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(HANSARD)

Friday, March 29, 1996

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 29, 1996

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAM ACT

The House resumed from March 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-13, an act to provide for the establishment and operation of a program to enable certain persons to receive protection in relation to certain inquiries, investigations or prosecutions, be read the third time and passed.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

* * *

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved that Bill C-16, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gordon Kirkby (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to Bill C-16, an act to amend the Contraventions Act. The amendments to this act are the result of consultations and discussions with the provinces.

I would like to thank the critic for the Reform Party and the critic for the Bloc Quebecois for agreeing to expedite the proceedings of

this bill and for treating it in a non-controversial fashion. I appreciate the co-operation. The end result will be an effective and harmonious contraventions system throughout Canada.

This bill is but another example which clearly demonstrates this government's willingness to work with its provincial partners and to avoid unnecessary duplication in federal and provincial activities.

To understand the bill, it is important to understand the act which it amends. The Contraventions Act was given royal assent in 1992 but it is not in force yet. It creates a contraventions scheme for federal offences. Currently those who are charged with an offence under federal statute or regulations are treated in the same way as those who are charged under the provisions of the Criminal Code.

The Contraventions Act provides for the establishment of a contraventions scheme as an alternative procedure to the Criminal Code. It will permit enforcement authorities to issue tickets to persons who are charged with an offence designated as a contravention under the act. Individuals who wish to plead guilty and pay a fine could do so, thus avoiding a formal court process and a formal court appearance.

There are three objectives to the contraventions scheme. The first is the decriminalization of certain federal offences. Decriminalization in effect means that a person convicted of a contravention will be subject to both civil and administrative sanctions without criminal stigma. Certain traditional criminal consequences of conviction such as finger printing, having a criminal record and being denied a passport will not apply.

The second objective is to ease the court's workload. The courts are presently administering all federal regulatory offences. Taking most of these cases out of the court system will reduce costs. The defendant will still have the option of taking the matter of contravention to trial for a hearing.

The final objective of the contraventions legislation is the improved enforcement of all federal regulations and legislation. It is much more efficient and effective to have enforcement authorities enforcing the law rather than spending a great deal of time testifying in courtrooms and getting ready for trial in order to bring a conviction.

The Contraventions Act is a great tool to achieve compliance with rules that protect Canadians. The act and amendments which are before us are designed to provide Canadians with a fairer, more

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efficient and more practical process for federal offences. It will ease the workload of courts, prosecutors and enforcement officers.

Over the years the provinces have developed expertise in handling tickets for offences under provincial legislation. Some provinces have central agencies capable of dealing effectively and at a reasonable cost with a large number of tickets. Quebec and Ontario for example have central computerized systems that deal with all their provincial tickets. These systems will be able to handle the federal tickets issued on their territory.

Using the provincial systems would avoid the creation of a complex federal administrative structure. Also, the provinces have indicated they prefer that we use their respective offence schemes rather than establish a federal structure in duplication of their own. Indeed it is simpler for Canadians to know one system within a province.

The government is dedicated to finding solutions with its provincial partners. The current bill would allow us to accept the provincial offer and use their systems. This bill would allow federal contraventions to be dealt with under the ticketing procedure and process of each province.

• (1010)

In other words, the Ontario Provincial Offences Act, the Quebec Code de procédure pénale and the Manitoba Summary Convictions Act would apply to designated federal offences committed in their respective jurisdictions. Therefore an Alberta resident who has contravened federal regulations will face the same administrative and judicial system as if that resident had committed a provincial infraction.

It is important to note that fines levied for federal contraventions will be the same across Canada for the same offence. Some provinces impose court costs and administrative fees in addition to the fine. Bill C-16 would permit these provinces to continue to collect these costs and fees.

The bill would also authorize the Minister of Justice to enter into revenue sharing agreements with the provinces. Under these agreements part of the fine revenues collected by the provinces would be used to compensate provincial costs and efforts. This I believe is a very reasonable approach.

Some provinces are ready to proceed immediately with the implementation of the Contraventions Act while others would need more time. Bill C-16 would allow us to bring the legislation in force province by province and provide the flexibility required for the smooth implementation of the Contraventions Act across the country. Federal departments and enforcement authorities are waiting for these changes to help them with their workload.

This bill reflects our government's willingness to co-operate with our provincial partners. It demonstrates flexibility and under-

standing of the realities of Canadians and Canadian society. It has the support of the provinces and I would urge all members of the House to support this initiative.

Once again I would like to thank the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois for providing their assistance in expediting passage of this important bill.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will add a few comments to those made by my colleague on the other side of the House, the hon. member for Prince Albert—Churchill River.

We do support this bill. It is not providing major changes and seems to be streamlining the justice system somewhat. It will provide a procedure for the prosecution of regulatory contraventions as designated by the governor in council through what is essentially a ticketing scheme much like that of highway traffic offences.

This bill assists the process by introducing administrative agreements of the provinces and territories, their municipalities and agents to utilize existing resources and to share the revenues generated.

We have looked at the bill and I have been in communication with my colleague, the hon. member for Crowfoot, who is the justice critic for our caucus. He informs me that the bill will not forfeit provisions. The forfeiture of provisions in fact will be maintained and the provinces have agreed to this legislation.

The bill will make our justice system more effective and therefore I am happy to add my support to Bill C-16.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you would find unanimous consent to deal with this bill in committee of the whole and subsequently at all stages immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

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(By unanimous consent, House in committee on Bill C-16, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, Mr. Kilgour in the chair.)

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

The Chairman: Order. The House will now go into committee of the whole to consider Bill C-16, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

[*English*]

(Clauses 1 to 6 inclusive agreed to.)

On clause 7:

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, the parliamentary secretary will be back momentarily. He will be indicating to the committee of the whole the text of the amendment being proposed in order to deal with the issue.

Mr. Gordon Kirkby (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, the amendment is to the English text as its meaning does not conform to the French text put forward.

I move:

That the English version of clause 7 of Bill C-16 be amended by striking out line 31 on page 3 and substituting the following: “menced under this act”.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Chairman, we would like to know what words would be replaced by “under this act”.

The Chairman: Does the hon. member for Joliette have a copy of this amendment?

Mr. Laurin: Mr. Chairman, the words were not mentioned in what was read by my hon. colleague. I therefore wonder if my copy conforms with what my colleague said.

[*English*]

The Chairman: Would the parliamentary secretary indicate if what he has said conforms with the wording of his amendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Laurin: Mr. Chairman, if it can help, is it the words “by means of a ticket” on line 31 that would be replaced by “under this act”? That is what I was asking, but if that is indeed the intention, we have no objection.

[*English*]

Mr. Kirkby: That is correct.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Chairman, I want to ask the parliamentary secretary if he would make it clear that the wording does not change the effect of the legislation. In other words, by adding the words “under the act” to replace by means of a ticket, are the same ends being accomplished?

That is my understanding but I want to confirm with the parliamentary secretary that this does not change the substance of the legislation.

Mr. Kirkby: Mr. Chairman, it is my understanding that this amendment does not in any way change what is being proposed in the bill. It is merely a technical amendment to ensure that the English and French texts are equivalent.

(Amendment agreed to.)

• (1020)

(Clause 7, as amended, agreed to.)

(Clauses 8, 9 and 10 inclusive agreed to.)

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Chairman, there are no additional amendments. I wonder if the Chair would consider asking if all the remaining clauses carry, up to clause 44, so that we could do them all at once.

[*Translation*]

The Chairman: Are all the clauses that have been listed agreed to?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clauses 11 to 44 inclusive agreed to.)

[*English*]

(Title agreed to.)

(Bill reported.)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Rock moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Andy Mitchell (Parry Sound—Muskoka, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I want to take the opportunity to mention to the House that the original Contraventions Act, which was passed in 1992 and amended today, began a long process that dates back to 1982. I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Stan Darling, who initiated the legislation.

I want to let my colleagues know how important this piece of legislation is to my riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka. We have

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long suffered a safety issue on our waterways and have needed better enforcement procedures. This bill will give us that opportunity. It works well through provincial regulatory authorities to make that happen.

Negotiations are taking place right now between Ontario and the federal government and within a very short period of time enforcement officers will have the means to enforce safety regulations.

I would like to thank my colleagues from the Bloc and from the Reform Party for agreeing to this process today. It has allowed this bill to be passed quickly so that enforcement can be on our waterways this summer.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I too will be brief. I would like to take this opportunity, particularly when the Minister of Justice is with us, to say that when his department brings forward good laws we can move co-operatively to have the legislation pass quickly through the House. It is in stark contrast to legislation such as Bill C-68, which was a bad law and which the minister had considerable difficulty getting through the House.

The bill is basically cosmetic, but it does provide minor improvements to existing legislation. The bill permits changes to prosecution by provincial attorneys general or their agents. This is an improvement and it will likely reduce the cost of enforcement. That is one reason why we can support it. Therefore, we would like to see this bill passed and go to the Senate to become the law of the land.

• (1025)

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find unanimous consent to move immediately to private members' hour until shortly before 11 a.m. and to resume private members' hour immediately afterward to complete that item on today's Order Paper.

[Translation]

Mr. Laurin: Mr. Speaker, because we always come in prepared, we agree to move to that stage, especially since our speaker is in the House and has excellent points to share with you.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

QUEBEC BRIDGE

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert, BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should, in conjunction with the Canadian National (CN), carry out repairs to the Pont de Québec.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as the mover of the motion, I welcome this opportunity to speak to this motion, but before getting to the heart of the matter, I would like to remind the hon. members of an incident that happened at the Standing Committee on Transport last June, during the clause by clause consideration of Bill C-89, the CN privatization bill.

One day in June, the Coalition pour la sauvegarde du Pont de Québec appeared before the committee to support an amendment put forward by the Bloc Québécois, which was designed to exclude the Quebec bridge from the operation of the privatization bill.

The coalition was represented by Mr. Jobin, the coalition's leader, and Mr. Beaulieu, an engineer and Laval University professor who has been taking an active interest for nearly 10 years now in the important matter of the repairs to be made to the Quebec bridge.

They made their case, then the government members spoke, and the attitude they displayed was an absolute disgrace. They started by saying: "Look, one bridge cannot be excluded from the privatization process; there are 6,000 bridges in the Canadian railway system", which was like saying that the Quebec bridge had no more value than any of the 6,000 small bridges crossing over gullies, brooks and small rivers. This is the first indication of the government's absolute ignorance.

The second one is the fact that several government members who sit on the Standing committee on transport and who only understand English, and this is certainly their prerogative, did not even bother to use their earphones to listen to the comments made by the two individuals who were representing the coalition. Worse still, some committee members would get up, leave and then come back, so that the meeting took place in a circus-like atmosphere and these two people had the impression of being treated the way they might have been in a school yard.

Let us now go back to the motion itself. Why are we submitting motion M-202? We do so out of despair, because the Quebec City bridge is in such a deplorable and preoccupying condition.

Let us not forget that when the Quebec bridge was built to span the St. Lawrence River—until the day it collapses—it was the easternmost bridge, all the others being located in Montreal. At the

time, trains could not cross the St. Lawrence when travelling from the maritime provinces to Montreal.

• (1030)

Consequently, the Quebec bridge was a very important addition to the economic development of the Quebec region. This is still true today. I will not discuss the historical aspects or the actual construction of the bridge. The hon. member for Lévis will deal with these issues later on, and he will also talk about the bridge's heritage value.

Today's motion is important because it reminds the Canadian government and the CN that they have a duty to maintain this monument, because it is indeed a monument, which is also an essential component for the economic development of the Quebec region.

To give you an idea of the state the Quebec bridge is now in, I have decided to read you a few paragraphs from an article by Louis-Guy Lemieux that appeared in *Le Soleil* on September 10, 1995. It is entitled: "Bridge of Shame".

The article reads as follows: "It is possible for a person to lift off shovel-sized chunks of rusted iron with their bare hands. Motorists are treated to pieces falling on their hoods and windshields. Pleasure boats do not like to pass under the bridge—for fear of falling debris, of course. It is going to crumble into the river one day, and sooner than you think. You do not need to be an expert to see that the Quebec bridge is on its last legs. It is in such a decrepit state that traffic should not be allowed on it".

The article continues: "After the alarm sounded by the coalition to save the bridge, and the on the whole comforting conclusions of the study by CN's experts, I went to see it up close, this marvellous old bridge I remember from my youth. I did not recognize it. The old bridge, this heap of rusted iron, abandoned to the elements, cannot be the longest cantilever bridge in the world, the triumph of civil engineering, the eighth wonder of the world. These were the glowing terms used in all the newspapers at its inauguration on September 20, 1917. Today we would have to call it the first cantilever bridge no longer fit for use, an embarrassment to local civil engineering, a perfect example of the inertia of government".

The question we must ask ourselves is the following: Who owns the bridge? There is no doubt that from the moment construction began in 1907, until 1993, there was no possible doubt, it was the Canadian government, represented by Transport Canada, which owned the bridge, although it must be understood that responsibility for its maintenance was given to Canadian National several decades ago.

Since 1993, however, the bridge has belonged to CN. It must be kept in mind that this was exclusively a train bridge between 1917

and 1928, however. Its sole use was for the railway. From 1929 on, the Government of Quebec obtained the right to have automobiles use it, back in the days, some forty years ago, when vehicular traffic was light.

This makes no difference in terms of who owns the bridge. Even if the Government of Quebec has used the Quebec bridge, is still using it, and the use is increasing, this does not in any way cast doubt on the ownership, since the Quebec department of transport has been doing this on a leasing arrangement.

• (1035)

Since 1949, the Government of Quebec has been engaged in an agreement renewable more or less every 20 years. I doubt that the Quebec government forced the federal government to sign it at gun point. The federal government has, therefore, signed this succession of agreements willingly, and in full knowledge of the situation.

The current agreement will terminate in 2012. If the arrangement no longer suited the Canadian government when the last renewal came up, during the 1980s, it had only to terminate the leasing agreement with the Government of Quebec. It did not. Instead, it extended the agreement to the year 2012, at a rate I would agree is somewhat low, \$25,000 a year. I do not think this rate was imposed by Quebec. It is my understanding that the Canadian government was in agreement on it.

Earlier, I waxed somewhat poetic in describing the location and the appearance of the Quebec bridge, because Mr. Lemieux is a poet as well as a journalist.

Now I shall offer a description, not by a journalist, but by an American company. It appears that no Canadian company was capable of offering an expert opinion on the true condition of the bridge. This is particularly surprising when one of the designers, Dominion Bridge, has a business office in Quebec, if not its head offices. But no.

Mr. Dubé: It bought out MIL Davie.

Mr. Paré: As my colleague from Lévis has reminded me, they have just acquired MIL Davie. So it was an American firm, Modjesky and Masters, that the Canadian government asked in 1994 to thoroughly assess the state of the bridge at a cost of \$1 million. The money might better have been put toward maintaining the bridge, but that is what they did with it.

The results of the study are fairly alarming. The bridge has reached a point where it is rusting at a much faster rate than it ever did in past decades. Repair and maintenance work are needed to extend the useful life of the bridge well into the 21st century. The bridge, therefore, is in real danger.

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A little further along they go on to say that, while the structure shows no signs of falling apart, if it is to remain intact and irreversible damage avoided, work must be done within the next five years.

This is not the dream or the vision of a group of Quebec bridge lovers, who are defending the bridge. No, the bridge is really in dire straits.

The price tag is a big one, we have to agree. The company expects that full repairs, including architectural lighting will cost \$63 million.

This is the funny part. The federal government says it is washing its hands of it. A real Pontius Pilate. It is washing its hands of it, because it handed the bridge over to Canadian National in 1993.

However, the government fails to recognize that, over the previous 10 or 15 years, maintenance of the bridge was seriously neglected. It is, therefore, not true that CN alone is responsible for getting the work done.

The state of the bridge reflects the negligence of Transport Canada over the past 15 years. Who then should pay the \$63 million? The answer is very clear: Canadian National and the Government of Canada.

The Government of Canada claims that Quebec has significant responsibility.

• (1040)

I mentioned earlier that Quebec only leases the bridge. In spite of the fact that it is only the leaseholder, the Government of Quebec has shown incomparable magnanimity in offering to tear up the \$25,000 per year lease agreement if the CN and the Canadian government promptly commit to initiating the work called for in the agreement entered into by Transport Canada and CN in 1993. The Government of Quebec is prepared to tear up the \$25,000 per year lease and to pay \$1.5 million per year instead.

This is 1996, and the lease agreement expires in 2012, which means that there are 16 years left in the term of the agreement. If the federal government and CN had the wits to realize what the Quebec government is offering, they would jump at the offer. While under no obligation to do so, the Government of Quebec is offering to change the terms of the agreement, putting \$24 million on the table, and all the Canadian government has to do is to say: "Yes, we readily agree; this is a deal for \$31.5 million", especially since the repairs, which will take between seven and ten years to complete, will create 400 to 500 summer-long jobs for many years to come. It is estimated that this would generate approximately \$10 million in taxes for the federal government.

So, adding the \$24 million the Government of Quebec is putting on the table and the \$10 million the federal government will collect in taxes, we get a total of \$34 million. But when a \$31.5 million contribution is requested, the federal government does not want to

have anything to do with it and says: "No. The government has handed over responsibility to CN". It certainly did.

Either the Canadian government pays the \$31.5 million that makes up its share or the CN will be forced to operate under the agreement signed in 1993, a perfectly clear agreement, which states at section 1 that Canada will hand over to CN all Canadian government railway land, with a few exceptions. They gave CN a present. Section 2 states that the commissioner shall transfer to CN all national and transcontinental railway land. Another present.

In today's *Le Soleil*, the former mayor of Quebec City and illustrious chief of staff to the PM is quoted as saying that the land given to CN was worth \$35 million. CN was to use the proceeds from the sale of this land to initiate the work, but failed to do so.

Article 4 is very interesting. It reads as follows: "Canada shall transfer the Quebec bridge to CN—CN shall undertake to fund a major maintenance program on the bridge, including the installation and maintenance of architectural lighting, which shall restore this structure to a condition which shall ensure its long term viability and ensure it is maintained in this state".

Without limiting CN's obligations described above, the company was asked to try to reach a new agreement with the Quebec government, and that was done.

Article 12 of the famous agreement signed by the former Quebec transport minister, Mr. Gobeil, and CN's president, Mr. Tellier, provides that the agreement can only be amended through an instrument signed by the parties to it. The agreement does not appear to have been amended. Article 13 says that the agreement is subject to the law of Canada, is interpreted pursuant to that law, and is binding on the parties, their successors and their assigns.

In other words, CN's privatization does not change a thing. CN must do the work and the Canadian government must pay its share, since it has a direct responsibility after 15 years of neglect. I will stop here. Someday, we will have to expose the petty role played by the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

In a memo released today, he says that the federal government no longer has any obligation regarding the restoration of the Quebec bridge, and that it is now CN's responsibility. It may be so, but then the federal government should tell CN to do its homework.

• (1045)

One thing is certain though: the taxes Quebecers everywhere have paid since the bridge was built should have gone to its maintenance, but nothing was done. Let those who had a duty to maintain the bridge do it now.

[English]

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue the debate on the motion presented by the hon. member for Louis-Hébert who would like to see the federal

government in conjunction with CN carry out repairs on the Quebec bridge.

I reiterate the Quebec bridge is a safe structure. The bridge is inspected regularly by CN to ensure it is reliable and will remain a safe structure. An in depth inspection on critical aspects of the bridge is undertaken on an annual basis and every five years a detailed inspection takes place on the railway section of the bridge.

As the hon. member may be aware, the Quebec bridge has been the subject of a great deal of attention particularly by la Coalition pour la sauvegarde et la mise en valeur du pont de Québec.

Originally built for \$25 million, the first train crossed the bridge in 1917. In 1923 the Government of Canada entrusted the bridge to CN. In 1949 the federal government removed one rail line from the bridge and moved the second rail line and widened the highway section. The bridge has two sections, a railway line and a section for vehicle traffic. A long term lease was concluded with the province of Quebec at that time for a \$25,000 annual rate. As my hon. friend has acknowledged, that lease expires in 2012.

In 1993 as a result of an agreement between Canada and CN on Canadian government railway lands CN became the sole owner of the bridge. The bridge is recognized as a masterpiece in bridge engineering. It spans a total of 3,239 feet. It has a clear centre span of 1,800 feet.

In 1987 the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Canadian Society of Civil Engineering jointly designated the bridge a historic monument. It is a very historic structure. In addition, the bridge was recently declared a national historic site by the former minister of Canadian heritage. Steps have been taken to have UNESCO designate the Quebec bridge an international historic monument.

I have digressed from the hon. member's motion to emphasize this bridge is a world landmark. CN has long recognized this fact and has been spending more than \$700,000 per year on the bridge's maintenance. Following the transfer of ownership to CN the company engaged the consulting firm Modjeski & Masters to perform a detailed investigation to determine the state of the bridge, its condition, and the work that would be required for its long term maintenance.

I reiterate the inspection of the bridge revealed that its overall condition is remarkably good given its age and the operating environment of the structure. It is fully capable of handling projected traffic for years to come.

• (1050)

Nevertheless, as with any structure which is nearly 80 years old with a very complex design, a major maintenance program must

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from time to time be undertaken in order to ensure the structure's long term use.

I understand the bridge is now at this stage. To achieve this goal, CN plans a major maintenance program to begin this summer. CN expects to invest between \$1.5 million and \$2 million per year on the bridge over the next 15 years, in other words \$22 million to \$30 million. That planned expenditure is there.

An expenditure of this magnitude confirms CN's commitment to maintain this important structure. The hon. member is recommending that the federal government, in conjunction with CN, participate in the repairs to the Quebec bridge.

I advise the hon. member that as of 1993 the federal government is no longer a player, no longer the owner of the bridge and is under no obligation to share in the maintenance.

In 1993 Canada and CN entered into an agreement stating in part that the Quebec bridge and Canadian government railways lands were to be conveyed to CN.

By this arrangement, CN agreed to fund a major maintenance program on the bridge ensuring its long term viability and maintaining it in the current state.

The 1993 Canada-CN agreement also transferred to CN the lease between Canada and Quebec. Initially entered into in 1928, which my hon. friend alluded to, the agreement allowed the province to construct and maintain a roadway on the bridge for \$25,000 a year, a lease arrangement.

With the last option exercised in 1991, the current lease agreement will expire in 2012. This annual payment, negotiated decades ago, no longer comes even close to contributing to CN sufficient funds to reverse the deterioration that has been caused by roadway de-icing and other things used in maintaining a road.

Roads come under provincial jurisdiction. The predominant users of the structure, motor vehicles, represent approximately 75 per cent of the bridge's volume now. It has become more of a roadway than a railway.

I have already stated CN's commitment to the bridge. It also is prepared to participate in a more complete restoration program if the Quebec department of transport agrees to review the terms of the 1949 lease agreement with the view to financing half the cost of a major maintenance program. I have been advised that CN is ready to discuss with the province of Quebec and its transport reps a cost sharing initiative.

The hon. member responsible for bringing forth this motion may wish to discuss cost sharing with his provincial colleagues or examine other cost sharing alternatives such as contributions from neighbouring Quebec City municipalities. This could lead to an accelerated maintenance program.

S. O. 31

The Quebec bridge serves commuters who cross the bridge daily to get to their places of work. Currently the bridge supports one railway track and three vehicle roadways. There are approximately 10 trains a day utilizing the bridge, whereas there are upwards of 25,000 cars regularly crossing the bridge on a daily basis.

• (1055)

The Quebec bridge has, for all intents and purposes, become a highway bridge for commuters from the north and south shores. The former government made the transfer of Canadian government railway lands contingent on CN's assuming full responsibility for the Quebec bridge. The federal government's contribution was made at that time. This responsibility is now clearly CN's.

The government recognizes the uniqueness of the Quebec bridge and that it was and still is one of the engineering marvels of the world. I am very confident that CN will fulfil its obligations agreed to in the 1993 Canadian government-CN agreement at which time the responsibility for the federal government's maintenance of the bridge ceased.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Fraser Valley East, you have the floor on debate. It is my intention to interrupt in you a few minutes and so perhaps you would like to begin your statement after question period.

Mr. Strahl: Mr. Speaker, it is a dynamic speech and so I think it best I keep it all together for after question period.

The Speaker: I would not want to miss it. I agree with you. It being almost eleven o'clock, we will proceed to Statements by Members and we will have a little room to manoeuvre on it today.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

Mr. Andy Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday I attended a lecture which was part of a discussion series marking the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Last Sunday's lecture was called "Childhood Survivors' Memoirs of the Holocaust".

I thank Dr. Israel Unger for sharing his story with us. It is difficult to listen to the horrors of what happened during the second world war and I cannot imagine what it must have been like to live through it.

I hope that Dr. Unger and others like him will continue to recount their experiences so that we can learn from our mistakes.

Ignoring these kinds of atrocities will only lead us to forgetting and possibly repeating them.

I thank the organizers of this discussion series and encourage others to promote similar events in their areas across Canada.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has claimed victory in meeting his deficit targets when it really is defeat in wrestling the deficit to the ground.

Debt and deficit elimination is possible. Recently the agricultural society in the hamlet of Calahoo in my riding celebrated the return to a debt free environment. Through good times and yes, difficult times, it lived up to its obligation to repay a \$200,000 debt and not pass it on to the next generation.

Two months ago a constituent, Lyle Quintal, accepted the challenge of getting the community to pay off the last remaining portion and personally phoned everyone in Calahoo. The people of Calahoo rose to the occasion, made the contribution to their community and the debt is now gone.

Congratulations, Calahoo. Will the Minister of Finance recognize that Canadians want balanced budgets and debt free environments? Will he deliver results like the people of Calahoo or does he intend to pass the debt on to the next generation?

* * *

[Translation]

REFUGEE RIGHTS DAY

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 4 we will celebrate Refugee Rights Day in memory of the Singh judgment, which extended to refugees the application of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In 1996, there are over 23 million victims of persecution in the world, and it should be pointed out that Canada is now taking in fewer refugees than it did under the Conservatives. In addition, the Canadian and U.S. governments are getting ready to sign an agreement that would force thousands of refugee claimants now in the United States but hoping to come to Canada to apply in the United States, when that country offers a much lower level of protection than that offered in Canada.

I ask the Canadian government to fully respect its international humanitarian obligations and to demonstrate openness and tolerance for victims of persecution.

On April 4, let us express our support for refugees and for the organizations working in their defence in Canada and in Quebec.

• (1100)

[English]

MR. GORDON COOK

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (York—Simcoe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian, Gordon Cook.

York—Simcoe suffered a great loss on March 22 with the passing of this fine man. Gordon was one of those rare individuals with great energy and a continually positive outlook, able to manage a demanding public life, a full family life and a thriving 100-acre cattle farm in King township.

Mr. Cook's impressive public service career included 11 consecutive years on King council, five years as reeve and eight years on county council. He was the last warden of York county. He participated on York region committees and boards, including the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority.

Proud of his agricultural roots, Gordon bred an impressive breed of cattle, the Lincoln Red Shorthorn.

To his wife Alma and his family, the people of York—Simcoe and I express our great respect and appreciation of Gordon Cook's legacy. Gordon, you have our thanks.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a time when considerable profits and tax refunds are being reaped by the mining sector, it is worth highlighting an auditor general's report to the effect that under provincial monitoring and enforcement, industry compliance to the metal mining liquid effluent regulations of the Fisheries Act fell from 85 per cent in 1982 to 48 per cent in 1988.

This finding brings into question proposed further delegation of federal environmental responsibility if high standards of human and environmental health are to be maintained for all Canadians.

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CANADA POST

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the amount of direct mail or junk mail sent through Canada Post appears to be increasing at a frightening rate.

A 500-unit condominium in my riding estimates that it receives 25,000 pounds of direct mail annually, 95 per cent of which, it claims, is tossed into recycling bins.

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Though this practice may generate significant revenue for Canada Post, we should look at ways of reducing such wastage in order to become a more environment-friendly nation.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Surrey North are horrified by the series of tragic deaths caused by repeat offenders.

Canadians in Surrey and across the country want to know that their lives are not in danger when a potential repeat offender is set free.

Canadians want to know what the justice minister is going to do to keep potential repeat offenders from victimizing other families and communities. What is the minister going to do to keep repeat offenders where they belong?

Our private members' motion M-139 asks the government to direct parole boards in their deliberations to give any benefit of doubt to the victim, the victim's family and public safety, not to the offender who would make more Canadians victims.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government claims to be modernizing the unemployment insurance program, but in reality what it is doing is adulterating it.

When one pays for protection, one expects to be able to benefit from that protection when the need arises. That is the very principle of insurance. With the new legislation, however, workers and employers will be paying more for less. The government will be pocketing a \$5 billion surplus from UI contributions.

In addition, the burden on employers and employees will be greater, because deductions start with the first hour worked. This raise in taxes on the salary mass will have a devastating and catastrophic effect on small business.

Part time workers will also be affected. In Quebec, 68 per cent of part timers are women. Why has the minister chosen women, small business and workers as his targets? Why is he taxing employment?

* * *

[English]

ENGINEERING WEEK

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 4 to March 8 was Engineering Week in Canada. It was a time for us to

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honour the achievements and contributions of all engineers, and to thank all those who have dedicated their lives to this very important science.

• (1105)

In Canada there are 140,000 licensed engineers. These important men and women are represented by two excellent associations: the Engineering Institute of Canada and the Canadian Society for Professional Engineers.

Engineers are leading the way into the future. The government has recognized the important work of engineers by establishing Technology Partnerships Canada, a \$250 million investment fund to encourage research and development in high technology projects.

Engineers design and build our roads, they pioneer technology and they are responsible for putting people into space. Wherever there is good there is an engineer. Wherever there is a problem engineers find solutions. Engineers are everywhere.

I congratulate and thank all engineers across Canada and commend them on a job well done.

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REFORM PARTY

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a member of the Reform Party stood up during question period and launched yet another hapless smear campaign. As usual, in his attack on the Minister of Finance, the member from the Reform Party used no facts and had no hard evidence. In fact all he had was cheap innuendo.

Canadians hope in vain that the Reform Party will find a new tactic or change its style. These lame and baseless tactics are getting very old and very tired, and they are totally irresponsible.

During the 1993 election campaign the Reform Party promised Canadians better. The Reform Party promised it would raise the level of debate, it would not sink to childish, pathetic name calling and it would not depend on mud-slinging and innuendo. Mud-slinging has been the order of the day for the Reform Party.

Mr. Speaker, there is an old saying I am sure you know, that you never wrestle with pigs because you cannot win and all you do is get mud all over you.

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BEL ROTARY

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bridgenorth, Ennismore and Lakefield Rotary are hard at work raising funds for the construction of a new firehall in the township of Ennismore. The commitment of the many volunteers of the BEL Rotary are making a dream come true.

BEL Rotary has only 25 members but they have already raised \$25,000 toward this project. Through events such as golf tournaments and video dances, BEL Rotary is over half way to its goal of \$47,000 for the firehall.

In the past 10 years this small Rotary club has raised half a million dollars for community projects. This is truly the real nature of community service.

I would like to recognize the BEL Rotary for its hard work and perseverance and wish its members well as they work to improve the quality of life in Peterborough and around the world.

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NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised Canadians a say on national unity. This means they will put a vague unity package to a referendum or call an election seeking a mandate to negotiate a deal with Quebec. Those approaches are unacceptable to Canadians as they use the buy now, pay later approach which sank the “Charlatan” accord.

However, from April 1 to 30 people in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan will have a say in our country’s future.

Tele-vote '96 on National Unity allows residents to vote on proposals outlining the basis for a renewed confederation and a federal bargaining position if Quebec attempts to separate. Answers from constituents will form my position on these matters in Parliament.

Starting today, constituents will receive a householder in the mail providing details of Tele-vote '96. Starting April 2, I will be door knocking and holding town hall meetings because this April the voters in Nanaimo—Cowichan count for Canada.

* * *

MR. BOB CHAMBERS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a great Nova Scotian. Wednesday night in Halifax Bob Chambers died at the age of 91. He was a very well known cartoonist for the Halifax *Herald* from the mid-1930s until 1976.

He was born in Wolfville, Nova Scotia and studied art in New York City. He could have stayed there and earned a very good living, but like many maritimers he wanted to go home and went back to Nova Scotia.

The Bob Chambers cartoon was for many years the first thing people looked for in the newspaper each day. His cartoons were often full of pointed and funny political humour but they were never harsh, strident or cruel. In fact his victims were often the first

to ask for the originals. They now hang all over the maritimes and even in offices in Ottawa.

• (1110)

Bob Chambers was known as a compassionate man with a wonderful sense of humour. Nova Scotia will miss him.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the cities of Montreal and Quebec signed yesterday a co-operation project with the city of Beirut, in Lebanon. One of the objectives of this 18-month project is to rebuild the land registration system of the Lebanese capital. The project, valued at \$387,000, will be funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

This co-operation agreement will allow students from the Faculté d'aménagement urbain at Montreal University to work on the implementation a system of urban management, urban planning and local self-financing for the City of Beirut.

The Government of Canada is pleased to be associated with this project, which highlights Canadian expertise in the area of urban development, while helping one of the great French speaking capitals of the world.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Government of Saskatchewan tabled a balanced budget with a plan to continue balancing its budget in the coming years. NDP governments are not renowned for being good keepers of the purse. Just look at the Bob Rae disaster.

Liberals will vilify Klein and Harris for moving from red ink to black and for cutting up their credit cards. But now even the timid NDP and the Quebec separatist government are singing off the Reform song sheet. The sweet melody is: Balanced budgets create jobs and preserve funding for health care and education.

Canadians knew that Liberals were not as committed to deficit reduction as were Klein and Harris, but they are shocked and angered that even the NDP and the separatists are leaving the Liberals in the dust. Surely the Liberal government must be ashamed to know that it is the worst money manager in the country.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was amazed to find out that the Department of Public Works and Government Services was planning a dredging operation in the Sorel harbour which would involve discharging in open waters more than 71,000 cubic metres of sediment contaminated with copper, chromium and nickel.

With the solution selected by the department, the polluted sludge would be dumped out on the other side of the river, on the shores of Saint-Ignace-de-Loyola Island in the riding of Berthier—Montcalm.

The department seems to have a double standard. What is denied to private enterprise for environmental reasons is acceptable to the department. If the department wants to work to improve the value of the infrastructure, that is one thing, but to do it at the expense of the environment and the wildlife is something else.

The residents of Saint-Ignace Island and the surrounding area are concerned, and rightly so. If the work must be done, the government should act responsibly and require that the polluted sludge be disposed of on land. The shores of my riding do not have to suffer from the carelessness of the government. You do not solve a problem by creating another one.

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[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Mr. John Finlay (Oxford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently I was pleased to assist at the opening of another infrastructure project in my riding of Oxford. This was a \$2.5 million project which has made a modern performing arts centre, conference centre and art theatre out of a 100-year-old market building in the centre of the city of Woodstock.

The Woodstock Little Theatre, after 50 years of operation in rented facilities, now has a new home in which to present quality theatre for its growing audience.

As a Little Theatre member and sometimes actor I look forward to enjoying this new facility for which the Little Theatre members raised \$400,000.

This project is another fine example of co-operation among three levels of government and a community group. I was honoured to present a plaque with congratulations from the Prime Minister of Canada both to the city of Woodstock and to the Woodstock Little Theatre.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[Translation]***DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the camouflage operation under way at the Department of National Defence and made public this week by the information commissioner raises questions about the authenticity of over 80,000 documents, that is, more than 450,000 pages the department provided the Somalia commission.

The Minister of Defence would not say yesterday whether these documents could still be considered reliable.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister not believe, now that we know some documents provided by the Department of National Defence were totally falsified, if not destroyed, that the government should declare a moratorium on the work of the commission of inquiry, until the authenticity of all the documents provided by the department can be verified?

• (1115)

[English]

Mr. John Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the question from the hon. member.

The Department of National Defence has acknowledged that some very serious problems have arisen in the access to information requests and how they have been managed.

However, two inquiries and an outside inquiry have allowed us to take action. Strict measures have been taken to correct these problems. Written directions are being reissued to all members of the Department of National Defence to remind them of their obligations under the Access to Information Act. This is in accordance with a recommendation recently made by the commissioner in his report.

Other measures have been implemented which allow us to respond to requests in a manner Canadians have come to expect. DND and Canadian forces officials are conscious of the need to respond quickly, completely and fully to requests.

I can assure the House that we will continue our efforts, working with the information commissioner when appropriate, to ensure continued progress in our commitment to fully meet our obligations.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is very comforting to hear that people at National Defence are being told to stop falsifying documents. Quite frankly,

if they did not know this before, I wonder what business they have being there.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister realize that, by refusing to declare a moratorium, because this is what we have just been told about the work of the commission, the government is putting all of the commission's work at issue, since it relies primarily on the documents provided by the Department of National Defence? If these 80,000 documents have been falsified, are we being told that they will be updated? This makes no sense. How credible will we consider the work of the commission, when it is based on documents that may have been falsified?

[English]

Mr. John Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated before, actions have been taken to make sure that the rules concerning access to information are strictly enforced.

I would like to go over the sequence of events that led up to this. On September 21, 1995 three members of the Canadian Armed Forces reported to their official that they had breached the code of conduct and had altered documents.

On September 22 the deputy minister and the chief of defence staff sent a letter to the chief of review services tasking him begin an internal inquiry into what happened in the situation.

The deputy minister, then to be sure that they were doing it right, contacted the commissioner, John Grace, to tell him what she had discovered and the measures she had taken to deal with the investigation.

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): We are not looking for a speech.

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the member wants a clear a thorough answer. I am trying to give one.

She asked if there was anything she could do. This is important to establish the veracity of the Department of National Defence. Mr. Grace said she was doing the right thing and would keep him informed.

Later, Mr. McAuliffe, a reporter, asked for an investigation under the regulations of the act. The commissioner complied and made his report. His report is truly congruent with the conclusions of the internal investigation of the Department of National Defence.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem with National Defence is that it pretty well always takes a video for an inquiry to be called. There has to be some sort of revelation before things start happening.

• (1120)

We are told that three officers admitted to having altered documents. We are not told their names, however. Not bad, in terms of transparency. There are 80,000 documents, and we are told that they will not do it again. I would argue that the commission of inquiry is not investigating the future, it is investigating the past. Commissions of inquiry rarely investigate things that might happen. It might not be a bad idea at National Defence, but there has been so much in the past that they have enough to keep themselves occupied for a long time, I can assure you. The commission spokesperson, Sheena Pennie, says she herself is concerned and is keen to know whether the information received was not falsified as well.

I would therefore ask the Deputy Prime Minister if she could at least tell us what resources the government will make available to the commission to get through the 80,000 documents and the 450,000 pages? I hope they will provide resources and, especially, that these resources will not come from the Department of National Defence, because the army's art of camouflage looks like cover up.

[English]

Mr. John Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the questions put forward by the hon. member are serious questions. Of course, the inquiry is at arm's length from the government, but there are qualified and quality people on that commission. If they suspect any of the documents, they have the right to return them and ask for verification.

* * *

[Translation]

GULF WAR SYNDROME

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. At a press conference yesterday, a former member of the armed forces was very critical of the government for dragging its feet on the gulf war syndrome issue. She said that over 200 former soldiers are affected. While the American administration has acknowledged the existence of this syndrome, the Canadian government simply stated that it has been impossible to find a clear relation between certain symptoms affecting some members of the forces and their involvement in the Gulf War.

How can the government remain so passive and refuse to have this issue really looked into, thus depriving those allegedly affected by the syndrome of all public support?

[English]

Mr. John Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again this is a very good and serious question. I would

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like the House to know that the epidemiologist for the armed forces has asked for further studies because of the seriousness of this claim of the gulf war syndrome.

We are not the only country that is wrestling with this problem. Britain has done the same thing. The leading epidemiologist has undertaken to make further and more extensive investigations into the serious problems which face all who served in the gulf war. When the final conclusions come forward we hope they will be acted on.

I know that in the Department of Veterans Affairs they are getting a good hearing but I will leave that for the Secretary of State for Veterans to answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand that the position of the government is that potential victims of this syndrome should be left to fend for themselves, so that the government can avoid compensating them, should the department be found to have some responsibility?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Secretary of State (Veterans)(Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a long and proud tradition of taking care of its veterans. We have one of if not the best packages of benefits for veterans in the world.

There are a number of gulf war veterans who receive disability pensions through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

* * *

SOMALIA INQUIRY

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the defence minister told this House that his department initiated the information commissioner's investigation into DND's document tampering. That is just not true. According to the deputy information commissioner, the investigation was launched at the specific request of CBC radio.

I ask the government, why did the defence minister mislead this House?

The Speaker: Colleagues, the word mislead usually is not used in the House. Of course it would be completely unparliamentary to say "deliberately mislead".

• (1125)

I would take it that because there is nothing else to qualify it, I am going to permit that question to go ahead. However I would ask the hon. member to couch his question in such words that it would be more acceptable to the House.

Mr. John Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the debates the minister alluded to our

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involvement with the commissioner through the involvement in process and conclusions. In that sense, we did get involved with the commissioner. It was Mr. McAuliffe, a CBC investigative reporter who did request the investigation.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I take that then as an admission of guilt, shall we call it.

Let us go over the facts one more time. At the written request of CBC Radio the information commissioner investigated allegations that the Department of National Defence tampered with documents. It was at his initiation. Yesterday however the minister said it was the defence department that went to the information commissioner and that is false, false, false.

I ask the government again, why did the defence minister say what he said?

Mr. John Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister did not deliberately mislead this House. The minister was going through a series of contacts with the commissioner and inadvertently mentioned it. There was not a deliberate falsification. There was not a misleading of the House. The hon. member knows that.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, then we have other problems. As a former member of the armed forces like the member himself who just spoke, I can tell this government a thing or two about leadership, honesty, integrity and responsibility.

The Minister of National Defence cannot keep blaming his subordinates for the chaos in the department. He is the Minister of National Defence. Documents were altered. Unlawful orders were given and cover-ups happened on the minister's watch.

If the minister is not willing to take full responsibility for the chaos in the Department of National Defence, will the government, the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister demand his resignation?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada as represented yesterday by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons has full confidence in the capacity of the Minister of National Defence.

I would point out that the Reform Party is very intent on claiming a cover-up. Why would the government of the day be interested in the cover-up of a mess that was created by the Conservatives?

[Translation]

POVERTY

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the finance minister.

Yesterday, in a poverty profile report, the National Council on Welfare stated that the average poverty rate was higher in Quebec than in the rest of Canada, and that it remained significantly higher than the national average.

How can the finance minister explain his refusal to immediately close all the loopholes, which amount to billions of dollars and benefit rich Canadians, as shown by the council?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, poverty levels in Quebec and also in the other Canadian provinces are a concern for all of us.

If there is a scourge we must deal with, it certainly is the poverty of children, of single mothers in our society.

• (1130)

This is one of the reasons why, in our past three budgets, we closed the majority of loopholes. What is left are incentives to help industry create jobs. One of the most important ones, for instance, is the taxation level which is much lower for small and medium size businesses than for major corporations.

The best way to help is first to give money directly to the poor, but also to create jobs, which has been the result of our past three budgets.

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the finance minister not agree that it is high time for him to listen to the official opposition's proposals and, for the sake of fairness, to open the government consultation process on business taxation to groups representing the poorest members of our society?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only do I totally agree that we have to meet with these groups, but I have done it. I met with the antipoverty association before each budget. In preparation for the budget, I met with most social groups wishing to talk about the budget. The finance committee did the same, and we intend to keep on doing it.

On the other hand, as I know the member is well aware, all governments are faced with the same problem. We have debts, we have deficits, this is a burden we do not want to pass on to our young people. This is why, when we see in today's *Le Devoir* community groups comparing Bouchard to Harris, we understand that it is another provincial government faced with a problem.

I do not intend to criticize the Government of Quebec. Governments are trying to do their best, and so are we.

*Oral Questions**[English]***MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House the Prime Minister said that he is proud of his minister of defence. What a strange use of language. Is he proud of the hazings? Is he proud of the continued cover-ups? Is he proud that senior officers ordered documents destroyed or falsified? Is he proud that morale is at an all time low?

Perhaps the Deputy Prime Minister could tell the House just exactly what it is the Prime Minister is proud of.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member has complaints about morale in the armed forces, he should get himself a mirror to see the reason why.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, are there no better answers than this?

The incompetence of the minister sets an unacceptably low standard for all other ministers to stoop to and we have just seen it right there.

The men and women on the front lines of the Canadian military are the most courageous in the world and they deserve better leadership. My question again, if I can get a decent answer this time, is: What message is the Prime Minister sending them when he does not have the courage to do the right thing and demand the defence minister's resignation?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the Reform Party is obsessed with moles, cover-ups and other kinds of stories. If the Reform Party is truly interested in getting to the bottom of the facts it should support the decision of the Minister of National Defence who had the courage to call a public inquiry into the events surrounding the Somalia affair precisely because he did not want to have anything to do with the mess that was created by the previous Conservative government.

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*[Translation]***BUSINESS TAXATION**

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we just learned this morning that Imperial Oil, an oil company making huge profits, will receive a \$843 million tax refund from the federal government.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. While the minister is asking all Canadians to tighten their belts, is asking the people most in need to forego \$7 billion through his cuts in social programs, including \$500 million to Quebec students, and is asking the unemployed to cough up \$5 million in premiums each

year, is it normal and morally acceptable that a company that will make \$514 million in profits this year should benefit from such generosity on the part of Revenue Canada?

• (1135)

[English]

Mrs. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify to Canadians that the Government of Canada through Revenue Canada will be paying refunds. The refunds are not the government's decision but are in reaction to and the reality of a court decision, and this government does obey the law in this country.

With respect to the resource allowance refunds it has been nearly a quarter of a century that the mining and oil and gas sectors, very important sectors to our Canadian economy, have needed clarity. It is with the work of the Minister of Finance since 1992 when the court procedure ended and in discussions with these very important resource sectors of our economy we have now in a very proactive manner inserted regulations and legislation that will give certainty that was not there before to an area of the law. This is very beneficial for all the stakeholders.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the secretary of state is telling us that taxation is defined by the Supreme Court. He has some nerve, using that as an excuse.

I will rephrase my question. Is it not time that the minister understood, once and for all, that it is crucial and urgent to proceed with a total and complete review of business taxation, not behind closed doors, not exclusively by a group of experts of the type that, indeed, made sure that Imperial Oil receives an \$843 million tax refund, but a real review, through a parliamentary process open to the public and transparent, to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen again?

[English]

Mrs. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer this question by stating very clearly that this government has acted to stop the situation from repeating.

The government of the day in 1992 issued draft regulations after the court decisions were halted and over with. We passed legislation in 1995 requiring large corporations to specify and quantify their outstanding tax issues. We released the new tax rules for the resource allowance in the 1996 budget.

Of the refunds being issued over this time period, they were anticipated and prudently allowed for in our budgets. Fully two-thirds of the moneys being expended as refunds now is interest. There will be corporate tax, mostly at the top corporate tax

Oral Questions

rate, payable on this interest. Therefore the government will be getting some of this money back in its pocket.

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GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Ontario Premier Mike Harris has said that hell will freeze over before we will see co-operation for a 15 per cent sales tax in Ontario and with good reason. His finance minister has said that harmonization would cost Ontario taxpayers up to \$3 billion.

Page 15 of the red ink book states: "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".

Will the finance minister now admit that his \$3 billion harmonization proposal for Ontario based on the red ink book promise to eliminate the GST actually breaks another red book promise to harmonize and reduce the tax burden?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that our proposal does exactly what we said in the red book. What the member has just called for, which is harmonization, is in fact what the member's party called for in the finance committee.

It is important to understand that the \$3 billion the hon. member refers to, as far as the federal government is concerned, whatever would occur would be revenue neutral. If there would be a gain on one segment of the taxpaying public in Ontario, the Government of Ontario would certainly have the opportunity to use that funding either to reduce taxes or in fact to increase social services in the province of Ontario. It would have complete flexibility.

• (1140)

Therefore it is simply not true to say there would be a shift from one level of taxpayer to another. In fact, it would give the government the scope for far more fairness in Ontario, as was the conclusion of the Ontario fair tax commission over a year ago.

What we are looking at is a profound structural change in the tax system which would do a great deal of good for small business and the consumers of Ontario.

In terms of the opening statement of the hon. member, his reference to hell freezing over, that may be the case. It may well be that the hon. member and other governments have a better knowledge of that place than I have.

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, based on that response I suggest the finance minister get himself a fur coat.

A study done at the University of Toronto Institute for Policy Analysis found that the Liberal plan for harmonization could lead to the direct loss of 70,000 jobs in Ontario; 70,000 more people on UI in Ontario. The government was elected on a promise of jobs, jobs, jobs.

Will the Minister of Finance now admit that his harmonization proposal breaks yet another red book promise? Does the finance minister consider one job, the Deputy Prime Minister's job, ahead of 70,000 jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Tax Foundation and most other commentators have indicated that the savings available to small and medium size business would be between \$400 million and \$700 million, and they may well be in excess of \$1 billion. That is the kind of money that small business needs to create jobs and it is the kind of money that harmonization and the new tax would provide.

There is a reason the majority of Canadian exporters have called for a harmonized tax. They know it would put them in a more competitive position vis à vis the United States. That means jobs.

There is a reason the consumers have called for it. They understand the simplicity it would provide to small retailers. That means jobs. Virtually every economic group in the country has called for a single tax. They all recognize the benefits.

The hon. member is calling for ten different sales taxes plus the federal sales tax across the country. Immense complexity. We are the only country that does not have a single sales tax.

Why does the hon. member continue to try to take Canada backwards? Is that an essential part of Reform Party policy?

* * *

[Translation]

INFORMATION HIGHWAY

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it would seem that what is good for manpower training is also good for the information highway: the federal government keeps infringing upon areas of provincial jurisdiction, increasing the overlap and the waste of public funds and getting taxpayers in deeper trouble by adding new programs left and right. We just had another example of this when the Minister of Industry announced he intended to link every school in Canada to the Internet, even though some provinces already have similar programs.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. When will the federal government recognize that education is an area of provincial jurisdiction and transfer to the provinces all the money it currently spends on these institutions?

Oral Questions

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec students have the same right as students elsewhere in Canada to be connected to the information highway and that is what we are trying to do with this project. It is unfortunate that the Bloc Québécois is much more interested in political separatism than in the information that will open the doors to the 21st century for our students.

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister just demonstrated all the respect she has for areas of provincial jurisdiction. Such is her position. In the information the federal government is releasing about Rescol, teachers are invited to apply to the federal government to get funding for this Internet project. Again, the federal government is going over the heads of the provinces.

When will the minister and the government recognize the provinces' jurisdiction in the matter and transfer all the money they spend on schools?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I took part with students from the cities of Hull and Dorval in a project dealing precisely with the information highway.

• (1145)

The system linked us with students in Hamilton, Winnipeg and other parts of the country. Why is the hon. member scared of information? Why is he afraid to let students from various areas of the country start talking to each other? Does it go against his separatist policy which closes doors instead of opening them up?

* * *

[English]

FEDNOR

Mr. Andy Mitchell (Parry Sound—Muskoka, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry recently announced that the budget of FedNor, the regional development agency in northern Ontario, is being increased to \$60 million over three years.

In view of the concerns of the auditor general, will the parliamentary secretary advise the House what the minister will do to ensure that Canadian taxpayers get full value for this expenditure, particularly as it relates to access to capital for small businesses in northern Ontario?

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was an announcement last week by the Minister of Industry revitalizing FedNor and providing the financing that has been referred to in the question.

This is a necessary step in helping small business in northern Ontario. By setting up the system that has been put in place there will be a leveraging approximately fivefold in the money from the banks in helping establish greater financing for small business in northern Ontario.

FedNor is a regional agency along with other agencies in Atlantic Canada, Quebec and western Canada; the same agencies the Reform Party would have destroyed in its budget. It wants to eliminate development and employment in the different regions of Canada.

* * *

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to issues of national security the solicitor general has taken the approach that Canadians will just have to trust the public statements from CSIS, SIRC and him.

The minister is so secretive that he has even denied the national security subcommittee unexpurgated copies of his ministerial directives to CSIS, although his Conservative predecessors gave the subcommittee full access.

Can the minister explain why he is so intent on keeping secrets from members of the House?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be happy to review the matter to see if we are doing anything different from my predecessor and I will be happy to get back to her. Certainly we want to co-operate with the subcommittee which is part of the justice committee of the House.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps saying “trust me, trust CSIS and trust SIRC”, but trust must be earned.

Has all the information in the documents the minister has tabled in the House of Commons from CSIS and SIRC been completely accurate?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has not identified the documents she is talking about. As far as I am aware the material I have tabled on behalf of CSIS or SIRC is accurate. If she has any suggestions to the contrary, I ask her to bring them to my attention so we can go into the matter.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA-U.S. TAX TREATY

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Oral Questions

When tens of thousands of pensioners saw their American social security payments cut by 25 per cent, the only thing the government found to say in this House on March 14 was that it would raise the issue with the U.S. government, in order to find a solution to this inequity resulting from the new Canada-U.S. tax treaty.

Such a meeting has not yet taken place, and the pensioners are still waiting. Will the minister commit to raising the issue on his next visit to Washington, and can he tell us right now exactly when that will be?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, my next trip to Washington will be in two weeks, and it is on the agenda for the talks I shall be holding with the Secretary, Mr. Rubin.

• (1150)

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the minister agrees these pensioners are not being treated fairly, why does he not commit to passing the appropriate tax measures to compensate Quebecers and Canadians, if the U.S. does not respond favourably to his request.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that this is an American legislative issue that affects other countries as well as Canada. There seem to be exemptions, which is rather discriminatory, but Canada is not in a position to compensate Canadians who are taxed by other countries, whether that country be the U.S., Britain or France.

I am totally in agreement with the hon. member that this is unfair. We do not agree with the way the Americans are handling this, and I certainly intend to raise the issue directly with Mr. Rubin. I should add, moreover, that there have already been discussions between officials of our two departments.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, last year John Fraser's report on the Fraser River fishery laid the blame for millions of missing salmon clearly on the mismanagement and negligence of the fisheries minister.

Since then the government has also failed to negotiate a new Pacific salmon treaty. It failed to use licence fees to help fishermen and even failed to keep open the fish hatcheries which are the future of the industry. It destroyed the fishery and now the minister will be forced to announce the destruction of the fishing fleet.

Will the minister accept that his bungling, his mismanagement and his negligence of the west coast fishery are responsible for this? Or would he like to blame it on his predecessor, Brian Tobin?

Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Agriculture and Agri-Food, Fisheries and Oceans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not accept the premise of the member's question.

The minister is on the west coast and will be making an announcement later today. This follows a long series of consultation with the industry and will also go a long way to meeting recommendations that were made by people who participated in the round table.

I would have thought the member would be out there today to applaud what the minister will be announcing. The measures will be in the direction which will certainly contribute to the revitalization of the salmon industry in B.C.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I suppose they will have lots of places to hold the press conference. About 18 fish hatcheries have been shut down.

One recommendation of the Fraser report was that fee increases were acceptable but only if "it can be assured that all moneys collected will be used only for local fisheries management". Now we find that \$65 million collected in fees did not go to fisheries at all, the government has already shut down 18 fish hatcheries and enforcement is at a dismal level.

Why did the minister not follow the recommendations of the Fraser report accepted by the government and use the fees collected from fishermen to help out the fishing industry?

Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Agriculture and Agri-Food, Fisheries and Oceans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague will listen to the announcement that will be made later this day from the west coast, I am sure he will find occasion to applaud the minister's action. This announcement will go a long way in meeting the expectations of the industry on the west coast.

* * *

MINING

Mr. Peter Thalheimer (Timmins—Chapleau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party was the only party to have a mining policy during the last election. The Liberal mining agenda and the mineral exploration measures in this month's budget laid out a forward looking strategy to assist the Canadian mining industry.

Mining and exploration are vital to the Canadian economy, in particular to the people of Timmins—Chapleau in northern Ontario.

My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. On Tuesday the keep mining in Canada campaign statistics indicated that mineral exploration in Canada is declining at an alarming rate. Is mineral exploration in Canada decreasing?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Marlene Cowling (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the surveys by keep mining in Canada cover only 10 per cent of the total number of companies conducting mineral exploration in Canada. They exclude any company spending less than \$4 million annually.

This year exploration expenditures are forecast to reach \$850 million. Canada has ranked first in the world in 11 of the past 15 years. In 1996 I am confident that Canada will maintain its premier position in the world, thus creating jobs for thousands of Canadians.

* * *

• (1155)

[Translation]

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or the parliamentary secretary.

Following personal comments made during the referendum campaign by George Berthu, the president of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with Canada, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs exerted pressure in a number of ways, including cancelling a visit by European parliamentarians to Ottawa last February, with the aim of having Mr. Berthu relieved of his duties by the European authorities concerned.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs intend to pursue the course taken by his predecessor, by continuing to intrude in this unacceptable manner in the affairs of European parliamentarians, through the person of his Canadian ambassador to the European Union?

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs intends to work with all members of Parliament in the conduct of Canada's foreign policy, in Europe as elsewhere.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that by burning bridges with the leadership of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with Canada, he is alienating one of the better allies Quebec and Canada have in several very important issues involving Europe that represent thousand of jobs here?

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the conduct of Canada's foreign policy is the responsibility of the Government of Canada. The minister responsible is working with members of Parliament, including the parliamentary associations. He is giving his support in this regard in the interests of all Canadians.

[English]

KREVER COMMISSION

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Krever report is stalled by government lawyers who are looking at, in the justice minister's words, narrow grounds of procedural fairness. This guy is a judge, a supposed expert in the area of procedural fairness.

Does the justice minister not recognize that he is calling into disrepute the competence of this judge?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have professional and personal knowledge of the skill and ability of Mr. Justice Krever. He is a person of extraordinary ability.

The reason government lawyers are in the federal court is that notices were given to certain individuals in circumstances in which we contend there was not fairness shown as required by law. It is a procedural matter.

In no way do we quarrel with the commission's authority to make findings against people if that is what it chooses to do on the evidence. In no way do we wish to slow down the inquiry. We have asked the court to expedite the hearing and it has agreed. It will be heard on May 22.

Without departing at all from the respect we have for Mr. Justice Krever or the anxiety we have that he finish his work and make his findings, we want to take the points, which we think are important and have to do with fairness in the process, before the court for a quick determination.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the health minister faces quite a challenge. We have a justice minister looking at procedural fairness for fat cat politicians. We have a health minister who should be looking after procedural fairness for the victims, victims like Lynn Kamph from Pickering who is infected and ill, victims like Chris Taylor of Duncan, B.C. who is sadly already gone.

Would the health minister take off his lawyer's hat, put on the health minister's hat, a compassionate hat, and let Justice Krever speak and tell everything he knows?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, implicit in the hon. member's question is the suggestion that by resorting to court we are somehow trying to stop the commission or Mr. Justice Krever from making findings or from making recommendations, which is simply not so.

The anxiety we have about seeing this commission complete its work and make findings so we can improve the system of blood storage and control is reflected in our agreement to extend the

Routine Proceedings

commission's life, to provide it with additional funding when requested.

• (1200)

We are in court but we are there on questions which we think are important for the fairness of the process. We are not there to interfere in any way with the judge's powers to make findings as soon as possible. We have asked the court to hurry up the case and it has agreed to do so. We hope we can get these matters resolved quickly so we can get on with the commission's report.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shaughnessy Cohen (Windsor—St. Clair, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of Windsor know firsthand the value of Canada's medicare system because they see the alternatives every day across the river in Detroit. They have concerns that the North American Free Trade Agreement might open medicare to competition from U.S. companies.

What assurances can the Minister of Health give Windsorites and all Canadians that our health care system is being protected from U.S. corporate competition?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member and the House will know, when we signed NAFTA there was protection, particularly annex II.

However, due to the fact that Canadians had some anxieties and due to the fact that we as a government wished to reassure those Canadians that medicare in this country is protected, we have been able to negotiate an agreement in principle with the United States, Mexico and us which will further give assurances to Canadians that our health care system, which is the best in the world, will be protected for Canadians for generations to come.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions presented during the first session.

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-254, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Criminal Code.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this bill is identical to Bill C-240 which was introduced in the first session of this Parliament on April 22, 1994.

Pursuant to the order made on March 4, I am requesting that this bill be reinstated to the same position it was prior to prorogation.

The bill seeks to amend both the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. It would allow for post-sentence detention orders. Currently a dangerous offender designation can be sought only at the time of sentencing, which occasionally requires our justice system to release offenders who are deemed high risk to commit further serious offences.

The bill would permit the authorities to seek a dangerous offender designation against these individuals in the last year of their sentence. I humbly request that it go back where it was before prorogation.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-240 at the time of prorogation of the first session of the 35th Parliament.

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Monday, March 4, 1996, the bill is deemed to have been read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

* * *

BEVERAGE CONTAINERS ACT

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-255, an act respecting the beverage containers.

• (1205)

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to provide for a minimum deposit on all beverage containers made in whole or in part of plastic, metal or glass and that contain beverages for the purpose of sale.

The purpose of the bill is to ensure that these containers are not thrown by the roadsides and into the countryside of Canada, and to keep our environment cleaner. A deposit system will achieve that.

I am pleased to introduce this bill, which I had introduced not in the previous session but in the previous Parliament.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-256, an act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to amend the Criminal Code to include in the definition of identifiable groups those identified by sex, sexual orientation or mental or physical disability and include them for the purposes of prohibiting those who wish to promote hate propaganda against specified groups from doing so.

Those groups would now achieve the same protection others now have under the law if this bill were adopted by the House. This bill had also been introduced by me in the last Parliament. It is being reintroduced now but it was not in the last session.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Crête: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was expecting to introduce a few bills today. I had been told that I could introduce them at noon.

The Deputy Speaker: Do I have the unanimous consent of the House to revert to introduction of bills?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-257, an act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would change certain functions with regard to insurability of UI claimants. At present, there is a very serious backlog of files to be reviewed in terms of insurability. The purpose of the bill is to decentralize administration to the employment centres to make sure the backlog problem is resolved.

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

* * *

PUBLIC HARBOURS AND PORT FACILITIES ACT

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-258, an act to amend the Public Harbours and Port Facilities Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill, which had been introduced during the previous session, would insure more fairness in the appointment of harbour masters. In the present legislation, there is an old

practice harking back to early Confederation days that lends itself to a lot of political patronage.

The purpose of the bill is to make sure that appointments are made as a result of a selection process based on merit.

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

* * *

• (1210)

CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-259, an act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (membership of Board of Directors).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the objective of this bill is to ensure that the board of directors of the Canada Post Corporation includes representatives from each and every province in Canada so that there is a balance and the specific character of each region can be respected, and to set up committees so that, when decisions are made at the regional level, the people from the regions affected are consulted to ensure that the economic impact of those decisions on regional development is taken into account by Canada Post Corporation.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Andy Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to lay upon the table of the House a petition signed by approximately 200 constituents of Fredericton—York—Sunbury and neighbouring ridings.

Basically the petition calls on the House to amend the current legislation to exclude convention refugees from having to pay the right of landing fee.

TAXATION

Mrs. Georgette Sheridan (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour to present two petitions, one from the residents of the city of Saskatoon and the second from the rural portion in my riding, including communities such as Annaheim, Naicam, Muenster, Humboldt and St. Gregor, urging this government not to increase the federal excise tax in the 1996 budget.

Of course the petitioners were pleased with the minister's announcement on March 6 not to raise any taxes, but they will be pleased to remind him of this for next year's budget.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION TAX

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by constituents from Montréal-Nord, in my riding, and from several other cities in Quebec and Canada.

These petitioners are opposed to the \$975 immigration tax. They say it is offensive and discriminatory, particularly for immigrants and refugees from poor countries. Needless to say, I totally support this petition.

CANADA-U.S. TAX TREATY

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to present a petition signed by more than 200 people who criticize the inequity of the new Canada-U.S. tax treaty on American pensions paid to Canadian residents.

The petitioners call on the Canadian government to deal with this problem either by changing the way these pensions are taxed by the Americans or, if that is not possible, by finding a way of making sure these people are not penalized by the new tax treaty signed by Canada.

[English]

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition from citizens in Edmonton who draw to the attention of the House that since 1926 the opposition in Westminster Parliaments have been known as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition; that the Bloc should be moving over; that the Reform Party should be taking its place.

They call on Parliament to implement a means by which it could be determined democratically whether the leader of the Bloc Québécois should continue as Leader of the Opposition.

REVENUE CANADA

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it pleases me to present 52 petitions to the House from Newfoundland. One is from over 400 employees of Revenue Canada. They all deal with the same subject.

The petitioners are demanding the reinstatement of about 50 employees of Revenue Canada who are being laid off today. Because these people process the child benefit cheques and the GST tax credit cheques, the layoffs will lead to delays throughout Atlantic Canada for millions of people.

We look forward to a response from the Government of Canada to this petition. The layoffs do not make any sense and I agree with every single person who signed these 52 petitions.

● (1215)

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have five petitions to present today.

The first petition is signed by about 2,300 people in my constituency urging the government to forget about increasing taxes. They ask specifically that gasoline taxes not be increased in the next federal budget. Already they are planning for the next one.

TAXPAYER PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition requests the government reduce spending and that there be no increases in taxes whatsoever. The petitioners also request a taxpayer protection act to limit federal spending. That petition has about 300 signatures.

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the third petition asks Parliament to strengthen the Young Offenders Act. It contains 571 names.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the fourth petition asks for protection of unborn human beings and is signed by 215 petitioners.

EUTHANASIA

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the fifth and last petition is against euthanasia and doctor assisted suicide. It bears 88 names.

GASOLINE TAXES

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present from residents in my riding and surrounding area. The petitioners request that Parliament not increase the federal excise tax on gasoline and strongly consider reallocating some of the current revenues to rehabilitate Canada's crumbling national highways.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***QUEBEC BRIDGE**

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is my fourth attempt at this speech. I started before question period, I started after question period, I started before petitions, I have started after petitions and now I am going to deliver this speech.

I am a little concerned as I did promise the Speaker just before question period to deliver a barn burner. I am grateful to see there are enough empty seats in the House that if members from the government side flood across the floor after my speech, there will be room to accommodate them over here.

The motion we speak to today is about the Quebec bridge. It is a famous landmark and is sometimes called the eighth wonder of the world because of its engineering expertise in its day. I understand it is still a marvel.

I have to admit up front that I have never seen this bridge. From what I have heard about it today and read in the press releases sent out the heritage minister and by others, it is a beautiful bridge. I hope one day to travel on it and to see it for myself. I will plan that in my future travels and I look forward to it.

The bridge is 80 years old. It started out as a railway bridge. It graduated into a multi-purpose bridge and now is used more for car traffic than it is for rail traffic.

The problem is that the bridge is not being maintained properly by CN which is now the legal owner of the bridge. The Quebec government pays only \$25,000 a year for the use of the bridge for car traffic and it probably costs \$4 million or \$5 million a year to maintain the bridge and bring it back up to standard.

The gist of the argument being studied is the shortfall in the maintenance of this bridge. Who should pay for bridge maintenance on this project?

Since the 1980s CN has been putting only about \$600,000 a year into the bridge. That is not enough. It is gradually deteriorating and engineers tell us that it will deteriorate until it becomes unsafe, some time in the next century. Maintenance has to be improved. To repair it now will cost about \$45 million. If repairs are not ongoing one day it will be unsafe and will eventually have to be demolished. Obviously a landmark like this should not be demolished. It should be part of our heritage and preserved so people like myself, who have yet to see it, can have a look and appreciate what our forefathers and mothers have created for us.

• (1220)

In 1993 the federal government sold the bridge to CN for one dollar with the proviso that CN maintain the bridge.

The principle being discussed is: Who should look after the bridge? The motion says it should be the federal government. I would argue that there are principles at stake in this debate and I would like to elaborate on them at this time.

I would argue the principles are ownership and user pay. The users of the bridge, CN Rail and the people of Quebec and the maritimes, should pay to maintain it. However, they are reluctant to shoulder their responsibilities in this regard. They want to escape the increased costs which are incurring. They want to return the responsibility to the federal government which has already sold it to CN for one dollar.

Why should the federal government maintain it if it does not own it? I would like to note the wording of the sale agreement. It states:

Canada shall transfer the Quebec Bridge to CN as part of the first land block transfer of CGR lands. CN shall undertake to fund a major maintenance program on the Bridge, including the installation and maintenance of architectural lighting, which shall restore this structure to a condition which shall ensure its long-term viability and ensure it is maintained in this state. Without limiting CN's obligations described above, CN will attempt to reach an agreement with the Province of Quebec to co-fund such a maintenance program.

It is CN's responsibility. It is obligated to work out a co-funding agreement with the province of Quebec.

Clearly CN is not meeting its obligations under the agreement. We understand its reluctance when there are others who use the bridge. As a matter of fact, car traffic amounts to three-quarters of the traffic on the bridge.

CN is reluctant to shoulder all the cost and I can understand why. However, there are several options which flow from this and I would like to mention a few of them.

First, the Department of Transport, which has jurisdiction over the safety of the bridge, could continue to inspect it, table reports and finally, when it becomes unsafe, throw its hands up in the air and close the bridge. Obviously that option should not be pursued.

Second, CN has indicated that it could use other routes for its railway traffic and is prepared to do so. It has indicated that it has been using the bridge primarily for political reasons. It looks good. It is historic. However, CN could work its way around the situation. It does not need the bridge for rail traffic.

If CN can no longer afford to maintain the bridge and if it no longer needs to use it, maybe it should sell it to the province of Quebec for its use. This would force a resolution to the problem, although I am not sure it is the best one.

Private Members' Business

Third, CN and the province of Quebec could look at alternate means of funding to maintain the bridge. They could look at a toll. There are 25,000 cars a day. There are 10 trains a day. Some fees could be applied for people who want to use the bridge to shorten their trips. A toll such as the one we pay on the Coquihalla highway in B.C. could help to raise money for maintenance purposes.

I would argue that the federal government coming up with more money is not an option. The federal government purposely sold the bridge to CN. CN has an obligation to look after it. It should work out a co-funding agreement with the province of Quebec.

It is fair to note that CN has offered to pay half of the cost of the repair. It is willing to ante up \$27 million. It is willing to do its share. However, CN expects some level of government to pick up the other half of the tab. I would submit it would be a bad precedent to set if the federal government agreed that it had millions of dollars available for the repair. I would argue it has no legal or ethical obligation to do that. I agree with the previous government speaker and I may even agree with future speakers.

We should think about the precedent it would set. I can think of several bridges in my riding which could use some federal money. I think of the bridge over the Chilliwack River which is an old Bailey bridge built by the armed forces about 50 years ago. It now handles hundreds of thousands of cars a day and is one of the busiest bridges off the Trans-Canada Highway. People going to Cultus Lake have to use the bridge. It is continually jammed to capacity. It is a dangerous, narrow bridge built by the federal government.

• (1225)

If the government can put money into the bridge in Quebec, maybe it would not mind putting in a four lane bridge in Chilliwack but I do not think it will happen. The government has to be consistent. Unless it is willing to be consistent it will find itself on the tab for hundreds of bridges around the country and it will be unable to fulfil the needs many people have.

As I mentioned, I appreciate the historic significance of the bridge. It has tweaked my interest again to actually go and see the bridge someday soon, hopefully when the snow quits blowing. I hope to make a trip over the bridge.

An hon. member: Over which way?

Mr. Strahl: Not over the edge of the bridge, but over the bridge proper and enjoy it.

I encourage CN to continue with its maintenance plans and I encourage the province of Quebec to do what it takes to make sure the maintenance is done properly and that safety is maintained. Other options should be explored, perhaps a small toll or fee which

would help the bridge pay its own way. The federal government has no obligation in this area. It cannot afford to cough up millions of dollars whenever there is a cry for more money. The feds are going to have to stay out of it. CN and the province of Quebec are going to have to solve the problem.

I promised a barn burner speech. I am now on my fourth try and I think I will rest while the resting is good and leave it to hon. members on the government side to wrap things up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I would like to comment on the motion by the member for Louis-Hébert dealing with the federal government's responsibility for repairs to the Quebec bridge.

As my colleague, the member for Louis-Hébert, already knows, the Quebec bridge is an issue which has been much discussed in recent years. In fact, the bridge was recently declared a historic site by the former Minister of Canadian Heritage. As the longest cantilever railway bridge in the world, it is a remarkable tribute to the perseverance and triumph of engineers and bridge builders.

In 1987, the Quebec bridge was classified as a historic monument by both the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering. Like any other complex 80-year old structure, this bridge must be examined and repaired regularly. I can assure all the members of this House that the Quebec bridge is very safe.

It can safely withstand existing traffic and the expected increase in suburban traffic for many years to come. This was confirmed by CN, following a comprehensive study on the condition of the bridge conducted by Modjeski & Masters, a firm of engineering consultants.

This firm was one of the major consultants involved in the actual building of the Quebec bridge. According to the comprehensive inspection it carried out, the bridge is in a remarkably good condition, considering its age and the operating environment of its structure.

The member recommends that the federal government, in conjunction with Canadian National, participate in repairing the Quebec bridge. I want to remind the member that the bridge is no longer the property of the federal government.

• (1230)

An agreement signed in July 1993 by the Canadian government and CN provided for the transfer to CN of the Quebec Bridge and the Canadian government railway lands. Pursuant to this agreement, CN undertook to invest in a maintenance program to restore the structure in a way that ensures its long term viability.

I am glad to announce to the House that, in accordance with its commitment to ensure the long term viability of the bridge and honour the agreement signed in July 1993, CN intends to launch next summer a major maintenance program.

CN expects to invest in the bridge \$1.5 to \$2 million a year for the next 15 years. Such a significant investment proves that CN is committed to maintaining this important infrastructure. This is a huge commitment on the part of a railway for a bridge that is used mainly for suburban road traffic. Surely the hon. member knows that, although the bridge was originally constructed to meet the needs of rail transport, a Canada-Quebec agreement signed in 1928 allowed the province to build and maintain a road span on this bridge.

An agreement signed in 1949 allowed for the widening of this span for \$25,000 a year. This agreement is still in force and will expire only in 2012. Needless to say this payment negotiated almost 50 years ago is far from covering structural costs resulting from daily road traffic.

Motor vehicles represent close to 75 per cent of present traffic on the bridge. Although I should point out again that the bridge is safe, a certain amount of deterioration has occurred from the use of products to remove snow and ice on the road portion of the bridge's superstructure.

In addition to the sums CN is prepared to invest in order to ensure the long term viability of the bridge, the railway company is totally willing to contribute to a more complete restoration program, if the Quebec Department of Transport agrees to review the terms and conditions of the 1949 agreement and if it agrees to assume half of the costs of an important maintenance program. I have also learned that CN is willing to meet with the representatives of Quebec's Department of Transport to discuss cost sharing.

The hon. member for Louis-Hébert should admit that the previous government disposed of the railway lands belonging to the Canadian government on the express condition that the CN take total responsibility for the Quebec Bridge. The federal government made its contribution at that time.

Since deficit reduction is our priority, the participation of the government in a maintenance program that is clearly the CN's responsibility would be an inappropriate use of public funds.

As the hon. member for Louis-Hébert knows, the Quebec Bridge is primarily used by south shore commuters who cross over every day on their way to work on the north shore. In fact, less than 10 trains use the bridge daily while 25,000 cars cross it regularly. All things considered, the Quebec Bridge has become a road bridge

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used mainly by commuters. The deterioration of the bridge is certainly attributable in large part to that car traffic.

The government recognizes the unique character of the Quebec Bridge and its historical significance for the world. Its unique splendour must be preserved for future generations and it will be. I am convinced that the CN will fulfil its obligations according to the agreement concluded with the Government of Canada in 1993.

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Lévis, I am one of those who cross the Quebec bridge regularly to come to the federal Parliament.

• (1235)

One of the bridge's piles is in the riding of Lévis, the other in Louis-Hébert. This explains why my colleague and I sponsored this motion together. He was lucky in the draw today, and I fully support his motion.

I have already detected a positive impact of discussing the Quebec bridge for one hour. I have noticed, for example, that a Reform Party member showed a certain interest in the subject, also a certain ignorance. This has allowed us to make certain clarifications, and to more fully inform all the members of the House.

I have also noticed that the members across the floor have been forced to ask about the respective positions of the Department of Transport and the Department of Canadian Heritage since, two days before being relieved from his duties, the former Minister of Canadian Heritage had recognized the Quebec bridge as a national historic site—national, in the Canadian sense, of course.

Let me review the historic significance of this structure. This bridge has been the subject of a long debate that dates back to the very beginning of the Canadian Confederation. I remind the House that, at the time of Confederation, the railway issue was important. All regions had to be linked. At that time, trains ran along the south shore. They did not serve Quebec City which was a capital. No service was provided to those who wanted to cross over from Quebec City to get to the Maritimes.

This issue was discussed at length, and one could say that Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who declared it an important issue, was its main champion. Since history was to be made, he wanted this bridge to be a symbol. He had said—I do not have the exact quote—that it was the symbol of federalism in Quebec.

The coalition wrote this week to all the members opposite, in fact to all members of the House of Commons. They sent them an envelope with a little piece of the bridge enclosed, to show that any member concerned about Canadian heritage has reason to be worried. This symbol of federalism is now becoming a symbol of collapse, of disintegration. This is a signal, a warning sign.

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It is very important; it is history. If Sir Wilfrid Laurier was here, I am sure he would agree with me. He would say that it is critical to save this historic structure.

Unfortunately, Canadians do not judge it at its true value. The member for Louis-Hébert told us earlier that the members of the transport committee did not show any interest, when they met the coalition's members. One member, whose name I will not reveal, said that, all told, CN owned some 6,000 bridges across Canada. He compared this bridge to any structure that crosses a stream or small river.

We are talking here about the St. Lawrence River, and the longest railway bridge in the world. It is also the first cantilever bridge in the world. Later on, there was one built in Scotland, which is also recognized as part of the world heritage.

The member for Pontiac reminded us earlier that the American Society of Civil Engineers had recognized the bridge as a masterpiece of engineering. As for folk culture, everyone remembers that the bridge of Quebec was considered to be the eighth wonder of the world. But absolutely no one is filled with wonder by it anymore; on the contrary, many are afraid of it.

I invite the people opposite, all those who still have some interest in the Canadian national heritage that is symbolised by the Quebec bridge to respond as soon as possible to the letter of the Quebec bridge coalition's president by saying: I am convinced that the necessary efforts should be made and I support the federal government in doing so.

• (1240)

But since my time is almost up, I would like to remind the House of some numbers. First, I listened to the hon. member for Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle when he said 25,000 vehicles a day are now using the bridge, that is, more automobiles than trains. That is true. And that because of it, the owner, the CN, should make the leaseholder pay more.

I would inform the hon. member who announced his government's position, which is that CN will spend the necessary amounts, that the Quebec government agrees, and in writing. Not just orally but in writing. It told the president of the coalition they were ready to spend \$1.5 million a year over 16 years to review the contract, provided, of course, that the owner first undertakes to do the work. A tenant does not pay the rent on a new apartment in advance before the work is done.

Then, the government replies, like Pontius Pilate: "Oh, but you know, it is not really our responsibility. CN is now a private company". I remember, I was one of those who took part in the debate at the time. We wanted the new Canadian corporation, CN,

which has since become a private company, to exclude the Quebec Bridge, as it did the CN Tower in Toronto. This, however, was not done. The government did not exclude the Quebec Bridge. Although it recognized, six months later, that it was of national patrimonial interest, it left the matter in the hands of CN.

They are now content to say that CN will do its part, that it is a private company, that, in 1993, an agreement was reached to transfer the bridge to CN, but the members did not read everything. It may take me a while to find the article, but there was a land transfer worth \$35 million, provided CN did the work.

Well, the work would cost around \$63 million. I was listening to the hon. member for Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle earlier. In the end, only \$22.5 million to \$24 million would be spent, although the work would cost \$63 million. The announcement is made, and the people listening think: "My God, the federal government is saying it will be done, that CN will do it", even though this amount represents only half the cost, even less. Of the \$63 million needed, \$40 million is still missing. Where will it come from?

Again, the Quebec government is prepared to contribute \$1.5 million per year for 16 years, for a total of \$24 million.

The federal government recognizes the heritage value of the bridge, but there is still \$14 million missing. The federal must do one of two things: either provide the \$14 million missing, or force CN to do what was provided in the agreement. After all, a contract means something.

Article 4 reads as follows: "Canada shall transfer the Quebec bridge to CN as part of the first land block transfer of CGR lands". This is what is worth \$35 million. "CN shall undertake to fund a major maintenance program on the bridge, including the installation and maintenance of architectural lighting, which shall restore this structure to a condition which shall ensure its long term viability and ensure it is maintained in this state. Without limiting CN's obligations described above, CN will attempt to reach an agreement with the Province of Quebec to co-fund such a maintenance program", etc. That was done.

So, we ask that articles 4 and 13 be applied, because even if CN is privatized, it cannot elude its obligations. Let the federal government force CN to pay the missing \$14 million.

The Deputy Speaker: The period for Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

[English]

The House stands adjourned until Monday, April 15 at 11 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 12.44 p.m.)

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