Minister.

* * *

• (1425)

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it seems we have all been transported to the set of "Let's Make A Deal". It is like this country is suddenly being governed by Prime Minister Monty Hall. Pearson, salmon, cod, patronage appointments, government handouts galore. The only people who will not be walking away with a Liberal gift in the next little while are the 1.4 million unemployed Canadians.

Since the Prime Minister appears so preoccupied with passing out his pre-election goodies, what does he have to offer the 1.4 million unemployed Canadians in the country?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whenever we go to the people we can offer the success in creating close to 800,000 jobs and the pledge that we will build on that to do much better than ever could be contemplated by the discredited Reform Party program.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the country currently has the worst string of jobless numbers since the great depression. That is a fact and the government knows it. One would think the Liberals would be trying to come up with some new ways to put Canadians back to work, but the government is so void of ideas that it wants to call an election after only three and a half years in office.

Does the Prime Minister have anything new to offer unemployed Canadians or does he still believe, as he said during the CBC town hall meeting, that some are lucky, some are unlucky and that's just life?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member and the members of his party were truly concerned about the plight of the unemployed, they would have supported the government when it brought in the infrastructure program, when it brought in programs to deal with tourism, when it brought in programs to deal with education, when it brought in programs to deal with research and development.

The fact is the Reform Party voted against every single measure, whether youth unemployment or summer jobs. Every measure the government brought in the Reform Party opposed. On the other hand, it is understandable why it has opposed these measures. The

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House leader made a reference to what the Reform Party has had to say about its program for the unemployed.

[Translation]

I quote from the taxpayers' budget, which is the Reform Party talking about what it would do: "The short term employment impact of the Reform Party program is negative but manageable". How much unemployment is manageable? How much human suffering is the Reform Party prepared to put up with? How much degradation of families from coast to coast does the Reform Party want to recommend in order to put in place its archaic policies?

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the minister can huff and puff and bluff all he wants. He can talk about documents that are years old. We could go back to when the government was in opposition and see what it said when it was over on this side. That is the debate that will occur in the next election and I look forward to that.

In the past three and a half years the Liberals have done little to put Canadians back to work. The minister talked about programs. I guess there were not enough canoe museums, hotels and armouries to go around, only enough for Shawinigan. There are 1.4 million unemployed, two million to three million underemployed and one in four Canadians worried about losing the job they have today. That is the Liberal legacy.

In 1993 the Prime Minister said that he had the plan. Is his only plan in 1997 to have all the unemployed move to Shawinigan?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ink is barely dry on the two-year-old taxpayers' budget and already Reformers deny it. Is there no policy the Reform Party will stand behind?

The taxpayers' budget is two years old and we reject it. The false start, six months old, we reject it.

• (1430)

Time and time again members of the Reform Party stand up in this House and deny what other members of the Reform Party have said. It is why so many of them have already decided to leave.

Every single policy reform of the Reform Party contradicts itself. The only consistent factor the Reform Party puts forward is its inconsistency.

We will match any one of our budgets against anything that we have said. We stand behind our first budget. We stand behind our second budget. We stand behind our third budget. We stand behind our fourth budget. We look forward to bringing in four more.

LINGUISTIC SCHOOL BOARDS

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for months now, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has been saying there must be a reasonable consensus before the government can go ahead with the constitutional amendment requested by Quebec. Yesterday, he finally admitted that there was consensus on the issue in Quebec, but that he would do everything in his power to include Alliance Quebec in that consensus.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the only reason his government is requiring public hearings on the eve of a federal election is to satisfy a pressure group, Alliance Quebec, an ally of the federal Liberals, whose view it values more than that of all allophone, anglophone and francophone MNAs, who were democratically elected in Quebec and who voted unanimously in the National Assembly?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was still good news. The Government of Canada said that it supported the proposal to amend the Constitution put forward by Quebec. We approve it and we are going to defend it. This will be done: it is still good news.

What is so scandalous about having a parliamentary committee on an issue as important as this one, which involves language, religion and education? Why is this a problem? Why is the official opposition unable to accept good news? Is it because it is afraid that good news, by definition, will be interpreted by Quebec as additional proof of the benefits of a united Canada?

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of rambling on, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs should repeat what he said yesterday on RDI. He said that people would have to vote Liberal in the next election if they wanted the constitutional amendment to be approved, because it would not be done before the election. That is what he said.

An hon. member: That is blackmail.

Mrs. Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, it is truly unacceptable and shameless blackmail.

My question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister. Will he admit that he can, if he wishes, pull out all the stops and have his government approve the constitutional amendment before the election, even if it means postponing it?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I note that the official opposition is applauding the idea of voting Liberal. That is already progress.

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Second, what I said was that, if in fact it cannot be done before the election, people will know that if they vote for the Liberals they are voting for candidates that support the amendment. It will be an interesting piece of information. I fail to see how it is such a problem

And finally, as for how long it will take, it will take far less time than it took the Government of Quebec. The Government of Quebec, which was elected in September 1994, only put the proposal forward last February 7, only presented the exact wording of the amendment March 24, and only approved it last Tuesday, after waiting six days for the leader of the official opposition to come back from holiday.

That was very nice of Premier Bouchard, but it shows where his priorities lie.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals want to run on their record in the next election. That is some record.

• (1435)

The government has spent millions of dollars to build armouries in the ridings of the Minister of Health, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister; millions of dollars to build hotels and canoe museums in Shawinigan; millions more to build golf courses, town hall canopies, boccie courts and other things through the infrastructure program; and has given half a million dollar expense accounts to patronage appointees. It is three and a half years of waste, mismanagement and spending.

Is pork-barrel spending the Liberal government's idea of a job creation policy?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is \$50 million put into the Business Development Bank of Canada to finance small and medium sized business pork-barrelling? Is \$50 million put into the Farm Credit Corporation to help with rural diversification pork-barrelling? Is \$800 million put into the Foundation for Innovation so that Canadian universities and teaching hospitals can spawn the new economy pork-barrelling? Are tuition credits, helping students to go back to school and helping parents to save for their children's education pork-barrelling?

No. It is the result of sound policy that will build a great country. The Reform Party ought to get on board.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we just heard the Minister of Finance brag about all this new spending when taxpayers cannot afford to pay their own bills, much less the bill for taxes that he wants to squeeze out of them.

Let us listen to the record. Unemployment insurance premiums are up by \$900 million. Corporate tax revenues are up \$1.3 billion. Revenues from the GST are up \$700 million. Other revenues are up \$1.3 billion. And the list goes on. He has even squeezed taxpayers for \$3.5 billion more in personal taxes.

What are cash strapped Canadians getting in return for all this extra money, other than the worst string of jobless numbers since the great depression and a pitiful job creation program?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at what has happened.

Since we have taken office unemployment insurance premiums, which under the Conservatives were supposed to go to \$3.30, are now down to \$2.90. The last three years the Tories were in power they went up every year. We have brought them down the last three years.

The hon. member wants to talk about tax cuts. How about the tax cuts and the credits that were given to students to enable them to go back to school? How about the tax credits given to disabled Canadians to level the playing field? How about \$600 million in new tax credits for poor children to give them a decent shot?

The hon. member objects to the fact that the government's revenues from corporations are going up. He ought to understand that they are going up because business is better and the economy is booming. That is a good thing. It is not a bad thing.

* * *

[Translation]

LINGUISTIC SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister or anyone who aspires to take his place.

Yesterday, as I listened to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs answer questions, I could almost hear Pierre Elliott Trudeau back in 1982. Once again, the government was busy denying the Quebec National Assembly's legitimacy and thumbing its nose at the people of Quebec by interfering directly in matters that come under the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that, through the arrogant attitude of his Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, his government is setting itself up as the judge of democratic decisions reached by the national assembly?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I understand the question correctly, the hon. member is saying that we are the judges of what goes on at the national assembly. It has done what it believed it had to do in good

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conscience. It is now up to the Parliament of Canada to do what it believes it has to do in good conscience.

We, in the Government of Canada, believe that the national assembly made a good decision.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister told us he was proud to have unilaterally patriated the Constitution.

How can the Prime Minister be proud of continually going over the head of the national assembly? Does he not, in fact, take pride in showing contempt for Quebec's institutions?

• (1440)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, naturally, when one wants to justify something as serious as secession but really has no reason to break up a country as successful as Canada, one has to make up serious reasons, allege some conspiracy or other appalling deeds. I forget the exact words the leader of the official opposition used earlier to describe these actions.

I challenge you to show the Canadian Constitution in other countries around the world and find one where it is described as appalling. Where will you find another country where the linguistic minority enjoys as many development possibilities as in Canada, and Quebec in particular, whose level of responsibility would be the envy of any other federated entity in the world? Where is the scandal? What is deplorable is that the only way the official opposition can justify secession is by making the current Prime Minister of Canada out to be a monster.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the cod fishery has been terribly mismanaged by the federal government. The most recent report of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans says that the stock is still extremely low. Yet the minister today, on the eve of an early election, announced that the cod fishery off Newfoundland would be reopened.

Why is the minister risking a resource so valuable and important to the Atlantic economy?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Secretary of State (Veterans)(Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister made a very limited fisheries announcement today that was recommended by the FRCC.

The total allowable catch announced is lower than that recommended by the FRCC.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's decision will at best create a few short term jobs. The catch will be far too small to even reopen idle fish processing plants.

This move will virtually make certain that Newfoundland fisheries and fishing communities cannot survive, all to net a few more Liberal votes in the upcoming election.

What is the minister's real concern? Is it the survival of the cod fishery or the survival of the Liberals?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Secretary of State (Veterans)(Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assure my hon. colleague that we will both survive.

The fishery announcement today, as I indicated, was recommended by the FRCC. All the information that will be gained by this test fishery is vital to measure the stocks and to find out exactly where we stand in the fishery.

In fact what was done today was recommended by the FRCC and the fishing community.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN CULTURE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister.

Prominent members of Quebec society are rallying behind Pierre Falardeau and his film project on the Patriotes of 1837, which has been turned down by Telefilm Canada. Telefilm is being accused of political censorship. Not all that long ago, the heritage committee called together the major Canadian cultural institutions, including Telefilm and the Canada Council, in order to find out what they were doing to promote national unity.

Is the Acting Prime Minister aware that transforming her department into a propaganda tool at the service of its government has sullied the reputation of independence and integrity the major Canadian cultural institutions have hitherto enjoyed?

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the so-called propaganda the hon. member talks about has done a great deal to assist Canadians.

Let me point out some of things the CIO has done. It has set up programs to promote exchanges in sharing among Canadians, such as the recently organized Canada student exchange project. The CIO has used the community leadership program to work with community leaders, bands and institutions across the country. The CIO has done a great deal of work to promote Canada's richness and diversity to all Canadians.

Oral Questions

• (1445)

We do not need the hon. member to talk to us about propaganda. We have seen how the party across the way used an enormous amount of money to promote propaganda on its behalf.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is in the right church, but the wrong pew, as they say. I suppose it is still better to mishear something than not to hear anything at all. I was, however, referring to a specific case, the film by Pierre Falardeau.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is also continuing his propaganda activities. Despite the demands of the Bloc Québécois and the Government of Quebec, he is maintaining the criteria of promoting national unity as one of the yardsticks for awarding grants.

Does the minister realize that, by refusing to do away with this indecent criterion, she too is putting propaganda before Canadian culture?

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the objective of the Department of Foreign Affairs is to promote Canadian culture abroad, and in order to do so, we make use of the forms of culture available to Canadians, Quebecers included. This is one of our government's objectives.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Members of all parties in the House recognize that Canada's volunteer and charitable sectors welcome and are delighted with the enhanced tax incentives brought forward by the finance minister to assist charitable giving.

At the same time we recognize that in the last ways and means motion there were some unintended adverse consequences.

Could the minister assure the House that the government will undertake and is undertaking consultations with the charitable sector to ensure that the unintended or adverse consequences will not come about?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member just outlined, we have made it a priority in our budgets to help charity raise additional funds. A great deal of the leadership for this has come from the chairman and the membership of the finance committee. While we have enhanced the generosity of the system, we have also acted to ensure its integrity.

The suggestion has been raised by the member that a particular measure dealing with loan backed transactions may be too broadly drafted at present. I assure the member the government is consulting with and will continue to work with the charitable sector to ensure the legislation has neither adverse nor unintended consequences.

* * *

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, let us look back at the government's shopping list: \$745 million spent and no helicopters, \$2 million spent to assuage Brian Mulroney, and \$260 million spent on Pearson airport and not one shovel of earth moved.

Is this the Liberal idea of taxpayers dollars well spent?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned Pearson airport. Interestingly enough I read in today's paper that the leader of the third party said that it was money for absolutely nothing.

Is a new crosswind north-south runway at Pearson International Airport nothing? Is firefighting equipment at Pearson International Airport nothing? Is the new de-icing facility at Pearson International Airport nothing? That is on what the \$185 million was spent at Pearson International Airport.

Which one of these safety and environmental capital projects at Pearson would the hon. member call nothing?

• (1450)

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is small wonder they call this portion of the day question period. We do not get any answers from over there. We ask a perfectly legitimate question and we get a bunch of razzle-dazzle and a question in return. Since this is question period I will try once more for an answer from the other side.

Since the government likes to be known as job creators, how does it expect to explain to the electorate that after spending \$260 million on Pearson airport not one job has been created?

Perhaps, if it had been handled correctly, it could have been one of the biggest infrastructure programs to take place under this mandate.

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member tries to leave a perception with the Canadian people but the Canadian people will not buy it. They understand the government protected them from the lobbyist money that was to be paid out and demanded by that private consortium.

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The reality is that the government spent the \$185 million I just spoke about on all those environmental and safety capital projects that are so necessary at Pearson airport.

Pearson was not the only airport the government invested in. What about the Calgary airport? Is the hon. member against us spending money to improve capital safety projects and environmental projects at that airport? How about Edmonton and the \$127 million spent on that airport? What about the \$45 million spent on the Vancouver airport? What about the \$120 million spent on the Montreal airport?

We have a national airport policy that will put decision making into the hands of local authorities to make them the economic jewels they so rightly are.

* * *

[Translation]

DEFICIT

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Two months ago, the official opposition pointed out to the minister that his deficit projections of \$19 billion for the 1996-97 fiscal year seemed totally wrong. The minister refused to admit his mistake and tried to tell us that, in the two months that would follow, the figures might vary enormously. Now, the figures are in for 11 months out of 12, and they show that the deficit stands at \$7.8 billion, which is far below the minister's forecasts.

Either the minister voluntarily overestimated his deficit to make the major cuts imposed on the provinces and the unemployed more palatable, or the government is in the dark and the minister is incapable of coming up with a credible forecast. Which is it?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, when I tabled the budget, I said that the deficit for the current year would not exceed—meaning it will be below—\$19 billion, and it is definitely the case.

I also said that we did not have the figures for the months of January, February and March. We still do not have the figures for March. When we get these figures, we will certainly have a clearer picture.

I should also remind the member that, historically speaking, there always are adjustments ranging from \$4 billion to \$6 billion at the end of the year. Finally, the member should know that the fact that the deficit is going down is not bad news but good news.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, BQ): Mr. Speaker, given that 84 per cent of the deficit reduction for the first 11 months was achieved at the expense of unemployed

workers, welfare recipients, sick people and students, it is a bit ridiculous for the other side to applaud.

Since the minister has more room to manoeuvre every month, to the point where he will achieve a zero deficit by the year 2000, will he pledge to pay back the money he took from the provinces and from unemployed workers, welfare recipients, sick people and students?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has the wrong government in mind. He may be referring to some provincial governments, but certainly not to this government.

The first reason why we are ahead is because we did not have to use our contingency reserve. The second reason is that our revenues are on the rise, because the economy is on rise. The third reason is that our interest rates are lower than expected. Again, this is all good news.

* * *

• (1455)

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, page 92 of the red book says:

—Conservatives made a practice of choosing political friends when making—
thousands of appointments—

In October the *Hill Times* reported that 3,000 Liberals have been appointed to patronage positions since 1993.

I look at the title of the red book, *Creating Opportunity*. Like the 1.4 million unemployed Canadians I have to ask myself creating opportunity for whom.

I have a question for the Prime Minister. Do 1.4 million unemployed Canadians have to take out Liberal memberships in order to get jobs?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the appointments made by the government have been made on the basis of competence and merit. We do not believe people should be excluded because of their political affiliation.

I thank my hon. friend for holding up the red book. It helps me to say that Liberals are proud of our record but the Reform Party is running away from its record.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the 20 for 20 record of the Prime Minister in appointing loyal Liberals to the Senate is far worse than the Tories he complained about in the red book.

Page 93 of the red book has a list of statistics on the cynicism of Canadians toward politics. A recent Environics poll found that 73 per cent of Canadians think the Prime Minister has done a bad job.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister think his thousands of patronage appointments have reduced cynicism in Canada?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an example of the ridiculous analysis of the Reform Party is the one used about the Senate. The Senate is a partisan legislative body like the House of Commons. Why would the government want to maintain a Tory majority there ad infinitum?

The hon. member's comment is only an example of how ridiculous their analysis is and why, as I said and I repeat, the Liberals have reason to be proud of their record. Once again it has been proven why the Reform Party has nothing else to do but run away and hide from its record.

* * *

GRAIN

Mr. Bernie Collins (Souris—Moose Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food.

It was reported in United States news today that Canada has agreed to limit the sales of wheat to the United States market to 1.5 million tonnes.

Would the minister tell the House and the farmers of western Canada the real situation concerning shipments into the U.S. market?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sometimes wonder what part of the word no these people fail to understand. Let me be clear.

There is no gap. There is no limit. There is no agreement. There is no inclination on the part of Canada to move in that direction.

Our grain trade with the United States is fair. It is fully within the rules of the WTO and the NAFTA. It has been investigated three times by the United States. On every occasion Canadian grain trading practices have been vindicated and we shall continue to defend ourselves.

* * *

COMPUTER PROGRAMMING

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Prime Minister or the spokesman for the government today. It concerns what in the computer world is called the millennium problem, the problem concerning the year 2000.

As the hon. member might know, many of the old mainframes left only two digits rather than four digits for dates. To change that on a global basis will require hundreds of billions of dollars. It will also have a major impact on the Government of Canada.

How prepared is the government with its various departments? What is the estimated cost of redesigning the programs? What impact on revenues is expected as private industry will have to undergo hundreds of millions of dollars of costs in rewriting their programs?

• (1500)

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right to mention that question. It is a complex one, not only for the public sector but also for the private sector. We have already spent millions of dollars on it and we have started to look at how our various computer systems could be adapted.

Good progress is being made in that direction but there is still a lot of work to be done and we are at it.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Miloslav Vyborny, Defence Minister of the Czech Republic.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: This is a rather special day for us. On behalf of members, over the past few years we have started a program of bringing distinguished Canadians into the House of Commons to be recognized by us, the representatives of the people of Canada.

[Translation]

We have the honour today of welcoming to this House new recipients of the Order of Canada.

[English]

These 31 men and women from across the country have made outstanding achievements in a wide range of fields from the arts, voluntarism and philanthropy to business, science, education and public service.

I am going to introduce the Order of Canada recipients to you, and to all of the citizens in Canada one at a time. I know that you want to applaud each individually but would you bear with me and hold your well deserved applause until I have called each of their names.

To you, my fellow Canadians, the recipients of the Order of Canada, I would ask that when I call your name to honour you in this place, the most honourable place in Canada, that you stand and stay standing until I have introduced all of you.

The Right Honourable Martial Asselin, Mary Frances Pratt, James Downey, Arthur Horne, James Kenneth Irving, Malak Karsh, Anne-Marie Alonzo, Sarah Anala, Simon Baker, Norman Barwin, Jenny Belzbert, Anthony Dobell, Frank Gunston, Joan Fletcher Harrison, Gerald Hatch, Simma Holt, Mary John, Charles Linkletter, Jean Loiselle, Lawrence Mysak, Sarah Weintraub Paltiel, Marilyn Ruth Peers, Jean-Henri Picard, Grace Davis Pine,

Government Orders

Charles-Albert Poissant, Bernard Riedel, Raymond Setlakwe, Bernard Snell, Charles Alexander Thompson and Irving Zucker. These are the distinguished citizens of the Order of Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I cordially invite all of you to receive our recipients of the Order of Canada in Room 216 for a reception immediately following question period, if you can absent yourselves from your duties.

* * *

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is something of a holiday atmosphere in the House, but I would like to ask the government House leader if the House will be sitting on Monday.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Zed (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think you will find that parties continue to negotiate on a regular basis for a number of issues that are coming forward.

We intend to proceed with Bill C-92, Bill C-93 and to see how our work continues to proceed over the course of the next several days. I want to thank all parties in the House for their co-operation in facilitating the important work that Canadians feel we do in this place.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

FARM DEBT MEDIATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-38, an act to provide for mediation between insolvent farmers and their creditors, to amend the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act and to repeal the Farm Debt Review Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-38, the farm debt mediation act. The purpose of the bill is to change the farm debt review legislation and replace this decade old legislation with a review board system which involves a mediation type service for farmers who are facing seizure of their property by creditors.

First I will discuss the legislation currently in place and then the changes that have been made to it. After that I will discuss issues related to the farm debt review bill. The main provisions of this legislation put in place a review of a farmer's financial affairs, as there was in the old act and the provision of mediation between farmers and creditors to replace the old system which was far more adversarial. I am very familiar with that system. I have worked through it with some farmers.

The bill puts in place an order temporarily suspending the right of creditors to continue proceedings against farmers. The intent of this legislation more than anything else is to hold off creditors that are knocking at the door if the farmers and the board feel there is a possibility of working out a deal that will be beneficial to the creditors and the farmer involved. That is the purpose of the act.

The new system would replace the appointed panel members with mediators who would be hired after a bidding process. It allows a farmer facing insolvency to apply for up to a 30-day stay of proceedings. Then a farmer could renew this 30-day stay of proceedings for up to a total of 120 days.

In complicated cases, an expert on debt and the reorganization of debt could be hired to prepare an assessment of the farmer's situation. That was done under the old system as well.

• (1510)

The main change in the process is to move to a system which involves more mediation. In fact I know from personal experience that in many of the cases under the old system it did work more like a mediation process. In a way this formalizes the process that was being used before this change to the act.

The appeal board is made up of farmers who are considered to be financial experts and would be available to hear complaints about decisions and to grant, extend or to terminate proceedings. That is what this legislation is about.

The Reform Party's policy, even before the last election, supports measures by government to give farmers the instruments necessary to create more self-reliance. Farmers have used these instruments. Some have been available for some time. Farmers have used them extremely well and are far more capable now of working through complex financial situations, the reorganization of debt and situations like that, than they were a few years ago.

Unfortunately part of the reason they have become so good at reorganizing debt is that some of them have had to do it several times. Agriculture has gone through extremely tough times. Unfortunately, governments—it is not just this Liberal government but the Conservative government before as well—have put in place legislation and programs which have damaged farmers immeasurably.

It is very unfortunate that we even need legislation that is geared to helping farmers reorganize debt or geared to finding some way

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of working with creditors so they have something left should they have financial failure and should the creditors come to collect. I put the blame for that clearly at the feet of governments and again, not just this government. Certainly past Conservative governments have put in several programs which have made things much worse for farmers and which have distorted the market so badly that farmers really do not have the opportunity to work within a free enterprise market situation. Instead they have had to work under the framework laid out by these various government programs. That has harmed the competitive ability of Canadian farmers immeasurably.

Liberal governments before the Conservatives were in power and this current Liberal government have to share some of the blame for those programs which have replaced the market situation which would be much healthier for farmers.

While this legislation makes some improvements to the farm debt review board act, it does not solve the main problem that farmers face today. The main problem that farmers face today directly stems from governments becoming too involved in the agriculture industry. I am not just talking about the Canadian government, although the Canadian government is certainly guilty of this and has been for the past 20 to 30 years. I am also talking about foreign governments. The European governments have dumped completely unfairly on markets around the world that under a competitive situation, under a fair trade situation, would have been markets for Canadian farmers.

In the grain industry, for example, the American government with its export enhancement program depressed world markets around the world. Canadian governments, Liberal, Conservative and now Liberal again, have put in place programs that make it difficult for farmers to do business. That is what they want to do. Farmers have no choice with the present trade agreements.

• (1515)

We have moved to some extent back to the free enterprise system that farmers want, but we have a long way to go and the government certainly has not helped to accommodate that change. It should be chastized for that.

I mentioned in my opening remarks that I know how the old Farm Debt Review Act works. I have seen how the panels work. In some cases it has helped farmers work through some very difficult situations. Unfortunately in most cases it involves the farmers going out of business. At least in some cases they can go out of business without having to carry debt beyond the end of their farming business.

In other cases there have been successes. Some farmers who have used the farm debt review board have managed to keep their farms. In some cases they rent the land from the Farm Credit

Corporation, which became the owner as a result of the farm debt review board process. The farmers were able to farm the land. In some cases they were able to buy the land from the Farm Credit Corporation and other creditors.

The old Farm Debt Review Act worked in some cases. It was good for some farmers. At the same time it considered what the creditors wanted. It succeeded in getting farmers and creditors together to try to work out a deal which would be beneficial to both.

On the other hand, this program involves a lot of overlap with provincial programs which are already in place. I have personal experience. I was hired as a consultant by Alberta agriculture to work with farmers. I know the Farm Debt Review Act duplicated the services which were offered by the province and by the private sector. The duplication was completely unnecessary. Unfortunately that will continue with the new act. In many cases it puts the federal government into provincial jurisdiction.

The services that the mediator and others in the process offer to farmers to work out a deal with creditors are being provided by private consultants and provincial governments. The provinces have hired farmers on a contract basis to do the work. There is a lot of duplication.

Ten years ago when the Farm Debt Review Act was put in place it served a purpose. However, the provinces were fulfilling that role much better than the federal legislation. In the late 1980s farmers were being forced out of business as a result of government involvement in markets, which was depressing the prices at alarming rates.

I believe there was a role for provincial governments. Private consultants were not available and they certainly were not trained to the level which would allow them to help farmers work through their problems. For provincial governments to get involved made sense back then. They provided a service.

I worked for Alberta agriculture. I worked with dozens and dozens of farmers as a business management consultant. I helped them work through their difficult situations.

• (1520)

I have often worked with creditors just as a go between to try to work out a deal, sometimes very successfully but in many cases unfortunately completely unsuccessfully in terms of saving the business. However, often the farmers who were leaving the business because they were being forced out ended up with something. They had a little something to help them.

I think that was a useful service. I really wonder about the necessity of duplicating that service. I now know that private consultants are far better trained, are there and are quite willing to help farmers to work through these very difficult situations and, more important, to work with farmers before the situations become

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so desperate that they go to the farm debt review board or to this new farm mediation system.

I do think there are some improvements in this legislation. For some of the reasons I mentioned earlier this legislation does provide a better framework. However, I have some specific concerns on the amount of money involved. My first concern is that the budget for this process is way too high. It is not just an arbitrary judgment that I make. Right now the Saskatchewan farm debt review board handles about half of all the cases in Canada and the cost is \$700,000. Yet the budget for this new farm debt board is \$2.2 million. It leads one to ask if this government is anticipating that the load of farmers needing this service will increase dramatically. There has to be a reason for a budget being much higher than would seem to make sense when one considers the current budget.

One has to ask whether this government really does anticipate that more farmers are going to end up in serious financial trouble and will need the services of this act to work through financial difficulty, which usually ends in farmers being forced out of business and losing, in many cases, all their assets but at least not having to carry debt beyond the termination of their business.

As members would know, many Reform MPs are farmers or were before they got into this business. Of 52 members of Parliament, we have somewhere between 14 and 17 members who have a farming background, own farms or have worked in the agriculture industry. That is a real high number for a caucus of 52. When we have meetings dealing with agricultural issues it is not unusual, as we have had many times in the past, to have 14 to 16 Reform MPs at these meetings. The interest in agriculture certainly cannot be equaled in any caucus. The level of expertise on agriculture certainly cannot and is not equalled in any other caucus in the House.

The importance that the Reform caucus places on agriculture, on farmers, on ranchers and on others in agricultural business is not equalled by any other caucus in this country. We have shown a commitment to farmers and we are going to continue to do that. We ask farmers, as we ask all other Canadians going into the election, which seems certain to be coming quite soon, to look at everyone's platforms. We ask them to take a good look at the platforms that are being offered in agriculture and in other areas by all the political parties. I then ask them to look at the Reform platform and compare it to the platforms offered by others in the agriculture area and other areas.

• (1525)

Let us have the election fought on issues, not on labels that one party tries to pin on another. Let us not have an election with name calling and dirty politics. I invite any other political party to compare what we offer in agriculture and in the rest of our

platform to theirs. If that comparison takes place during the election campaign, Reform will form the government after the election.

All I ask is that the political parties compare platforms so that Canadians can compare platforms and vote for whomever has the best ideas, the best policies, the best people to carry them out and the best leader. I believe it will prove to be the Reform Party.

Another problem with the legislation is that there is too much political patronage. That should not be a big surprise because members throughout the day have been pointing out Liberal patronages one after the other; all Liberals appointed to the Senate since they came to office. It is unbelievable.

Even under the Mulroney government there was an elected Senator, Stan Waters of Alberta. He happened to be a Reform member. But what is important is that he was elected to the Senate. A precedent was set.

British Columbia has legislation to accommodate elected senators. The premier of British Columbia has asked that senators be elected. Albertans and the Government of Alberta have asked for elected senators. And what do we get? Every senator since the election has been replaced by patronage appointees by the Prime Minister. That is completely unacceptable. That is just the start of the list of patronage appointments. It goes on and on. I am not going to get into the list because I do not have time in my presentation today.

This legislation just sets up space for more patronage appointments. That is completely unacceptable. That alone is reason enough to not support the bill. We do not want to support anything which would allow more spots to be filled by patronage appointments.

This legislation is a minor one, acknowledged. It makes minor changes to the existing Farm Debt Review Act. It is really dealing with a small issue in terms of how many people it affects and it should be dealing with important issues. At least it does offer some changes to improve the existing Act.

I want to congratulate the government for those particular changes. On the other hand, as I have said, there a lot of other things that should have been changed but were not. There is \$2.2 million in the budget, but if we could trust that the government had any ability to forecast accurately, I think farmers should be very concerned because the budget is way beyond what should be required when we consider the present costs.

Instead of dealing with this legislation just before an election, the government should be dealing with some serious legislation to improve grain transportation which would allow competition in the grain transportation system, allow some recourse for farmers to make the railways and grain handlers accountable. But it is not

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doing that. The government should be dealing with legislation that would get rid of the wheat board monopoly and instead improve the wheat board to make it accountable to farmers and to give farmers an option to either market their products through the wheat board or a grain company or on their own. The government did not do that, therefore we are debating this legislation. Much more important legislation should have been debated than this. For that reason I will not take any more time on this legislation.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are not many farmers in the riding of Lévis, but I wanted to speak in this debate nevertheless. In any case, whenever we talk about agriculture in the House of Commons, I have a particular interest in the subject for two reasons.

As a farmer's son, I was aware of these problems from an early age. Reform Party members just said there were a lot of problems in the agriculture and agri-food sectors in Canada today, and especially in Quebec. Why? Because we do not get our fair share of federal spending on agriculture, although we contribute 24 per cent.

Today we are discussing Bill C-38, an act to provide for mediation between insolvent farmers and their creditors. We are talking about this because there is an increasing number of farmers with serious financial problems, in Quebec and in Canada. Why do they have so many financial problems? Because they must operate within an international free trade context which is hard on farmers. And also because the federal government's policies have brought a number of farmers close to bankruptcy and in many cases have pushed them over the brink.

This bill, although not perfect, has the effect of alleviating to some extent the untenable situation of certain farmers. Farmers today have to invest and go deeper and deeper into debt. To have a viable operation, they have to increase their acreage and expand their operations by buying their neighbour's land. Where I used to live, there were seven or eight farmers, but today there is only one farm, one operation.

An individual who has to manage all that has to incur enormous debts and take enormous risks, considering the fact that there is no new generation waiting in the wings. People are not lining up to continue this agricultural tradition. Why not? Because of the enormous investment involved.

You have to have a vocation. You almost have to be a missionary today to be a farmer. It is a very demanding occupation. As the Bloc Québécois critic, the hon. member for Frontenac, said this morning, it is a seven-day-a-week job. It is as demanding as being a

member of Parliament. We have to be here during the week and in our ridings on the weekend to take part in all kinds of activities. It is very demanding.

But do not expect any sympathy from farmers. No Quebec farmers will pity us because of the hours we work, because for years they have been used to working long hours to support their families. If everything works out, when he is old enough to retire, the farmer manages to convince his son or daughter or several sons to take over the farm and take out a farm loan, and then perhaps he will be able to enjoy his retirement.

• (1535)

But for 30 or maybe 40 years, the farmer and his wife have to work very hard. I mention the farm wives because, if there is any sector in Quebec that is a prime example of a family enterprise, it is farming.

Farm wives deserve as much praise as their husbands. The work has been divided up on the farm for years. Often the wife does the books, because the accounting is getting more and more complicated, and then there is all the paperwork to do with the milk.

I grew up with that, so I know what I am talking about. But people often have no idea. I am sometimes horrified to hear city people, of which I am one myself now, people who deserve what they earn and have their own problems but do not have to work the hours that farmers do, making deplorable comments about farmers.

They think the government heavily subsidizes agriculture and supports farmers. So many city folks make comments like this that they have an influence on the lawmakers and the people in government, especially the federal government, and end up convincing them that cuts to agriculture are justified.

This opinion is shortsighted because, if agricultural subsidies are cut, if there is no help for farmers at the primary level, this will have repercussions in the processing industry and then at the tertiary level, where agricultural products are sold to consumers.

I was listening earlier to our excellent agriculture critic, the hon. member for Frontenac, who often reminds us in the Bloc Québécois of the importance of agriculture in Quebec, and no doubt in Canada as well, and in the West, as defended by the Reform Party. But we are not reminded often enough.

Based on my years as the political assistant to Jean Garon, the Quebec minister of agriculture between the Parti Québécois' ascent to power in 1976 and 1996, I would have no hesitation in describing him as the best minister of agriculture Quebec has ever had. He developed a concept that was no longer agriculture, but the concept known as agri-food, which established the link between production, processing and marketing. That forms a whole.

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Mr. Garon used to talk about the importance of self-sufficiency and of buying our own products. This is vital. Why? Because it provided a living for more people in rural areas.

Whatever problem there may be in rural communities in Canada is due to the fact that we have started to ignore agriculture. Without agriculture, the major rural areas could not survive, and I think the problem starts at the grassroots. In other words, we have lost sight of the problems of the farming community, of farm producers, of people who process farm products and of those who sell them. Things are very difficult in the context of globalization.

This bill will ease things a bit for those in difficulty, because all too often we have seen people go bankrupt. I know you know how it works, but it always bears repeating. People get a farm loan, but they often must provide part of the financing themselves.

Parents who want their children to take over the farm sometimes loan some of the proceeds from the sale of their property to their children so they can make up the difference. This means that, at some point, there are two loans outstanding: the farm loan and the parents' loan. The time comes when they cannot be repaid, the operation is no longer profitable, and some of them face bankruptcy.

• (1540)

This legislation softens the edges. It provides for a new procedure to be established at the federal level to allow for mediation, so that people can make arrangements to keep the farm in operation before it reaches the point of going bankrupt.

What good does it do to declare someone bankrupt if no one else wants to buy the property and this agricultural heritage, sometimes built over generations, has to be abandoned for wanting to get out from under a burden of debt that has become excessive for a family? I think this is a good idea.

At report stage, the Bloc Québécois, through its agriculture critic, the hon. member for Frontenac, put forward several amendments in committee. Like the third party, we had concerns. The whole issue of political patronage appointments, among other things, was of concern to us. We would like appointments to be made on a non-partisan basis, putting an end to the practice established in the federal government of rewarding defeated candidates by giving them a position. There will be plenty of them after the next election.

I know that many expect to win in ridings where the hold of the Bloc Québécois is very strong. Soon we will have some of these people sitting on the kind of board that Bill C-38 is seeking to establish.

It is extremely difficult to wrest approval from the Liberals in committee, as is usually the case with the government, for

amendments put forward by the opposition, sovereignist members who are looking after the interests of Quebecers. They cannot support this kind of amendments, because they are in office. So, the amendments are lost.

This does not prevent us from very objectively recognizing that this is a step in the right direction. Because it could save the taxpayers \$1 million, we will vote in favour of this bill at third reading.

The hon. member for Frontenac has pointed out a number of flaws, which were unfortunately not addressed. But when one cannot have the best, one has to settle for second best. Because this bill is an improvement over the existing legislation, we will support it.

I would like to use the time I have left to remind the hon. members that, as I said at the beginning of my speech, Quebec is not getting its fair share of federal spending in agriculture. According to figures from the Quebec Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, we get only about 10 per cent of the federal expenditures in that sector, or some \$311 million.

Yet, Quebec's contribution to Canadian revenues from agriculture represents about 16.4 per cent of the total. The figure goes up to 21.4 per cent if we take into account not just farm production itself, but the whole agri-food industry. In this case, if we take into account only the processing industry, the shortfall is increased by an additional \$201 million.

In the years 1985-86 to 1994-95, when the Conservatives were in office, federal expenditures in Quebec's agri-food industry represented only 9 per cent of the total. During the same period, agricultural revenues from our province amounted to 16.3 per cent of the total. So, for these 10 years, the cumulative shortfall for Quebec totalled \$3 billion. I could go on.

One might have thought the Liberals would have corrected the situation, but no. Things remain the same and Quebec is still being treated unfairly. Let me mention an important point. The figure of \$3 billion resurfaces again. The government abolished the Crow's Nest rate. What was the result? They gave \$3 billion in compensation to western farmers because that was what the Reform Party called for. In this case, Reform Party members deserve credit. They obtained \$3 billion in compensation for western farmers. I do not know what those of us from Quebec did. We asked for our share of compensation as well. Instead of compensation, cuts were made to our agricultural sector.

• (1545)

As it is, we are not receiving our fair share, and they are cutting again. They cut \$107 million in 1995-96; in 1996-97, it was another \$30 million, in addition to the other cuts; in 1997-98, it will be another \$113 million. This is unacceptable. Consumers thought

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they were in purgatory. Now they are headed for hell. Things keep getting worse. We must speak out before the next election.

The point can never be made too strongly. It is true that Reform Party members have spoken about farming because they are looking out for western voters, but I say to them that in Quebec our farmers are suffering as well.

At the federal level, despite the fact we represent 24 per cent of the population, we are not receiving our fair share. As long as we stay in this system, as long as the people of Quebec do not opt for sovereignty, we in the Bloc Québécois will continue to ask for our fair share, because we are paying taxes here in Ottawa.

We demand the equivalent of the \$3 billion for the Crow rate buyout. Unfortunately, although this bill will ease the pain a little for a number of farmers, it resolves nothing. Canada's agriculture minister should show some backbone and resolve the problems; he should reach an agreement with the Government of Quebec to avoid duplication among other things.

Yes, I applauded the amalgamation of the three federal food inspection agencies a few months ago in the House. One came under the Department of Health, another under the Department of Agriculture and a third under another department. They were combined into one agency.

The fact is that it is essential that a stop be put to duplication in this sector and that Quebec receive financial compensation because it is closer to the people. You do not farm in an office in Ottawa. Raising cows, fishing and so on cannot be done in an office in Ottawa. The government must be closer to the community. The closest government is the Government of Quebec. Why not work together more, instead of structuring and regulating, which is sometimes of no use to Quebec?

I will conclude by urging my colleagues opposite, those who, knowing Friday would soon be here, have unfortunately already left, to give the matter some thought. We may not speak about those who are absent, but there are not very many of us here today on Thursday to speak about agriculture, although it is an extremely important sector. If they want to do some more work on the economy, if the Prime Minister is serious when he talks about the economy and "jobs, jobs, jobs", he would deliver speeches aimed at the agricultural community.

There is a line that is funny but true. When it comes to agriculture, certain Liberal ministers are behaving, as Jean Garon used to say, like mosquitos in a nudist colony; they do not know where to start. I apologize for this bit of humour, when the situation is so grim.

[*English*]

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-38. Before I get

into my speech I must commend my Bloc colleague for trying to impress on the House how important agriculture is to Quebec. It has always been appreciated by myself and other Reform MPs that Bloc members take such a unique interest in agriculture. They realize that we have to eat before we do anything else.

• (1550)

Bill C-38 is a quick way of fixing a farmer's problems. It decreases the time of suffering, but I still do not like to see that kind of thing happening.

The Farm Debt Review Act was established in 1986 in response to exceptional circumstances. The late seventies and the mid-eighties were difficult times in the agriculture sector. Family after family was forced to leave farming because it was not profitable. Why was it not profitable? Because of too much government interference.

Some members of Parliament will remember that in 1970 or 1971 the Liberal government of Prime Minister Trudeau was elected. The slogan at that time was we will create a just society. That sounded good. Everybody in western Canada felt that maybe conditions for western farmers would be improved, as well as conditions for western processors and the special crops industry.

The first thing that Liberal government did was increase the wages for grain handlers by 68 per cent in one shot. That was very extreme, although at that time their wages were probably not what they should have been.

That started a whole series of problems. The next thing the government of the day did, because of low grain prices, was to establish a program known as the LIFT program. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if you were around at that time or if you remember that program. That program was designed to encourage farmers to summer fallow their land and to decrease the supply. They were paid \$8 an acre to summer fallow their farmland.

That was a bad mistake. There was a crop failure the following year and the billion bushel surplus that everybody talked about, which was depressing prices, was gone. It was not there because of mismanagement in estimating what was held in reserve. That happened because three or four different grain companies in each town and each grain company, more or less, surveyed how many bushels were in the area, added them together and came up with an estimate which was three or four times higher than it should have been.

In 1972 we had grain prices the likes of which had never been seen before. Prices of \$1.50 per bushel jumped to \$5 and \$6 a bushel. It was inflation. The farmers did very well. They started to be optimistic. People were encouraged to spend money.

The worst thing that happened was that government officials tried to encourage farmers to specialize. If a farmer wanted to

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borrow money to improve his milk herd, or dairy operation or hog operation and wanted \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000, the Farm Credit Corporation would say: "No way. You have to get your act together and direct your energies toward one operation". If you did not borrow at least \$50,000 or \$100,000 you were denied the loan.

That gave farmers the direction to specialize. We saw small operations being closed down and bigger operations starting. Before we realized it, many farmers had a debt load that was beyond servicing when interest rates started, all of a sudden, to jump because of the money supply.

• (1555)

If I had not have been out of the country in 1981 and seen what inflation did in other countries, I probably would not have realized how detrimental it was to our country. However, when 24 per cent interest rates developed and farmers had debt loads of between \$100,000 and \$200,000, their debt load increased by one-quarter each year and they were unable to service that debt load.

This was the just society. I do not know if it was a just society for the bankers, the financiers or for whom. At that time I know there was a big debate on whether we should do away with the Crow and whether we should do certain other things.

I will never forget a program I was watching one night called *Front Page Challenge*. Members might remember Mr. Gordon Sinclair who was one of the specialists on the program. They were talking about the huge recession in the country. All of a sudden Mr. Sinclair could not sit still any more and said: "What recession? Twenty-four per cent interest rates. What recession?" The financial institutions and investors were making huge profits. People did not realize we were losing farmers and business people left and right.

I will never forget the comic made out of the huge Liberal milk cow. Mr. Speaker, you might remember that picture. It showed this huge Liberal milk cow and the western farmers were feeding it as fast as they could. They were scrawny, poor, overworked and looked almost like skeletons compared to the huge cow. While the farmers in the west were feeding this huge Liberal milk cow, they were really feeding the eastern interests. Those interests were collecting the money and getting their 24 per cent interest rates.

The worst of it was that when one has a huge milk cow there is some organic material that has to be disposed of because otherwise it is environmentally unfriendly. Therefore, this organic fertilizer was dumped on the eastern provinces and it pretty well buried them. So we had three little problems. We had the western farmers starving to death. We had the eastern interests getting filthy rich and paying more income tax and the eastern Atlantic provinces being buried by something they did not really like. That was the situation that got western farmers into a huge debt load.

Looking back on the issue today, if we could have avoided the high interest rates at that time, we would have a lot more small business people still in business in western Canada and the family farm might not be in the position that it is today.

However, I want to get back to the debt review board. When we had the old board, it was at least willing to look at farmers who were viable and give them support and try to get them to reorganize.

Bill C-38 is only there, more or less, to get farmers out of business. Once you get to that point, I am a firm believer that just consultation and some advice is not sufficient. As members know, when banks or financial institutions are prepared to take over one's assets they have the best legal advice and the best consultation services available. They do not care about the cost. However, when a farmer is under that type of stress he does not have any financial power. He does not have the economic resources to get that type of advice.

If the government was really diligent and wanted to do something for farmers, it would make funds available to them to get the expert advice and consultation service needed because the banks or financial institutions have the upper hand.

During that time, I think during a Liberal government, I know there was a very big debate about the Crow rate. It think a prop of a crow being hung was brought into the House at that time. There was quite a bit of confrontation here. There was talk that governments were willing to bail out western farmers with the crow to a tune of \$15 billion. That was its values then.

• (1600)

Some farm organizations were stubborn and did not realize how critical the issue was. They felt that it was not enough, was a very bad deal for western farmers and refused it. Fifteen billion dollars in 1978 or 1979 compared to \$1.5 billion today is just a Mickey Mouse amount, peanuts. Big mistakes made in western Canada.

When we look at the grain transportation system we see that we did something in the House in the last year. We bought out the crow with \$1.5 billion and did not have the transportation system in place that should have been there.

We heard from our colleagues from Peace River and Vegreville that farmers are in dire straits today because of the grain in their bins or out in the fields. Bill C-38 will be used probably more than ever before to liquidate farmers.

This is a sad situation. In such a desperate situation some special provisions should be made like we see in many big businesses instead of only having good consultation services available. They ask for bankruptcy protection for a certain time to see whether

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things can be ironed out. They do not have the financial assets to protect themselves.

As the Bloc member pointed out, food is number one. If we cannot protect our food supply industry or our producers, sooner or later the country will fold. That is one point I have always appreciated. Even if we do not agree with a lot of the philosophy of Bloc members on the agriculture committee, this is one point we agree on. Agriculture is most important. A trip to a Third World country or an eastern bloc countries makes one realize the value of food very soon.

I met a young lady who was in Canada with a Chinese trade delegation shortly after I was elected. I asked her what she liked best about Canada after having seen some of it. She said the thing she liked best was our cheap food. I asked her what she meant by cheap food. I had no idea what that meant for the Chinese. She gave an example of a McDonald's in the city where she lived that charged exactly double in Chinese dollars what she would pay for the same hamburger in Ottawa.

I asked her how the amount of money spent on food compared to the earning power in China. She indicated that a high wage earner in China spent about 30 per cent to 50 per cent of his wages on food. We have a food basket cost that is about 11 per cent to 12 per cent of our earning power. That helps us see what kind of a blessing we have in Canada.

• (1605)

As was pointed out by another member, when we talk of farmers being subsidized to produce a product it is a subsidization for the consumer to get a cheaper and better product. They are the beneficiaries.

Let us look at the net income of farmers today. I am using Statistics Canada figures. They indicate that 48 per cent of net farm income comes from off farm jobs. We see what is happening to our food production system. If we do not change the system to a market driven, viable food production one, other systems will collapse along with it.

It is very important to realize that we have gone from a system of specialization. It did not work. Then farmers were told they had to become more efficient. Now we have a system that says we have to diversify. How much can they diversify when 48 per cent of their net farm income comes from off farm jobs?

We also hear that there must be value added industries. When farmers are financially strapped they do not have money to invest in value added industries. Somebody else will do it.

To make the farm economy viable again we must take some strong measures. After the next election I hope we will have a Reform government that is interested in making the system

efficient, viable and self-reliant. That will transfer into other industries and we will have a country that does not need higher taxes or government support. That is the direction the country must go in.

At the Forum of Young Canadians banquet yesterday I saw their energy, interest and dedication to making the country work. They need a system that will look after some of the huge debt put on their shoulders by the government. They could make the country as viable as it should be.

We have the natural, renewable and human resources to do it. We need some expertise that we have not seen in the last 25 or 30 years of Conservative and Liberal governments. They have been directing our industry and have failed us every time.

It is imperative the electorate in the next election looks at the platform of the Reform Party. It proposes huge changes that will give provinces the right direction to do what they do best and will give the federal government the tools to do what it should do to reduce taxes, to bring down the deficit and to make the country a better place to live. We have heard our leader say a number of times that we could provide a better Canada and a better future for Canadian youngsters, for future generations.

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette commenting on Agriculture and Agri-food Canada since it is a very significant portion of our economy.

We are second in the world with the lowest cost of food. We have 29 million people in Canada, an economy of more than \$700 billion, an export industry of \$17 billion and quite a phenomenal growth rate.

With this bill and others the government has focused on the Farm Credit Corporation by providing extended finances, guaranteed loans, long term mortgage programs, vendor loan guarantee programs and agricultural equity development programs.

• (1610)

The hon. member talks about Bill C-38 as putting farmers under faster. The bill is actually a review process if a farmer becomes insolvent. If he gets into financial difficulty it is a process to assist him to go through mediation, to go through review, and to have a stay of proceedings if there is action taken on his assets.

If the hon. member's party formed the government and offered new policies to the public, would he repeal Bill C-38?

Mr. Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague across the way.

I have been trying to say to the House that the farming industry should have never been put in this position. The bill will put farmers out of business. There is no place in the bill to help farmers

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rejuvenate or become viable again. It is a last resort to make the pain a little less so they can get out of business.

That is not what we need. We have seen over the last three decades the farm population decrease to an unbelievable percentage. When I started farming a half section was sufficient to feed a family. Today a two-section farmer cannot survive. He has to have his mate either employed off the farm or he has to be involved in some other venture to make the farm viable.

We are taking jobs away from people who deserve them, The farm family should be on the farm making sure that it is running properly and is efficient and viable. That is why this piece of legislation is so bad. It will not give farmers any hope. It will just lessening the pain a bit of getting out of business. I do not know whether they will go on welfare or try to get into a new business, which is not easy today.

What astounds me is in the 1970s a Liberal government told us day after day that we had to have high interest rates to bring down inflation. We had to kill inflation. We have killed inflation. We have low interest rates and farmers do not have the opportunity to be viable. The passage of Bill C-38 will get them out of the system. It just does not make sense.

On the one hand a 24 per cent interest rate is inflationary. On the other hand the banks feel 24 per cent makes them viable. If it is not inflationary when the banks charge it, why is it inflationary when the farmer pays it? Those are the problems I have with some government policies. They like to interfere.

First we had to specialize and it did not work. Then we had to diversify and it did not work. Now we have to get value added industries, and who knows if that will work? If farmers do not get their fingers into value added industries, other industries will benefit and we will have less farmers rather than more. As I said, farming should never have been put into the position where it required this legislation.

Due to government policy over the last 30 years this has happened. It is not because of the way farmers have operated their farms. They have increased production. They have become more efficient. They have worked harder. The taxation system and the government bureaucrats have forced them off the land. That is very easily proven.

• (1615)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): 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 Mississauga South, health; the hon. member for Davenport, transport; the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton, health.

I have also received notice from the hon. member for North Vancouver that he is unable to move his motion during private members hour on Friday, April 18. It has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence.

Accordingly, I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence. Private members hour will thus be cancelled and the House will continue with the business before it prior to private members hour.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to join in the debate this afternoon on Bill C-38, the Farm Debt Mediation Act.

At the outset I would like to reply very briefly to the comment and question posed to my hon. colleague from Lisgar—Marquette from across the way a minute ago.

The hon. Liberal member referred to the fact that we have very cheap food in Canada. Certainly that is the case and all consumers are very thankful for that. Everyone has to eat and therefore I am sure everyone is thankful in a way.

I remind the member of something that MPs from rural ridings are constantly reminded of, that a cheap food policy is a two edged sword. For the consumers to gain by this type of policy, the producers of the food lose.

She went on to ask if Reform would repeal Bill C-38. At the time we form the next government, we certainly will take a look at all the legislation passed by this failure of a Liberal government from the 35th Parliament and perhaps amend it.

We suggested a number of amendments to Bill C-38, as we have to a lot of bills, most bills that were introduced in this place. Unfortunately those amendments, of which Reform had four, were defeated by the government. That is why we are opposed to this.

The preceding speakers from the Reform Party, the hon. member for Vegreville and the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette, remarked that we are not opposed to the intent of this legislation. There is no party that has a monopoly on good intentions and good ideas.

As amazing as it sometimes seems, even the Liberal Party comes up with some good ideas once in a while.

Mr. Hoepfner: Especially the backbenchers.

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): Especially the backbenchers. All members in this place come up with good ideas from time to time, some good policy suggestions. Some good amendments to legislation are brought forward by people from all political persuasions at committee and in the House of Commons.

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It is unfortunate when we see time after time that the cabinet or the applicable minister cracks the whip and gets the amendments, either at the committee stage or in the House, defeated for purely partisan reasons.

It does not matter that the amendment makes sense. The only reason is that if Reform suggests it, for example, in some cases the Bloc or the other independents, then it is automatically ruled that it does not make sense and it is voted down. "We have the majority on the committees. We have the majority in the House of Commons. We will vote that amendment down". Then they stand in the House of Commons and say "those darn Reformers vote against everything we try to do and every good idea that we bring into this place, those Reformers vote against it".

Is it any wonder? It seems every time we try to introduce amendments to legislation they are voted down. They are ruled out of hand. It is ruled that they are not good amendments simply because they come from Reformers. That is a tragedy to the democratic process and I believe that it puts paid to the red book promise of restoring more free votes and more true democracy to this place. We have seen the exact opposite happen during this 35th Parliament.

• (1620)

The Reform Party is supportive of the intent of Bill C-38. If there is sufficient time before the Liberals decide to go to an election, the bill will be passed because the Liberals have the majority, despite any amendments we bring forward which would be voted down.

The bill is an act to repeal the Farm Debt Review Act, a decade old farm debt review board system with debt mediation service for farmers facing seizure of their property by creditors. As a farmer I was fortunate that I never had to go through that process but I have had many friends and neighbours who during the tough times of the last 15 to 20 years in agriculture unfortunately had to face that situation.

Although they varied from region to region and province to province, the farm debt review boards did a lot of good work and certainly helped some farmers through some tough times with their creditors. They helped farmers as much as possible to meet their financial obligations. It is certainly a worthy and good intention that this bill is being brought forward to replace that old act.

The new act provides for a review of the farmer's financial affairs, for mediation between the farmer and the farmer's creditors for the purpose of reaching a mutually acceptable arrangement and in order to temporarily suspend the rights of creditors to take or to continue proceedings against the farmer's assets if the farmer were to request it.

Some concerns were brought forward not only by Reformers but also by a number of organizations and individuals who appeared

before the standing committee when Bill C-38 was before the committee. I will run down the list to indicate to the viewing public that many witnesses came forward with concerns about this bill. They suggested possible amendments at the committee stage.

Included were the Alberta farm debt review board, the Canadian Bankers Association, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the National Farmers Union, the Ontario farm debt review board, the Quebec farm debt review board and the Saskatchewan farm debt review board. A number of submissions were made and a number of concerns were raised at the committee stage about the content of the bill. My colleagues from Vegreville and Lisgar—Marquette raised some concerns as well.

One concern is that the budget seems fairly substantial in the sense that the Saskatchewan farm debt review board is currently handling half of all the cases in Canada for a total of only about \$700,000 whereas the estimated total mediation budget under this new legislation will exceed \$2.2 million. This is clearly a case where the bureaucracy is looking after itself, ensuring it will have ample funds available, as we have seen in so many different departments and ministries, to ensure its longevity regardless of what happens in the upcoming election.

Another concern, which we have had with a lot of legislation that has passed through this place, is with potential patronage under this new act. For instance, the appeal boards are to be appointed by the minister without being reviewed or approved by Parliament or the standing committee.

• (1625)

As we saw with Bill C-72, which for some reason has been swallowed by a black hole, the wording in the legislation states that the minister would have the power to appoint the board of directors and that he in his infinite wisdom could hold an election for one or more of the board members.

I did a survey, which I referred to a few hours ago, on Bill C-34. I referred to the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board had refused to allow me access to the mailing list of the producers who reside in the riding which I am honoured to represent in the House of Commons. I felt that was a bit of a tragedy in the sense that MPs want to serve their people accurately. That is the guiding creed of the Reform Party of Canada, to represent constituents accurately where there is the ability to deduce what the majority view of a group in a riding is.

In this case I wanted to target permit book holders. They are the ones who will be the most affected by Bill C-72. I was unable to obtain the list. The Canadian Wheat Board even refused when I told it I would pay to have the labels printed. I said them I would send them the questionnaires. They could look at the questions. I was not trying to hide anything. It was not anti-wheat board propagan-

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da. It was a straightforward questionnaire containing ten questions. I wanted to survey permit book holders. It refused.

An hon. member: What democracy.

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): Exactly. What democracy. How is a person supposed to represent their constituents accurately?

I did not want to dilute the results of the survey by sending out a larger mailing which would include people who would not have the same interest in Bill C-72 because it would not affect their livelihood.

I mailed it out to a larger mailing list that I was able to obtain. I had 124 responses, which is fairly comprehensive for an area as small as the Peace River agricultural area. I do not know exactly how many permit book holders there are in my area because the wheat board will not tell me. I have heard that there are somewhere in the neighbourhood of 450 to 500 permit book holders. So a return of 124 is substantial.

Unfortunately I do not have the time to go into all the survey questions asked, but I would like to explain the first question. The question I asked the producers was the following: "There has been a lot of discussion on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. Overall, how would you describe your attitude toward the Canadian Wheat Board?" Then I gave them the choices: "Eliminate. Major overhaul is needed. Minor overhaul. Unsure. Should the wheat board include other crops? Keep it as it is".

While 9 per cent of the respondents wanted to completely eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board, 70 per cent indicated they wanted a major or minor overhaul. I believe this indicates that farmers want to retain the Canadian Wheat Board but they want to see some substantive changes. They want choice.

Unfortunately, as with so many pieces of legislation, the government simply does not get the message that the farm community is trying to send it.

The minister did a mail ballot on the other legislation. I do not know how much it cost the taxpayers. Basically it was an all or nothing question: "Do you believe that barley should be included as it is now under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board or do you think that the Canadian Wheat Board should get out of it altogether?" There were no other options for farmers to choose.

• (1630)

What we saw, what we told the minister and what farm groups and individual farmers were telling him—I am sure they were because they were telling us this—was that it was a status quo question. It did not solve anything.

The fact is that farmers are still being sent to jail for trying to market their own product. This does not solve anything. Farmers

recognize that. Likewise, Bill C-38 is not the answer. That is why we proposed four amendments to Bill C-38.

We proposed that the bill be amended to allow the standing committee on agriculture to review the appointment of the administrators. What would be wrong with that? Would not the farm community support that? Obviously the committee would be the place. It has the expertise and knowledge and witnesses could be called, if necessary, to look at who was being appointed as administrators.

We proposed an amendment to insert a new clause in the bill to make the government develop regulations or guidelines on performance evaluations for administrators and mediators. What could possibly be wrong with an amendment like that? It strikes to the heart of accountability.

If there is one thing that members have heard Reformers repeat day after day, speech after speech, whether on justice, spending, defence, agriculture, health or aboriginal affairs, name the department, over the past three years it is that we have constantly used the word "accountability". The people at the top must be held accountable. Members heard it about the Somali inquiry. That was why we are so concerned about what appears to be a cover-up at the highest levels. Members have heard it about so many other departments that unfortunately for Canadians have been tainted by scandal and by suspicion of patronage and those types of things. We have insisted on accountability.

We proposed a minor amendment that the government develop regulations on performance evaluations to hold the administrators and mediators accountable, and it is voted down. It is ruled that it is not appropriate by the Liberal majority.

The third amendment we proposed was to clause 15. It reads:

That clause 15 be amended to allow the standing committee on agriculture to review the minister's appointments to the appeal boards.

What could possibly be wrong with that? What does the minister want to hide, that his appointments should not be reviewed?

The fourth and final amendment that we proposed was:

That clause 28 be amended to allow the standing committee on agriculture to conduct a three year review of this act.

That was also voted down also.

When I start getting on to some of these issues I do not know where time goes. It just flies by. At any rate, I will sum up what I have in the little time remaining.

As a former farmer, whose family is still involved in the farming business back home and as a person who used to be active in farm groups, I am fortunate to have a lot of friends and supporters in the agricultural community in the riding that I am honoured to represent in this House. I can tell the House that the majority of

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farmers in my area are thinking about trying to get last year's crop salvaged from under the snow. They are looking forward to trying to get that crop off or do something with it even if they have to burn it, accepting the huge loss that they are going to suffer and then try as hard as they can, weather permitting, to get this year's crop seeded.

One thing that galls me to no end is that there does not seem to be a lot of recognition from the people on that side of the House of the struggles and travails facing the farming communities. I get pretty upset when people say we do this for the farmers and that for the farmers and why do we treat them so special?

• (1635)

A lot of Canadians forget where the food comes from and how many people owe their livelihood to the farmer who is struggling to get his crop off. They forget the person who sells the herbicides for spraying, or the people who owe their living to transporting grain, whether it is the man running the locomotive or others involved in the transportation of grain. They forget the people who sell the farm equipment, the person at the store who sells building supplies to build a new granary. They forget the hundreds of thousands of people who owe their livelihood directly and indirectly to the sustainability of agriculture.

It is high time we had a government in the country, a Reform government, that puts some emphasis on agriculture.

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy listening to the member from the Peace River area because he knows how important agriculture is.

Would he like to comment on an issue we addressed this morning when we were dealing with Bill C-34. This kind of flows into Bill C-38 which is more or less trying to dissolve farming operations which we hope can be avoided somehow. This morning we were asking for emergency cash advances of \$50,000 interest free. That was denied because the government would not accept our amendments to Bill C-34.

However, in the last couple of months the Liberal government has doled out about \$250 million to a company like Bombardier, that is interest free and probably forgivable. How does that compare with his feelings of how the farmers are treated in the west and even in Quebec, as we heard from our hon. colleague from the Bloc.

The Liberal government promised fairness, equality and democracy. I do not think we have seen any of that in the number of bills that have been passed lately.

How does my hon. colleague feel about this?

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question and the comments from my colleague from Lisgar—Marquette.

Farmers in the riding of Prince George—Peace River and farmers across the country are quite frankly appalled by the performance of the Liberal government in doling out money to corporate friends. However, when farmers in Quebec or western Canada, Nova Scotia or Ontario get into trouble, it turns a deaf ear. "There is no money. We are cutting to the bone. We are trying to get the deficit under control".

Nobody understands the problem of deficit and debt better than the members Reform Party. We were the ones who highlighted this problem for the Liberal government before there was even a Mulroney government. We know what nine years of Tory government did to the country. The debt was doubled. We are well aware of the problem of deficit spending.

We have been saying for years and years that it has to be prioritized. I do not see how giving a handout to a corporation that is already making millions of dollars is a good or wise investment of Canadian tax dollars.

But when farmers with their backs to the wall turn to the government and ask not for a handout but for an interest free loan to tide them over the short term, recognizing the thousands and thousands of people who owe their livelihood to the agricultural sector and farmers in the country, the government says "no. You are not a priority. Sorry". A priority is a bocce court in a minister's riding or a canoe museum in Shawinigan.

I want to say that the farmers and the people of Canada are fed up with this kind of attitude from the government.

• (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is the House reading for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): In my opinion, the yeas have it.

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Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): I declare the motion carried, on division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS) ASSISTANCE ACT

Hon. Diane Marleau (for Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.) moved that Bill C-77, an act concerning an order under the International Development (Financial Institutions) Assistance Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. John Godfrey (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise before the House today to table the second reading of a bill that will authorize payments made to the multilateral fund for the Montreal Protocol and the Global Environment Facility.

These organizations were established in 1990 as primary international financial mechanisms to protect the global environment. Since then the multilateral fund for the Montreal Protocol or the MFMP has served as the main financial mechanism for projects aimed at reducing ozone depletion in the developing world.

Similarly, the Global Environment Facility or GEF is the principal international mechanism through which donors can support developing countries in the areas of biodiversity, climate change, the ozone and international waters. It was endorsed as such at the landmark 1992 Rio conference on the environment and development.

As you know, Madam Speaker, we honour our commitments to international institutions in full and on time so that they can carry out their vital work unencumbered by financial shortfalls. To do so in this case it was necessary to add the GEF and the MFMP to the schedule of financial institutions under the International Development (Financial Institutions) Assistance Act. An order in council to this effect was approved on November 15, 1994 and published in the *Canada Gazette* on November 30, 1994.

The international development act also stipulates that the order in council be tabled before Parliament no more 15 sitting days after it is approved. Due to an administrative oversight this obligation was not met within the specified time.

The bill I am tabling for second reading today will correct that oversight. On this matter I am sure that I have the full support of members on both sides of the House who know the value of environmental protection and want to see Canada continue to meet its financial obligations uninterrupted.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): The hon. member for Terrebonne has the floor.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, you are right. It is still Terrebonne for a few weeks because, as I mentioned to your alternate a few days ago, after June 2, or thereabouts, it will be Repentigny.

I made an omission I want to correct before addressing Bill C-77. The last time I rose, I thanked the residents of the five municipalities in the riding of Repentigny, but I forgot to also thank the residents of the two former municipalities in my riding, namely Terrebonne and Bois-des-Filion, for the good times spent together during the past three and a half years. These are people with whom, under Irénée Forget, in Terrebonne, and Paul Laroque, in Bois-des-Filion, we were able to co-operate, work and bring several issues to a successful conclusion, and thus improve the quality of life of the residents of these two municipalities. This was achieved with a great deal of enthusiasm, drive and interest.

• (1645)

The last time I rose in this House to speak, I forgot to thank the mayors and the people of these two municipalities. I just wanted to correct this oversight.

That said, as my hon. colleague pointed out earlier, the purpose of Bill C-77 is indeed to remedy an omission. In February 1994, the federal cabinet agreed to contribute to the Global Environment Facility Fund and the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

The implementation of this decision required that the institutions in question be included in the International Development Assistance Act. An order in council to that effect was therefore approved on November 15, 1994, and published in the *Canada Gazette* on November 30 of the same year.

By law, an order has to be tabled in Parliament within 15 days of its signing. Earlier this year, after the standing joint committee of which my hon. colleague is a member discovered the omission as part of its regulatory review, the Department of Foreign Affairs was notified. An order was indeed published in the *Canada Gazette*, but the legislation was never implemented so that the two organizations mentioned previously, namely the Global Environment Facility Fund and the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, could receive the money it was supposed to get from the government.

Oversights happen even in the best of families. Several very important issues are before this House, and we understand the need for urgent action to restore funding to these two organizations.

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As the previous speaker said, he will ask the House to fast-track Bill C-77 so that the two organizations mentioned earlier can receive the money they need to improve the environment and even encourage developing countries to become more environmentally conscious.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-77. This act has been designed to correct an oversight that happened in 1994. I can understand how that can happen and we agreed to participate to support this bill and to correct that error.

I want to take the opportunity to talk about the bigger picture in terms of Canada's foreign policy and the government's role in that. Foreign policy does not just belong to the government in power, it belongs to Parliament. There have been numerous incidents in which the Liberal government ignored Parliament and failed to inform it properly. In the area of foreign affairs Reform has raised many issues in the past years and almost all of them have been completely.

In October 1993 a private member's motion was put forward to address the important issue of peacekeeping, which would go on to consume a fair amount of time of the House later on. What did the governing party do at the time? It voted it down because it was not interested in the opinions it seemed of other members on this side of the House. There have been other occasions when that has happened as well.

This happened in spite of the fact that when the present foreign affairs minister was on this side of the House he was very critical of the Tories for showing a lack of respect for the parliamentary process. I would think he would be very sensitive as the foreign affairs minister to that very criticism he raised when he was on this side.

We know that this Parliament has probably had more closure and use of time allocation than any other Parliament including the one the minister of foreign affairs was so critical of, the Mulroney government of nine years.

When we look at the foreign policy of this government we can see that it has lacked vision and has failed in some areas. It is clear to us that the Liberals want to use foreign policy as their own political agenda, and that is a fairly serious charge.

• (1650)

What can one think when the Prime Minister makes his first trip to our friends in Washington, to visit the president of the United States, our most important trading partner, three and a half years into the mandate? Some would say it was a photo op, a good chance for the Prime Minister to have his picture taken with the president, on the president's knee, shortly before the election campaign.

Canada and the United States have a very close trading relationship, which has grown to something like a billion dollars a day of two-way trade.

I am a little cynical about his motives. However, I want to talk about an area that the Liberals have come full circle on. I give them full credit. That area is free trade.

When the Liberals were on this side of the House in the opposition benches they were very critical of the free trade agreement with the United States. They fought it tooth and nail in 1988. They were very critical of it in the 1993 election. They said they would rip up or renegotiate the accord unless it got a subsidies code and an anti-dumping code. Of course that did not happen.

The Prime Minister has led a number of trade delegations around the world. That is a good move. They are the Team Canada missions.

I wonder about our exporters, what they are thinking. It seems our exports to most of the countries that the Prime Minister and his entourage have visited in the last three years have actually fallen off as a result of these trade missions. How can that be? The reason I put forward is that Canada has done our homework at home to make possible the opportunities for our businesses to take advantage of these important trade missions that have developed.

I would suggest that the Prime Minister concentrate more on the trade mission at home to correct some of the problems for our companies can take advantage of.

The committee has certainly heard the high cost of doing business in Canada. We have payroll taxes, taxes, interprovincial trade barriers where we have made very little progress. These are very big problems to trade within Canada.

We know that there are something like only 100 companies in Canada that are responsible for over 40 per cent of Canada's exports. We would like to see it be a great deal more than that. The Minister for International Trade has suggested that we should get to about 4,000 companies doing business. I agree.

When we cannot even trade effectively across our own provincial borders, how can we be exporters around the world? How can our companies get the economies of scale that are required to get out there and compete in the world market?

The federal government has to show leadership in breaking down the provincial barriers we have. That will resolve a lot of our problems.

We heard at our committee in foreign affairs and international trade when we were doing a study on small and medium size enterprises what is holding them back from exporting. Some said they are moving into the United States. They have better access to the Canadian market from the United States than they have from their Canadian locations. That is a big problem.

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In any case, I am glad to see that the Liberals have been born again, if you like, free traders. It is the right approach. Canada is a trading country. Forty per cent of our GDP is derived from exports along with one job in every three. It will be a very important area for us in the future.

The initiative that the trade minister has developed to try to bring more countries on in the southern hemisphere will be good for Canada. Let us concentrate on correcting some of the problems at home so that we can take advantage of these very important initiatives.

Although they are born again, I welcome it. I hope their hearts are in the right place and that this will continue into the future.

I want to talk about a couple of other areas that we have identified in terms of peacekeeping. The government has not taken into consideration the long term consequences in some cases of Canadian involvement. I cite Haiti as an area where United States went in with a lot of fanfare. Guess who gets to do the mop-up operation. Canada.

We seem to continue to extend that mandate. We have RCMP officers there who are trying to help in training Haitians in terms of policing. We have the problem in Canada where we have lack of police forces. We seem to be taken in by United States. It makes the big initiative, gets the fanfare and then we do the mop-up afterwards. There are long term consequences that have to be anticipated.

• (1655)

What is wrong with a full scale debate in the House, as one of our members suggested in a private member's motion in 1993? Let us involve the House a bit more to hear more of what other people are thinking in that regard.

With regard to Bosnia, the government has allowed itself to be dragged into a mission it was not equipped for. We have to reassess the whole idea of whether we are in peacekeeping or peacemaking.

There was the initiative to go to Zaire. Things changed pretty rapidly, but it was an ironic situation. Our peacekeepers were pinned down. They could not even get their weapons out of the airport. They were supposed to help police the area but they could not get their weapons out of the airport. It was a fiasco. It is a good thing there was a major turnaround in the situation and people started to return of their own accord.

There are a lot of things which need to be changed. The United Nations has to go through a reassessment in terms of its effectiveness. We are concerned that the United Nations is being forced to downsize in terms of bureaucracy.

I am concerned about some of the organizations which were put in place shortly after the second world war which were well intended and have done good work such as the World Bank, the

IMF and the United Nations. Many are trying to reinvent themselves to stay in existence. If there is no role for them or if there is a reduced role, we have to recognize that.

Reform in many of these institutions is badly needed and Canada has to show leadership in these areas.

We will support the motion to clean up this oversight, but let us involve all of Parliament when it comes to foreign policy because there are some good ideas which we should have an opportunity to debate.

Mr. Godfrey: Madam Speaker, I suggest, with the agreement of the House, that this matter now be referred not to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade but rather to committee of the whole.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, by unanimous consent considered in committee and reported.)

• (1700)

Mr. Zed: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you will find unanimous consent to go now to third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Diane Marleau (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Marleau (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

Mr. Zed: Madam Speaker, I understand there is unanimous consent to permit the commencement of second reading stage of Bill C-95 this afternoon, as well as to agree that after second reading the bill will be referred to committee of the whole.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Herb Gray (for the Minister of Justice, Lib.) moved that Bill C-95, an act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal organizations) and to amend other acts in consequence, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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He said: Madam Speaker, in moving second reading of the bill, I think I should begin by thanking the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Party for their co-operation in enabling us to move it through the legislative process in the House as quickly as possible. I look forward to co-operation of this kind through all stages of the bill, including committee of the whole and third reading. I say this because we are dealing with something very important.

The bill involves a package of tough new measures to target criminal gang activity, activity of organized crime. The proposals developed through extensive consultations with police across Canada will give them and other law enforcement agencies better tools to investigate and prosecute those who participate in criminal gang activity.

The proposals provide a new approach to fighting gang activity, in other words organized crime, by creating a new offence of participation in a criminal organization. This offence does not criminalize mere membership in a criminal organization. Rather the new offence along with new definitions in the Criminal Code will lay the groundwork for the targeted use of proposed new investigative tools and Criminal Code provisions.

• (1705)

These include a new peace bond designed to target gang leadership and make it difficult for criminal organizations to carry out their criminal activities. New powers will allow police to seize the proceeds of organized crime activity and with a judge's order to access income tax information related to gang activity. New Criminal Code offences and penalties will target the use of explosives in criminal gang activity. New sentencing provisions in the Criminal Code will be aimed at criminal gangs, including the delay of parole eligibility for certain criminal organization offences, and measures will support increased police surveillance of gang activity.

Last September there was a National Forum on Organized Crime hosted by the Minister of Justice and me. The proposals we see here today are based in large measure on the recommendations made to us by the participants in the forum including representatives of police organizations from around the country, legal scholars and lawyers who have studied the matter.

Following through on a specific recommendation from the national forum that I have not yet mentioned, I will be setting up national and regional co-ordinating committees to address police concerns about the need for co-ordination and leadership on multi-agency enforcement operations. In addition to the national committee there will be five regional co-ordinating committees. If I am not mistaken, two have already been set up: a committee in British Columbia and one in Ontario.

This underscores the point that the legislation is not aimed only at one part of our country. There have been particular concerns in

Montreal and Quebec and surrounding areas about the operations of biker gangs, but I am told biker gangs operate in every province of Canada except for possibly Prince Edward Island. There are organized crime activities of other kinds all across the country. This is important national legislation to help add to and improve protection of the public.

Again in response to a recommendation by police organizations at the National Forum on Organized Crime, the solicitor general of the day will make an annual statement on organized crime in the House of Commons. Likely the first one will come in late 1997. Time will tell who will give it. I have my views on who will form the government, but I will not get into that in this relatively non-partisan second reading debate.

Working with the police we have achieved two objectives. We have given law enforcement agencies better tools to help in their efforts against organized crime.

[*Translation*]

In the same vein, I can quote my hon. colleague, the Minister of Justice, Allan Rock, because he has said:

Thanks to collaborative efforts with the police, we have attained two objectives: we have equipped law enforcement agencies with better tools to combat criminal gangs, and we have developed a series of measures that ought to stand up better in court. These measures represent a first step in the right direction. The federal government had promised to inaugurate measures against criminal gangs, and the present government has kept its word; in order to be effective, however, the battle requires the federal government, the provinces, and the law enforcement agencies to join forces.

• (1710)

[*English*]

Organized crime gangs have increasingly become a threat to the safety of many communities all across the country. Police officers have made it clear they need improved tools and a mechanism to better co-ordinate and integrate their efforts to get the job done.

I am confident this package can help. I am not suggesting it will end the problem overnight as soon as the measure becomes law, but it will give important and effective new tools to police authorities across the country to make some important breakthroughs in fighting organized crime wherever it is in the country.

I am confident this package can be of great help to the police authorities in ensuring public safety. These proposals are the results of consultations with provincial and municipal officials across Canada, including the province of Quebec as well as law enforcement organizations across the country.

I do not intend to go into these matters at length. I understand there is a disposition on the part of the Reform Party and the Bloc

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Quebecois to co-operate in moving the bill through the House quickly. Again I thank them for that co-operation.

By working together in the House we can help create greater safety for Canadians in their neighbourhoods, on their streets and in their business dealings across the country. I commend the bill to the House for second reading and early passage.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Madam Speaker, at the request of the solicitor general, the Bloc Québécois, the official opposition, will co-operate in expediting the second reading of this bill. We agree with the principle of the bill which, as the Quebec Minister of Public Security admitted today, is a step in the right direction and the kind of legislation he had in mind.

However, he would have liked the bill to go a little further and be more specific, especially considering the problems in Quebec, both in the Montreal area and in Quebec City. In my own riding of Lévis, on March 16, the residents of Saint-Nicolas held a demonstration following an incident. When a jeep exploded, this caused considerable public reaction in the neighbourhood where the Hell's Angels clubhouse is located. Citizens said they were fed up with the biker war which was and still is a cause for concern among many residents.

As long as this war was strictly between members of the gangs, it did not really matter, but when the quality of life and the very lives of citizens are at stake, public perception changes. We saw, for instance, the dedication shown by the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve in dealing with this problem, following an incident in his riding in which young Daniel Desrochers was killed.

All this led the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve to ask for anti-gang legislation. On the initiative of the hon. member, the Bloc Québécois examined these issues and, like the Quebec government, requested legislation to deal with biker gangs engaged in criminal activities.

• (1715)

I remember that on several occasions in the House, the former parliamentary leader of the official opposition, who is now the leader of our party, asked the Minister of Justice and the government to act as soon as possible. Finally, the Minister of Justice went to Quebec City for a meeting with the Minister of Public Security, the Quebec Minister of Justice, mayors from the Quebec City area and representatives of the police forces concerned to look at ways to deal with this problem.

The opposition reserves the right to engage in a more thorough analysis when the bill is considered in committee. However, at the second reading stage, a parliamentary tradition, we will support the

motion and hope it is considered in committee as soon as possible. We will co-operate. You can count on us.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I have a few comments to make on this bill.

We support the positive aspects of the bill and it does have positive aspects. We have concerns and we will be examining those concerns as the bill proceeds through committee of the whole.

I would like to point out the new tools that have been presented to the police. The wire tap laws have been extended. That is very positive in dealing with this type of criminal activity.

One of the most powerful aspects of this bill may very well be the breakthrough that has been made with regard to accessibility to income tax records that this bill provides in tracing the paper trail of criminal activities. Also something that may prove to be exceedingly important is the peace bond. Individual members of a criminal organization can be forced into a peace bond where they will be ordered not to communicate or associate with members of a criminal organization. If they do, no further evidence is required other than the fact that they have broken the bond in order to bring them into court. In the long term this could break up criminal organizations. Those are three of the very significant aspects of this bill.

I will turn quickly to two areas in the bill that concern me. One is the creation of the definition of a criminal organization. How will this be done? Is it going to be possible to do it?

We have seen bills come through the House before, and I think of Bill C-27, which dealt with child sex tourism where it looks good but it may be unenforceable. How is a criminal organization defined in this new bill? A criminal organization means any group, association or other body consisting of five or more persons, whether formally or informally organized, having as one of its primary activities the commission of an indictable offence under this act or any other act of Parliament for which the maximum punishment is imprisonment for five years or more.

That is what the crown will have to prove in order to have an organization declared a criminal organization. How will that be done? There have to be at least five people in a group, association or other body and the crown will have to prove that one of the primary activities of members of that group is the commission of an indictable offence. What does that mean? Does it mean that the crown will have to have proof of a conviction of an indictable offence or just evidence that they are engaged in activities that could lead to the commission of an indictable offence that has a punishment of five years or more? There are an awful lot of questions I would like to have cleared up.

• (1720)

Once the organization is defined as a criminal organization, we have to look at this new penalty. Section 467.1 reads: "Everyone who participates in or substantially contributes to the activities of a criminal organization, knowing that any or all of the members of the organization engage in or have within the preceding five years engaged in the commission of a series of indictable offences under this act or any other act of Parliament, for each of which the maximum punishment is imprisonment for five years or more and is a party to the commission of an indictable offence for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with the criminal organization for which the maximum punishment is imprisonment for five years or more".

What is the crown faced with if it is able to prove a person is a member of a criminal organization? What evidence has to be gathered in order to convict? It has to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused participates in or substantially contributes to a criminal organization with the knowledge that members of that organization have in the last five years engaged in an indictable offence that carries with it a punishment of five years or more.

I hope that the government can explain to us and to the people of the country in a clear manner that the section of the bill that creates the new offence is not just simply creating false hope in the minds of the people, that this is enforceable, that this can be done by the crown.

I mentioned earlier other parts of the bill which will be of great benefit to the police and will lead to greater intervention into organized crime. I am not going to hold my breath at this stage in the hope that we are going to see reams and reams of convictions under this new offence.

The final point that concerns me is the subject of youth gangs. Does this bill apply to youth gangs? If it does, do the consecutive sentences apply to youth gangs? If they do, then how do we overcome the fact that an indictable offence committed by a youth under the YOA carries only a three year maximum penalty? What are we going to do there? Can it only apply if the youth is transferred to adult court?

I hope in the next few days and hours before we enter the election period that those questions will be answered, not only for members of the House but for the people of the country who are hoping that this bill will move in a very positive direction, with positive force, to give the police the tools they need to break up organized crime in the country.

We have reservations about this bill, but we support its direction because we think it is right. We know the police chiefs and police forces want it. They have been asking for it.

I close on this dour note. I wonder why it has taken so long to bring this bill forward. It has to be rushed through the House and

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we do not have enough time to really establish its constitutionality and enforceability by hearing witnesses who would give us their viewpoints from both the defence and prosecution sides. I wonder why the government waited for two years after that little boy was killed as a result of organized criminal activity before the bill was brought in. Now it has to be rushed through the House.

We have seen that happen too often over the last three and a half years. It is wrong and I do not think it is needed. Nevertheless, we will support the direction of bill. I am hoping the questions that I and other members will raise can be answered for the good of the people of this country.

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the second time.)

Mr. Zed: Madam Speaker, I wonder if there might be unanimous consent to call it 5.30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL PAROLE BOARD

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should direct the National Parole Board that any benefit of doubt in hearings and deliberations on parole shall go to the victim, the victim's family and public safety and not to the prisoner.

She said: Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the Chair that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I would like to draw the attention of the House to the motion and note that it specifically addresses the National Parole Board. It asks the parole board to have as its objective the rights of the victim, the victim's family and public safety over and above that of the prisoner.

I feel quite sad in a way that we have to bring a motion of this nature into the House to recognize the rights of law-abiding citizens, especially victims. Their rights as citizens should be

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respected before the rights of prisoners, those people who have chosen not to abide by the rules of society.

A number of issues will be reflected by this motion, such as sentencing and other issues. However, I would like to address my comments to the parole board as an evaluation tool.

The parole board is a tool of the justice system. It comes into force once a person is convicted. Basically when we talk about parole hearings we are not talking about passing a judgment on the person with relation to the crime committed, instead we are talking about passing a judgment with respect to their rehabilitation over a certain period of confinement and whether that person is ready to return to society.

As a society we have agreed to establish certain rules and regulations by which the majority of us agree to function. We set up those rules and regulations to establish our society through legislation and through the various other government agencies throughout the country.

• (1730)

The fact that we establish these rules and regulations also sets precedents as to the kinds of rights and privileges the Canadian people will enjoy. If you choose to violate the rules and regulations established by the society, then it follows that you choose to relinquish those very rights and benefits that society establishes.

We seem to have moved away from that to the point of view that we argue that rights and privileges bestowed on the law-abiding Canadian citizen by Canadian society should be applied to those who violate those as well. I submit to the House that is not justifiable. If you choose not to participate within the parameters of society you should not be eligible for the benefits and privileges that society has created for you.

We can say that is not being compassionate and this type of thing, but when someone violates a law or breaks a law and actually causes damage to another Canadian individual, we see them as not being safe to go about in public. We decided that we would take these very people and put them away and incarcerate them in some facility which we have called prisons.

There was a time in our history when that is all we did. We would remove them from society and put them into a building somewhere and the level of activity that occurred there was little better than custodial care. We have debates in our past which show how inhumane this was. Since that time we have progressed into what we have established within the prison system as a rehabilitation program. It would seem to me that once we take people and remove them from society because we fear them and what damage they may do to us, i.e. our public safety is at stake, and put them away, we should be guiding and directing them toward coming back into

that society and participating where they will not harm the public and harass previous victims.

I argue that we have put in legislation along the way that gives these people an option to participate in the rehabilitation program and this kind of thing. That is another debate for some other time. Right now I am saying that when a prisoner goes before a parole board that parole board should be looking at their rehabilitation during the time period that we have put them away. Have they participated in some sort of a program that will change their behaviour so that they will function in society and not be a liability to public safety and to the victims they have in the past harmed?

The way it is right now it seems that is not actually happening. That evaluation of the rehabilitation process is not happening. The focus seems more to be on the rights of the prisoner. I suggest we focus more on the rights of the victims and public safety or the Canadian citizen.

When a person chooses to break the law and goes into a prison they should realize that they relinquish those rights and that the victim and the public come first. I often wonder where we lost track or where we went astray. I tend to think that sometimes in our legislation, and this goes back to the sentencing probably, we have lost focus of directing our judgment on the actual action that was committed. We started focusing on the intent behind the action. I suggest to the House that it was with that deviation in focus for a judgment decision that we tended to leave the victims and move more toward the prisoner. I think we should go back and address that at some point as well.

It concerns me greatly that we have a movement for establishing groups. We now have a group for victims rights. We should have Canadian citizens rights and those rights should apply to all people, whether they are victims or not victims.

• (1735)

I see the need for a victims bill of rights in the present direction we are heading because of the indiscretion of what is happening in our system. It seems to be favouring the criminal versus the law-abiding citizen. We are coming up with all these mechanisms such as victims rights and various victims interest groups. This type of thing seems to be growing which suggests to me that there is a lack of respect and confidence in the existing system.

If the rights and privileges that law-abiding Canadian citizens enjoy were not applied to those who were incarcerated because they broke the law then we would probably not need victims rights.

I suggest to the House that since we have to start somewhere we should look at the parole board. We should look at it from the point of view of evaluating what has actually happened once a person has been confined to prison. There is absolutely no way that if a person does not participate in the rehabilitation program, is not capable of going back out into society and functioning as a productive citizen, that they should be released from prison at that point. They become

a liability to public safety and will probably inflict either more physical harm to their victims or certainly emotional harm through such things as harassment and this type of thing.

When we look at some of the things that victims are denied in relation to the National Parole Board when the situations are brought forward, we should be reviewing the whole process, the direction or the objectives of the National Parole Board as it stands.

These people are incarcerated because they inflicted harm on specific individuals. I see no problem with these victims being aware of the progress of that person through the rehabilitation program. Right now once the person is convicted that is the end. They do not receive any other information unless they initiate it by writing letters to the parole board for information, and then it can be very limited as well.

My motion is asking that the government direct the National Parole Board in its process of deliberating or evaluating the rehabilitation of a prisoner that if there is any doubt concerning the prisoner, i.e. that he may harm the victims or become a liability to public safety, that benefit of doubt should go to the victims and the public in general and not the prisoner. He can go back and go further through the rehabilitation process.

I think my time is about up and so I will close in hoping that the government will look at this and will review the direction of the parole board and offer it some guidance that reflects its interest in the victims.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Paul Zed (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am looking for some guidance from the Chair. I believe you would find unanimous consent that notwithstanding the second reading vote that was taken on Bill C-95, that Bill C-95 be put back on the Order Paper for a resumption of second reading. I believe you called for the question, no one rose and the question was put and carried.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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NATIONAL PAROLE BOARD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): I will make a slight correction. The hon. member did not have consent to divide her time with her colleague. The rules do not provide that members can divide their time in private members hour.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nick Discepola (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to take part in the debate on Motion M-139 before us.

If I understand, the hon. member feels that the government should order the National Parole Board to accord the benefit of the doubt, not to the prisoner, but to the victim, to their family and to public security at parole hearings.

The motion expresses a legitimate concern that both the government and I share with respect to victims, their families and public security. However, we must recognize that a number of government measures already exist to respond to the concerns of crime victims and to ensure public security.

I would begin by pointing out that protection of society is the primary consideration in any decision on parole. The National Parole Board grants parole only if, in its opinion, the offender will not present an unacceptable risk for society at the end of his sentence and that his release will contribute to protecting society by promoting his return to the community as a law abiding citizen.

The Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board are already directing all their efforts at protecting society by controlling offenders and helping them change behaviours and attitudes that have led them to crime in the past.

The transition from imprisonment to freedom can be difficult, and offenders have a better chance of success if they are supervised, have suitable programs, have opportunities for training and are given support in the community to which they will eventually have to adjust.

In helping offenders return to society, the government ensures public security and the security of the victims. The Correctional Service of Canada already directs much of its energy to helping offenders adapt and return to society.

Similarly, the National Parole Board is helping to protect the public by taking judicious decisions in favour of the return of offenders to the community as law abiding citizens.

I would add that the information provided by victims plays a key role in the decisions made by the National Parole Board. A balance

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must be struck between the victim's concerns and the need to help the offender return to society without compromising public safety.

The best way to achieve this balance is through risk assessment and management. Certain offenders represent a greater danger than others. In accordance with National Parole Board policies, board members systematically examine the risk an offender would represent for society if released.

They look at all the relevant information they have available in order to conduct an initial risk assessment. They take into account such factors as the offence, prior criminal behaviour, social problems such as addiction and family violence, the individual's mental health and especially his potential to reoffend, behaviour during earlier releases, psychological and psychiatric records, motivation to change, and information provided by the victim.

• (1745)

After this initial assessment, the National Parole Board looks at other, more specific factors such as the individual's behaviour in the institution, the information provided by case management personnel and other professionals that is indicative of changes, and the benefits derived from programs in which the offender has participated, such as detox or cognitive skills programs.

After going over all this information, board members make a decision. If parole is granted, the Board can add conditions, in addition to those required by law, in order to help manage rehabilitation and ensure public safety.

For example, it may require the offender to abstain from alcohol if this is deemed reasonable and necessary for risk management and the protection of society. It is common for an offender to be prohibited from having contact with a victim, if the victim so requests.

The great majority of offenders are serving definite sentences and eventually return to the community. As you know, imprisonment is only a temporary measure that cannot guarantee the safety of the public.

As a result, once an offender has been sentenced, correctional staff begin assessing risk and preparing for the day when the offender can be released. Personnel in the community gather information on the offender from a wide variety of sources: family, police, the court, victims, other members of the public. The information provided by the victim is an integral element of the risk assessment and the decision to release an offender.

What I mean is that, based on all of the information at our disposal in order to make wise decisions about parole, by allowing gradual release and preparing the offender to return to the community, we are protecting the public and the victims at the same time.

For the moment, I would like to talk about the rights our correctional system gives to victims. The year 1992 was a watershed year, when the Corrections and Conditional Release Act was passed. For the first time, victims' rights were officially acknowledged in federal legislation on correctional services.

[English]

I would like to discuss the rights of victims as they exist in our correctional system. A significant step was made in 1992 with the enactment of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. From that time, for the first time, the rights of victims were formally recognized in federal corrections legislation.

The Corrections and Conditional Release Act clearly recognizes the role of the victim in relation to federal corrections. It provides for the sharing of information with victims and enables victims to have access to parole hearings.

Under section 101(b) of the act victims may provide information to the National Parole Board which the board must take into account when reviewing the inmates on any kind of conditional release. This may be done in writing or in an interview with a National Parole Board staff member who makes the recommendation and a record of the discussion for inclusion in the offender's file.

The legislation allows the correctional service and the National Parole Board to share upon request information about offenders with their victims. At the victim's request the correctional service and the National Parole Board have an obligation to disclose certain information about the offender such as the offender's name, the offence for which the offender was convicted, the eligibility dates and review dates of respective temporary absence or parole, the dates the sentence began and the length of the sentence. This information is also made available to the public.

Victims, however, are eligible to receive additional information that is not normally disclosed to the public. Such information may include the location of the penitentiary where the sentence is being served; the date, if any, on which the offender is to be released on escorted or unescorted temporary absence, work release, parole or statutory release; the date of any hearing for the purposes of review; conditions attached to any form of release; the destination of the offender on any form of release; whether the offender is in custody; and, if not, why not; whether or not the offender has appealed a decision of the board; and the outcome of the appeal.

[Translation]

This specific information can be given to victims, provided the Chairman of the National Parole Board or the Commissioner of Corrections deems that the victim's interests clearly outweigh the breach of privacy that will result from disclosure.

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● (1750)

The Corrections and Conditional Release Act also takes victims' concerns and needs into consideration by affording them the opportunity to attend parole hearings as observers.

In the past they could do so only with the offender's agreement; now it is the National Parole Board's decision. As I said, victims can also provide information to the Board, and it must take this into consideration during the case study.

The information provided by the victim which the Board must take into consideration during the case study includes the victim impact statement submitted to the Crown prosecutor, the police reports on the nature of the crime, and the information provided directly to the Board or correctional authorities by the victim or the victim's relatives.

The Board also considers any reports of abuse or violence against the offender's family or against people in a relationship of intimacy, dependency or trust with the offender. The information provided by the victim is also important when assessing the relevant conditions in managing a specific risk.

This is also a factor to be taken into consideration when preparing the offender's release plan, particularly if he is related to the victim, or will be living in the vicinity of the victim after release. The Board takes into consideration the victim's requests if he or she feels that certain conditions are necessary for protection.

[English]

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of the motion put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Surrey North. It might be worthwhile repeating its wording:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should direct the National Parole Board that any benefit of doubt in hearings and deliberations on parole shall go to the victim, the victim's family and public safety and not to the prisoner.

While the intent of Motion No. 139 is clear to me, I would like to expand on its objective for those who might criticize it for the use of the phrase "benefit of doubt". In that phrase we can see both the strength and the reasonableness of the motion before us.

Criminal court proceedings are structured so that persons charged with an offence go free if it can be established that there is a reasonable doubt as to their guilt. It is pretty fundamental in our justice system. It is therefore only fitting in the case of an individual who has been found guilty and imprisoned that his or her parole application be refused if there is a doubt as to their ability to be reintroduced in society. In other words the benefit of doubt factor has already been addressed in good part.

Sadly there are those who would argue and try to convince us that is the way system works now. There are examples on examples that illustrate that people who so think have their heads in the sand.

In my colleague's own riding of Surrey North there are a few horror stories of criminals who have been released only to violently reoffend again. For example, a 10-year old girl was taken from her bed, brutally assaulted and murdered by a criminal who was out on conditional release. Another individual was killed in her own home by a person who was out on parole for a string offences including car theft. The list of tragic incidents goes on and on in communities across Canada.

The figures for 1994-95 show the following. Of those on conditional release 256 reoffended and were charged with criminal offences ranging from murder to armed robbery. Since 1987-88 and in almost any given year approximately 250 conditional release criminals have been charged with serious community offences. In 1989-90 alone 39 were charged with murder and 63 with sexual assault. Surely this gives us some pause to doubt that the system is working.

● (1755)

An article in today's Vancouver *Sun* read:

A man serving time for attempted murder was charged Wednesday with sexually assaulting a young female corrections volunteer while out on day parole. The woman, in her twenties, was alone in her home with Clinton Dale McNutt, 29, Monday when the alleged offence occurred, said the Abbotsford Police Constable—"We can't overstate how concerned we are about the whole parole system," he said. "Our concern is these people are out and our citizens can be put at risk".

That is what we are talking about here. Sometimes when we are pounding away on the justice system I hear members across the way saying that everything is fine and the justice minister is doing a great job. I think reality is the opposite to that. We on this side are heckled because we keep speaking out and pounding on the issue, particularly when we speak on behalf of victims.

In my riding and across the country it seems Canadians are tired of a justice system which puts the rights of criminals ahead of the rights of victims. It is as basic as that.

We get criticism from across the way. They will find out there in a couple of weeks knocking on doors. If they listen to what the people of Canada have to say they will get an earful. Ordinary people are saying it is not working. When Liberal members are on their doorsteps there will be no one to stop the constituents from saying what it is they think and feel about the government and the justice system.

I wonder if Liberal members will try to berate their constituents when they raise the topic of criminal justice during the campaign in the same way as the Prime Minister tried to tell a waitress from

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Montreal that she did not read what she read and did not hear what she heard in relation to the government's promise to scrap the GST. So much for the criticism of members across the way.

What will we do? We would advocate a fundamental shift in who are seen as the real victims of crime. It begins with a change in the shortsighted National Parole Board definition of who is a victim, to one more much encompassing. Reform would expand the existing definition and define a victim as anyone who suffers as a result of an offence, physical or mental injury, economic loss, or any spouse, sibling, child or parent of the individual against whom the offence was perpetrated, or anyone who has an equivalent relationship not necessarily a blood relative. That is an important change in the definition of victim.

More important, Reform also recognizes the need to revamp the National Parole Board where the rights of victims in Canadian society are being well and truly ignored. Each of the following changes would need to be implemented by the government if Motion No. 139 is to have any meaning or significance.

First, the National Parole Board must be reformed to ensure that release conditions are enforced in favour of the victim whom I have just redefined, the victim's family and public safety, and not in favour of the offender. In fact it is not just on the parole board, our whole justice system needs this basic reform.

• (1800)

The parole board must be reformed and its responsibilities shifted to community merit release committees. The parole board must be reformed to ensure that sentences given to all violent offenders are served in full. The parole board must be reformed to ensure that dangerous offender status can be sought at any time during a criminal sentence and not just at the time of sentence. Finally, the parole board must be reformed to ensure that the parole is limited, earned and tightly monitored.

In conclusion, the motion before the House merits every consideration. I am saddened to know that the motion is not votable. If it were I would want members to know that I would certainly be voting in favour of it and thus allowing for a fresh start on criminal justice reform for all Canadians.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words about Motion No. 139 posed by the hon. member for Surrey North.

I would like to pay tribute to my colleague from Surrey North who will not be a candidate in the next general election. She first came to this place in 1993 with many of us and I served with her on the health committee. I know she is a nurse by profession. I know that she has many fond memories of the many friends she has

made here. I want her to know, on behalf of many colleagues in the House, that we will miss her. We wish her well in her next career.

I have found this member to be a very calm and rational and reasonable member in her representations in the House and in committee. She has come up with a motion in which she has asked the House to consider an aspect of the justice system, the National Parole Board. The concept she is raising, which I think is important, says that when there is a benefit of the doubt she is interested in making sure that the victim's interests are balanced and taken care of in situations dealing with people who have been convicted of criminal offences.

I know from the member's speech that it is not just a wild grab to incarcerate everybody for life and throw away the key. Her statements and her rationale have been well thought out. She has articulated some of the ways in which she knows from her research that there are people, the families of victims and the victims of crime, who do not know what goes on in this process. This is not something in which we are trained. When families unfortunately are in a situation where a loved one, a friend, a family member or acquaintance has been the victim of crime and their families are thrust into that situation, it is terribly tragic. It happens so often and it is very regrettable but it is a reality in our society that there are people who have done some bad things.

The important thing is that the member has been reasoned and constructive in her suggestions. Even the parliamentary secretary who spoke earlier has acknowledged that. It is to the member's credit that she raises them and has not tried to somehow take that position in a way which would be off the wall in its presentation.

• (1805)

The member has acknowledged that people who are incarcerated for various crimes are not all the same. There are different circumstances and conditions. Imagine how many people there are in the criminal justice system who have committed crimes against family members, who have murdered family members, who have assaulted or otherwise committed some criminal offence against someone they know and love. Things happen, like spousal homicide, for instance.

I was astounded to find out what a high percentage of homicides in Canada are cases of people who have killed people they knew. It is shameful. Those crimes do not occur because the perpetrators are devious people like Clifford Olson. Something has happened. There is more to it. There is something underlying the reason for that crime. Something has happened that has influenced the actions of people. They are not the kind of people who are going to kill anybody else. It is not a criminal mind but a mind which has—in the vernacular—snapped or reacted in the extreme at a point in time when something bad has happened.

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The member has basically said that maybe there are things we can do. Maybe we can identify that in the vast majority of these cases we are not dealing with the bizarre cases that are often raised in this House. It is important that Canadians are educated on the kinds of things that happen. There is a lot of misunderstanding or lack of information about what happens in the process.

I am not a sociologist or a psychologist and I do not know very much about the theory and the philosophy of our penal and justice systems. However, I know that after they have served their time, people who have done bad things will eventually have to come back into society. They will have to reintegrate into society. They will potentially be my neighbours or my co-workers. They will have every right.

That says a lot about the need to have an effective parole system which takes into account the need for rehabilitation and education of everyone about the things that should be done to make sure people have the incentive while they are incarcerated to understand what happened, why it happened and how to cope and deal with that so they can eventually reintegrate. For the vast majority of people that is the case.

There is now legislation for habitual dangerous offenders and we know they may never get out which is probably the right thing as well.

In the few minutes I have left I want to raise another issue. Young offenders make up quite a large number of the people who are incarcerated or who have committed crimes and may not have received a penalty.

I know a lot of Canadians have an opinion on young offenders. Many would say that we have to lower the age because young offenders are committing crimes at a lower age than they used to. Many would say that young offenders should be treated like adults, that if they commit adult crimes they should be treated like adults. To some extent in some cases that is true. From the research I have done on family and divorce issues I know that about 70 per cent of young offenders come from lone parent families. That is significant. It relates to the member's motion. There are other factors to be considered.

I am not sure whether all of the 70 per cent of young offenders should be herded into the same kind of mould which says here is what is going to happen because you are just a bad kid. I want to know where the parents were. I want to know what the conditions were, whether it was a situation of poverty or whether abuse was prevalent in early childhood or whether there were other situations about which we have no way of knowing.

• (1810)

I raise that as another example of why we should not paint all criminals in the justice system with the same brush and say that

they are all Clifford Olsons and here is what we have to do with them. In fact they are not all Clifford Olsons. Some of them are neighbours, friends and young people who have had bad things happen to them during their lives. We have a responsibility not only to deal with the very bad criminals, we have a responsibility to deal in the preventive vein to make sure that some of these things do not happen in the first place.

I thank the hon. member for bringing this motion to the House and I thank her for being a friend and a colleague.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I too would like to mention that we are certainly going to miss my colleague. I would like to thank her for bringing in this motion today.

Back in 1968 when the public was in the grip of Trudeaumania the Liberal government set out to revamp the justice system. Some of the revamping which resulted from Mr. Trudeau's just society we are dealing with today and have been labouring under it for quite some time. For instance, that Liberal government abolished capital punishment against the will of the majority of Canadians. It sanctioned 25 year life sentences which can be served in 15 years.

As my colleague opposite has pointed out, there are different circumstances in every case and I will touch on that later.

That government also gave us the Young Offenders Act. Punishment was replaced with a new buzzword: rehabilitation. Liberals, then and now, have failed to establish the worth of a life.

Since arriving in Ottawa, the Reform Party has called for changes to the criminal justice system, changes which would support victims and punish convicted criminals. We have called for the complete elimination of the faint hope clause, which of course is section 745 of the Criminal Code. It allows convicted murderers to apply for parole after serving 15 years.

Reformers believe that the only fair and just penalty for premeditated murder is life imprisonment. As previous speakers have pointed out, there are circumstances which would allow for parole before the criminal has served 25 years.

Thanks to the weak-kneed Liberals, life means 25 years at best, which can be served in 15 years. By the time this minister was finally convinced that the law had to be changed, he left a loophole big enough for Canada's most notorious criminal, Clifford Olson, to slither through.

The minister did nothing to prevent Clifford Olson from jumping on his soapbox. He did nothing to prevent Clifford Olson from forcing his victims' families to relive the nightmare which has been part of their daily lives since their children were so sadistically murdered. This calculated killer violated every one of his victims' rights. He did not give any of them a faint hope for survival.

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No one expects his bid for freedom to be successful, but he will have an opportunity to present his case to a jury of Canadians. Think of how repulsive that will be for those who draw the short straws and have to sit on his jury.

Now because of the minister's inaction, Clifford Olson will not only have a venue, he will be given a forum in which to try to set the terms of his August parole bid. It is hardly surprising that he does not want the jury to hear the statements of the families of his victims, or to hear about specific police or prison reports about him, or to submit to the psychiatric examination requested by the crown. With his record it is not surprising that he would not want this information in the hands of a responsible jury.

As well, flaws in the justice system make it impossible to revisit the plea bargaining agreement which Karla Homolka tricked crown prosecutors and police into granting her. She will be eligible to apply for parole this summer, having served a mere four years of her 12 year sentence.

• (1815)

If she declines the opportunity to apply for parole now while she is in the spotlight she can and probably will exercise this option at a later date.

This is the sort of case that the Reform Party is so opposed to. Certainly we believe that there are people who could be allowed early parole, but in these cases it makes absolutely no sense and the Canadian public is repulsed by the idea that they can get early parole.

With an election call just 10 days away the minister and his colleagues have discovered that Canadians from coast to coast are concerned about the lack of justice in the justice system. Where have they been for the last 3.5 years? At the doorsteps they will try to convince Canadians that they were tough on crime and passed legislation to modernize the criminal justice system.

Let us look at the changes this government made to the Criminal Code. Bill C-37 and Bill C-41 on sentencing did nothing to improve the plight of victims. Bill C-45, which dealt with section 745, betrayed victims of crime. The Minister of Justice promised the families of murder victims a voice at parole appeals. They will get it but not for a long time. The minister fixed it so that this new law only applies to people convicted in the future, not to anyone currently serving a life sentence. He betrayed bereaved relatives to have an opportunity to speak at any hearing held 15 years from now. That is how committed Liberals are to victims rights.

In December 1994 a private member's bill authored by the member for York South—Weston calling for the elimination of

section 745 was passed by a majority of the members of the House of Commons, including 73 members from the government side. It was subsequently sent to the justice committee.

What did the member for York South—Weston receive for his efforts? History will show that he was turfed from the Liberal Party. The member for York South—Weston lost his opportunity to bring about meaningful change to the justice system, and families of murder victims lost the chance to see the killers of their loved ones pay in years of lost freedom for the lives they took.

The Minister of Justice uses the old adage that tough cases make for bad laws as his excuse for not taking a tougher stance. There might be some credence to this if we were talking about isolated cases. However, there are about 650 convicted murderers who are waiting for their chance to apply for this faint hope that has become a sure bet in lots of cases.

If we had enacted tough laws in the first place we would be able to deal effectively with all the facets of criminal activity.

The Prime Minister, his ministers and his backbenchers obviously do not believe that murder is a very serious offence. How can I say that? They sent a message to the victims of violence that their pain is just not that important. They sent a message to criminals that their crimes will be tolerated. They sent a message to all Canadians that their streets, homes and playgrounds are not safe.

I suggest to the government that it is not too late. Instead of making meaningless promises in red book II, as it is likely to do, why not use this last week of the 35th Parliament to do something truly worthwhile and give victims the rights they deserve. If the government does that it can be assured of a warmer reception at the doorsteps of the nation.

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion of my colleague from Surrey North. Her contribution to this House has been tremendous and certainly it will be noted in history in terms of compassion for those in need, not only aboriginal families of this nation but many other people who need special attention and consideration in a very humane and humanitarian purpose. I would like to thank the hon. member for making that contribution.

• (1820)

I hope into this next election that there is an opportunity somewhere in Canada that she may play a role, become a candidate. That would be an exciting possibility as well.

Motion No. 139 lays out for us a motion that gives direction to the parole board of Canada, saying that the priority for that parole board should certainly be victims rights rather than criminal rights

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and that there has to be a better balance. Through this motion my hon. colleague has tried to give direction for that.

That sounds like common sense for us. The question is why does it not happen. Why have we not over the years been able to recognize that victims rights must be considered before someone is put out into the general public or back on the streets with parole?

I have spoken with ministers of justice, the attorneys general of a variety of provinces with regard to this question and lawyers as well, legal people. They often say "The case before us is to judge this person who committed a crime as to whether he or she should be given parole or consideration or should be kept in prison for a longer period of time". That is the consideration. It is that individual on which they focus. They say "Our venue does not allow for the victims to come in and make some kind of presentation because it is not the victim we are judging". They say that is the dilemma that they are facing in making these kinds of judgments and carrying out their role either as a parole member or a judge in a court and so on.

Somewhere in that process we have to open our minds and recognize that if someone is paroled that person, prior to that, has committed some kind of a crime on the street, in somebody's home, in terms of somebody's private property or has invaded the privacy of an individual or hurt some individual in some way, serious or otherwise. That has happened and there is a victim there all the time.

Now that we are going to put this person back out on the street, why do we not consider victims rights and some input for victims?

This motion aims in that direction and tries to alert the parole board that it should happen, that we as members of the House of Commons, as the member says so well in her motion, should direct the National Parole Board that any benefit of doubt in hearings and deliberations on parole should go to the victim, the victim's family and public safety, and not for that person who has committed the crime.

What have we had from the government since we came to Parliament in 1994? In the year 1994 not much. My colleagues laid before the government case after case that the Minister of Justice was too soft on the criminal and there was not a consideration for the victim. I heard my hon. colleagues from Alberta and British Columbia lay that out over and over again. Section 745 of the Criminal Code comes into question where someone who has committed first degree murder is allowed to have consideration of parole after 15 years when they were given a 25 year sentence. We cannot see the common sense of that.

The many victims of the crime, as we laid the issue before the hon. Minister of Justice, were not considered.

• (1825)

All of a sudden we are into 1997, three years later, and the government is excited. It will do something with the criminals of this country. It will come down hard on the criminals.

I see a press release issued by the Minister of Justice and the solicitor general April 17. Again they are making the claim to the public of Alberta that they will come down tough on the criminal. They say they have introduced a package of tough new measures to target criminal gang activity.

It is all part of a facade. It is all part of a process by which the government thinks it must do this today, not bring some common sense to the criminal justice system. If that were the purpose, it would be excellent. The purpose becomes "I want to do this". This is what the Liberal government says.

Mr. Gallaway: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you will find there is unanimous consent to proceed immediately to consider the motion respecting the Senate amendment to Bill C-216 and to adopt it without further debate or amendments.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Do we have unanimous consent?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Madam Speaker, the government again and again tries to give the impression that it will now be tough on the criminal and have a criminal justice system that may be a little fair or which will consider the victims of crime as such.

We will look at the motives regarding what is behind it. The motive is very clear. On Sunday, April 27 the Prime Minister will call an election and the government requires a criminal justice package to convince the people of Canada that they should vote for the Liberal Party because it is tough on the criminal and is doing something for the victim.

The motives are wrong. They are absolutely wrong. If the motive were really to deal with the system and to take responsibility in a legitimate, reasoned way rather than doing something for only political reasons, we would have better government and better policy in terms of the criminal and certainly in terms respecting the victims of crime.

That is not the way it is. We see this knee-jerk reaction from government which is supposed to be good policy.

Now we look at the parole boards. How are they appointed? I know some of these individuals because I have been in active politics for about 34 years. I recall in Alberta Mike Maccagno was a good Liberal. He was leader of the Liberal Party of Alberta. He was elected to the legislature of Alberta and we became good friends even though I was a minister of the government.

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I remember talking to Mr. Maccagno one day. He said: "Ray, I think I am going to quit as the leader of the Liberal Party because I am going to Ottawa heaven. I am going to be appointed to the Parole Board of Canada". Forever after he lived very happily because he got that appointment.

The problem is do we have people there with credentials? I do not think we have. We must appoint those people because they have experience and something to contribute. I know members will take that into consideration with regard to this motion.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): The hour provided for the consideration of Private Members Business has now expired and the item is dropped from the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in 1992 the Standing Committee on Health published a study called "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: A Preventable Tragedy". It describes a little about FAS. There is no question that maternal alcohol consumption can have devastating impacts on the fetus.

• (1830)

The basic fact is that when a pregnant woman drinks her unborn child drinks also. The alcohol in the mother's bloodstream circulates through the placenta into the bloodstream of the fetus. It is possible the blood alcohol level of the fetus will remain at an elevated level for a longer period than that of the mother because the immature fetal liver metabolizes the alcohol more slowly.

Research shows that fetal alcohol syndrome is responsible for 5 per cent of all birth defects. It can reflect on the following: severe neurological disorders, social dysfunction, permanent behavioural problems, criminal problems, reduced life span, restricted brain development, learning disorders, hyperactivity, mental retardation, pre and post natal growth retardation, speech and vision impairment, and other physical deformities.

There is no question that fetal alcohol syndrome, often referred to as FAS, is a growing problem in Canada. In Ontario recent studies showed that although all other causes or problems to do with alcohol have gone down, the only only problem associated with alcohol that has gone up is fetal alcohol syndrome. In the last decade the number of incidents identified has risen by some 400 per cent.

In June 1995 my private member's Bill C-337 which asked for health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages. Part of that labelling was to caution expectant mothers about the risks associated with alcohol consumption. Subsequently the bill passed in the House and is before committee. I hope it will come to this place.

A couple of weeks ago the Canadian Pediatrics Society and the health ministry finally came out with a joint statement saying the best decision for pregnant women was to abstain from alcohol. This is the new wisdom of the ministry of health. The minister outlined a couple of things they have done. We only have to learn once that drinking or alcohol consumption during pregnancy even in moderation can impair an unborn child.

I hope the health minister will get the message. We need to take a dramatic step to alert women planning to have children or currently pregnant to abstain from alcohol consumption. We should do something to produce full page advertisements in every paper in the country to once and for all make it very clear that consumption of alcohol during pregnancy is a severe risk to the health of the child to be.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question on fetal alcohol syndrome by the hon. member for Mississauga South whose interest in the matter is unabated.

Alcohol use during pregnancy is a national health concern. Alcohol can affect the health of the mother, the fetus and the ability of the affected child to lead a healthy life even throughout adulthood. Fetal alcohol syndrome or FAS is a medical diagnosis that refers to a set of alcohol related disabilities associated with the use of alcohol during pregnancy. FAS children may suffer from a wide variety of physical and behavioural problems including learning disabilities. These children tend to have poor school experiences and as adults are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system.

The joint statement on prevention of FAS in Canada was developed by 18 national and grassroots health organizations and the Department of Health. The main message in the statements is that women are advised to avoid alcohol during pregnancy. The statement also calls for appropriate family centres and culturally sensitive treatment programs for women addicted to alcohol. These recommendations address primary prevention of FAS, that is preventing the problem from occurring.

There is also the need for accurate diagnosis, treatment of FAS children and support services for their families. In addition, we need a better understanding of the rate of FAS in Canada and further research into the effect of follow up programs for affected children.

Health Canada is working with the co-signatories of the joint statement to continue to identify effective strategies in addressing these needs. The problem of alcohol use during pregnancy is a

challenge to all of us concerned with the health of women, children and their families.

TRANSPORT

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on March 7 I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport whether the minister would implement the Transport Safety Board's recommendations to ensure that tanker car standards are strengthened to protect the public during the transport of dangerous chemical substances.

• (1835)

I thank the parliamentary secretary for his reply to the effect that work was already in progress to upgrade the strength of tanker cars. This is certainly progress on the road to protecting Canadians, their lands and water from toxic chemicals in the event of rail accidents. It also represents an important step in maintaining the confidence of Canadians in rail transport.

While this is a step in the right direction the public interest covers a much broader picture. If we are to have a truly sustainable transportation policy in Canada, not only do we need to have a safe rail system, important as it is. We also need to examine the effects of air pollution caused by increasing car and truck traffic. We also need to tackle the serious problem of carbon dioxide emissions and their contribution to the onset of climate change.

Let me elaborate on one of these items. In a 1995 study by the sectoral task force on transportation of the Ontario Round Table on the Environment and the Economy it was calculated that for every tonne of cargo hauled road transport produced seven times more carbon dioxide than rail. This fact must become a central consideration when making transport decisions in Canada. At present we are unfortunately headed in the wrong direction. The amount of freight being hauled on Canada's roads is greatly increasing while the amount of freight being hauled on rail is decreasing.

For example, road transport has increased its share of surface transport in Canada from 30 per cent in the 1950s to 70 per cent in 1991. At present, subsidies to rail are being cut while road subsidies continue to increase. Today our highways are clogged with trucks when in some regions railway lines are being underutilized or even abandoned.

Then there is the public health component of a sustainable transportation policy which points to the health cost caused by urban smog in Canada. Hundreds of millions of dollars between medical and hospital care are being spent. Clearly there is a link between transportation policy and human health. Therefore we need to find ways of reducing automotive transport.

Producing cars and trucks which pollute less is helpful but not sufficient an answer unless accompanied by decrease in vehicles

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and vehicular use. What is needed is a gradual reversal of the present trend, a movement toward a greater reliance on rail, a movement toward incentives favouring public transit in cities and a movement toward reducing subsidies for road transport.

I have a question for the parliamentary secretary. When can Canadians expect the federal government to produce a sustainable transportation policy which would address protection of human health through pollution reduction and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by giving greater importance to moving freight by rail and by encouraging and quite possibly facilitating policies aimed at moving people by public transit?

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like to answer in French a question raised by the hon. member for Davenport on March 7.

At the time he mentioned the recommendations of the Transportation Safety Board that additional restrictions be put on the use of Class 111A rail tanker cars for hauling dangerous materials.

I can assure him that safety has always been and will continue to be the first priority of Transport Canada. The department is constantly working on upgrading the safety of the transportation systems used in this country.

Regarding the specific recommendations of the Transportation Safety Board to which the hon. member referred, I can inform him that Transport Canada had carried out a complete review of goods that could be shipped in Class 111A tanker cars well before the Board presented its report.

At the time, there were specific restrictions on the shipping of 80 dangerous goods which may now no longer be carried in this type of tanker car. Recently, two more dangerous goods were added to the list of restricted goods. Transport Canada is continuing its analysis of 14 other dangerous goods.

• (1840)

I may also point out that Class 111A tanker cars are the workhorses of the freight car fleet, with 165,000 cars in service in North America. Although Transport Canada feels that these cars provide a safe method of confinement, the department continues to look for effective ways to improve the safety of all Class 111A cars.

Work is being done on ways to improve aluminum and nickel Class 111A cars. From now on they will require a full protective shield to protect the outside of tanker cars from perforation when used to carry dangerous goods.

Finally, I would like to repeat that safety always has been and always will be the first priority of Transport Canada.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on February 20 I raised a question in the House for the first time on a subject of great value and importance to many Canadians, that is their right to use herbs and other natural products for health and/or medical reasons.

What these people are suggesting is quite simple. They are saying Health Canada in its health protection branch is being non-consultative to the extent that it ignores the freedom of choice of Canadians.

The parliamentary secretary will suggest as he did on February 20 that products which are sold must be safe and effective. He will talk about Ephedra and how some people out west had a bad reaction to it, but he will not talk about pharmaceutical drugs which each and every day put people into emergency rooms at great cost to the system because they are not safe for the intended user.

This issue is really about miracles of magic when through the wonder of the health protection branch something that grows in the garden or swims in water is no longer a food but becomes a drug, a drug that may be restricted or not accepted at all. What is a dietary supplement south of the border is a drug in Canada. What has been used for hundreds of thousands of years with positive effects is banned in Canada. What is naturally occurring and at worst innocuous is outlawed by nameless faces in the name of good medicine in Canada.

In all of this we have lost sight of the consumer. Regulatory mania and cost recovery are driving this. Health Canada is putting the onus of proof on the individual consumer. Yet who is speaking for the consumer?

It should be noted that British Columbia is investing more than \$5 million to found a centre to apply alternative health products and procedures. Because of the influx of people from the Pacific Rim there is a realization that their ways, although we do not know why, are safe and beneficial. We know this to be the case because for thousands of years their methods have in fact worked. Yet the health protection branch says: "This is all news to us. Prove it".

I am suggesting that consumer rights are greater than bureaucratic rights. I am suggesting that bureaucrats should accede to the right of Canadians to access natural products they believe to be of benefit to them.

I am urging the minister to speak for Canadian consumers and not for business interests, rule makers and multinational corporations.

On a parallel point, last Saturday the *Globe and Mail* carried an article on the apparent power of prayer to improve the condition of

the sick. Why this treatment works on a scientific basis, who really knows. Perhaps I could suggest the health protection branch should investigate and regulate this too.

I realize this is really stretching the comparison. Yet why regulate daffodil bulbs, oil from parsley and lily of the valley, all of which grow in my garden? If I believe that consuming these will in a natural way correct a medical problem I might have, what does it matter to the health protection branch if perhaps like prayer they can in fact have a beneficial effect on my particular case?

I have a prescription for Health Canada. Perhaps a dose of sense and sensibility before those two things are regulated would persuade the minister to rethink his department's position.

What is effective such as daffodil bulbs and prayers may not always be scientifically quantifiable.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I guess I should respond since we are in a definite linguistic mode.

[Editor's Note: Member spoke in Italian.]

[English]

I do not want to go back to what I said just a moment ago but the member is pre-empting what he thought I was going to say. I think I am going to surprise him.

I want to respond to the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton regarding the implication of herbal products in Canada. The mandate of Health Canada is to ensure that drug products on the Canadian market are safe, effective and of high quality.

It is not our intention to restrict the right of free choice but rather to ensure that choices available can be made without concern for the effectiveness and safety of products. Any herbal product in a form used by the consumer that is intended for medicinal use requires a drug identification number. Canadians can be assured that if a product has a DIN it has been verified as safe and effective by the Canadian government.

It is worth mentioning that it is the importer's responsibility to ensure its products are in compliance. There are thousands of legitimate products on the market. Health Canada is encouraging the herbal medicine industry to come forward with proposals regarding the acceptable use of various herbal products.

In response to numerous requests for lists of herbs and herbal products that might be stopped by Customs from entry into Canada, the department is developing a system by which there can be a greater degree of certainty and transparency in terms of the products that are permitted in Canada.

[Editor's Note: Member spoke in Italian.]

Adjournment Debate

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): 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 6.47 p.m.)

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