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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, April 6, 2006
(Part A)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 6, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1000)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest. I will now hear from him on his question of privilege.

• (1005)

PRIVILEGE

COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN BUREAUCRATS AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions of privilege. How do you want me to proceed? Did you wish me to proceed with both at once or one at a time?

The Speaker: If the hon. member could proceed with both, we will deal with them at the same time.

Mr. Tom Wappel: Mr. Speaker, the first question involves an issue which arose during the election campaign in my capacity as a member of Parliament, and obviously the earliest opportunity to raise it is this morning. In order for you to understand what has occurred, I have to give a bit of background.

In the 38th Parliament I was a member of the House Subcommittee on Public Safety and National Security of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. The House of Commons had charged that committee in December 2004 to study and report to the House of Commons within one year on Bill C-36, the Anti-terrorism Act. The subcommittee finished its hearing of witnesses in October or November, I cannot quite recall which, and we were just about ready to sit down to begin deliberations of our report when the election was called.

When the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of the time appeared before the committee, they came with a number of officials, two of whom, Mr. Stanley Cohen and Mr. Douglas Breithaupt, were identified as the experts on the Anti-terrorism Act. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of the time invited me, if I wished to, to contact these two gentlemen and any others through his office if I wished to discuss any matters with respect to Bill C-36.

Of course, the election occurred, and it occurred to me as an individual who never likes to go down a one-way street that there are always two possibilities in an election: one either wins or loses. I was hoping I would win, of course, but I thought that in the event I were to lose I had put over a year's work into this committee and had 104 recommendations and questions that I wanted to put to the ministry so that it would have the benefit of my views. I therefore sought a meeting with these two individuals so I might communicate these 104 points to them, so that in the event that perchance I was defeated in the election, at least the work that I had done would survive by having been passed over to the appropriate justice department officials.

I began by doing everything in accordance with the channels of communication that I was told to do, namely, I contacted the then parliamentary secretary and asked that he arrange a meeting with these two individuals. I did not hear back, so on Monday, December 12, I contacted Mr. Stanley Cohen directly through my office. When I say "I", I mean my office. We got his voice mail. We left a detailed message explaining why I wished to speak to Mr. Cohen and asked that he call me back.

Mr. Cohen did not call me back, so on the following day my assistant called and talked to his office coordinator and assistant, Linda Ménard. Actually, we got her voice mail. Again it was explained what I wanted. When he had not heard back by 2 p.m., he called again. She answered and they had a conversation in which it was explained what the purpose of my call was and why I wanted to speak to Mr. Cohen. She assured my assistant that Mr. Cohen had received my message and would return my call.

By Wednesday I had not received a call from Mr. Cohen. I began to get frustrated. I called the chief of staff for the then Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Hilary Geller, and explained the difficulty. She indicated that she understood there was a PCO directive that had gone out instructing bureaucrats not to speak to members of Parliament during an election campaign. I indicated that I wanted to speak with justice officials and spoke with the chief of staff of the Minister of Justice. His name is Jonathan Herman. He said he would contact Mr. Cohen personally and suggest that he at the very least return my call. Mr. Cohen never returned my call.

My assistant then called his assistant again on December 14 and left a message explaining that I was getting more and more frustrated. She returned the call and indicated that Mr. Cohen was not going to be available for two or three days. In my view, it became clear at that point that Mr. Cohen's office was being intentionally uncooperative in returning my telephone calls.

Privilege

• (1010)

I then turned my attention to Mr. Doug Breithaupt, who was the second gentleman who had been identified as an expert. My assistant called his direct line and left a message on December 15 and also spoke to his assistant, who suggested that I make the request by e-mail. I made the request to Mr. Breithaupt by e-mail, asking that he contact me. Mr. Breithaupt did not return my call or respond to my e-mail.

I tried to find out what was going on. Since it had been suggested that it was the PCO that had issued the directive, my assistant contacted the PCO. We contacted the clerk's office there through the then Prime Minister's switchboard, asking them what kind of directive had gone out to bureaucrats not to speak with members of Parliament during an election.

A Hali Gernon returned the call, indicating that she was not aware of any such directive but that it would not have come from the communications and consultation section, which is where she worked, if it had been issued. My assistant then spoke with the PCO clerk's office manager on December 15 and explained my problem. By the following Friday, my assistant had not heard, so again called. She indicated that she had just been told that the PCO had not issued a directive and that it may have come from the Public Service Commission.

My assistant then immediately called the Public Service Commission and spoke with Debra Crawford, director of parliamentary affairs, who, believe it or not, did return our call. She said that the Public Service Commission had posted clear guidelines for the impartiality of public servants on the PSC website, but in no way do those indicate that bureaucrats cannot speak to MPs. In fact, she said that MPs and their office staffs continue to receive regular service for their daily business with the public, and of course I knew that because we were dealing with them.

My assistant indicated the problem and that we had come full circle. I still had not been able to speak with these two officials, nor had I been able to receive a copy of any written directive to the public service indicating that no one should speak to members of Parliament.

On Monday, December 19, not having had at least the courtesy of a telephone call from either of these two gentlemen to explain that they, in their view, could not speak to me, I then called the Deputy Minister of Justice, John Sims. The Deputy Minister of Justice did not return my call either; however, Melissa Cassar, from the then Minister of Justice's office, called and indicated that there could be no conversations because of an e-mail prohibiting bureaucrats from speaking to members of Parliament. I asked for a copy of that e-mail from Melissa and of course she could not locate such an e-mail.

• (1015)

The reason I am raising this is that, in my view, my abilities as a member of Parliament have been impaired. In my opinion, and I believe this is correct, we remain members of Parliament, and certainly our constituents consider us to be members of Parliament, until the actual date of the writ. That is why they continue to come into our office. That is why they continue to ask for our help.

I can understand if there would be some sort of a directive from bureaucrats, but it seems incumbent that if there is a direction to bureaucrats it should also be given to members of Parliament, so that we know, first of all, who gave that direction not to speak to members of Parliament, second, on what basis that direction was given, and third, so that we have some input into coming up with some kind of reasonable policy during an election period.

What I have determined as a result of my experience is that either there is no such vague policy directive or, if there is, everybody is afraid to show it to a member of Parliament. I believe that has breached my privileges as a member of Parliament to effectively exercise my duties. Let us suppose I had not been running for election. Let us suppose I was going to retire, wanted to finish off some files before I did so and called these justice department officials to try to finish off some of these files. Even though I was not seeking re-election, according to this phantom directive they would have been prohibited from speaking to me.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is completely outrageous and I believe it is a breach of my privileges, and if you so find, on a *prima facie* basis, I would be prepared to move a motion to refer this matter for further study to the procedure and House affairs committee. That is the first point.

• (1020)

ADVERTISING EXPENSES

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second question of privilege is one that might be considered minor in terms of monetary amounts but it is an irritation and it is a possible overzealous interpretation, in my view, of the manual of members' services.

On October 28, 2005, I was contacted by a newspaper called *The Interim* to place my usual Christmas greetings. I have placed my Christmas greetings in that newspaper for at least the last 16 years. Immediately my office indicated that I would be prepared to place my Christmas greetings in *The Interim* that year. The cost of that was \$100 plus 7% GST which is \$107.

On November 24, 2005, Interim Publishing mailed me the expected invoice for \$107. That invoice arrived in my office on December 1, obviously mailed before the election and arrived after the election was called. I approved the invoice for payment on December 3 and sent it in. It was rejected. The reason given to me for the rejection was section 6.2 of the Members' Allowances and Services manual entitled Constituency Offices and Services. I say parenthetically that this has nothing to do with my constituency office. I have dealt with this through my Ottawa office for 15 and a half years.

In any event, under the heading Constituency Offices and Services it states:

Advertising: Because of certain restrictive provisions of the Canada Elections Act, Members are not allowed to use their Member's Office Budget to advertise during dissolution up to and including election day. Members should review and cancel their advertising commitments.

Being a lawyer I wanted to check everything out so I contacted *The Interim* and I received a written letter indicating that the particular issue had been published and mailed to the public on November 25, four days before the election was called. I had approved it a month before the election was called. It had been prepared and mailed before the election was called.

House administration believes that under the heading of advertising in section 6.2 it indicates that the invoice could not be paid even though I could not possibly cancel my advertising commitments since they had already occurred and since the matter was already being delivered across Canada. By the way, this paper goes across Canada, not into the riding of Scarborough Southwest exclusively so that I might be re-elected.

In my view, my privileges as a member have been breached because we are entitled to advertise. I believe I have complied with all of the rules and regulations but House of Commons officials have taken an interpretation which I believe to be too restrictive under the very unique circumstances that occurred. Everybody knows I have no control over the timing of an election. I did not know an election was going to be called. Had an election been called before the issue had gone to press I would have been happy to cancel it. However since it had already been mailed it was too late.

In this instance I would suggest that if you find that there is at least a *prima facie* case of privilege this matter could be referred by way of motion to the Board of Internal Economy to examine it.

I say parenthetically as well that there were numerous members of Parliament on both sides of the House who also advertised in that particular edition of that particular newspaper. I do not know how many of them had their particular request for payment authorized or how many of them were rejected. If any of them were authorized, then mine should have been authorized. If they were all rejected, then I would suggest that all of those bills be reviewed and that the wording of that particular section be very carefully examined by the Board of Internal Economy.

The bureaucrats who service us as members of Parliament are not agents of Elections Canada which has its own people. If for some reason Elections Canada believes this particular expense should be included within election expenses, then that is something that my campaign and Elections Canada will work out individually. I ask that this matter also be found to be a *prima facie* case and referred to the Board of Internal Economy.

I hope on both of these issues I will have the support of the House.

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a remark in connection with the first question of privilege that my hon. colleague lamented about. He expressed his frustration about an alleged directive from the PCO that prevented interaction between him and his office and specific bureaucrats. While I certainly can sympathize with his frustration, I want to point out for viewers who might be watching this at home and anyone who might be in the gallery today, that this is in connection with the direction of the former government of which the member was a member. This has nothing to do with the administration of this new Conservative government.

Privilege

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the first question of privilege my colleague raised.

The most recent election marked my fifth campaign. It was the first time I too had heard of this alleged directive. During the campaign, I had the feeling that my privileges as a member were being breached, even though we remain members until election day.

Since 1993, I had never come up against a bureaucratic brick wall when trying to solve problems for constituents. And I am not alone. My colleagues had the same experience as my Liberal friend. This is not normal.

In the end, not only are our privileges breached, but we are unable to obtain immigration, revenue and other services for our constituents. Even during an election campaign, we have to be able to serve the public. For 50 years, the public has suffered because of an inappropriate directive. Like my colleague, I am wondering whether it actually exists.

Yet calls my office made to departments in Ottawa to deal with issues on behalf of constituents systematically went unanswered because of this directive.

Old government or new, this sort of barrier to public service must be eliminated. When the next election is called, members should not be faced with a bureaucratic brick wall.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking to the first point of the privilege that has been raised by the Liberal member, it is up to the Speaker to determine whether there is a *prima facie* case of privilege but I have to say that I and my colleagues experienced many of the same kinds of frustrations that are being described.

I think two very important points need to be made. First, it is of course up to the Speaker to decide whether there is a personal question of privilege for an individual member but I think it is in the minds of many members and of the public that exactly what we have heard described and what we experienced was the predictable, lamentable outcome of the culture of entitlement that really characterized the previous government.

The second point is that I know our public servants, who work very hard for Canadians, do not expect nor should they expect that they will have their names, individually, and their reputations, individually, dragged across the floor of this House by members who are complaining about their own privileges having been trampled upon. I wonder whether there is not every reason to be guarded and concerned about the situation that is evolving here on the floor around this discussion.

Routine Proceedings

I think it is absolutely in order for us as individual members to indicate that our privileges have been interfered with but I would urge the Liberal member, who has chosen to name public servant after public servant, to look upon his own government's actions, which was the government in power at the time that created the clamp down, the shutdown, not just on information but on cooperation that is normally extended by those very professional public servants.

• (1025)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although the hon. member may have a grievance I really do not see under what guise the Speaker could consider this a *prima facie* question of privilege.

This is the first time we have heard of this and, if it does please the Speaker, I would look into the matter and get back to the House later today or first thing tomorrow before the Speaker's ruling.

The Speaker: I think I have heard enough on this point for the moment. I will deal with the second question of privilege first.

The hon. member for Scarborough Southwest has raised a question about advertising that, in my view, has nothing to do with his privileges as a member. The rights granted to him by the Board of Internal Economy to advertise, to give him a budget and so on are not privileges of members of Parliament. They are rights that are granted by the board and by statute and do not come with the package of privileges that we normally claim as privileges of members of the House. Accordingly, I will treat the matter as referred to the Board of Internal Economy.

The member could write to the board and make it clear but I think the board could receive the *Hansard* of today, look at it and decide whether or not the member has an argument. However it is purely a technical argument with the board. It has nothing to do with privileges and, accordingly, in my view it ought not to be raised as a question of privilege and I dismiss it out of hand.

On the first question of privilege we have heard submissions from various parties in the House and I thank hon. members for their submissions. I will take the matter under advisement so that if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons wishes to come back later he will have an opportunity to make further argument on it. It need not necessarily be today. Then, if the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest wishes to respond to his arguments, I will hear more.

I will take the matter under advisement. I will look into it and come back to the House with a ruling in due course.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

MEMBER FOR HALDIMAND—NORFOLK

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order. Graves' disease is a genetic thyroid condition that affects 1 in every 100 Canadians. Its symptoms include a dramatic increase in metabolism, shakes and tremors, and sensitivity to heat, cold and

light. It also sometimes affects the eyes in a range of different ways. While there is no cure yet, there is treatment. It just takes time.

I was very recently diagnosed with this non-life-threatening condition and am responding well to treatment. As it now appears that I have had this disease for almost a year, I can assure everyone that it in no way affects my ability to do my job.

I raise this today to ease the concerns of my colleagues and constituents and to explain why from time to time I may wear tinted lenses when I have the honour to rise here.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group respecting its participation at the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region's 15th annual summit in Seattle, Washington, July 14 to 18, 2005.

While I am on my feet, I would like to present a second report, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States interparliamentary group respecting its participation at the 46th annual meeting of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group held in St. Andrews by-the-Sea, New Brunswick, September 30 to October 3, 2005.

* * *

• (1030)

NATIONAL APPRECIATION DAY ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-201, an act respecting a National Appreciation Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am extremely proud and pleased, on behalf of the good citizens and constituents of Prince Edward—Hastings and, of course, the balance of the people of Canada, to introduce a bill entitled national appreciation day.

This enactment would designate the third day of March in each and every year as a day for the people of Canada to express appreciation for the heroic work of members of the Canadian Forces and emergency response professionals, including police officers, firefighters and paramedics.

I believe all members of the House and all parties would agree to support and see a speedy passage of this bill.

Routine Proceedings

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

●(1035)

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES SUPERANNUATION ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-202, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act (marriage after the age of sixty years).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a bill entitled “An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act”. This enactment would amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act to allow the survivor of a contributor to receive an annual allowance after the death of that contributor, notwithstanding the fact that the contributor and the survivor married or commenced to live in a conjugal relationship after the contributor had attained the age of 60 years. In all fairness and decency, I believe all members would agree to the swift passage of this bill.

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

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-203, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (telephone, fax and Internet service to campaign offices).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in consideration to some of the difficulties that colleagues from all parties in the House may have experienced on occasions, I am pleased to introduce this bill to amend the Canada Elections Act. This enactment would ensure that telephone, fax or Internet service is provided in a timely manner to the campaign offices of each and every candidate in all federal elections and in all parties. In order to ensure parity, I believe my esteemed colleagues would agree to seek approval and swift passage of this bill as well.

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

* * *

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE CONDITIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-204, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance by the Canadian International Development Agency and other federal bodies.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with some of the inadequacies that we have seen with regard to the disposition of funds by developmental agencies, I am honoured to introduce a bill today entitled “An Act respecting the provision of development assistance by the Canadian International Development Agency and other federal bodies”.

This enactment would set out criteria respecting resource allocation to international development agencies and would enhance transparency, accountability and monitoring of Canada's international development efforts. Once again, I believe all members in the House would agree to support and see a speedy passage of the bill to protect Canadian taxpayers' dollars and service the needs of the international community.

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

NUCLEAR ENERGY ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-205, An Act to amend the Nuclear Energy Act (change of responsible minister).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would ensure that the proper ministry handles the proper responsibilities, so I am pleased to introduce a bill entitled “An Act to amend the Nuclear Energy Act (change of responsible minister)”. This enactment would amend the Nuclear Energy Act in order to make Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, the federal organization responsible for research on nuclear energy and its development and marketing, accountable to the Minister of Industry rather than the Minister of Natural Resources.

The enactment would also transfer to the Minister of Industry those shares of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited that are owned or held by the Minister of Natural Resources. I believe it respects the nature of industry and of course the disposition of allocation of responsibilities to the ministry that is better suited to handle that. I believe all members would agree as well to the swift and speedy passage of the bill.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-206, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (extension of benefit period for parental leave).

He said: Mr. Speaker, children are our most important resource and raising those children well should be a key priority. All families and their circumstances are different and one model of child rearing does not fit all.

Therefore, families need as much flexibility, options and choices. It is estimated that 25% of our children will enter adult life with significant emotional, behavioural, academic or social problems. Therefore, investing in children, particularly in the first three years, is an imperative not an option.

The bill would respond in part to this need by seeking to amend the Employment Insurance Act to increase the benefit period for maternity and parental leave to a full two years.

I want to dedicate the bill to my first grandchild, Mae Johnson, who was born on December 19, 2005 during the last election. Children must come first and I look forward to earning the support of all hon. colleagues.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-207, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present my first bill in this House. Its purpose is to amend the Income Tax Act to provide a tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions.

The purpose of this bill is to encourage new graduates to settle in regions experiencing economic difficulties, thereby curbing the exodus of young people. This bill will provide graduates of vocational schools, colleges and universities with a maximum tax credit of 40% of their earnings, up to \$8,000.

I am proud to be tabling a bill that will enable thousands of young people in my riding, Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, in my region Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, in several regions in Quebec and throughout the country to work where they grew up.

In closing, I would like to thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, the Bloc Québécois finance critic, for his support and advice while preparing this bill.

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

* * *

● (1040)

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-208, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (members who cross the floor).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I first introduced the bill in the Chamber in 1999 and this is the fourth time that I have introduced this particular bill. On behalf of all Canadians and constituents who vote for us, if we truly wish to be accountable, we must be accountable to our constituents and it is time that the despicable aspect of floor crossing has to stop.

I remind those in the Chamber today and those listening that this is not the no tell motel where we check in under an assumed name. We have a responsibility to those constituents and so I am hoping that the next time the bill comes forward that it will garner the full support of all members of Parliament, including the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-209, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (expenses incurred by caregivers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, as you know, in an aging society many of us are caught in what we call the sandwich generation where we are looking after children and our parents. Many of those people looking after our elderly are elderly themselves and they incur tremendous expenses on their own looking after the care of people who are severely disabled or under various ailments. I believe that the expenses they incur while looking after their loved ones should be completely tax deductible.

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

* * *

SALE OF MEDALS PROHIBITION ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-210, An Act to prohibit the sale of Canadian military and police medals.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we have all seen it, medals that are worn by the bravest of our Canadians are for sale at garage sales, on the Internet, or in various flea shops around the country.

I believe that the medals that the men and women of our military and RCMP wear are not currency that they have dangling from their chest. They wear those medals in honour of their sacrifices, in honour of their colleagues, and in solemn remembrance of those that left before us.

I do not believe that those medals should be sold for profit. I believe that they should be honoured in the tradition that they have been worn by the bravest of our Canadians. This bill would prevent the sale of those medals.

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

* * *

CANADA HEALTH ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-211, An Act to amend the Canada Health Act (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

He said: Mr. Speaker, there are 346,000 children in this country that have autism spectrum disorder. Unfortunately, the federal government does not play a role in their lives at all. We are asking the federal government to assist the provinces and territories with financial funding through the health care system to provide the treatment that these families can then give to their children.

It is unacceptable that 346,000 children and their families are left out of the Canada Health Act all together. This bill would include those beautiful children so that they would have a chance at a quality of life that we all take for granted.

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

* * *

● (1045)

CANADIAN AUTISM DAY ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-212, An Act respecting a Canadian Autism Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, on April 23 of this year and every other year we would like to have that day recognized as national autism day, so that people such as Laurel Gibbons of Ottawa and Roxanne Black of British Columbia and their children could be recognized on what these children and their families go through on a day to day basis.

By having a national day in honour of this, we could then possibly turn our attention to further research and further assistance, so we can find a cure for this neurological disorder. By highlighting this day, we also highlight the abilities that these beautiful children have and what they can provide to our country as well.

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

* * *

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-213, An Act to change the name of the Electoral District of Sackville—Eastern Shore.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in my riding is the largest indigenous black population in Canada. The community is called Preston, a very historic community in our country. I think it would honour them and our country if the name of my riding were changed to Sackville—Preston—Eastern Shore.

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

* * *

INTERNET CHILD PORNOGRAPHY PREVENTION ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-214, An Act to prevent the use of the Internet to distribute pornographic material involving children.

He said: Mr. Speaker, one of the most despicable things in our society is Internet child pornography. We need to do everything in our power to stop this or mitigate it to its lowest level.

One of the things we can do is have ISP providers partially responsible for monitoring their sites and passing that information on to our authorities so we can track down these low-lives and scumbags, as we call them, and stamp out child pornography. We need to do everything we can to protect the innocence of our children.

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

The Address

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-215, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (community service group membership dues).

He said: Mr. Speaker, we would not have the society we have today if it were not for the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who support various charities and issues throughout our country. The dues they pay, for example, to Lions Clubs, the Kinsmen, the Legion, churches or whatever should be 100% tax deductible.

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

* * *

● (1050)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. It is a great honour and given your length of service in this chamber, it is well-deserved.

I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from April 5 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost in my remarks I want to thank the voters of Malpeque for their confidence in me in returning me to the House of Commons. I might add as well how proud I have been to have served the riding of Malpeque, under two prime ministers, in a party that turned the finances of the country around and turned the government over in extremely good shape to the new government entering the House. I also am looking forward to this time period of holding the government to account as the member of Parliament for the riding of Malpeque.

The Speech from the Throne sets out the government's general direction, but this speech fails completely. As much as the Prime Minister may want the country and Canadians to have only five key priorities, that is not how a country as complex as Canada functions, nor how a federal government should respond.

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The minister who best revealed how the Prime Minister intends to function was the Minister of Agriculture. He told the CBC that if he brought forward legislation this spring “The Prime Minister would look at him as if he were from Mars”, meaning basically that if the issue brought forward were not in the Prime Minister's five key areas, then do not bring it forward this spring. I can tell the House clearly that farmers on the Hill yesterday do not want the minister or the government to be from Mars. They want the minister and the government to act on their concerns, whether they meet with the Prime Minister's five key issues or not.

The message from the Prime Minister and from the Minister of Agriculture was clear to farmers and any Canadian: the Prime Minister does not consider it worthy of attention. If this issue does not meet with the five priorities of the Prime Minister, they are out of luck. The Prime Minister has decided that only his agenda matters and those other issues, whether related to trade, or related to rural Canada in terms of the agriculture crisis and farm income, or the future of the fishery, or issues related to transportation and infrastructure, or the needs such as in Atlantic Canada in terms of economic development, will just have to wait.

Mr. Speaker, I neglected to mention at the beginning that I am splitting my time with the member for Laval—Les Îles.

Let me turn to the issue of agriculture. I want to congratulate the new Minister of Agriculture in his position and his responsibility. As agriculture critic for the official opposition, the Speech from the Throne is a failure as it relates to agriculture. Yes, there was a paragraph in the speech, but it basically looks like it was almost an afterthought.

Let us begin with this one fact. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, in February of this year, stated that farm income across Canada would decline in 2006 by a further 16%. In the previous year, 2005, the farm income crisis situation was evident and responded to in five specific areas.

First was the ongoing support for income support programs such as CAIS. The government committed itself to working cooperatively with all stakeholders on improving the program. While the Prime Minister said during the election campaign that he was going to scrap the CAIS, he has now at least changed his mind and said that it will be in place for a year to give some stability. However, the lending community as it relates to primary producers has been taking action, in part because of the uncertainty caused by the Prime Minister himself.

Last year as well there was the direct infusion over the year with support going primarily to grains and oilseed producers, beginning in March of 2005, of close to \$1 billion in ad hoc payments to assist with spring planting and other needs of producers.

• (1055)

In October an additional commitment, through supplementary estimates, of \$348 million was lost to farmers due to the efforts of the other three parties causing an election.

There was an additional announcement of \$755 million in November of 2005. This money was booked in November and the new government has only managed to get \$400 million of that out to

farmers as yet, according to the Minister of Agriculture recently. What is the holdup with the government?

Last year a comprehensive report on farm income entitled “Empowering Canadian Farmers in the Marketplace” was tabled with the federal and provincial ministers of agriculture. It has some 46 recommendations and provides strong support for the farm community. The government should be acting on those recommendations and moving forward so it empowers primary producers in the farm community.

That was the direct action taken by an activist government in response to the needs of Canadian farmers. That is what the previous minister of agriculture and agri-food did as part of his responsibility to those he represented at the cabinet table, the farmers of Canada. His job was to fight for additional assistance and he received it.

Ministers should not stand before audiences of desperate people and say that they would like to do something, but they do not want to disturb the Prime Minister's timetable or disrupt his plans. We need to see some leadership from the government as a whole on the farm crisis before us.

Also during the election the Prime Minister left the impression that there would be \$500 million for producers. However, we find out now that it is not \$500 million more for producers. It is \$500 million over and above the safety net programs, which means it is about \$1.2 billion short of what was actually funded over the last two years by the previous government. That is unacceptable. As farmers said on the Hill yesterday, they need cash and they need it now.

I see the member for Essex sitting opposite. I was surprised last night by his comments. While he said during the election campaign that the government would give immediate assistance to primary producers, he did not mention the word agriculture in his speech last night. He did not mention farmers. We have not seen a dime come forward from the government as yet. All we have seen is part of the money that the previous government put in place.

The Minister of Agriculture is either prepared to defend the interests of farmers in Canada in need or he is not. The Minister of Agriculture is a good person and a great individual. By reading the throne speech and seeing practically nothing in it in terms of the agriculture portfolio, I can only assume that the Minister of Finance, the President of Treasury Board and the Prime Minister himself have their own priorities in agriculture, and primary producers do not seem to be a part of it.

Yesterday close to 10,000 farmers from across Canada were on the Hill. They outlined their concerns about the inaction of the government and the fact that it had not put forward an ad hoc program for producers this spring. That is what the Minister of Agriculture has indicated thus far. Farmers are demanding cash and they need it now. The Minister of Agriculture called a press conference and basically said not to look to him because the problem relative to CAIS lay with the provinces. They support CAIS but it is not the only program.

Members across the way now make up the Government of Canada. They cannot sit there and just complain any more. The throne speech should spell out clearly what they are going to do for those rural communities many of them represent. We need to see some action. That is what producers yesterday were telling members opposite. That is what they were telling the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture. They want to see some action, not just hear words. It is not enough to say the problem is with the provinces. The members opposite are in a position of responsibility. What we need to see from the Prime Minister and the new government is leadership and leadership is going to require dealing with the farm crisis, putting money out there, or at least catching up to the kind of financial commitments that the previous government put in place.

• (1100)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member opposite. In particular, I noted how quick he was to take credit for the finances of the nation which have now been turned over to the Conservative government. What he left out was the fact that during his government's tenure in office, it was the recipient of a great deal of revenue generated by the GST and by the benefits of free trade. Both were policies I am quick to note that he and members of the Liberal Party adamantly opposed and fought tooth and nail to prevent, and then were the recipients of both of those financial policies.

It is also interesting to note that when the election commenced, the Liberals were opposed to what they used to be opposed to. Let me rephrase that. They did not want to see the GST lowered, and they are still opposed to lowering the GST so that ordinary Canadians could keep more of their hard-earned money.

The credibility of the member opposite is somewhat speculative. Then he had the audacity to stand up with great pomp and ceremony and such over the top emotion yesterday that I thought he might come out of his shoes and suggest that somehow this government, after two months in office, was entirely responsible for the terrible state of the Canadian farm. He suggested that somehow a government that has been in office just over two months should bear sole responsibility for the over 12 years of neglect that the member's government demonstrated in addressing the crisis of the family farm.

The member takes hypocrisy to staggering new heights when he gets up in this chamber and tries to castigate the current government for the state of the family farm.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting how the member opposite does indeed change positions. I saw a great cartoon a little while ago. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was tied up in a pretzel because he made an announcement one day and the Prime Minister changed it the next. I thought it was quite appropriate.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for ACOA talked about the GST.

• (1105)

Hon. Peter MacKay: And your island, Mr. Potatohead.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, he is responsible for Prince Edward Island as well. We hope that he will take that issue seriously.

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Let me get back to the point on the GST. What we are concerned about on this side is that there is tax relief for low income Canadians.

A study released on March 29, 2006 by an independent non-partisan research institute, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, found that 5% of families earning over \$150,000 a year will receive 30% of the benefits from the Conservative tax cuts, an average of more than \$2,010 in savings each year. On the other side, almost half of Canadian families earning less than \$40,000 will receive only 20% of the benefits of the Conservative tax cuts, an average of just over \$163.

The GST cut the Conservatives are proposing, and taking away the tax reduction that the Liberals put in place, will transfer the benefits to the rich in society and take them away from the less well off. That is what the Minister of Foreign Affairs ought to be concerned about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am angry, not to say enraged, to hear the speech by my Liberal colleague.

It was the Liberals of the previous government who precipitated the agricultural sector into one of the worst crises, which has now become even more brutal. For nearly three and a half years now there has been trouble in the agricultural sector. Everything started when bovine spongiform encephalopathy, commonly called "mad cow", was discovered in Alberta.

Since then there has been a snowball effect on the dairy producers, who were its first victims. Next came the cattle farmers. Now it is the grain growers, who for two years have been getting next to nothing in international prices, for those prices are set by Americans vying with each other to subsidize their agricultural sector. We have seen the rise of the Canadian dollar, the doping of the Canadian dollar with western oil exports. There has been no compensation for hog producers, for example, who are also experiencing what is almost the worst crisis of their lives.

For three and a half years, those people did absolutely nothing to help farm producers. We knew from the outset that the stabilization program set up by the Liberals would not work, because the compensation mechanism was totally warped.

Now here we are with one of the worst crises. Those people are responsible. This gentleman, a past president of the National Farmers Union in the Maritimes, did nothing in the 13 years he was in that office, and nothing again over the last three and a half years.

I am also counting on the Conservatives to respond quickly. Yesterday I was not satisfied with the minister's reaction. We must take action before all the agricultural producers of Quebec and Canada are wiped out. We must do so quickly, with significant amounts of money. In recent years the government has been more catholic than the Pope. It has slashed subsidies, starting with the dairy subsidy which at that time was paid to all the dairy producers in Canada.

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We have beaten our competitors to the punch. With the result that, today, it is not the quality or supply of our products that is lacking, but the subsidies. We are competing with the American and European subsidies. That government did nothing over all those years to help out the producers. And here we are facing the worst of crises.

What does the past president of the National Farmers Union for the Maritimes say to that?

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member and I are in agreement that the government has to take prompt action. It has not shown that and it is certainly not showing that in its speeches. In fact the Minister of Agriculture seems to be backtracking on ad hoc funding.

The member knows that last March 31 there was a billion dollars put out there to primary producers to assist them in terms of getting their crop in the ground. We need to see the same kind of action from the government.

With respect to the international subsidies of other countries, I suggest to the member, and I hope that he would be on side, that the government should adopt the programs and recommendations outlined in the report empowering farmers in the marketplace.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House of Commons on behalf of the official opposition to reply to the government's throne speech.

Before I begin, allow me please to welcome the new government, especially the new members. I would also like to offer you my warmest congratulations on your appointment as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole House. I have no doubt that you will provide the wisdom and calm needed in this House.

I must also take a moment to thank the residents of Laval—Les Îles in Quebec for electing me a fourth time. It is an honour to continue to be their voice in Canada's Parliament on issues such as immigration, early childhood, youth employment, expanding the labour market, infrastructure development, old age pensions and, right now, bilingualism. Their trust will not be betrayed.

[English]

In the 10 minutes that I have, I will cover four issues missing from the government's agenda: integration of minority language communities outside Quebec, support for la francophonie arts and culture, youth and child care.

The Governor General's opening remarks reminded me of my own travels across Canada and the people I have met in the two great linguistic communities. I too can attest to their tremendous asset to our country. We are indeed living in a country where everything is possible. We can follow our dreams and help build a strong and united country.

[Translation]

• (1110)

Mr. Speaker, I am not satisfied with the rigid contrast found in the message of the Government of Canada. It offers no vision for the

ongoing integration of francophones and anglophones in Quebec or for the development of official language minority communities.

The year 2006 will mark the 40th anniversary of French immersion programs. It all started with a project at the Riverside school board in St. Lambert, Quebec. Today, this vision of the duality and equality of the two languages is enshrined in the Official Languages Act, and \$751.3 million over five years has been earmarked by the action plan for official languages, which sets out clearly the government's responsibility for putting it in place. Linguistic duality is now firmly entrenched in the foundations of our multi-faceted society.

[English]

The mother tongue of almost six million people in Quebec today is French. Almost 66% of another approximately 700,000 English speaking people speak French at work. Also, 400,000, or 63%, or another half a million people without French or English, many of them immigrant workers, live and work in French.

[Translation]

The most recent statistics indicate that nearly seven francophone workers in ten living outside Quebec, or some 566,000 people, use French at work.

The Liberal vision of a bilingual country has taken root. We now have a government that is trying to destroy that vision. The day before yesterday I asked a question in this House about the future of bilingualism in Canada. The hon. member responded, and I quote:

[English]

"We have a strong minister in charge of heritage and culture who has indicated that she wants to promote that", meaning bilingualism, "throughout Canada". The member also said that "bilingualism is something this party supports". I am very happy about this since the Prime Minister can certainly thank the Liberal policy on bilingualism for having had the opportunity to learn French.

How has the government shown support for bilingualism? The Prime Minister appointed a unilingual minister whose mandate is to coordinate the horizontal work of the government in promoting French and English. What has that minister done since her appointment? She has refused every attempt by the Commissioner of Official Languages, Madame Dyane Adam, to meet with her.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage has yet to say two words about official languages or even meet with francophone and other national organizations which are still waiting two months later for a return phone call.

[Translation]

These groups confirm today that:

in the Speech from the Throne, arts and culture in Canadian francophonie have been eradicated from the vision of Canadian society as the Conservative party sees it. The Conservative party wants to build a strong, united, independent and free Canada, but it is an aberration to think they can do so without culture, without the arts and without cultural diversity. We cannot accept this. How does the Canadian government intend to sustain these sectors, these strong social, economic and educational drivers of our Canadian society and true foundations to building our identity, within the francophone and Acadian communities?

[English]

Instead, the minister had a lot to say about the CBC even before her briefing and nothing to say about the minority language community.

There is more. Without even bothering to read the mandate of the Canadian Unity Council, funding was gutted from the council because it does not fit into the Conservative government's vision of open federalism that, according to the throne speech, recognizes the unique place of a strong, vibrant Quebec in a united Canada.

[Translation]

The Canadian Unity Council is a non-profit, non-partisan organization created in 1964 when a group of francophone and anglophone Quebecers established the Canada Committee, which was the precursor to the council. Its mandate is to create an openness toward federalism and its mission is to inform and mobilize the public on the development and promotion of Canada. It stems from our social foundations as a nation.

Most of the council's work affects young people. For example, its summer job and student exchange program, originally supported by all parties, allows young francophones and anglophones to improve their second language while discovering a region of Canada they are unfamiliar with. I know for a fact that one hon. member opposite benefited from this program when he was young. Because of this decision by the Conservative government, roughly 80 Canadian employees, including 21 at the council's head office in Montreal, have lost their jobs.

• (1115)

[English]

The Conservative government talks about supporting democracy, about accountability, open federalism, respect for diversity, bilingualism and the understanding of cultures. How does it do it? It does it by gutting the funding of the Canadian Unity Council across Canada.

Here is an institution able to add to the dialogue of our country. It has or, more aptly put, had offices located in every region of the country. Thirty-two regional round tables were held in Quebec alone through the Council's Centre for Research and Information on Canada. They engaged all sectors of our society: academics, business people, volunteers and the general public. Their work was citizenship participation in action.

How do Canadians get to understand their country if cultural misperceptions exist, if access to people's stories is cut off? If integration and adaptation is eroded by the government's hidden agenda that is now coming to light, how many other non-profit community based organizations are going to be affected?

In the meantime, the Prime Minister's first public address to public servants, delivered mainly in English and posted on the govern-

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ment's website, was a direct violation of the Official Languages Act. Now we know the Conservative leadership's stand on bilingualism. Since being elected and establishing its cabinet, the government's target has not been about bilingualism because it has no vision.

It has been about building super jails to house youth while abolishing the gun registry, instead of putting in place better community support systems and leaving in place the substantive national crime prevention strategy and the youth employment strategy that have helped to reduce crime by 12% over the last 10 years.

[Translation]

This government's Speech from the Throne is an insult to the five-year plan of action to allocate \$751.3 million to official languages. The agreements reached between the federal government and the provinces on early childhood education helped to fund more places for official language minority communities.

Nova Scotia could have stimulated the vitality of its francophone and Acadian communities. Newfoundland and Labrador could have worked with its associates, such as the regional health services, to satisfy the needs of francophone children.

There were also plans to have the appropriate authorities report on the provisions available for services in French. This government will put the future of our children at risk because of its linear views on flexible and open federalism.

[English]

The Conservative alliance government might definitely need to use as its guide the foresight which our forefathers showed to build a federal system that would be flexible and accommodating of diversity.

[Translation]

In that way, the Conservative alliance could build on one of Canada's greatest strengths—the federal system of government. In the meantime, it would build on the unique strengths of the different parts of our federation.

[English]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I was seated in another place.

[Translation]

My name is Steven Blaney and I am the member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

I would first like to thank my colleague for wishing—

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The member has to be in his own seat if he wants to speak. I did not think he looked like the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, but he was sitting in her seat. If the member wants the floor he has to take his proper seat. We will give him time to do that.

The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

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● (1120)

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, first I wanted to thank my colleague for welcoming all new members of Parliament, including myself, here to the House of Commons. I am proud to have the opportunity, as the representative for Lévis—Bellechasse, to ask her my first question.

I listened closely to her address. I can sense her love of the French language, which is one of Canada's greatest cultural assets. It is also the language spoken in the riding of Lévis—Bellechasse.

The Government of Canada and all departments are responsible for defending the French language. And the Conservative government intends to do so. The election of this government has already contributed immensely to the promotion of the French language, both in Quebec and across the country.

I ask my colleague this: how did her government help promote French culture when the French language was sullied by several scandals?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I really do not at all see the connection that my colleague is trying to make between these two things. What is very clear is that in our party there are a lot of bilingual people from across Canada. This is one of the signs of the respect our party has for our country's two founding languages, not just for the French language.

Furthermore, I would like to remind the member that, when we were in power, we set aside a large sum for language-teaching. The amount of \$751.3 million over five years was provided for the action plan for official languages.

A question arises, and I would like to put it to my colleague and to all the members on the other side of this House. Do they intend to respect this agreement for \$751.3 million provided for the action plan for official languages? We have not heard anything from the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women or from the Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages. They were appointed over two months ago and we have not seen anything yet. We stand before a large void. This is very worrying for us.

[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment.

The throne speech, as the hon. member has said, was very light. It was light on details, light on vision and light considering that only one-third of Canadians voted for the Conservative government. Perhaps that is the reason that the Conservatives do not reflect the Canadian values of bilingualism and respect for other cultures.

As the member has said reviewed the whole speech from the throne and other areas and is so well-versed in issues, what are other areas that my hon. colleague thinks that the Conservatives have arrogantly duped or insulted Canadians of francophone origins?

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the government's website, on which the Prime Minister, for more than

24 hours, left his speech totally in English, except for a few words in French, in spite of the fact that we contacted him.

It is the duty of the Prime Minister of Canada, of the leader of the government, to be the first to respect legislation. The Official Languages Act clearly says that all government documents, those from Ottawa as well as those coming from elsewhere in Canada, must be presented to the Canadian public in both official languages.

Perhaps that does not count for some people, but it is very important for us whose language is the minority official language in Canada. I am sure that my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse would agree with me, contrary to his party.

● (1125)

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague how it is that she can continue to—

The Deputy Speaker: I was not recognizing the hon. member on questions and comments. The time for questions and comments has expired. I was recognizing the hon. member on debate as the hon. member is the next speaker.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the people of Winnipeg South who elected me to this chamber. I also would like to highlight that my wife, who is my biggest supporter, is very happy to be here today.

I am happy to be participating in this debate on the most recent Speech from the Throne which contains a number of important new initiatives that I found of great interest as a westerner, as an aboriginal Canadian and as an entrepreneur. I am especially proud to speak before you today, Mr. Speaker, as a Métis member of Parliament from Winnipeg South, an area of Manitoba which has not elected a Métis representative since Louis Riel.

A lot has changed since then and the Prime Minister highlights that change by giving me the opportunity to work as the minister's parliamentary secretary in this important department relating to aboriginal issues. I also look forward to working with the Prime Minister on our government's important new initiatives which will benefit everyone in Canada, including our first peoples.

Of these new initiatives there are several I would like to highlight. For example, take those measures designed to strengthen the family, that vitally important institution that lies at the heart of everyone's community. It represents the very foundation of this country.

One of the most important measures would give Canadian parents greater choice in child care, so they can choose the option that makes the most sense for them. This is particularly important now that the family unit has changed. Many families have different makeups and their needs should be addressed. In these various situations it is critical that their children be well cared for while they are on the job and that child care options be right for their child and match the family's needs and values.

However in order to get this right it costs money and many families do not have enough money. This is where the Government of Canada comes in, helping to make good child care a bit more affordable.

The problem is that the federal government has not always done a very good job of addressing the needs of families. This was particularly true since the previous government tended to have a do nothing approach to child care, which became a one size fits all approach whenever an election was looming.

As a result, the previous government ploughed every penny of taxpayer dollars into publicly funded daycare, while stubbornly refusing to accept that there might be any other options. We as a government campaigned on a different approach. We as a government believe that money is best kept in the hands of parents who can decide what the best care option is for their children. It is simply a matter of philosophy; would parents rather be given a choice or would they rather have the government tell them how best to care for their child? I and my colleagues believe that choice should and must rest with parents.

Under the old system, if a family did not fit into some stereotype dreamt up by Ottawa bureaucrats, ivory tower academics or lobby group leaders they were simply out of luck. Families had to choose between trying to live their lives the way the experts said they should or digging into their own often meagre financial resources to pay for child care that matched their needs. That was then and things have changed. This government recognizes that every family is unique, which means their needs are different too, including their child care needs. That is why the Speech from the Throne calls for greater choice in child care by providing parents with a child under the age of six with \$1,200 per year to help them purchase child care that is right for them and right for their child.

That is not all, to ensure parents keep as much of their income as possible, the throne speech also contains a commitment to drop the GST from 7% to 6% and ultimately down to 5%. Such a tax cut would be particularly welcome for those families living on modest or fixed incomes, people whose income is often too low to allow them to benefit from a cut in the personal income tax rate.

Since the GST is the one tax that everyone pays no matter what they earn, cutting this tax benefits all Canadians. Again, this is a question of philosophy. Where is the hard-earned money of Canadians best kept? Both our government and Canadians believe that their money is best kept in their pockets. Cutting the GST is a tax cut that benefits all Canadians from all income levels. I am sure these benefits will become quite apparent.

• (1130)

Strengthening families is about more than just money. It is also making sure that people can get the medical treatment they need to live long and healthy lives when they need it. After all, they paid for it.

This is addressed by our promise to negotiate a patient wait times guarantee. Under such a system, people who cannot get the medical care they require in their own locality in a timely fashion using the public system can go to a private facility or another jurisdiction with the cost being paid by public insurance. Such a guarantee is long

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overdue. People who often require significant medical attention on an urgent basis in the past could not get it. This was particularly true in families with young children or elderly or disabled family members.

The universality of health care has long been ignored and we will do our part as a government to ensure that Canadians get the health care they deserve and the services they are entitled to.

Mr. Speaker, I am also splitting my time with the member for Calgary Southeast.

Of course, some families involve veterans, many of whom are seniors living on fixed incomes. These are people to whom we owe a lot which makes it imperative that they be treated with respect. Unfortunately, one group made up of first nations, Métis and Inuit veterans has not received the respect it deserves.

I recently had the pleasure of witnessing the honouring of five such veterans myself. Bob Ducharme, Oscar LaCombe, John Pederson, Joseph Clement and the late Louis Lamirande are Métis nation citizens who along with their brothers made a great sacrifice for our country, who for too long have not been properly recognized. This is why I was so pleased that the government committed to making redress for the inequities they have suffered for the last 60 years. I look forward to working with the government to make this a reality.

This past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Métis National Conference in my home province of Manitoba. I can tell the House that the Métis people are fiercely proud of their veterans. I, along with them, look forward to the day when their sacrifices and their selfless contribution is awarded the recognition it deserves, not just from their families but also from government.

The Speech from the Throne contains measures aimed at protecting and strengthening communities. For example, to ensure citizens can go about their daily lives in peace and security, the throne speech contains measures aimed at combating gangs and youth violence that we see in some of our larger cities including my home of Winnipeg. To do this, it proposes a two-pronged approach. First of all, we will get serious about youth crime by giving police and the justice system the tools they need to combat it.

The message here is simple. If one commits a serious crime, one is going to do serious time. This message is even stronger given the resolve of our justice minister who will stem the tide of victimization in our justice system. Law-abiding Canadians will be protected with him at the helm.

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However, tougher laws and law enforcement cannot by themselves solve all the challenges in this area which is why the Speech from the Throne calls on government to help those young people already in trouble to get back on track. It commits us to working with our partners, in the community and other levels of government, on projects that encourage young people to make good choices, so that they can get their lives back on track.

Taken together this should go a long way toward providing our young people, who are after all the very future of our country, with the help they need to become healthy, productive and well-adjusted citizens capable of making their own special contribution to this country and their community.

Canadians are yearning for change. They are looking for new ideas and they want a government that works for them and with them. The throne speech contains a number of important new measures which, when implemented, will strengthen Canadian families and communities even more.

However, translating these commitments into action will not be easy for we are talking about complex issues where everyone must get involved if we are to enjoy success. We will require the ideas and cooperation of all members of the House if we are to find solutions to challenges facing us. By working together we can be an example to all Canadians. We can show them that through cooperation much can be achieved. Together we will restore the public's faith in their elected officials. It will not always be easy and it will require hard work. Still, it will be worth the effort, for when we are finished, we will have laid the groundwork for a stronger and safer Canada.

It is for this reason that I support the commitments in the throne speech and I encourage other members to do the same.

• (1135)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his election to the House, but I would like to make a few comments about the speech itself.

When he talks about long ignored, long ignored and long ignored, I would like to point out something that was very much ignored. My hon. colleague from Prince Edward Island talked about how there was very little in this throne speech regarding the agricultural world. I can point out even less that was said about the fishery. As a matter of fact, I will even go further and say there was nothing, other than to point out that the oceans provide a vital resource, which is an incredible flash of brilliance that has been talked about very much.

I would like the hon. member to address the situation in the fishery. As recently as a few days ago, in the Atlantic snow crab industry, our fishermen went back out on the water. In a situation where prices are low and the resources are not as plentiful as they used to be, the question becomes management. One of the grave concerns in the fishery is about local management and more local say, something that was talked about very much by the current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans from Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would like my hon. colleague to address this situation. Perhaps he would like to give us some vision on what the government sees for the fishery. I am not sure whether the throne speech, all 12 pages, was written by the government or Robert Munsch. It was very cute,

but very small on detail, especially regarding the fishery where there was virtually nothing.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, we often hear members of the previous government talk about what was accomplished in the past, yet we currently find ourselves in this state. When we refer back to the 13 years of the previous government, it really dumbfounds me to hear the questions that are asked.

We are waiting for a plan that we are going to be implementing regarding the fishery. Right now we are focusing on our five priorities. I assure the member that when the finance minister comes out with his plan, it will make sense and it will be focused. It is unfortunate that we have seen a 13 year term, but he will be seeing a plan from the finance minister as soon as possible.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the government wants to give our constituents choices, but before leaving Victoria I received a visit from many parents who were very concerned about the lack of their prospects next year when there will be no new child care spaces created. Many of them plan to be going to university next year and now they are faced with uncertainty. Many young parents simply lack the funds.

In Victoria, child care costs for one month are about \$800. It is obvious that \$1,200 will not go very far. I am wondering if the government truly wants to give Canadians choices, whether it will consider broadening its definition of choice.

• (1140)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, as I believe we demonstrated in the throne speech, we have a philosophical difference in our opinion on child care. We believe that choice should be present. The previous government looked at a single system which only offered one choice, state-run child care. Our position is that we are going to be offering more choice. We are providing stay at home parents, or any parent, with \$1,200 per child. This gives a new option. We are also going to be providing incentives for 125,000 new spaces. This is an important change and departure from the previous government. We are looking forward to implementing it as part of our upcoming agenda.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Multiculturalism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by adding my words of congratulations on your elevation to the Chair. Mr. Speaker, as dean of the House and one of the most respected members of this place, it is encouraging for all of us to see you assuming your rightful place in the Chair. As a member of the government, I am delighted that you will not likely be participating in question period very often in the future.

Let me also begin by thanking my constituents of Calgary Southeast for the honour of serving them for a fourth mandate here in the House of Commons. It is a particular honour in my case, not to be boastful, because they rewarded me with more votes than any other candidate in this election, 46,000 votes, which is more a sign of the growth of Calgary than the quality of their member of Parliament, I assure the House. It is also a sign of the need for, among other things, this Parliament to allow full representation by population given that many of us from cities like Calgary represent a huge and growing population that deserves proper representation.

[Translation]

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Prime Minister for making me his parliamentary secretary and for assigning me certain responsibilities. I have great faith in this Prime Minister's leadership and in his vision for the future of our country.

[English]

It is a vision that was well and briefly articulated in the Speech from the Throne. Members opposite have criticized the throne speech for its brevity. It is impossible of course in any throne speech to provide a comprehensive program for every area of public policy. What we see here though is a different approach. Canadians voted on January 23 for change and they have a new government which has expressed that spirit of change in this throne speech document. They have a government which is focused on achieving results, focused on priorities, and not distracted by dozens of priorities.

[Translation]

The former Prime Minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, has said that if a government has 45 priorities, it has no real priority. He was right.

That is why the present Prime Minister has decided to set a government agenda that focuses on certain priorities shared by all Canadians.

[English]

Those priorities were well articulated in this throne speech.

[Translation]

I would like to stress the fact that the first priority of this government is, obviously, accountability. We are going to replace the previous government's culture of kickbacks with a culture of accountability. That is why the first bill introduced by this government, which will be tabled next week, I believe, will be the Federal Accountability Act. The purpose of that act will be to carry out the most ambitious reform of federal institutions in the modern era of Canadian politics.

• (1145)

[English]

This will affect everything from party financing to access to information to whistleblower protection to the ability of the Auditor General to look into every nook and cranny of government to route out waste, and to stop it before it begins. That will be our hallmark.

We are setting a high standard and we in the government recognize that. We are setting a high standard for ourselves, and if we fail to meet that standard, a price will be exacted. We understand

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that. We understand that mistakes will be made. The Prime Minister has said that no one is perfect in any organization with thousands of people. Mistakes will be made. The difference in this government is that when those mistakes are made, deliberately or otherwise, there will be consequences and people will be held accountable.

[Translation]

That is the difference between this government and the previous one. Under the previous government, politicians and public servants could do anything at all without being held to account.

That is why Canadians voted against the Liberal government. They saw the enormous waste of their money. Canadians and families in this country work hard to earn that money and pay their taxes. They want to support the services provided by the government, but they do not want to see the waste, the corruption and the kickbacks that they witnessed over the last 13 years.

[English]

That is why this government has a mandate for accountability and change.

I am speaking directly of my own constituents now. We are very blessed in Alberta generally, and in Calgary particularly, with tremendous prosperity. I think my riding is the fastest growing constituency in the country. We have become magnets for risk taking, entrepreneurialism, business and enterprise.

The people in my constituency in particular would like me to say that they want us to be focused here on reducing the tax burden on Canadian families. I think they are pleased that one of the first acts of this government and the tremendous new Minister of Finance from Whitby—Oshawa will be a universal tax cut for every Canadian family.

[Translation]

The Liberal Party's finance spokesperson said during question period yesterday that his party is in fact opposed to reducing the GST, because they want to keep the previous Liberal government's tax strategy.

The income tax reductions proposed in the Liberals' last budget do nothing for the 32% of Canadians who have the lowest incomes. Those families do not pay income tax, because they do not have enough income for that. However, all Canadian families pay the GST. That is 100% of Canadian families who will benefit from a tax reduction in the first budget of this government, thanks to a reduction of the GST from 7% to 6%.

[English]

Then, of course, it will go to 5%.

This is a universal tax cut. It is just like our day care program, our choice in child care allowance. It is a universal approach.

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[Translation]

In the past, the Liberal Party was in favour of the principle of universality in public policy, when it comes to social programs. It supported the principle of universality, under which everyone must have access to the same services. In fact, it developed a child care centre program that actually targeted 20% to 24% of parents, those who use institutional child care services. However, it forgot about all the other Canadian families and the great diversity of choice that is available to them for child care.

[English]

We are not going to forget the other three-quarters of Canadian families. We are going to provide 100% of the families with preschool children with resources to assist them in their child care choices. Yes, we admit that it is not perfect, but to be blunt, we do not have the fiscal capacity to provide the \$13 billion in budgeted money that the advocates of a universal, Ottawa-run, institutional-government-knows-best, cookie cutter style of Liberal day care program would cost. That \$13 billion is precisely why the Liberals never delivered such a program in 13 years. It was 13 years and \$13 billion. They delivered nothing except a tiny pilot project last year, at a billion dollars a year.

The Liberals pretend that the choice is between universal, quality day care and the \$1,200 a year choice in child care allowance. What nonsense. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, the choice is between something, the \$1,200 a year, or nothing, which is what the Liberals delivered after 13 years.

Those are our priorities. I know that, in particular, accountability, tax reduction and child care choice are priorities that my constituents would like me to speak to.

As a word of personal interest, I would like to commend my hon. colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister for the new principled dimension of our foreign policy that we are already seeing at the beginning of this government.

I am somebody who came to this place partly because I had a heart for human rights issues abroad and for moral principle in foreign policy. I am delighted to see that already in the first few weeks of this government we have seen some principle restored and Canada's prestige restored to our role in the world, most clearly typified by the Prime Minister's brilliant voyage to Afghanistan. Many Canadians have said to me that they now feel proud of their government again. That, I think, is already our greatest achievement.

• (1150)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. It is certainly well deserved. I know the member has the full support of the House.

In his speech yesterday, the Prime Minister reiterated a point that the opposition members have used quite often, and that is that the existence of a surplus at the end of a fiscal period means that Canadians have been overtaxed. It is a very interesting point, because the member is a learned member in financial matters and knows very well that in order to pay down the debt a surplus must be created.

The current national debt is still in the range of \$500 billion. In fact, it is just a little lower than it was when the Liberal government first took office back in 1993, notwithstanding that there had been, since 1997, eight balanced budgets and surpluses, so that yes, there was \$65 billion of debt paid down, saving about \$3 billion of interest expense. But it does raise the question: what is the true fiscal dividend to Canadians when we balance budgets and create surpluses? Does it mean that we should spend the surpluses or is the real dividend the savings on the interest on the national debt?

Since the Speech from the Throne also indicates that the government will be presenting responsible budgets during this 39th Parliament, what is the position of the government with regard to the paydown of the national debt when times are good, knowing full well that we cannot pay down debt when times are bad?

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate my hon. colleague on his re-election. I will not say more nice words about him, because I have done so in the past in the House and those nice words found their way onto his election brochure in this most recent campaign, which was not well received by his Conservative opponent. So while I congratulate him on his re-election, I hope it is the last one.

Let me say that the member raises a very important issue. I think it is known that I used to be president of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. One of the issues that drove me into political life was the desire for fiscal responsibility and a real concern about the intergenerational transfer of wealth that is represented by these enormous debts we are handing on to future generations. I will certainly be a voice in this Parliament and this government for continued reduction of the federal debt.

I can assure the hon. member that the hon. Minister of Finance shortly will present a budget that will continue the reduction of the federal debt, both in relative terms as a percentage of our gross domestic product and in absolute terms. We will run a government that is in the black, with balanced budgets and with surpluses.

The best way to achieve growing surpluses is to have a growing economy, which is precisely what we will provide by allowing Canadians to keep more of their own money, because we, unlike the Liberals, believe that families and small business people and entrepreneurs know better how to spend an extra buck than politicians and bureaucrats. They will create the wealth, and that growth will help provide that kind of surpluses to eventually pay down the debt and reduce the intergenerational burden.

• (1155)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say at the outset that I hold you in such high regard, and when I am throwing vitriol and righteous indignation through you at the other members it is strictly a reflection of the parliamentary system, not anything I hold toward you personally on those matters.

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I would like to ask the hon. member about issues of accountability and debt. I represent the Mushkegowuk clans of the James Bay coast, who have been suffering from years of absolutely disgraceful systemic negligence. As we are talking about debt, I will give members an example in regard to the people of the James Bay coast: up to 30% are not even registered under health insurance plans. The federal government has been aware of this. No moves have been made. My office staff fly to these communities regularly to hold birth certificate clinics to get these people on plans, but what happens is that the first nations health branch will not cover the costs for people in isolated communities who are being treated with emergency medical treatments.

The branch is accusing health officials in the hospitals on the James Bay coast of being irresponsible with the growing debt. That debt is created from the refusal of bureaucrats in the first nations health branch to deal with this issue. The hospital is trying to service people. It has an obligation to service people.

First of all, in terms of the debt being faced by our communities in the first nations through underfunding, will the government act on it? Second, in terms of accountability, will we get some accountability on the bureaucrats at INAC and the first nations health branch who have to deal with the communities and who keep these communities continually under their thumb?

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the member's hard work on that issue; we have discussed the question directly in brief.

I believe the hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has come forward with the first comprehensive plan to address the crisis in access to quality water on aboriginal reserves. This is certainly a government that will want to cut the red tape and empower people in their local communities, including their band councils and reserves, to find solutions that work.

I would say that in principle what the member says makes perfect sense to me. I am sure the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs will take that into account as he continues to try to help solve this serious problem in our aboriginal communities.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my distinguished and respected colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île. I would also like to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker and thank the electors in my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for their vote of confidence for a fifth consecutive time. I will continue to work with my usual passion and conviction to improve the welfare of my fellow citizens.

Expectations for the new government are high. They parallel the commitments made by the Prime Minister during the election campaign. He has the arduous task of repairing the breakage from 13 years of waste by the Liberal regime, a cynical, arrogant and corrupt regime that slashed transfers to the provinces to fund the obligations set for them under the Constitution.

I was happy, but not surprised. Throughout the election campaign, the Prime Minister made firm commitments regarding the fiscal imbalance. He convinced some voters in Quebec that he would settle the matter and rectify the fiscal imbalance. I was not surprised to

hear that. I was happy, because it was beneath the previous government to even acknowledge the existence of a fiscal imbalance in Canada.

The government must now rectify two aspects of the fiscal imbalance. First, there is the vertical fiscal imbalance, the government's ability to tax our fellow citizens beyond its financial requirements for carrying out its mandate. The governments of Quebec and the provinces, on the other hand, are unable to obtain the financial resources they need to meet the obligations set out for them in the Constitution. In other words, there is too much money in Ottawa for the federal government's requirements and not enough in Quebec and the provinces to enable them to carry out their mandates as effectively as possible. These are fundamental mandates to provide direct services to the public such as education and health care and other provincial obligations.

We are not asking the government to resolve this issue tomorrow. However, we are asking that it start making corrective changes as early as the next budget, which will be brought down in a few weeks. In particular, we are asking it to promise to sit down with Quebec and the provinces to negotiate, much the same as in 1964 at the Quebec conference between Mr. Pearson, the Prime Minister of Canada, and Jean Lesage, the Premier of Quebec. In 1964, it was agreed that the federal government had a fiscal overcapacity and that major reforms were needed in the provinces, in matters of education and student assistance in particular. At the time, Mr. Pearson agreed to hand over some of the federal government's tax fields to the provinces that wanted to benefit from this. In 1964, only Quebec benefited. Today, when we talk about tax points and their value of several billion dollars, it comes mainly from that conference.

Our expectations when it comes to the vertical fiscal imbalance are that the government will initiate discussions with the provinces and with Quebec and end up transferring these tax fields or taxes like the GST, transferring revenue, and taking jurisdictions that are exclusive to Quebec and the provinces away from the federal government. With this new revenue, Quebec and the provinces could fulfil their basic missions.

The second type of fiscal imbalance the federal government must correct is the horizontal fiscal imbalance. The government has a fundamental instrument at its disposal, an instrument that has even been in the constitution since 1982 and that is equalization. The horizontal fiscal imbalance is the inequality between the provinces in their ability to obtain tax resources to provide comparable services from east to west in Canada. This equalization system can offset the horizontal fiscal imbalance, in other words, the disparity in provincial wealth obtained from taxes and used to fund basic programs.

The current situation makes the imbalance much more apparent than ever. Alberta, for example, is swimming in unbelievable wealth. Soon the Maritimes will have their turn thanks to offshore oil. Meanwhile, the other provinces are getting poorer in relative and absolute terms.

The Address

●(1200)

We must not forget that the oil boom and Alberta's massive oil exports are artificially raising the value of the Canadian dollar. In Quebec and Ontario in particular, but in the Maritimes as well, businesses are becoming less competitive, especially against emerging countries. When the Canadian dollar is pumped up by oil exports, the whole manufacturing sector suffers, in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

Today, with the rise of economic powers such as China and India, a number of regions are faced with massive job losses. I will come back to this later. Business owners do not know where to turn, with increased competition and the rise in value of the Canadian dollar, which makes businesses less competitive.

Equalization is the perfect way to try to alleviate the disparity between provinces, but there needs to be a way to accurately measure each province's revenue-raising ability before the have-not provinces can be adequately compensated with equalization payments. Equalization reform is needed.

First of all, the equalization formula has to be based on the 10-province standard. Each province's fiscal capacity must be calculated against a Canada-wide average, not just a five-province average, as is the case now. All 10 provinces have to be taken into account. As well, some tax bases, such as property tax, need to be reviewed. For some provinces, estimates of the government's ability to raise property tax revenue are used. These provinces' property tax capacity can be overestimated, with the result that they receive lower equalization transfers than they actually need.

Second, when we say that each province's total fiscal capacity has to be considered, this means that we must not remove a tax base from the equalization formula, as the Conservatives are proposing to do. They want to take out non-renewable natural resources. This would skew the system and add to the horizontal fiscal imbalance between the provinces. One province's relative wealth would increase, while the other provinces' relative wealth would decrease. We have to be consistent.

Equalization is the only program with constitutional status. In the past it was felt that there would be growing inequalities among the provinces in terms of their capacity to collect wealth in the form of taxes, and this program served to correct that. Equalization has to be reformed, but not in the way the Conservatives have proposed to us.

We are on the government's side if it intends to rectify the fiscal imbalance in the medium term. The situation at the moment is urgent. Post-secondary education—i.e. colleges and universities—has been underfunded for many years. That began when the former finance minister, who later became Prime Minister, made savage cuts to transfers to the provinces for the funding of post-secondary education.

The situation in which we now find ourselves is dangerous. I have met with the president of the Association des collèges du Québec and the principal of François-Xavier-Garneau college, in the Quebec City region. They informed me that, since the mid-1990s, education programs have been reformed and modernized to take account of labour market realities and technological development. However they do not have the funds to set up these new programs. It is

becoming a disaster. We know that education is fundamental, that it is the future of our economy and our societies. We do not even have the money to modernize our programs, much less set them up.

When the Conservatives were in opposition, I chaired a sub-committee on the fiscal imbalance. I told them that we needed to increase the federal contribution to 25%. They agreed. This represents an increase in transfers for post-secondary education of \$4.9 billion per year for all of Canada. This has to be done. The government must take action on this.

I would also like to mention three other issues of close concern to me. One is POWA, the program for older worker adjustment. With the fierce competition from emerging countries, it is important to help workers aged 55 and over to get through this period until the time comes to retire. This program used to exist in 1997. In my riding, the people from Peerless in Acton were the last to benefit from it, in 1997.

●(1205)

Since then we have been fighting to bring it back. This is urgently necessary. The program is not expensive, and it helps the families of workers aged 55 and over to pull through.

Of course, the government must act on agriculture and the RCMP posts. The Conservatives have agreed to reopen the eight RCMP posts that had been closed.

In Saint-Hyacinthe, we expect to be waging total war against crime, thanks to the Info-Crime committee established by the warden of the RCM, Ms. Beaulac, and myself. We also believe we can do this with appropriate policing tools. That requires the reopening of the RCMP post in Saint-Hyacinthe and assignment of a significant number of investigators to it, i.e. eight. That is the functional mass that is necessary.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot on his re-election. We have been colleagues for some 13 years now and I always learn something when he speaks.

Since the beginning, Federal and provincial relations have been a big issue with the Bloc. We know that provincial jurisdiction covers things like child care, housing and social services, but in this Parliament child care has become an issue. I was very concerned when the OECD report came out and basically characterized, other than Quebec's model, the child care experience in Canada as glorified babysitting.

There now is a debate about whether we should give money directly to parents or give money to national programs, which could be extremely expensive. We agree on one thing, and that is it is an imperative not an option that we invest in the raising of our children.

In the light of how this debate has evolved, has the Bloc taken a position with regard to the priorities of children and their needs in this evolutionary society and is there a model which would provide a greater flexibility and support in choices for parents so that children do in fact come first?

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for his question. He is someone for whom I have a great deal of respect.

We have indeed taken a position with regard to children, young, older and in between. First, we have to talk about child care centres. The agreement signed on that subject between the previous government and the government of Quebec must be honoured. We insist on this. We will continue to fight, together with the government of Quebec and all parties in the National Assembly, to have the present government honour the signature of the previous government.

Second, my colleague from Trois-Rivières will have an opportunity a little later this week or next week to introduce the proposal that, if there is a direct transfer to parents for children under the age of six, that transfer must be done properly, that is, in the form of a refundable tax credit, and not in the form of a lump sum payment of \$1,200 to families, which would be taxable. Under the latter option, families with low or moderate incomes would be heavily penalized by the tax on their cash transfers.

Third, I would mention education. Post-secondary education, colleges and universities, that too is for young people. For a number of years, they have been underfunded. We support the demands by the federations of students in Quebec and Canada for restoration of the transfer that was eliminated in 1994-1995. At that time, it was worth \$2.2 billion, but since then there has been inflation. As a result of the emergency correction of the federal transfers in college and university education, that transfer is now worth \$4.9 billion.

Fourth, when we talk about child poverty, we have to think of the parents. Because if the parents are poor, their children are poor too. At present, because of the emerging nations, including China, India, Brazil, in the agri-food industry, and Chile, we find ourselves in a situation in which workers are experiencing mass layoffs. We have seen this in the Huntingdon region, the Drummond region, and in my region as well, in the case of Olymel, AirBoss, and so on. We have to help the workers. That can be done by reforming employment insurance and especially by introducing the assistance program for older workers.

After 30 or 35 years of service, workers are finding themselves in a situation in which, after a few months, they are no longer entitled to employment insurance and have to become social assistance recipients. To do that, they must sell all the property they have accumulated since they began working, for 35 years, all the time they have held jobs that demand unbelievable vigour and huge outlays of energy. At the end of the day, after 30 or 35 years, people can no longer reposition themselves on the labour market.

In 1997, POWA targeted workers aged 55 and over. That program enabled them to live decently and with dignity until their pensions started. The program was not expensive. When it was abolished, the cost was \$17 million for the whole of Canada. Today, that must be about \$60 million or \$70 million dollars. On the other hand, we have to think about the number of tragedies that a program like this can avert.

The Address

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but the time for questions and comments was used up by that one exchange. I would ask members, in the future, to try to keep their questions and their answers shorter.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment to the position of Deputy Speaker. I thank my colleague for his speech, which was brilliant, as usual.

And I thank the citizens of La Pointe-de-l'Île for re-electing me for a fifth time. Their strong support meant a lot to me and is a positive indication that they support the positions that the Bloc Québécois will defend to ensure the progress of Quebec.

To begin my reply to the Speech from the Throne, I would like to refer to yesterday's question period. It was my turn after my party leader and I asked the Prime Minister about keeping an election promise regarding UNESCO. He replied, "I am sure that the members of the Bloc will not support such an agreement. We know that their objective is to do much more than give Quebec a voice on the world stage".

First of all, I must say that the Prime Minister is right and wrong at the same time. Simply because we are Bloc members does not mean that we would be willing to accept a proposal on Quebec's position in the federal framework if that proposal were unsatisfactory. As we will see, there are many federated countries that have given their component parts the power, for instance, to sign treaties. In point of fact, we are sovereignists and we hope to achieve more than just a place for Quebec on the world stage. We want Quebec to play a role similar to small countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark, which all contribute significantly in terms of international aid and conflict resolution. We believe that we could play such a role. However, what we hope to achieve here is progress for Quebec.

I would like to point out that I was inspired by a book written by Stéphane Paquin, who studied models of federalism that have been reformed since the 1990s. Belgium is certainly a case in point. Following a debate that ended in 1993, Belgium permitted its federated entities—regions and communities—to play a role on the international scene. They have become the model to be admired and also to be copied. Rather than leading to the anarchy that some believed would ensue, this model on the contrary has also created mechanisms for cooperation enabling the regions and communities to further their respective development.

There are three types of treaties in Belgium, that is to say treaties signed by the federal government. It must by law consult them, but the treaties are concluded and ratified by the government. However, treaties that fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of communities or regions and that are concluded and ratified by the authorities of these entities do exist, from the legal point of view, in the same manner as treaties concluded by the federal government. The parliaments of the federated states approve treaties.

In matters of shared responsibility, the treaty is concluded according to a special procedure, as agreed to by all the governments, and must also be approved by all the parliaments concerned.

The Address

• (1215)

If a parliament does not agree, the treaty cannot be approved. Of course this requires discussion and negotiation. However, this allows each entity to make known its point of view. The same principles apply to international representation. When an entity is not satisfied with the position taken, there is no position. For example, Belgium will not voice an opinion; it will abstain rather than voting or speaking. This does not mean that Belgium is powerless on the international scene. On the contrary, compromises are sought out. This is a situation that does not occur often here.

Spain is another country that is very interesting and that is not a federation. It is a unitary state made up of communities. The communities are consulted when treaties are made or for international representations. Catalonia is an exception, since it has signed an agreement with the Spanish government, and a bipartisan committee studies treaties and international representations. That enables Catalonia to express its particular points of view. It might also be recalled that Switzerland allows its entities to sign treaties, provided they are consistent with what exists on the federal level. The great respect Switzerland shows to each of its entities is well known. This does not occur with respect to sovereign countries; the entities are federal entities.

I am insisting on this subject, because we think that, when the Prime Minister made his statements during the election campaign, he made an appeal for Quebec, particularly in the current context, to finally see its jurisdictions respected. I will quote a few of these statements:

We will respect federal and provincial jurisdictions, as they are defined in the Canadian Constitution.

In a while, through you, Mr. Speaker, I will put some questions to him because Canadian jurisdictions, since the strong centralization movement of federation, have lost a lot of their shine and their essential oils. In *Le Devoir* of last December 20, one could read:

On the international level, Quebec, as well as the other provinces, though they see less need for it, "will have a say in matters affecting their own jurisdictions," said the leader of the Conservative Party.

So this does not concern just their jurisdictions, but it does affect them. The Prime Minister also said:

—we are going to design mechanisms that will give the provinces a greater role in their own areas of jurisdiction on international issues.

In his much talked-about speech on December 20, he also said:

Clearly this issue is of greater concern to Quebec than the other provinces. I am ready to discuss mechanisms to enable the provinces to extend their jurisdictions on the international scene.

• (1220)

The extension of jurisdictions on the international scene is the doctrine favoured by Paul Guérin-Lajoie in 1965. On the basis of a decision by the Privy Council, a colonial court, he demanded the right for Quebec to negotiate, sign and ratify its own treaties, since globalization meant that Quebec needed to have a hold over its treaties and over international representation.

• (1225)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, federal-provincial jurisdiction and constitutional issues are always going to

be long-standing debates in this place, particularly with the Bloc. The Bloc has championed many issues over the years, among them the EI fund, cheese, shipbuilding, and the fiscal imbalance. The member has spent a lot of time on international and foreign affairs. I appreciate her comments on some of the international perspective.

Perhaps the member could share some thoughts about this constitutional situation that we are in, where Quebec is not now a signatory to the Canadian Constitution but is prepared to operate within the principles of the Constitution to try to move forward. We have to move this file forward at some time. Does she believe that there is a possibility down the road of a constitutional amendment process which would provide the opportunity to better achieve the objectives of all Canadians, including Canadians in Quebec?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to tell my colleague that I too appreciate his sometimes surprising but always interesting questions.

I remember — others must have heard it as well — the current Prime Minister emphasizing during a debate that he would arrange to make it possible for Quebec to sign the Canadian constitution. Frankly, it is a strange situation, to say the least. As a result of the Supreme Court's interpretation, we say of it in Quebec that it is like the tower in Pisa and always leans in the same direction. Quebec must abide by the rules of a constitution that it did not sign. This does not make any sense. We remember the last attempt. I would frankly be surprised if the Prime Minister were to try it again, but if he does, I would be astonished if he succeeded. It is sad, in a way.

I have before me texts from legal scholars saying to what extent—since 1937 and 1949, when the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ceased deciding jurisdictional conflicts, among others, and was replaced by the Supreme Court—Canadian federalism has become centralized to the point of no longer really meeting the criteria for a federation and instead becoming a unitary state. In view of all the interpretive theories, the jurisdictions recognized in the Constitution can be circumvented, identified, used and enclosed in all sorts of ways, with the result that we are headed more toward a unitary state.

As we know, I am a sovereignist. I think that this deterioration, this centralization of the Canadian federation, can no longer be reversed.

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I can appreciate that the hon. member would love to plunge the House back into a constitutional debate, I can assure everyone that the object of the government is to get things done for Canadians. We feel that will be very uniting for Canadians, including those in Quebec.

I would like to address what the hon. member indicated originally, a point that was made by the Prime Minister yesterday, which was that the Bloc would not likely be satisfied with whatever the outcome was regarding the negotiations on UNESCO. The point is quite simple. Because the Conservatives' end goal is diametrically opposed to that of the Bloc in that we want to unite Canada from coast to coast to coast and Bloc members do not, they quite simply will not be satisfied with any outcome.

● (1230)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat—and I am certain that I will do it often during this Parliament and will not be the only one—what our leader said yesterday, namely that we are here to achieve progress for Quebec which is to say to make its jurisdictions as broad again as they must be for the development of Quebec, which is a people and a nation. This is not a whim; we are a people and a nation. There are other countries in the world that consist of various peoples and nations and that find a way to recognize the place of all their peoples to ensure their development. That might have been possible in Canada, but it has not happened.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the Minister of Transport, my colleague the member for Pontiac.

It is a great privilege for me to rise in this place for the first time. At the outset I would like to thank the electors of Ottawa West—Nepean for their support. I commit to them that I will work hard each and every day to serve their interests in this place. Their priorities which they sent me here to address are health care, crime, support for seniors, and to be an advocate for our public servants.

A great number of very distinguished people have preceded me in this place. I would like to pay tribute to Marlene Catterall who served as our member of Parliament in Ottawa West—Nepean for the past 16 or 17 years, to David Daubney, Beryl Gaffney, Bill Tupper who was a real mentor to me, former Speaker Lloyd Francis who was good enough to come to my swearing in, along with David Daubney, Walter Baker, Dick Bell, and my great-uncle who served as the member for my riding in the 1940s. I am very privileged to follow him.

Today I rise to speak about accountability. It is one of the most important responsibilities, in my judgment, facing any government. Canadians, all of us, were shocked at the sponsorship scandal and other examples of irresponsible government. It shook the confidence of Canadians to the core. As the Prime Minister has noted publicly, and I do not think we can do it enough, this Conservative government does not blame the members of the public service for what happened. They did not cross the line. It was their political masters who did.

I want to say very directly that rebuilding the public trust can be the most important legacy for the 39th Parliament. Our federal accountability act can change how government works. It will make it easier not just for the House but for all Canadians to hold their federal government to account. I hope we will use this first step to rebuild the public trust of Canadians in their government.

The Address

We are going to focus on five key reforms. We want political reform through changes to electoral and party financing so that there is real confidence that undue influence is not exerted on the political process, on the parliamentary process or indeed on government. We want parliamentary reform through enhanced support for parliamentary committees so that all members of Parliament can do their jobs, and through stronger roles and greater independence for the officers and agents of the House of Commons and Senate.

We want public sector reform through better and improved accountability structures.

We want procurement reform to ensure that Canadian taxpayers are getting value for their hard-earned tax dollars and that the processes are open.

We want to see additional reforms to help increase transparency in government.

The reforms we will present to the House and through the House to Canadians will be far reaching and comprehensive.

Accountability is the very foundation for Canada's system of responsible government. It is key to assuring Parliament and Canadians that public resources are used both efficiently and effectively. Accountability means leading by example. That is especially true for those who aspire to public office, for members of Parliament and the political parties that all but one of us represent.

As I mentioned earlier, the federal accountability act will reduce the opportunity to exert undue political influence through large and secret donations of money to political parties and candidates. This will ensure greater transparency and help Canadians feel more confident about the integrity of the democratic process.

Canadians expect their elected representatives and indeed all public office holders to make decisions that are in the public interest and not in their personal interest both now and in the years to come. Public office holders must perform their duties and arrange their private affairs to withstand the closest public scrutiny. They must uphold the highest ethical standards at all times.

● (1235)

The weaknesses in the current Lobbyists Registration Act have increased the perception of conflict of interest. We must be concerned about conflict of interest, but we must be equally concerned about the public perception of conflict of interest. Some people feel that there is a privileged access to government that is reserved only for a chosen few. That is something this government intends to deal with head on when we introduce the federal accountability act next week.

The Address

I am privileged to represent the riding of Ottawa West—Nepean. In the national capital region a huge number of men and women work in the public service and deliver important programs and services that touch the lives of all Canadians every single day. We recognize the professionalism and dedication of the men and women who work in the public service and the value that they bring to the table. As Conservatives we see a strong role for a vibrant, healthy and dynamic private sector as the instrument of economic growth, as the engine of opportunity in the country, but it does not demean the important role that the public sector plays in the Canadian economy and the important role that members of the public service play.

The federal accountability act will help clarify roles and responsibilities which first and foremost will strengthen accountability. Our objective through the federal accountability act which was cited in the Speech from the Throne will be to have an even stronger public service, one that will continue to be second to none internationally.

The government is one of the largest purchasers of goods and services in the country. I strongly believe that the bidding process for government contracts must be fair, open and transparent. The federal accountability act will include an overarching statement of principles to meet these objectives.

One of the most important roles of Parliament is to hold the Government of Canada to account for the use of taxpayers' dollars. To do this effectively, parliamentarians need objective and fact-based information on how the government spends funds. That will be an important part to the parliamentary budget authority that we will propose next week.

I look forward to working with members on all sides of the House to make this new federal accountability act reality. The measures that I highlighted today signal a dramatic change in the way this city works to move from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability that pervades Parliament Hill, that pervades the public service, that pervades Canadian society so that all taxpayers will have the confidence that their tax dollars are spent wisely and well.

I look forward to working with members on all sides of the House, with my own caucus colleagues, with members of the official opposition, with members from Quebec and the Bloc Québécois and colleagues from the New Democratic Party. Pat Martin, one of the NDP members of Parliament, was quoted in the *Hill Times*. He said that we could leave a better legacy—

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am very delighted to hear the hon. member speaking but I think there is a time honoured tradition in the House that we do not refer to members by their names, as was the case by the hon. member. Perhaps the Speaker might want to be more attentive to these concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will just remind the hon. President of the Treasury Board to refer to our colleagues either by their riding names or by their titles.

● (1240)

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, the member said that we could perhaps have no greater victory in this first session of the 39th Parliament than that we could pass, enact into law, the federal accountability act, to leave a legacy of accountability and to show all Canadians that we can make this Parliament work and that we can

clean up once and for all the cynicism that has grown over the past 13 years.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment.

I congratulate the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean on his election and on his move from provincial to federal politics.

The hon. member talked about accountability. He spoke about the public servants, that they are not to blame. I believe that in all services, whether they be public or private, there is no perfection. There is always a problem somewhere. I would be very happy to give the minister a copy of the front page of a newspaper where the Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, said at the first inquiry initiated from her report, "public servants broke just about every rule in the book".

I am not here to stand up and blame all the public servants. I am saying that there was a fault. We went in and cleaned it up, which brings me to my question about the accountability act.

Today, there is an unelected appointed senator—another broken promise—who is going to be heading the biggest department in government. As a government accountable to the people supposedly under the accountability act, how can we ask him questions about procurement, for example? How are we going to ask questions to the new minister who does not sit in the House of Commons? The way I see it and the way most Canadians see it, we are elected by the people to be accountable here. Where is that minister going to be accountable?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I expect that every day the Minister of Public Works and Government Services will be on his feet answering questions in question period in the other place. I think he was asked two questions yesterday. This is good for accountability. As well, another 25 ministers will be here in the House of Commons.

I respect the opinion and judgment of the member opposite. I would be dishonest if I did not put on the table my concern about the continued maligning of our public service. The Liberal Party has tried to blame our public service for the scandal and the member opposite has thrown fuel on that fire. No member of the public service woke up one day and said, "How do I funnel money to the Liberal Party in Quebec?" That is a fact. Public servants did not do that.

What we did see in Justice Gomery's report was the active involvement and collusion of senior members of the Liberal Party both on Parliament Hill and in the province of Quebec, who were involved in the disbursement of public funds. We heard stories of envelopes filled with \$7,000 and even \$50,000 in cash. No member of the public service woke up one day and wanted to funnel money to the Liberal Party in Quebec. I can assure the member opposite of that.

Someone will have to stand up for the public service. I can say that there will be two people who will be doing that. They will be the political minister responsible for Quebec, the member for Pontiac, and there will be myself, the member for Ottawa. We will be the first two to stand up for the public service.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on joining the House of Commons. I am sure he will bring us some of his wisdom from the Ontario legislature. It is great to have him here.

I followed his comments with great interest. I totally agree with the member that we have to have public trust in our institutions. To that end, the Liberal government undertook quite a few things.

Let me say to the member opposite, because he talked about the public service, Chuck Guité was inherited from the previous Conservative government.

The other issue I wish to raise in talking about public trust is I suggest that the member read *On the Take: Crime, Corruption and Greed in the Mulroney Years*. This is important reading for members to understand how this works. Also the member really should take a look at the *W5* program where Schreiber gave \$300,000 to a former prime minister.

I am hoping that under this air of accountability and this quest that we all have as parliamentarians to clean up the ethics of government that an investigation will be launched. It really does go to the very heart of his presentation, which is private versus public interest.

● (1245)

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kitchener—Waterloo for his welcoming remarks on my election to this place. I look forward to working with him and others.

I think the last time the Liberal Party tried to investigate Brian Mulroney it ended up paying him hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars and having to issue a formal apology. Taxpayers' dollars went to pay for Liberal bungling. The member should be very cautious if he wants to reopen that issue. I remember the former justice minister having to issue a public apology and writing a very large cheque, perhaps a seven digit figure, over a million dollars in legal fees for that bungling. I hope we do not have to go back down that route.

With respect, I disagree profoundly with the member opposite. The member opposite said that Chuck Guité was inherited from the Conservative government. Our public servants do not work for a Conservative government or a Liberal government. Our public servants work for Canadians. We have a non-partisan public service. I want to underline that for the member opposite.

[Translation]

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes granted to me as the member for Pontiac, the transport minister and the minister responsible for Quebec, I would like to speak briefly on how the program outlined the day before yesterday fits in with the desire for change expressed by Quebecers.

Before I do so, I must first thank the citizens of the beautiful riding of Pontiac. I would not be here today without the trust and support of the majority of my constituents. Together, the residents of Pontiac and I have embarked upon a wonderful adventure—one that will bring change. I remember very well a campaign meeting held one cold December night, during which an elderly woman admitted that she had never voted for the Conservative Party in her life.

The Address

Fortunately, I was able to reassure her as I told her, “Nor have I, Ma’am”.

[English]

The people of Pontiac are proud people. They are honest, hard-working and independent people. They believe in fundamental values, community spirit and regional solidarity. They believe that efforts should be rewarded and initiative should be encouraged. They are courageous and compassionate people.

Though its first limits start only a few kilometres from this historic precinct, the Pontiac region needs help to develop its full economic and social potential. I want to assure the people of my riding that I will do my utmost, both within and outside this chamber, to give new hope and better opportunities to the people of the Pontiac.

[Translation]

As a member from the Ottawa-Gatineau area, I would also like to tell the thousands of public servants who work in the area and throughout Canada that we understood the frustration many of them felt when an attempt was made to pin the rap of scandals on them. The truth is—and I am reminded of this every day since assuming my duties as a minister—Canada has one of the best, if not the very best, public services in the world.

● (1250)

[English]

I know my colleague, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean and President of the Treasury Board, shares these sentiments. I look forward to working with him to give our public service and servants the respect they deserve and the instruments they need to continue serving their fellow citizens with pride, integrity and independence.

[Translation]

The election on January 23 did not just bring a new government and a new political party to power. That has happened many times in our history. But seldom do voters decide to make a more profound, more radical change in the calibre of their elected representatives. That is what happened on January 23. Canadians renounced a philosophy of government, a concept of federalism, that led to the worst abuses in recent years, and embraced a new vision of our future.

For too long, the former government acted as though Quebec was its to plunder. Illegally, with tricks and lies, it took whatever it could. The former Prime Minister banned members and officials from the party for life because their actions were simply indefensible.

At first blush, the Federal Accountability Act, the first piece of legislation we plan to introduce, may seem complicated to many Canadians. Yet it can be summed up in just two words: never again.

The Address

The throne speech referred to our government's commitment to address any fiscal imbalance so that all governments have access to the resources they need to meet their responsibilities. This imbalance reached dangerous levels under the former government. Our commitment to deal with this problem is very ambitious. But as with all our priorities, we have not chosen the easy way. We will focus on what is important and urgent. We may be a minority government, but we do not intend to be a caretaker government. We want to be a decisive government that takes action.

[English]

Fiscal imbalance is not just a Quebec issue. It is a Canadian problem which affects nearly all provincial governments. It also affects our cities even more where 80% of Canadians live. This is why we have put it on the top of our agenda, not because we think it is easy to accomplish but because we believe it must be done.

[Translation]

During another time not so long ago, I had the privilege of serving in another parliament, at the Quebec National Assembly. I have already noticed some differences, but I see in my new colleagues around me today the same dedication to strengthening their nation and the same desire to serve their constituents. That is why I want to congratulate the hon. members from all the parties and the independent member from the riding of Portneuf on their recent election or reelection. They already have my admiration and they can count on my cooperation.

Upon entering this room as a member for the first time the day before yesterday, I must admit that some memories came back to me. For instance, I remember the sense of trust and solidarity that existed between then Premier Bourassa and Prime Minister Mulroney. This sense of cooperation between these two remarkable leaders, which was applied in the interest of all Canadians, served the interest of Quebec quite well.

No one can deny that there currently exists between the new Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec a community of similar ideas and ideals that can only result in great accomplishments.

When I was in the National Assembly there was no Conservative party, but there was a sovereignist party, a close relative of my new friends at the Bloc Québécois. That is another reason why I do not feel out of place here. There is common ground everywhere. It was no so long ago that sovereignists hoped that Robert Bourassa would support Quebec independence one day. In the end, he was a fine example of how the interests of Quebec and the integrity of Canada could both be served.

Today the sovereignists are saying they will support some of the promises the Prime Minister made about Quebec during the last election campaign, such as Quebec's involvement in UNESCO, because that could possibly serve the separatist cause. I would say to them, amicably but frankly, that the success of our commitments toward Quebecers will not be to demonstrate that independence is possible. On the contrary, it will demonstrate that it is not necessary. We will prove that federalism works well when it is well thought out and well managed.

• (1255)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Minister of Transport on his recent election.

He talked about his local riding of Pontiac, about economic self-sufficiency and how he plans to prosper in his riding.

In our province and across many smaller communities one of the great programs that has been implemented over the past few years is the port divestiture program. Would the minister tell us the status on that, given the fact that the program ended on March 31 and many of these communities are now hanging on the fate of this program to achieve economic self-sufficiency? Would the minister please bring this matter to the House?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, we are discussing a program that came to its end on March 31. It is a program which I believe has demonstrated over the last number of years its viability and success.

As I speak today, this program is being revised. We are reviewing it. I will certainly let the Minister of Finance follow up on the next steps that should be taken, but hopefully this program will be pursued. I believe it has done a lot of good. I feel that there have been some problems. There are areas where there has been some difficulty. That has to be reviewed in the light of what was done. We will get back to the House, and I will personally get back here, and let the hon. member know what will happen in terms of the next steps.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you for the honour of presiding in that chair. I have every confidence that your judgment will be as good as your eyesight when you recognize the NDP way down in this corner where we reside.

My congratulations, too, to the Minister of Transport for accepting this important role.

I think the minister would agree with me that freedom of information is the oxygen that democracy breathes. I know he has experience in government and would agree with me that access to information is one of those rights that we enshrine in Canada and is one of the instruments by which we shine a light on the operations of government and feature open government as one of the cornerstones of our democracy.

Could the minister explain why his government has seen fit, under its new accountability, act to strip out the access to information reform that was the centrepiece of that piece of legislation? Why is his government going to ground, as it were, and slamming the door on true transparency and openness when surely he knows, as everyone in this country knows, that transparency and accountability have become the buzzwords of Ottawa today? If we had true access to information laws and open government, we would have 30 million auditors scrutinizing the operations of government rather than one overworked Auditor General.

The Address

•(1300)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, needless to say, I will be looking toward my right on numerous occasions, so the member need not worry. I will be listening with a lot of interest to the questions that are raised.

The question posed on access to information is a very interesting one. In my previous professional political life I had the opportunity of pursuing that piece of legislation in the Quebec national assembly. We had the opportunity as a government to adopt a measure that extended to the private sector elements or dispositions of our provincial legislation for the public sector.

I reassure the member that the government's intention is not to cover up access to information. On the contrary, the government, through the President of the Treasury Board when the piece of legislation will be known, will be able to demonstrate, without any doubt, that what we want to do is bring transparency into the government operations. We want to bring in accountability and all these values and notions that we share on this side of the House and certainly that my hon. colleague shares. We will be able to see that the government wants to pursue that endeavour with as much vigour and ingenuity as he has suggested.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you and your fellow Speakers. You certainly have an important job in the House ensuring that decorum is maintained and the impressions of Canadians are enhanced.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brampton—Springdale.

I would also like to congratulate all the other members of the House, those who have been re-elected and those who were newly elected. I started out on this side of the House, over in the rump. I remember the Prime Minister was down on that side back in 1993. Certainly, as new members, we were very enthused and in some ways naive, but it has been a really incredible privilege, and I say that for all of us, in being able to serve our constituents in the Parliament of Canada.

There is no question that our families greatly assist us in the work that we do. In my case in particular, my wife Nancy and my daughter Erin have put up with a husband and a father being off in Parliament since 1993. I extend a special thanks to all the volunteers who believe in the democratic process, and help each and every one of us get to this place.

When I first came into the House in 1993, this country was on the verge of bankruptcy. Unemployment was very high. There was not a lot of hope and there was a lot of despair. Over the years when the Liberals were in government, we restored the country's fiscal health. Instead of going on at length, I draw the House's attention to the *Globe and Mail* article on March 31 that stated:

A strong economy, a booming job market and generous government benefits have lifted more than one million Canadians out of the low income ranks since 1996.

Poverty has been reduced to 11.2% from 15.7% in 1996. That is important. Granted, one person in poverty is one too many, but the fact of the matter is we made change. The other part of the issue is that we were able to give hope versus the despair that we inherited.

I looked over the throne speech and I must say it is a throne speech that I have seen in my years in the House. The government talks about bringing back accountability. We as a government have done a whole lot of those things, but it is one of those issues where the work is never done and we have to continue working on it.

I urge the President of the Treasury Board, as he is making up the legislation, to perhaps take a look at the book entitled *On the Take*, which chronicles the abuses of the Mulroney government. I also ask him to pay special attention to *W-Five*, which pointed to Schreiber making payments of \$300,000 to the former prime minister. I think that is important. The people of this country have a right to have some kind of accountability framework around it.

In terms of helping families and Canadians, we all want to do that. Over the years the Liberal government put in place record tax cuts.

On the issue of tackling crime, I am a bit bothered at the U.S. style approach that has been taken. I say that because the rhetoric around that issue from the Conservative Party is very much like the rhetoric that comes from the Republicans in the United States. When we compare the crime rates of the two nations, while we have our problems, we are much better than the United States of America.

•(1305)

Providing child care support is going to be a real issue for us because it is not going to create one child care space nor is it going to enhance early childhood education. It is going to give money to parents who have preschool kids.

I must commend the government on another issue that it talked about and that is regarding an apology to Chinese Canadians with respect to the head tax. I agree that is long overdue. What is lacking is a comprehensive approach. We as a country have to come to terms with that. Apologies should also go to Ukrainians, to those Canadians who were interned during the wars, to first nations people, and also to all those people who were discriminated against in the evolution of Canadian history until we arrived at the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In a very real way it was the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that said those acts of discrimination were wrong. It was the charter that said we are not going to go there anymore. We are going to have it guide us in our future legislation. To that extent I have proposed a policy, call it the hall of the charter, which would educate Canadians about past injustices. Whether one is French, a first nation, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Italian, Black, or Asian, it is important that we understand each other's history because then we can understand why we need something like the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to ensure that we learn from our past mistakes and to ensure we never go there again. I am a bit disturbed that in this document there is no mention of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which is supposed to bind all of us as Canadians.

I have a greater concern with this throne speech about what is missing. There is no mention of post-secondary education. There is no mention of research and development. There is no mention of the Kyoto accord or the Kelowna accord. There is no mention of the charter. There is no mention of protecting manufacturing jobs in Canada which are under threat by countries that dump here from overseas.

The Address

Most important, there is no mention of anything really substantial with respect to citizenship and immigration. Reforming the Citizenship Act was part of the throne speech of the last government. When the House fell in November of last year, we were on the verge of receiving legislation from the government to upgrade the Citizenship Act. There was all-party agreement in committee on how that should be done. The report on the revocation of citizenship received concurrence in the House, but there is no mention of that here. I really hope that we are going to deal with this issue.

I look forward to working in the 39th Parliament, recognizing that I am a temporary guardian of the public trust. I am here, just like every colleague in the House, to represent our respective constituencies.

• (1310)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my predecessors have done, I would like to congratulate you on your new position.

I would like to thank the member for Kitchener—Waterloo for a most enlightening speech and for his dogged determination over the years to guarantee that all Canadians, Canadians by birth and Canadians by choice, are treated equally by legislation, and that Canadians by choice have the same charter rights and are not subjected to the political process of citizenship revocation.

In the last session of Parliament the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration tabled a report dealing with the question of citizenship revocation. How does my colleague think the current government may best deal with the flawed citizenship revocation process?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, we can deal with it by adopting the 10th report of the citizenship and immigration committee which received concurrence in the House. Let me also point out that this issue applies to six million Canadians who were not born in Canada. Thirty-nine members of the House were not born in Canada. We are talking about something that is very sacred. We are talking about our citizenship rights. Essentially, we have to get the Citizenship Act before Parliament and before committee, so we can collectively pass an act that we can all be proud of.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is great to have the member for Kitchener—Waterloo back. He served with me on the Standing Committee for Citizenship and Immigration in the previous session.

I would like to thank the citizens of Vaudreuil—Soulanges for the renewed trust they have placed in me.

The immigration system, I agree, has deteriorated and suffers from some significant shortcomings, particularly in terms of the rights of refugees. By failing to implement the refugee appeal division, the government is not respecting its own legislation.

Delays in processing permanent residence applications are also growing. There is no real possibility for regularizing the status of nationals of certain countries affected by moratoriums on removal.

Reuniting immigrant and refugee families is truly a nightmare and causes much distress and suffering.

My colleague has shown a great deal of enthusiasm for citizenship issues and we have made great strides together. The refusal to table the citizenship act promised in the Liberal throne speech has also been a source of considerable frustration.

Does the member believe that there is a certain consensus about the possible solutions to problems affecting temporary workers, the obvious lack of workers in several areas, including the lot of illegal immigrants? With regard to citizenship, I would like to hear the member address the issue of international adoption.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I worked with the hon. member on the citizenship and immigration committee, and I see another colleague of mine across the way from Surrey. We really had a wonderful experience as parliamentarians because we could work in a non-partisan fashion. We could take very difficult issues and arrive at a consensus.

I agree with the member that the refugee appeal division has to be enacted into law. One of the things we continually worked on was to make that happen. We said that when the government appoints members of the refugee board, it should be based on competence. That is essentially what has happened. We have put that in place and I must say I am a little disturbed to find out that three members of the Montreal refugee board, who have received excellent appraisals and who were hired by an independent tribunal, have lost their positions.

We have always said that things must be based on competence. One of the problems with the refugee board has been that people did not have the experience. We needed experienced people on that board and I hope that the minister will revisit that decision.

In terms of temporary workers, there is a solution. We must begin from the premise that if we were to take every worker in this country who is undocumented and ship them out of the country tomorrow, our economy would take a big cut because those jobs need to be filled in this economy. We must issue temporary work permits and see if over time we can regularize these workers, so they can become landed immigrants and Canadian citizens, and partake in the Canadian dream.

• (1315)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. I first would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the new colleagues and new members in the House on their victories.

I also would like to begin by expressing my sincere and genuine thanks to my constituents of Brampton—Springdale for their support in awarding me this tremendous honour and privilege to continue to serve as their member of Parliament.

I also would like to thank the thousands of volunteers who dedicated many tireless hours to ensuring that we would be successful in our victory in Brampton—Springdale. I thank my volunteers for their hard work and their tremendous commitment.

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As I stand here before the House today as a member of the opposition party for the first time, I would like to assure Bramptonians and Canadians that I will continue to be a firm proponent of ensuring that we create and build an environment in which children, seniors and families have the opportunity to really prosper and succeed.

In addition, I look forward to working on behalf of my constituents and thousands of Canadians to ensure that the values of equality, of justice, of acceptance, of respect and tolerance continue to remain the hallmark of our great country. Many of these values unfortunately have not been highlighted in the Conservative government's future agenda.

As I stand here today in the House, I wish to echo the concerns of many of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale who have called and e-mailed on their disappointment in the vagueness in regard to the lack of vision presented in the Speech from the Throne.

Although the Speech from the Throne reiterated the five Conservative campaign priorities and added two additional priorities with regard to federalism and the international obligations, it really provided no comprehensive plan or path for the future of our great nation. Many priorities and issues that are important to Canadians from coast to coast have been neglected in the Speech from the Throne.

The path that the Prime Minister has envisioned avoids issues that face our seniors, our women and our young people. It really makes no concrete reference to our first nations communities and barely even touches upon many of the issues that face our new immigrants such as foreign credential recognition.

In short, the Speech from the Throne really sets no clear goals and provides no legislative or fiscal framework of how these initiatives will be implemented.

It was unfortunate that in the Speech from the Throne language was utilized which was very unstatesman-like and also focused on the past instead of really ensuring that the Speech from the Throne would focus on the future.

Many of the priorities outlined do not serve many of the other pressing issues that our country faces. What Canadians need now is a government that will ensure and is prepared to face the many challenges that are encountered by families on a day to day basis. I think it is extremely important that the Conservative government move forward on a positive note, on a positive message instead of promoting negativity.

As I stand here today, I think it is extremely fortunate that the Conservative government has inherited one of the best fiscal records of any incoming government, due to the tremendous achievements that were accomplished by the Liberal government and by our former ministers of finance.

This incoming government has inherited from the previous Liberal government one of the strongest economic records, one of the best fiscal records in the G-7, a 30-year low in unemployment rates and eight consecutive balanced budgets. Yet I find it extremely shocking that the government is going on a slashing binge and cutting very

important social programs that are essential to many Canadians and their families.

The first question that I think is important to ask is, why is the government cancelling child care funding agreements with provinces that have taken years of hard work and dedication by many members of the House and many stakeholders from coast to coast to implement?

The Conservative plan to scrap the child care agreements reached by provinces after much negotiation and with stakeholders by the Liberal government has been put in in favour of a taxable \$25 a week payout to parents. Having a cash payout to parents is really not a child care strategy or a child care plan. As many of us know, \$1.60 a day is not going to allow parents across the country to provide quality child care for their children.

● (1320)

The Ontario government recently announced that it would not proceed with its plan to create 6,000 new child care spaces. The Conservatives keep talking about choice. What choice are parents going to have if child care is expensive and unavailable due to the chronic shortage of spaces?

All provinces, as well as parents' groups, women's groups and advocacy groups, especially those representing the lower and middle income class, have not been in favour. They have been opposed to the Mr. Harper's plan because they recognize the importance of ensuring a nationally funded—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member across referred to the Prime Minister by his name. We ask that the rules of the House be respected and that the distinguished colleague stay within the confines of the Standing Orders of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I thank the member for his point of order. I would remind the member for Brampton—Springdale that we refer to colleagues either by their riding names or by their titles.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, the point of order is noted. I apologize.

One must also ask the question to the Conservative government of why there has been no mention in the Speech from the Throne about the implementation and the continuation of the historic Kelowna accord, which would ensure that the standard of living for the Canada's first nations, Inuit and Métis people is raised.

Moreover, the Conservative Speech from the Throne did not talk about innovation, research and development, important qualities that our nation must ensure to compete in a global arena. We require those qualities to ensure Canada's success in the global arena, yet the Speech from the Throne had no mention of global competitiveness.

The Conservative government has inherited one of the best fiscal records from the previous Liberal government. I would hope that as it moves forward it will ensure that Canada continues to remain one of the best countries in the world.

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As we all know, it is of priority and extreme importance that we have a knowledge-based economy. That knowledge-based economy will be built by people, by investing in people with regard to education, human resources and a proper health care and child care plan.

Another issue raised by many of my constituents is the GST. They have asked why the Conservative government is willing to reduce the GST by 1% , yet not retain any of the \$30 billion tax cuts proposed by the previous Liberal government. Talking to any economist, one realizes that the savings provided by the Liberal government are of much greater value and benefit to Canadians than the 1% GST cut proposed by the Conservative government.

The Prime Minister needs to ensure that the government listens to Canadians. He needs to re-evaluate his plan to ensure that Canadians of all socio-economic backgrounds benefit from any financial savings. When we take a look at the statistics, only 5% of families make over \$150,000. The Conservative plan of a reduction of 1% in the GST would provide 30% of its benefits to those 5%. When we take a look at it, half of Canadian families from coast to coast earn less than \$40,000 a year. While 50% of Canadians are earning less than \$40,000 a year, only 20% would receive the benefits of Conservative tax cuts, an average of just \$163 per year.

The only clarity offered in this plan by the Conservative government is it would benefit higher income families while those who need the help the most, middle and lower income families, would not benefit.

I must also question the Prime Minister's intentions in reneging on Canada's Kyoto commitments to deal with climate change and the environmental degradation to Canada's air, land and water. We need to talk about sustainability. Cancelling the one tonne challenge that was utilized to promote many of these important criteria across this country is not a step in the right direction.

As we move forward, it is important that the Speech from the Throne and the priorities of the Conservative government reflect the needs of all Canadians, regardless of their cultural backgrounds and socio-economic record, and ensure that it focuses a message on positivity.

I would hope that the other priorities I spoke about, such as immigrants, the aboriginal population, seniors, young people and women, would be addressed by the Conservative government in the future.

• (1325)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your new position.

I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her very insightful review of the Speech from the Throne and for noting that there is a total lack of vision, that there is no protection for the low and the middle income and that it appears the Speech from the Throne and the Conservative platform would only benefit the 5% of people who are in the higher income bracket.

Could my hon. colleague comment on this? Where else has the government failed to look after the needs of the middle and the lower income Canadians?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, when we take a look at implementing any initiatives in our great country, it is important to realize that 50% of families make less than \$40,000. We have spoken about the very minimal benefit that the low and middle income class families would receive from the reduction in the GST. However, if the previous Liberal government's plan for \$30 billion in tax cuts would be implemented and sustained, we would ensure that many lower and middle income class families would also receive benefits.

Some of the other issues that have been neglected in the Conservative plan and in its priorities also deal with the issue of affordable housing. Many constituents in Brampton—Springdale require affordable housing. Unfortunately, once again, there is no plan of action in the Conservative plan.

In looking at the Speech from the Throne it is very evident that it is very minimal in terms of substance. It was a brochure, and it was one of the weakest speeches from the throne that has ever been done.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on her speech and remind her that the Liberal government had such a fine fiscal record thanks to two measures implemented by the previous Conservative government, that is the free trade agreement and the goods and services tax. It was an unpopular tax that the Conservative government had the courage to introduce in order to cut the deficits run up by the previous Liberal governments.

We know that the previous Liberal government accumulated surpluses but that it also made deep cuts to health care, which is essential, especially for people on low incomes.

Why did this government not reduce the GST more quickly since it was running surpluses?

• (1330)

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, it is really important that as the Conservative government moves forward it also takes a stroll down memory lane. Every Canadian knows that Brian Mulroney as prime minister and the former Conservative government left with one of the worst economic track records, and the Liberals inherited that.

It was only due to the tremendous amount of dedication shown by ministers of finance in the Liberal government that ensured we had eight consecutive balanced budgets and a 30-year low in the unemployment record. We invested \$42 billion in health care. We made investments in the environment, in our seniors from coast to coast and in a national child care strategy.

The Conservatives must never forget that they are inheriting the best fiscal performance and record of any incoming government due to the Liberal government.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to the lack of a commitment to young people. The post-secondary education transfer is still one of the most urgent aspects of the fiscal imbalance that we are discussing. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance dodged a question in this regard by saying that we would have to wait for the budget first, and then the consultations and deliberations, before we could address this important question. While the minister just sits on his hands, the students at universities and colleges are suffering under terrible debt loads, which just get worse.

Does the hon. member believe, as I do, that if we want to see this brilliant future that the throne speech talks about, we must first act much more quickly than this government seems ready to do and then —

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The member for Brampton—Springdale, 30 seconds or less, please.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, when we speak about investing in our young people and in our education, it is the Liberal opposition that will stand up for these values. I would hope if the member opposite truly believes in investing in young people and in education, that the NDP will not be in bed with the Conservative government and will be an effective voice for young people across the country.

The Liberal government previously had invested in education by ensuring tax cuts for tuition fees, not providing minimal investments in young people just in terms of their books. The Liberal opposition will continue to be an effective voice for young people from coast to coast and we will—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment. I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Kelowna—Lake Country.

It is a pleasure to speak today in reply to the Speech from the Throne. It is with a great deal of honour that I take my place here in the House of Commons as a Conservative member from Tobique—Mactaquac in New Brunswick.

I thank the voters and my campaign team for giving me the opportunity and privilege to represent the issues and concerns of my constituents.

[Translation]

I would like to take advantage of this occasion to thank the voters for giving me the opportunity and privilege of representing their views on the various questions and concerns of my fellow citizens.

[English]

I am honoured to be here with all the members of the House. The first two months as a new MP has been both challenging and gratifying, including my première semaine en immersion française.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome friends from the riding of Tobique—Mactaquac in Fredericton, New Brunswick, as well as

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some relatives, who are with us here today. I also was happy to have some of my riding staff join us here in Ottawa at the beginning of the week. They were unable to be here today as they were returning to the riding. I am not sure if yesterday's question period was too much for them.

For those members who are not familiar with the riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, it is located in western New Brunswick. It is one of the larger ridings in Canada and covers some 250 kilometres from north to south along the Saint John River and spanning from the U.S. border to almost Boiestown in central New Brunswick and all points in between.

The riding of Tobique—Mactaquac is home to a diverse community which includes both anglophone and francophone municipalities as well as two first nations communities, namely Woodstock and Tobique. Tobique—Mactaquac is known for the picturesque beauty of the Nashwaak, Tobique and Saint John River valleys and the head waters of the Miramichi River system. It is also a region of proud heritage in agriculture and forestry and a riding that boasts manufacturing, including McCain Foods.

Of course, there are problems. The family farms that cultivate these fields are facing hard times. There have been many factors at play: international trade issues, market forces and a previous government that did not respect the family farm.

• (1335)

[Translation]

I am proud of the new Minister of Agriculture. He has a firm grasp of these problems and intends to address them.

[English]

Under the Conservative government the family farm can grow and prosper and all of Canada can be proud in the food and agricultural products we offer to the world.

[Translation]

I hope to be fortunate enough to work together with the minister on this matter in order to help our farmers.

Forestry is also very important in my riding, and unfortunately, since the difficulties and restrictions at the border, we have seen a steep decline in the jobs related to this sector.

[English]

I am pleased to be part of a government that understands the concept of resource management and that industry needs innovation and change to be viable in the future. In spite of these issues, the people I represent have an entrepreneurial, can-do attitude and work very hard for every dollar. They want their government to work hard for them. They do not waste their money and they were very clear with me during the election when they said that government should clean up its act and that it could not be a trough for personal friends and insiders.

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I want to thank the Governor General for delivering the Speech from the Throne and setting this new Parliament on a path to a better Canada. A new government gives all of us a time to stop and re-evaluate the direction for the country. We will not run a government where the rich friends of members are given lucrative contracts for government projects. Some of these projects were real and some were not but all were funded by the taxpayers of Canada without any consequence.

There must be consequences. Our new government will not allow for this practice to continue. Our first act in the House of Commons will be to bring in the federal accountability act. During the election we said that our first move as the government would be to clean up Ottawa, starting with the accountability act. This is exactly what we are going to do. This is an important piece of legislation. We want to restore Canadians' faith in the way they are led. Without the faith of the population, we have a country on a decline. That is not the country we want to give to our next generation. Canadians expect politicians and public sector employees to conduct themselves with the highest ethical standards.

The government must be more effective and accountable to Parliament and to Canadians. The federal accountability act will set out in legislation an end to the influence of big money in politics by banning corporate and union political donations. It will also limit individual donations and put it back to the grassroots in our parties. It will strengthen lobbying rules and put an end to the revolving door that allows former ministers, political aides and the top bureaucrats to turn around and lobby the government for contracts. One portion of the act that I am proud of is the section that will give more power and teeth to the independent watchdogs, such as the Auditor General. This is all about making the federal government more transparent and accountable. It will not be about adding red tape. It will be about making it easier for people to do their jobs.

[Translation]

I am a professional accountant and member of the Certified General Accountants Association of New Brunswick.

[English]

In my role as an accountant and a consultant, I had the opportunity to work in Canada, the United States and Australia. In each case, my goal was to implement processes to secure various companies' assets from breaches in trust and ensure they were properly safeguarded. That included a budget authority to ensure credibility in our financial forecasts.

I believe government must take all measures possible to safeguard its assets and I believe the act will put in place the processes to do just that.

[Translation]

I understand the importance of complying with my association's code of conduct. If I observed only part of this code, I would certainly lose my licence to practise.

• (1340)

[English]

We need tough rules for government, including crown corporations and foundations created under federal statute. The account-

ability and ethics code also requires me to report ethical breaches and put processes in place for companies to protect all their stakeholders, including employees and shareholders. Why should the federal government not be held to the same high standards of ethics? Our act will protect whistleblowers from reprisal when they surface unethical or illegal activities they have seen while working in a department or agency that serves the federal government. Our citizens have the right to know what is going on in government.

Finally, we will make government more open by strengthening access to information laws, including extending laws to crown corporations. Such changes will take a thorough and complete debate to ensure we balance concerns for personal privacy, commercial confidentiality and national security.

[Translation]

I believe that this part of the legislation is important for a new start. As a member of Parliament, I think that it will help us establish a work relationship based on collaboration that will be productive for all Canadians.

[English]

These principles will give Canadians the good, clean government they expect and deserve. It also builds on our platform commitments and takes into account discussions with officers of Parliament, such as the Auditor General, the Information Commissioner, public policy experts, eminent Canadians and unions.

Accountability is everyone's business. It requires that Parliament, the government and public service work together to serve Canadians honestly and with integrity. Let us work together and use this bill as one thing we can all get behind immediately. It is time to move from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. We will fix the system for Canadians and the time is now.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his debate to the Speech from the Throne. He does come from a great riding. I had the opportunity of working in his riding in the Saint John River valley for a number of years as the president of the farmer's union and I know many farmers in the area.

Farmers have called me about the potato wart issue and the case that is going on there and I know they have called the member as well. During the election I believe the member opposite left farmers with the impression that, should the courts rule against the government, the leader of the Conservative Party, should he become prime minister, would not appeal the case. I think farmers need to know whether that is what the member really meant during the election campaign, that the government would not appeal the case if it went against the government and in favour of the farmers on potato wart.

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Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, the agricultural producers in the riding of Tobique—Mactaquac knew clearly where I stood on that. In fact, they were aware that our campaign escalated to the national office during the campaign. They are very aware of this and there should be no discussion as to where I stand on the issue.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, like the member for Malpeque, want to congratulate the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac on his election and wish him all the best in the House.

The member spoke about the accountability act but the first thing the Prime Minister did was to appoint his campaign chair as a non-elected senator and then appoint him as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. The situation is that we have an unelected campaign manager walking around Ottawa somewhere and spending \$50 million a day.

My question for the member is, will this accountability act put an end to this sad spectacle?

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said in the last couple of days, the appointment of that person was to reach out to the area of Montreal for representation in his cabinet. He did a fine job in making the selection. The person he selected is accountable on a day to day basis in the Senate. In fact, he made statements yesterday. I feel he is accountable and if members want to know where he is they can just go down the hall.

• (1345)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it warms my heart to see you sitting in that Chair. We sat as colleagues before. We should give you a big round of applause. No one could possibly be better suited for such a role.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I noticed that the member commented extensively and very eloquently, I might add, on the accountability act. The act will be the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. It will bring in a watchdog to protect whistleblowers against bullying. It will end the revolving door between lobby firms and ministers' offices. It will give the Auditor General the power to shine light in every dark corner in her hunt for waste, theft and corruption. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns all together. That is sweeping legislation and it will be the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history.

Does the member believe that this law, which will be the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history, will restore faith among his constituents in this political process?

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. During the election campaign it was very clear from the constituents of my riding and every riding that I travelled to across New Brunswick that they were very concerned about cleaning up government.

Having had experience in audit functions and in implementing Sarbanes-Oxley in various companies in the U.S. and Canada, I believe this will be the right thing to do, the right direction and our constituents will be very happy with the results.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I look forward to your bringing honourable decorum to the House.

On January 23 the people of Kelowna—Lake Country confirmed that they, like Canadians across the country, wanted a change of government. I am proud to be standing in the House of Commons representing the citizens of Kelowna—Lake Country. I thank them for their support. I thank all the volunteers for making it happen. I am humbled and honoured to have been given the responsibility. I am proud to be a member of a party that recognizes it is time for a change in the way we deliver government to the people.

The 2006 election proved that Canadians are weary. They are weary of hearing about the misuse of funds, of insiders appointed to high levels of government who believe they are above the law, of watching the Auditor General struggle to bring to light wrongdoing only to have it ignored, or to watch it get caught up in the circus of political theatre only to be reminded that under the current system there will be no accountability and no relevant punishment meted out to those who have committed real crimes against Canadians. It must stop. Canadians will never regain confidence in government if we do not make it stop.

As members of Parliament, we should not be the enablers of scandal. We must be the defenders of the people's right to honest, good governance. Canadians expect every politician and public sector employee to conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards. On this we must deliver.

We must deliver a government in which Canadians can once again be proud. We must give back to them a government that works for them, one that invests its resources not for the pursuit of power, but for the purpose of creating relevant and timely programs and services; for in truth, the biggest casualty of a lack of government accountability is the business of government itself. If the programs and services required are not in place, real solutions to longstanding problems are not carried out and confidence in doing business with the government wavers.

Many of my constituents should be excused if they believe federal accountability to be an oxymoron. I have many files on my desk already that express my community's frustrations with delays in non-existent funding from the previous government for important issues like Highway 97, a passport office, affordable housing, crime prevention strategies, health care and supportive social programs for seniors and youth. Many have had their attitudes hardened by the federal government's promises for assistance, only to have important programs delayed while being forced to read about misspending and inappropriate fund allocation.

Thousands of farmers are visiting Parliament Hill this week. Some of them represent orchardists from Kelowna—Lake Country. These growers were promised a farm income stabilization program that would be responsive to their needs, as well as being open, transparent and accountable. To the duress of all Canadians, this never happened.

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The 2003 Okanagan Mountain Park forest fire was the most destructive natural disaster in the history of British Columbia. In total, over 30,000 of my constituents were evacuated from their homes and hundreds returned to find nothing but charred chimneys and the foundations upon which their homes formerly sat. Since then the City of Kelowna has had to undertake \$2.6 million in drainage mitigation in order to prevent upwards of \$10 million worth of fire related flooding damage. Despite assurances in 2004 that a national disaster mitigation strategy was being developed to help with such costs, the program still does not exist today.

Residents of Lake Country may not be used to the idea of an accountable government that would ensure that disaster mitigation is a priority, but I can assure everyone that they, like most Canadians, are very supportive and excited by the notion of it. They listen closely, too, when other issues are at stake.

Recently Kelowna—Lake Country has been at the head of the debate on the future of Canada's first nations and aboriginal people. Their livelihood is of tremendous importance to our community. The fact that Kelowna was chosen to host the recent meeting between first nations, aboriginal leaders, premiers and territorial leaders bears witness to this. While there was much goodwill, there was also a sense of unease about the accountability of the promises made. My constituents want the Kelowna accord to be successful, but are all too aware of the systemic problems that could hamper its effectiveness.

Accountability in Ottawa is imperative, but it must also extend to the government's agreements. For the previous nine years I was a councillor for the City of Kelowna and a member of the regional treaty advisory committee. I have a good working relationship with Westbank First Nation Chief Robert Louis and the band councillors. Consequently, I am very concerned about the plight of Canada's aboriginal community. I believe that an independent auditor general would provide a very necessary and concrete measure to further foster aboriginals' unique and important role in Canadian society.

• (1350)

In previous federal governments, upwards of \$9 billion was spent on Indian affairs. Strikingly, over 70% of that money did not find its way to the reserves. Instead it found its way into the pockets of lawyers and consultants.

Instead of contributing to the proliferation of cleaner water, safer streets and better schools, money has disproportionately been spent on those who work in the boardrooms. This industry needs to be overhauled. We need to ensure that first nations people directly receive the majority of the funds.

An independent auditor general would provide transparency and bring these discrepancies to the forefront. It would allow native communities to see where their money was going and initiate dialogue on how their federal funding could be more effectively and efficiently utilized.

Canadians need a government to ensure that there is accountability not only relevant to Ottawa and Parliament, but also relevant to all areas that involve the commitment of federal funding designed to help Canadians. Federal accountability is our commitment and our obligation. We are obliged to change government from a culture of

entitlement to a culture of accountability. When we do so I believe we will see a government that works better for all Canadians. We will move away from government which too often fails to deliver programs directly to those in need, to a culture of effective programs and services where the funding reaches the intended purpose.

This is the reason our first order of business is to table the federal accountability act and to put in place the foundation of good governance. The new federal accountability act, the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history, will change the way business is done in Ottawa. It will not be easy, but change must begin in our own backyard. That is why a large part of the federal accountability act will focus on cleaning up corruption in Ottawa. Accountability should be the engine that drives government, not a casualty of political warfare.

The federal accountability act builds on our platform commitments and takes into account our discussions with officers of Parliament such as the Auditor General and the Information Commissioner, public policy experts, imminent Canadians and unions. This act will address long-standing and difficult issues head on.

We will increase public confidence in the integrity of the political process by tightening the laws around political financing and lobbying, by eliminating the power and influence of money and the insider. It is time we made the work of independent officers of Parliament such as the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Privacy Commissioner, and the Registrar of Lobbyists purposeful.

To accomplish such a reformation in Canadian politics, Canadians will require the cooperation of all parties in the House. If we are going to give Canadians the effective government they expect and deserve, then we must all come to the table with the intent of doing what is right for Canadians. We must ensure that our objective is clear, that there is a structure in place to provide for a political system of accountability.

Our number one priority is to restore Canadians' faith in government and provide them with a government that works for them, not in spite of them. This is not a partisan idea. This is the core value of democracy. Accountability is an objective upon which we all agree and one which we must achieve. That is what Canadians expect from us and it is what the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country expect from me.

In closing, accountability is everyone's business. It requires that Parliament, the government and the public service work together to serve Canadians honestly and with integrity. I support the Speech from the Throne and look forward to working with all my colleagues in the pursuit of providing Canadians with a federal accountability act that will be deserving of their trust, their confidence and their respect. This is the broadest ethics reform this country has ever seen. The best is yet to come.

• (1355)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member into this august House.

It is interesting to note that he talked about accountability, yet in the accountability act proposed by the Prime Minister, in fact the Auditor General has the most powers and the crown corporations too.

It is very interesting to note that the current Prime Minister himself thinks he is above ethics. He has displayed arrogance and basically thumbed his nose at the common people while saying he is about ethics. He started by appointing his friend and campaign manager to the—

An hon. member: Feathering his own nest.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes, to feather his own nest, Mr. Speaker.

He appointed him to the Senate and then lo and behold appointed him as the Minister of Public Works. He has allowed his previous MPs—

An hon. member: A lack of accountability.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: A lack of accountability, Mr. Speaker. He has allowed his previous MPs to become members of the Privy Council and lobbyists. He has allowed former employees of the Conservative caucus to become lobbyists.

How does he justify to his constituents that accountability on that side of the House is going to work?

Mr. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her kind welcome to the House. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the members.

Our Prime Minister and our government have clearly indicated that our number one priority is the federal accountability act to clean up the waste, corruption and mismanagement that has taken place over the last 13 years of Liberal government. Accountability is everyone's business. We need to clean things up.

I respect our Prime Minister. I look forward to working under his leadership to bring great government that is concise, clear and one that all Canadians can be proud of not only today but for many years to come.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your recent appointment. You look very good in the chair.

I was incredibly encouraged by the Speech from the Throne.

I was involved in trying to get the whistleblower legislation through in the last Parliament and we got it passed.

I am so proud of the new Conservative government that is going to propose the new accountability law. I am very encouraged with that.

My understanding is that the accountability act will be one of the toughest anti-corruption laws in Canadian history. For example, the act will bring in a corruption watchdog to protect whistleblowers against bullying. It will end the revolving door between lobby firms and ministers' offices. It will give the Auditor General the power to shine light in every dark corner in her hunt for waste and theft. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns. It will

move from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. We are fixing this system for all Canadians.

Does the member agree with this?

• (1400)

Mr. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in that whistleblowers could be exposed to potentially career ending moves when they bring forth discredited actions they see taking place. What has brought it home is the whole sponsorship scandal of the previous government.

I stand behind the accountability act. It is one of the reasons I am proud to be a member of the government today. I look forward to implementing the act as soon as possible.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the important issue of child care, sound policy must be based on facts rather than misconceptions.

For example, nothing the former government finally did even remotely resembled a national child care system. Firm agreements were signed with only three of Canada's 13 provinces and territories.

Then there is the myth that our government will not honour those few agreements: again false. They include an opt-out clause after one year. Exercising this right is fully respectful of the terms. And, rather than providing for needed day care spaces, promised money had almost no strings attached.

Canada's diversity is widely applauded. How can those who champion diversity at the same time attempt to force Canada's young children into a "one size fits all" bureaucratic system?

Our Conservative government will continue with measures to support all parents and families to carry out their important child care responsibilities. We believe in diversity, in choice in child care.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my constituency of Vancouver South there is a historic landmark, Joy Kogawa House, the childhood home of renowned Canadian author Joy Kogawa. It is the home from which Ms. Kogawa and her family were removed as part of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the second world war. The existence of this house is a powerful reminder of a shameful episode in Canada's history.

Statements by Members

The house is due to be demolished on April 30, 2006. The Save Joy Kogawa House Committee and the Land Conservancy of B.C. have mounted a campaign to save the house and turn it into a museum and writers' residence, but Canadian Heritage has denied the emergency funding request from these organizations. The Minister of Canadian Heritage will not even meet with them. I urge the minister to meet with the organizations and find a viable solution to preserve this very important historic site before it is too late.

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[Translation]

LEGAL AWARENESS EVENT

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Salon Visez Droit, an event organized by the Bar of Montreal, will take place April 4 to 7 at the Grand-Place of the Complexe Desjardins in Montreal. Numerous public and community agencies and private companies have been invited to come and inform the public about its rights and obligations.

The four days of law-related activities are designed to promote a better understanding of our legal system. Admission is free.

While the seminars, mock trials, exhibitors and quizzes draw many participants, the most popular activity by far remains the free legal consultations. Visitors interested in writing a will, finding out how to obtain money owed them, or learning about the legal steps involved in starting up or merging a business will find all the information they need right there.

I would like to thank the Bar of Montreal for putting on this ninth edition of the Salon Visez Droit.

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[English]

MINING

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that the Holloway gold mine near Matheson, Ontario, is shutting down. Over 150 mining families in Matheson, Kirkland Lake and Larder Lake will be affected, because these communities, like mining communities across Canada, are dependent on increasingly aging ore bodies.

It is time for a coherent policy for mineral exploration in this country. Let us take the super flow-through program as an example. That one worked. It was geared for the needs of exploration companies out in the field. Yet the Paul Martin Liberals killed the program and sent a very clear message that the needs of northern Ontario just did not matter.

The NDP has fought for mining in Canada. We have fought for northern Canada and we will continue to fight. We are calling on the Stephen Harper Conservatives to stand up today, reinstate the super—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay would not want to set a bad example so early in a new Parliament, with new members present, and refer to another hon. member by his full name. I am sure he meant the Prime Minister and nothing more in his comments. I know he will want to show proper restraint the next time.

The hon. member for Burlington.

* * *

● (1405)

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand here today in the House of Commons as the member of Parliament for Burlington. I want to thank the voters of my community for this privilege. I will honour this trust with integrity and dedication. I am looking forward to working with my colleagues in the House and with the citizens of Burlington. Together we can deliver on the needs of our communities and on our vision for this great nation.

At this time, I would like to formally honour Ms. Lynda Carpenter, who was recently named Woman of the Year for the city of Burlington. Ms. Carpenter is a tireless Burlington volunteer who has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for our local hospice. Her efforts have allowed many terminally ill patients and their families to deal with their final days with comfort and dignity.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I want to express our sincere congratulations to Lynda Carpenter, Burlington's woman of the year.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's musical heritage is alive and well. Just this past weekend, the Junos were held in Halifax, celebrating artists from coast to coast.

From February 23 to 27, the east coast celebrated its own thriving music industry with the East Coast Music Awards. Over 30,000 people took in the events and the excitement of ECMAs, held over five days in my hometown of Charlottetown. The phenomenal success of the ECMAs far exceeded everyone's expectations.

I would like to offer my congratulations to every musician, organizer and volunteer. I would like to also congratulate the nominees and award winners for their tremendous contribution to our country's outstanding music industry.

I am proud of what the city of Charlottetown continues to accomplish as a cultural and economic centre in Atlantic Canada.

* * *

VETERANS CHARTER

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 1 the most sweeping change to veterans' benefits in 60 years came into effect.

Later today, the Prime Minister, along with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, representatives of Canada's six major veterans' organizations, Canadian Forces members, and veterans will celebrate the launch of the new Veterans Charter.

Statements by Members

Supported by all parties of the House, the new charter is a clear example of how the Government of Canada is supporting its troops at home and abroad. It is a comprehensive wellness package that will benefit Canadian Forces members, veterans and their families.

The package contains key elements to support their transition from military to civilian life, including: rehabilitation, health benefits, job placement assistance, financial benefits, and the disability award.

[Translation]

Congratulations on this historic event.

* * *

VALÉRY TROTTIER

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my first words will be for the voters in Laurentides—Labelle who elected me for the second time in January. I want to thank them for placing their trust in me.

On the occasion of Quebec Adult Learners Week, I would like to pay tribute to a young woman in my riding who has excelled in French.

Valéry Trottier, a secretarial student at the Centre de Formation Professionnelle Mont-Laurier, won the Le Mot d'or 2006 contest in business French. This contest, which is organized by the Conseil pédagogique interdisciplinaire du Québec, is designed to promote the use of French in business.

In August, Valéry will travel to Provence with the support of the Office franco-québécois pour la jeunesse.

Congratulations, Valéry. The French language is the cornerstone of our culture, and we need to recognize what the younger generation is doing to further our dream.

* * *

[English]

LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the U.S. district court in Billings, Montana ruled against R-CALF USA and thus ended 12 months of R-CALF's legal wrangling aimed at closing the U.S. border to Canadian beef and cattle.

Last spring, the dithering Liberal government was caught asleep at the switch while 70 Conservative parliamentarians fought for and were granted standing in this crucial case. For the first time in history, Canadian parliamentarians were granted standing in a foreign court.

Yes, it was Conservative parliamentarians who had the initiative to grab the bull by the horns, so to speak, and get the job done for Canada.

Yesterday's ruling in Billings is cause for celebration for the Canadian cattle industry and all Canadians. The Conservative Party of Canada stood up for Canadian producers in Billings, Montana, and this government, this agriculture minister and this Prime Minister will continue to stand up for Canadian producers wherever and whenever it is needed.

● (1410)

VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 9, 1917, 100,000 Canadian troops in World War I, from all regions of Canada, battled solidly entrenched enemy soldiers at Vimy Ridge in France and won.

Over the previous three years, 200,000 allied soldiers died in failed attempts to take this strategic battleground. The Canadian corps, by their extraordinary efforts, planning and tactical execution, took Vimy Ridge. On that day, nearly 4,000 Canadian soldiers lost their lives and thousands more were wounded. This battle is now considered a turning point in the first world war.

At Vimy Ridge, Canadian soldiers fought shoulder to shoulder for the first time in international battle under the Canadian flag and under a Canadian commander. This victory has become known as the day when Canada truly became a nation, and it earned for Canada a signature on the Treaty of Versailles.

April 9, this Sunday, is now an official heritage day in Canada as a result of the enactment of former Bill C-227. This coming Sunday, April 9, will be the 89th anniversary of the great battle of Vimy Ridge. I therefore invite all members of Parliament to participate in local Legion events to honour this important day.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the throne speech, the Conservative government promised to help ordinary Canadians balance work and family life.

Yesterday the member for St. Paul's suggested that our government would need to "give everybody a Teddy bear with spy-ware in it to find what is actually happening to their kids if [the Prime Minister] is not prepared to give regulated child care spaces".

First we had beer and popcorn. Now this. This is incredibly insulting to every grandparent, sister, uncle, aunt or friend who looks after children on behalf of a loved one.

This is yet another example of the absolute arrogance of the Liberals and their belief that they know more about our children than parents do.

We believe that parents know best and that is why we are putting \$1,200 a year directly into their hands. With the creation of 125,000 new child care spaces, Canadian families will be strengthened. Ordinary Canadians will get the support they so desperately need.

Statements by Members

WALK OF LIFE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, April 7 is the 12th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in which 800,000 men, women and children were slaughtered while the global community effectively turned its back.

Today in Halifax and many other communities, through the leadership of SHOUT, Students Helping Others Understand Tolerance, Canadians are coming together to remember the horrendous Rwandan tragedy. They walk in solidarity with survivors of the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide and the continuing horror in Darfur. This Walk of Life symbolizes the death marches to which so many victims have been condemned. Let us never forget these genocides.

Parliamentarians must intensify efforts for stronger action by our own government, the United Nations and other international bodies to halt the killings in Darfur, where hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions displaced. We must stop this genocide in slow motion now, before thousands more lose their lives.

* * *

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise before the House today to express my sincere honour and sense of privilege to have the support of the constituents of Brampton—Springdale and to be able to serve as their member of Parliament. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers who dedicated countless hours to ensuring this victory.

I want to assure my constituents that I will continue to work on their behalf to ensure that the values of equality, justice, acceptance and tolerance continue to remain the hallmark of our great country.

Furthermore, I will continue to be a firm proponent of creating an environment in which children, seniors and families have the opportunity to prosper and succeed. To achieve this, we must ensure that we tackle the many challenges, that we empower our young people and address the issues of crime and violence, and that we work together to raise the standard of living for all women and seniors.

I believe that as Canadians we must continue to strive to build upon our record of achievement and ensure that we remain one of the best countries and nations in the world.

* * *

[Translation]

NORMAND SAEY

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 11 the Outaouais lost a great sovereignist, Mr. Normand Saey.

His entire life, Mr. Saey gave freely of his time and energy, and made every effort to promote the sovereignty of Quebec. He worked with the major players in the sovereignist movement as well as all the leaders of the Parti Québécois.

A long-time volunteer with the Coopérative funéraire de l'Outaouais, and a founding member of the Gatineau Bloc Québécois, he was also known for his work, at various levels, with

the Société nationale des Québécoises et des Québécois de l'Outaouais, particularly organizing the Fête nationale du Québec.

I had the honour of working with Normand Saey. I would like to pay tribute to him for his tireless efforts and his love of Quebec.

The thoughts of the sovereignist family are with his spouse, Manon Guitard, in this difficult time.

Normand, we will miss you.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

CHILD CARE

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently visited the Montessori Children's Academy located in Paris, Ontario, where I met with staff and students participating in the preschool program. I was very impressed by the facility, the staff and, most of all, the wonderful learning and caring environment.

In my riding of Brant, many parents and child care administrators have great concerns that children and educational and care facilities such as the Montessori Children's Academy will be left out of the new government's child care agenda. Heather Wilson, the director of this facility, stressed to me the need to give the children of our country the best possible start in life, emphasized by the message of her academy, "Early Learning Lasts for a Lifetime".

The reality in Canada is that most families have both parents working full time outside their homes. They deserve to have quality and universal care and their children deserve a stimulating learning environment that will lead them on a path of healthy growth and lifelong achievement.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 13 years of Liberal scandal my top ten memories are: ten, the former Prime Minister's imaginary homeless friend; nine, strippergate; eight, Liberal finance minister gives his steamships a Barbados tax haven; seven, former Prime Minister's ad scam letters about hot wives, wine and golf games; six, Liberal cabinet minister bypasses \$5 Pizza Hut coupon for a swanky \$224 candlelit pizza dinner for two; five, shawinigate shakedown; four, Mr. Dithers goes to Ottawa; three, gun registry misses \$2 million mark on way to \$2 billion broadside of a barn; two, suitcases and brown envelopes of ad scam cash; and the number one memory of Liberal scandal, Dingwall's money for nothing and his Chiclets for free.

No wonder Canadians chose Conservative change on January 23.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

CHILD CARE

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what the Prime Minister said yesterday about his party's child care program.

Statistics Canada now tells us that over half the children under five in this country are in child care; a 12% jump in the last eight years. Of course income support is welcome, but where are the quality child care spaces going to come from? The government has no plan to build affordable child care spaces.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why does his government believe that tax breaks to large corporations are the only way to create the child care spaces that Canadian families need?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development will be working over the next year on the second part of our program which will be designed to create 125,000 new child care spaces. In the meantime, we will be proceeding, within the next year, with the programs put in place by the previous government which have no child care space targets whatsoever.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, honestly, the Conservatives' plan makes no sense. It offers families only a fraction of the cost of child day care services. You do not have to be an Einstein to get the Conservatives' message, "You are on your own."

Does the Prime Minister really believe that tax breaks to large Canadian corporations will create the necessary day care places for Canadian families?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House knows that we have a plan to give each Canadian family \$1,200 a year for child care. It is better than the nothing the Liberals provided. We also have a plan to create places in day care centres. We will work with the provinces, which are responsible for child care. I would remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the Government of Quebec has already created such a program.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's answer illustrates exactly what we are talking about. Some families are spending \$1,200 a month and he brags about giving them four taxable dollars a day, shortchanging our children by small change from the government. Ultimately, the message is, "Don't worry about child care; big business is going to put this in place for you".

Surely the Prime Minister has to admit he cannot guarantee that his plan would create even one child care space in this country.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the plan which we will put in place over the next year will target the creation of 125,000 spaces over the next five years. The previous government's plan had no space creation targets whatsoever. This government is going to lay before this House a plan

Oral Questions

to give a child care allowance to every family for every preschool child. I hope the party opposite will vote in favour of parents and children—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of Canadians consider the environment a priority for the future of the planet. However, the intentions of the Conservative government are vague, and climate change is certainly not one of its priorities.

Can the government tell us clearly today whether it intends to honour Canada's international commitments to the Kyoto protocol?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the hon. member describes our plans as vague. I can quote Tom Axworthy, a Liberal Party advisor, who is proposing new policies for the party. I agree that it needs new policies. However, Mr. Axworthy said that their policy on Kyoto was "not real anyway".

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Prime Minister is incapable of a commitment to honouring the Kyoto protocol. In addition, there is total confusion over the abolition of certain programs intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Can the government confirm today that it intends to abolish the program to make the homes of low income earners more energy efficient?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former government told the international community that it intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 6%. It increased them 30%. That is the record of the previous government.

We are working on a plan to really reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That is the position of this government.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport said at noon that the Kyoto protocol objectives are unrealistic. This casts doubt on the Kyoto protocol itself, yet the Minister of the Environment is currently chairing the conference.

Could someone tell us whether the government's position is to challenge the Kyoto protocol and, accordingly, Canada's signature?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have come to the same conclusion as many world leaders and that is that the international community will not achieve the Kyoto protocol objectives.

Oral Questions

Other countries are in the process of coming up with alternatives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This government will work with the international community with a view to achieving these objectives.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, another of our concerns is this government's willingness, it seems, to cut subsidies to a number of agencies that are working on the Kyoto protocol issue. Such is the case for Équiterre, an agency in my riding that is doing excellent work.

The Prime Minister is talking about working with the international community. Could he start by working with the opposition parties, issue a moratorium on his intentions, submit his plan and allow parliamentarians to discuss the whole matter before acting?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the Bloc knows full well, the previous government had a record of spending billions of dollars without achieving the desired results in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and pollution.

This government has no intention of spending taxpayers' money without achieving results.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government is sending quite a signal in rejecting a moratorium on cuts to environmental programs.

Will the Minister of the Environment admit that slashing program spending without letting members assess her future plan and hear the comments of the Minister of Transport amounts to nothing less than the demise of the Kyoto protocol in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time rising in the House as the new Minister of the Environment, so I would like to take a moment to thank my constituents for returning me to the House of Commons. It is an honour.

The environment is important to all of us in the House and I look forward to working with all of the opposition parties and my colleagues on this file. The climate change program review process was initiated by the previous government. At this point the Minister of Natural Resources and I are reviewing the recommendations from our departments on these programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only did the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration state that the Kyoto protocol would send us back to the stone age, not only did the Minister of Transport add that Kyoto's objectives were unattainable, but the Minister of Natural Resources and the government have apparently cut funding to climate change programs by 40%.

In the light of all that, can the Minister of Natural Resources still say that his government still wants to implement the Kyoto protocol?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of the Environment has the floor. She has risen and has the floor.

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, now I know what it feels like to be on this side of the House.

I encourage the hon. member to participate in the debate as we move forward with our made in Canada solution. Our government is clearly, as reflected in the Speech from the Throne, committed to reducing pollution and greenhouse gases for the betterment of the health of Canadians.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 13 years ago the Liberals promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%. Instead, they went up by 24% or more. Even George Bush had a better record in dealing with pollution than the previous government.

In the throne speech the government has stated:

It will take measures to achieve tangible improvements in our environment, including reductions in pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

My question for the Prime Minister is simply this. How is cutting the funding for climate change initiatives going to get us toward the commitment that was made in the Speech from the Throne?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was wondering how many questions it would take before the leader of the NDP mentioned George Bush.

In any case, the way we are going to get toward a new climate change program is making sure we have the funds available, that the funds are taken from programs that are not working and not effective and are put toward those that will result in the reduction of greenhouse gases.

● (1430)

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Liberal Party, Canada has dropped from leader to environmental delinquent. The OECD considers Canada one of the world's worst polluters. The result is that our children and seniors are suffering from asthma because of year round smog.

Will this government do as little and be as timid as the Liberals?

If not, where is the Prime Minister's plan to ensure families have pure air?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the leader of the NDP that the previous government failed. In fact it did not resolve either the problems of greenhouse gases or those of pollution. This is why we are making policy and financial changes as we develop a new plan.

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have before me quotes from the finance minister indicating very clearly that he should join our “Don’t increase my taxes” campaign, which I started a few hours ago.

When will the minister sign up for the “Don’t increase my taxes” campaign?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, increase taxes from where? We have different sets of numbers from 2005 from the party opposite, which was then the government. We have budget 2005. We then have the NDP budget which followed that. We then have the spending announcements post-budget 2005, and the fiscal update. Then we have all the promises that were made after the fiscal update.

When the member opposite talks about taxes, I ask, increase taxes from where? Which of the five sets of numbers?

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the experience before when the bureaucracy tries to bury one in numbers whereas the reality is absolutely simple. The federal government is swimming in cash, and there is absolutely no reason to increase income taxes on hard-working Canadians. That is the fact.

The minister will agree because in his own quotes he has said that income tax cuts “have been most effective in creating jobs”, “boost productivity growth”, “put money right back into people’s pockets”, letting them “spend the money as they see fit”. He puts it eloquently. When will he join our campaign?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a campaign recently and the people of Canada voted for change. One of the changes they voted for were lower taxes. Unlike the party opposite, we do not just talk about lower taxes. We will reduce taxes for all Canadians so that all Canadians will bear less of a tax burden.

We are looking at all of our fiscal commitments. We will honour our fiscal commitments to the people of Canada who voted to turn over a new leaf.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 11 the Minister of the Environment said that the one-tonne challenge was a good project. Three weeks later, she ended all the environmental grants under the program.

If the minister thought that the one-tonne challenge was a good idea, why cancel it?

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that the previous old Liberal government initiated a program review. We are not going to fund programs that are ineffective and not in the interest of taxpayers.

Oral Questions

Where the review identifies programs or parts of programs that are not working, it is not in the interest to continue that funding, and we will stand by those decisions.

• (1435)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the environment is the number one priority for Canadians. Just because it does not fit into the Conservatives five simple little priorities does not mean it should not be a priority for the government.

We have a responsibility to continue making the plan that the Liberal government implemented work. It was working; it can work. We can meet our Kyoto targets if we work together as Canadians, but not if we cancel the programs that engage Canadians in making it happen.

How much are the Conservatives cutting from these programs? How many programs are being cut? Will the Conservatives guarantee that the funding from the programs being cut will be used for other environmental—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to talk about his government’s record, I am happy to do that. As the Prime Minister said, after spending billions and billions of dollars, greenhouse gases have gone up 30% more than the Liberal targets.

Those programs that are deemed not working, not effective by an independent program review that the old government initiated, we are not going to fund. It is not in the interest of the taxpayers.

We will develop a made in Canada solution and bring programs forward that will actually reduce greenhouse gases.

* * *

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an entire Speech from the Throne and not a single significant word about culture. This is a clear admission of negligence. At the end of the 38th Parliament, the previous Minister of Canadian Heritage made a very formal promise to increase the Canada Council’s budget from \$150 million to \$300 million.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women take up this promise, which was in response, I would remind everyone, to a unanimous request from the arts and culture community in Quebec and Canada?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will follow through on its commitment to the arts and cultural community. We have committed to support them and to ensure that they will be able to sustain themselves and continue their contribution to Canadian life and to an improved Canadian perspective internationally.

We will commit to supporting the arts and cultural community in the ways that are most meaningful to them and where the money is needed.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to encourage the government to become more involved, I would remind it that culture is a major source of job creation, as shown by a number of studies. Any investment in culture is of substantial benefit to the economy.

Will the minister therefore admit that the increase in the budget of the Canada Council is not only an excellent decision for culture but also beneficial for the economy?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government recognizes the benefits of the artistic and cultural community, not only to its cultural life but to the economics and the economy of this country. We will be working with every agency that benefits our cultural community and Canada in the appropriate ways.

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*[Translation]***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the previous government promised in Kelowna \$5.1 billion for aboriginal peoples. Unfortunately, the history of relations between the government and aboriginals has been marked by a host of broken promises. Even though the Kelowna agreement does not respond to all the concerns of the aboriginal chiefs in Quebec, they feel that it is a first step in the right direction.

Does the minister intend to keep the agreement signed with the aboriginals?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. We need to work together. We must first address a tragedy resulting from twelve years of inaction during the Liberal era. Now we will be doing what is needed to improve the quality of life for all aboriginals. This new government acts. Insofar as drinking water is concerned, we have already delivered tangible results.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an agreement in principle was signed for a comprehensive settlement of the native residential schools question, but it has still not come into effect. The government can assuage its conscience by signing agreements, but all the delays mean that too many victims die every day without ever being entitled to their just reparations.

Can the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development promise to implement the agreement on native residential schools as soon as possible?

● (1440)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about agreeing on an agreement in principle. We are working now with the aboriginals and their lawyers. The current issue is the question of the final agreement.

*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, and I hope someone can relay the message.

Why is the minister backtracking on the department's green procurement policy by closing down the Office of Greening Government Operations?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the information in the member's question was as bad as his joke. The government is going forward with a greening government program.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, accountability is no joke. The Speech from the Throne demonstrates the government's lack of commitment toward the environment. After years of progress on greening government procurement, the government is turning back the clock. Why?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should get his facts straight. The greening government program is going ahead. The hon. member is wrong.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 16 the Minister of International Trade warned Canadians that Conservatives would let the weak die, would demolish the national child care programs, would turn its back on first nations and aboriginal peoples and would undermine Kyoto. He said that poor Conservative public policy would result in deficits and the decimation of social programs.

Is this an accurate reflection of the policies of the Conservative Government of Canada?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was an exciting election campaign. There was a lot of partisan rhetoric from a lot of people. I want to say one thing. I am very proud to have been asked to serve in the cabinet of this new government. I believe I made a very good decision.

I want to finish by saying, Mr. Speaker, that I will be serving the people of Vancouver Kingsway as well as I possibly can, and I am going to do it very effectively with significant results.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): I take it, Mr. Speaker, that the minister is saying that what he said is not official government policy, so was he wrong in January or is he wrong today?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of International Trade just noted, the government decided to look beyond the partisanship of the election campaign and form a government that reaches out to all Canadians. I am very proud of the fact, and I think the Minister of International Trade should be very proud of the fact that he put his country ahead of his party. Members opposite should do the same.

* * *

• (1445)

[Translation]

MEMBER FOR EGLINTON—LAWRENCE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence, who is also a candidate in the Liberal leadership race, suggested that showing respect to the people of Quebec would divide the country. He has provided, yet again, more evidence of the Liberals' arrogant attitude toward Quebec.

What does the Prime Minister think of the comments made by this member who wants to become leader of the Liberal party?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the sponsorship scandal, it is essential for the new government to try to rebuild the image of federalism in Quebec. We will do so by respecting the Constitution and the autonomy of the provinces and by involving the provinces in international matters where discussions affect their responsibilities. This includes giving the Government of Quebec a place in UNESCO.

It is detrimental to national unity for the member for Eglinton—Lawrence to oppose our initiatives in this matter.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the recent trilateral meeting in Cancun, President Bush stated that he intends to enforce a new American law requiring all people crossing over the American border to have passports. It seems our Prime Minister is willing to roll over at this impractical U.S. plan that is going to create nightmares at the border crossings and affect trade and tourism in our country.

My question is straightforward. Did the Prime Minister present a counter-proposal to President Bush or did he simply throw in the towel?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly expressed to President Bush, and it was expressed to American officials by all Canadians present, that we believe this law is not in the interest of either of our countries, that it will inhibit commerce and inhibit travel between our countries.

However, this is a law passed by Congress. President Bush must respect it. We would expect the United States to respect our laws, and our government will make sure we are not caught with our pants down and we are ready when this law comes into effect.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope this administration at least wears its pants to the meetings because

quite frankly, this issue is emerging very significantly. We know that right now only 20% of Americans have passports and a new study today indicates that one out of every three Americans will not even participate in a new regime.

Centres like Victoria, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Edmundston and my riding of Windsor will be harmed by these new rules. The bottom line is these new rules will kill Canadian jobs and affect the Canadian economy. Will the Prime Minister please outline his government's plan to ensure that he is going to protect the workers of our nation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there will be meetings between the Minister of Public Safety and his American counterpart to get on top of this issue and make sure our countries are ready for this new law, if and when it comes into effect. In the meantime, I would be very interested in finding out how the NDP plans to force Americans to get passports.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the trend of the Conservatives to do as they say, not as they do continues.

It seems the government has rewarded the Prime Minister's friend and key member of his transition team, Marie-Josée Lapointe, with an untendered contract to reform, of all things, the tendering process. While I am sure her consulting firm is ecstatic, Canadians are not.

Now that the Prime Minister is in government, will he keep his word, undo this contract and end sole-sourcing for his friends?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as minister I take responsibility for what goes on in my department. The moment that my political staff and I learned of this contract, it was immediately terminated.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the Conservatives are so proud that when they—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1450)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering has the floor for a question.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Prime Minister directly, when was this decision made, after the hand was caught in the cookie jar or before?

Fundamentally the point is that the Prime Minister made a promise, he broke it, he was caught, and now he is changing his mind. There is a pattern here that is totally unacceptable.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite obviously does not know what accountability looks like. I am the minister. I take responsibility. The moment a political actor heard about this change, heard about this contract, we believe in providing leadership by example and the contract was terminated.

*Oral Questions***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, four elderly residential school survivors die every day.

Yesterday and again today the government has made excuses for not respecting the agreement that provides for immediate payment to victims.

My question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage. As minister responsible for this matter, how many more elders need to die before they will receive the respect they deserve?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to work on this. As I indicated to my hon. friend yesterday, there were two preconditions to the residential school agreement. The first was the preparation of a final agreement. That has not happened. The second was court approval. That has not happened.

I have spoken with former Mr. Justice Iacobucci about this matter. We anticipate progress and we will continue to keep the House informed.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first of all thank the electors of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River for electing me and allowing me to represent them here.

On Monday a thousand residents of the Canoe Lake Cree Nation in my riding were deprived of clean water because of a malfunction of their water treatment plant.

In a recent announcement by the minister responsible, he talked about certifying workers and training, but no funding announcement. Shame. As the House knows, the Kelowna accord booked \$400 million for such initiatives.

When will the minister stand up for aboriginal communities and commit to desperately needed funding?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that there was a system failure at Canoe Lake this week and this government together with first nations dealt with it in exactly the way the member's government never did.

We moved immediately. Public health was taken care of. The system was repaired. It was remediated. Those first nation citizens today are going to be drinking water that lives up to national standards that the former Liberal government would not institute.

* * *

[Translation]

SOCIAL HOUSING

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the lack of any mention of social housing in the Speech from the Throne is dismaying.

How can a government that says it wants to tackle crime and provide prospects for young people not realize that the solutions to

this problem start with support for building decent housing for low-income families?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign we made a commitment to work with industry to develop affordable housing. We are exploring options for that. We will continue to consult with industry to make sure that the program we develop will end up producing real results.

* * *

[Translation]

ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one of the government's priorities is accountability and it says it wants to present a bill on this shortly. For a number of years now, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for returning officers to be appointed by the chief electoral officer based on the skills of the candidates and not on their political affiliation.

Does the government intend to take this Bloc Québécois request under advisement and include it in the upcoming bill?

• (1455)

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to work with my colleague from Quebec. I can tell him that the answer to his question is yes.

* * *

ARTS AND CULTURE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage what her priorities were. In her answer, which was not an answer at all, she never mentioned the Canada Council. This is very worrying. Again today, she says that her priorities are to support performers and creators. However, the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres and the country's numerous other cultural and artistic bodies maintain that the top priority is to increase the budget of the Canada Council.

Are we to conclude, from the eagerness with which she did not answer the questions, that she has no intention of honouring the Liberal government commitment to double by 2008 the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not our intent to honour any Liberal commitment.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, our intent is to meet the commitments and to honour our commitments to the people of Canada and to the arts and culture communities. Our intent is to make sure that they have the resources that they require to meet their needs. The creators and the performers of Canada for years have been at the end of a string with the former government. We will make sure that they have stable funding. We will make sure that the resources go to the performers and the creators, as they should.

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GOMERY COMMISSION

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sadly, the sponsorship scandal highlighted 13 years of Liberal waste and corruption. As most Canadians are aware, Justice Gomery reported on this last year, yet his findings are now being challenged.

Can the Minister of Justice assure us that the Conservative government will defend Justice Gomery against spurious legal actions by various Liberals?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will defend all allegations of bias and unfair process against the commission based on the evidence that is known at this time.

In respect of defending matters of fact, departmental officials advise it is appropriate that the commission defends that aspect of the hearings and in the alternative that an amicus curiae be appointed to do the defence.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last August Canada won on softwood lumber under binding dispute settlement. When the Bush administration in effect said it would not respect NAFTA, the former Liberal government did absolutely nothing to stand up for Canadian rights.

One month ago, on the Prime Minister's watch, the U.S. Department of Commerce imposed further illegal punitive tariffs on Canadian value added products, like flooring.

Would the Prime Minister tell the House what specific actions he has taken to protect the small businesses newly hit by the latest bullying, or has he just rolled over here, too?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can say categorically having been on this file for a couple of years now that this Prime Minister has escalated this issue to the highest levels with the President of the United States.

We are looking at all options on both sides of the border. We are digging into this and we are going to come to a resolution that will be in the best interests of the Canadian industry and all Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see the minister emerge from the witness protection program. I can see why the Conservatives took a Liberal to handle this file; there is no difference in policy.

For Woodland Flooring in Comox, B.C., this bullying means a loss of 25% of sales.

Giving away Canadian rights under NAFTA by trying to negotiate a side deal means the death of binding dispute settlement, and that opens every other industrial sector to the same kind of illegal actions.

Since he has no plan, would the Prime Minister at least commit today to not accept one penny less than the over \$5 billion that is owed Canadians?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that there is more than one company affected by the softwood lumber dispute. The Government of Canada has an obligation to the industry across this country. We will solve this problem, and we will do it in the interests of all companies and all regions of Canada.

* * *

● (1500)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, genocide is being committed in Darfur right now where 200,000 people have been murdered and the situation is getting out of control. The United Nations has called this the worst humanitarian catastrophe in world. Bartering with the butchers from Khartoum will not end this problem.

My question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs is simple. Will he call on the United Nations quickly to push for, assemble and deploy a rapid reaction force to Darfur as soon as possible to save these people's lives?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. friend opposite has a long held interest in this file. Canada is very pleased and very proud of the role that it has held in the region albeit there is certainly much more work to do as the member knows. Yet, Canada has welcomed the recent African Union's decision to move into transition and put United Nations forces on the ground. There has as yet been no official request put to Canada, but we are certainly going to continue to work with our international allies to do everything we can to elevate the status of the people in Darfur.

*Business of the House***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal questioner forgot to mention that under the Liberal watch, water quality on reserves has been steadily deteriorating. We saw the awful effects of this neglect in Kashechewan. Could the Minister of Indian Affairs tell us what the government's plans are to provide clean water to reserves across Canada?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the tragedy of Kashechewan and the experience at Canoe Lake remind us of the abject incompetence of the former Liberal government in dealing with this issue. After 13 years and the expenditure of close to \$1 billion, the Liberals left aboriginal Canadians living in 21 communities at risk and an additional 170 communities at high risk.

The new Conservative government and the new Prime Minister are committed to accountability and to results. We will act. We have already taken action with respect to water, remedial standards and national standards. We will stay the course.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of a number of persons. I would ask hon. members to restrain their applause until all have been introduced.

First, there are six veterans representing major Canadian veteran organizations here for the launch of the new Veterans Charter. They are: Mary Ann Burdett, Ken Henderson, Brian Forbes, Retired Colonel Donald Ethell, Robert McKinnon and David Munro. Accompanying them are Elsie Wayne, former MP and Honorary Lieutenant Colonel of the 722 Communications Squadron Reserve Group and Major Mary Furey of the 722 Communications Squadron Reserve Group.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: This being Thursday, I believe the House leader for the official opposition has a question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that the House would be anxious to learn today from the government House leader.

[Translation]

Could he tell us what business is planned for tomorrow, next Monday and Tuesday, and the last week of April?

[English]

In that context, I wonder if the minister would provide for us full details on the rules applicable to the special debates that we have requested on both agriculture and the Canadian deployment in Afghanistan. Incidentally, we thank the minister for agreeing to these requests.

Further, I wonder if the minister could specify for us the days between now and the end of June that will be devoted to the business of supply. In other words, will he designate today the required opposition days? Finally, when will the government present its long awaited first budget?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to be in a position to answer the Thursday question, though I feel like asking the member opposite a question. Is that what he did as finance minister? Did he announce in advance when his budget would take place? Did he? I will check on that and perhaps get back to the member.

It is the government's intention to continue with the second appointed day of the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne and the third, fourth and fifth appointed days will be scheduled for Friday, and Monday and Tuesday of next week.

When we return from the Easter break, it is our intention to conclude the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

The member is quite correct, I have a number of motions that I believe will need the approval of the House. We will have a take note debate on Canada's commitment in Afghanistan on Monday, April 10. Therefore, I move:

That a take note debate on the subject of Canada's significant commitment in Afghanistan shall take place pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 on Monday, April 10, 2006 at the conclusion of regular government business.

● (1505)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties with respect to the take note debate tonight. I believe you will find unanimous consent to the following motion. I move:

That notwithstanding the special order adopted yesterday concerning the take note debate scheduled for tonight on agricultural issues, the debate shall begin at the conclusion of the orders of the day and shall continue for no more than five hours and that, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, any member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the Speaker that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another member.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that once again you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, at the conclusion of debate today on the subamendment to the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, the subamendment be deemed adopted.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Does the Honourable Leader of the Government in the House have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

• (1510)

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Surrey North. I also offer you my sincere congratulations on your re-election. I would also like to thank the people of London—Fanshawe for their trust and support and for the privilege to serve them in the House.

I wish to talk about the people I serve and about the impact of the Speech from the Throne and government policy on their lives. I want the new Conservative government to understand how very important positive action is to the well-being of the people in the community of London—Fanshawe.

I will begin by telling the House about Bill Hiltz. Bill is a physically challenged adult who deals with cerebral palsy and autism. He depends on his family home provider and support workers for everything in his life; food, shelter, personal care and communication. Bill is among the fortunate. He has family home providers, Joyce, Stan and grandma Ursel, who genuinely love and care for him.

For members here who may not have experience with cerebral palsy or autism, my concern is that there is absolutely no mention of Canadians with disabilities in the throne speech. By not making any commitment to improve the lives of the most vulnerable Canadians, the Prime Minister is treading down the same path as the previous government and ignoring the needs of Canadians with disabilities.

The Address

New Democrats have recognized these citizens and prepared draft legislation, the Canadians with disabilities act. We need a commitment from the government to address the needs of children and adults like Bill Hiltz. With the support of the federal government, resources can and must be available to enable disabled Canadians to have the quality of life they deserve as citizens of this country.

The statistics are a matter of shame. Disabled Canadians have great difficulty securing employment, finding affordable housing, receiving the education they need and, as a result, many of them live well below the poverty line. This must be remedied.

I would also like to talk about the auto workers in my riding. As I am sure members are well aware, many of my constituents depend either directly or indirectly on the Ford assembly plant in Talbotville. Recently, the company announced it would reduce the Talbotville assembly plant to one shift.

If this proposal goes ahead it will have a profoundly negative effect on the economy, not only of the London region, but on the economy of Ontario and Canada. In the Speech from the Throne the new Conservative government made reference to promoting a more productive and competitive economy. There was, however, no reference made to how this more productive economy would be achieved. We cannot be more productive without the well-paying jobs provided by the auto sector.

We need a clear industrial strategy for Canadian workers and support for the auto industry. Like the GM plant in Oshawa, the workers at Ford's Talbotville plant are among the most productive, competitive and dedicated workers in the world. They have demonstrated year after year the ability to produce a quality product. They do not need lip service from their government about productivity. They need secure jobs to raise their families and make their contribution to our community.

It is not a failure on the part of workers' productivity that closes auto plants; it is our high dollar that is killing competitiveness. We need more commitment from the government than just a throw away phrase in a throne speech.

The throne speech also failed to address housing needs that are evident not only in London—Fanshawe but across Canada. One of my constituents, Bill Clarke, a disabled veteran who lost both legs in the service of his country, was in desperate need of adequate housing. I first met Bill in 1990. He lived in one of the three storey walk-ups that comprised a compound of four crumbling, unhealthy, unsafe buildings in my riding. Many of the residents had lived in these buildings over a long period of time. They had become a community.

However the disgraceful disrepair of these buildings was making tenants ill, deprived them of security and drained them both physically and emotionally. Doors did not fit properly so heating and cooling costs borne by the tenants were extreme. The roofs of all four buildings leaked, causing water damage inside the tenants' homes and creating a mould problem in each apartment. Safety lights were not maintained and unsecured garbage chutes were a hazard to children.

The Address

When I met Bill Clarke he asked me to help the tenants purchase the buildings, secure the funding to effect the necessary renovations and create a co-op.

I am pleased to say that after significant work by my provincial office and members of the federal NDP caucus, we were able to secure federal funding and build Talisman Woods. It was the last federally funded co-op in Canada. It gave the people in my community the safe, affordable, decent housing they deserved. Tragically, there is no mention whatsoever in the Speech from the Throne about housing.

● (1515)

Canada is one of only two G-8 countries without a national housing strategy. In 1996 the former leader of the Liberals abolished the affordable housing program secured by New Democrats in the minority government of the 1970s. In the spring of 2005 the NDP budget secured \$1.6 billion for affordable housing construction and \$100 million for energy conservation in affordable housing.

Bill Clarke died of cancer in December of 2005. He is truly missed by all who knew and loved him. In the years since the Talisman Woods Housing Co-op became a reality, Bill lived in decent and secure housing. He deserved this comfort.

It is essential that the Government of Canada commit to ensuring that the NDP budget money flow to desperately needed housing projects in our communities and that it further commit to the restart of a national housing program to build the affordable and co-op housing units desperately needed by first nations, seniors, students and people with disabilities. There is far too much missing from this throne speech that is of profound concern to me and the citizens of London—Fanshawe.

My riding is blessed with a wonderful, vibrant community college, Fanshawe College. In the north part of London we have the University of Western Ontario, my alma mater. For the students of these institutions there is nothing in the throne speech. After 13 years of Liberal inaction, students in my riding have seen the student debt soar. The average tuition at colleges and universities has almost tripled in the last 14 years. They should have been front and centre in the government agenda.

New Democrats have and will continue to advocate for the restoration of funding cuts by the former finance minister in the Liberal government. We will continue to advocate for lower tuition fees, a long term federal grant system to make education and training affordable. We will continue to insist on an overhaul to the Canadian student loans program. Our students, the future leaders and contributors to our economy and communities, deserve far more than to be an oversight.

I wish I had more time. I had planned to talk about the need for more affordable public transit. Many Canadians depend on public transit to go to work, to school and have effective environmentally responsible transportation.

However I would be remiss if I did not speak about the child care town hall meeting that I had in my riding. More than 125 people were present and they provided much valued wisdom and advice to me in regard to their absolute need for safe, affordable, regulated, not for profit child care. They utterly rejected any government plan to

replace the child care spaces they need with a cash proposal and market based solution. Neither works. My constituents waited for more than 20 years for the child care spaces promised first by a Conservative and then a Liberal federal government. They are demanding the kind of child care that would be realized if we had the child care program proposed by New Democrats. They want a child care act.

Finally, I want to tell the House about two constituents, Jose Rodriguez and his spouse, Miriam Portillo. They are refugees who escaped Guatemala in 2000 after Jose had been kidnapped, two of his uncles murdered and both Miriam and Jose threatened by armed police. They are facing deportation on April 14, 2006.

After six years as contributing members of our community, they will be sent back to very real danger, despite having worked, volunteered and built a life in London, Ontario. Even with the best efforts of my office, two ministers of the current government refuse to abandon the hopeless practices of the previous Liberal government.

Miriam and Jose have an application with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Their lawyer has indicated that they have a good chance to succeed with this application but because the hard-working public servants at CIC do not have adequate staffing, it will take time to be processed. We have asked for extra time so Miriam and Jose can be safe in London while the application is processed. It has been denied.

We can do better. The people of this nation deserve better than the failure they have experienced in the Liberal years and from this less than inspired throne speech. I, with my caucus, will work diligently over the next months to achieve more for the working families of Canada and more inclusion of NDP priorities so that all Canadians will benefit.

● (1520)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome and congratulate the hon. member on her maiden speech in this chamber. I think she will find a lot of friends in this place with some of the points she made today in her speech.

Earlier today I spoke and shared with the House some piece of research that found that about 25% of Canadian children enter adult life with significant emotional, behavioural, academic or social problems. This should be a beckon call to all Canadians and parliamentarians to ensure that our policies and priorities do in fact put kids first. I want to congratulate her on her contribution to the debate on child care.

The Address

We know that one solution does not fit all. We know that families need flexibility, options and choices. Giving money to people and allowing them to use it as they wish is certainly one approach. However we have the problem on the other side where today's child care system within Canada, which the OECD, other than for the Quebec situation, has characterized as glorified babysitting. We do have to move beyond glorified babysitting to good quality child care but it is tremendously expensive. Some have suggested that the cost would be as much as \$15 billion per year for a national child care program.

I wonder if the member could comment on what she would see in terms of a transitional approach to providing child care support to Canadian families in need which is realistic of the financial realities.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I do indeed have 29 wonderful colleagues and I am very proud to stand with them.

As the member pointed out, there is no simple solution no matter what we do but I think we should begin with the \$1.8 billion that we saw in the NDP spring budget and invest that money in child care as it was intended. I am a former teacher and, while I recognize the fact that education may well be expensive, I can say that ignorance is far more expensive.

I can also say that as a secondary school teacher I could see very clearly the difference between those children who came to my classroom who had received the interventions that every child with a disability deserves and those who had not. By the time they get to grade 9 the strategies in terms of managing their disabilities, the time for remediation is long past. We need to act immediately.

As an admirer of Fraser Mustard, I would say that there is absolutely no substitute for proper, regulated, not for profit child care to ensure we have children who can participate fully in the economy of the future and, might I suggest, Mr. Speaker, look after you and I in our dotage.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was impressed with the member's comments about the high cost of developing ignorance in our young people. I would like to point out that every child in the country, if they have special needs or learning disabilities, has the right to the adequate support they need in education, unless, of course, one is a first nation child because under the former federal Liberal government's policy we were not getting the kind of funding that we needed for special education on reserves. People from our region are being moved to non-native schools to get that funding and it seems to be a position that the present Conservative government wants to maintain.

What does the hon. member think about the fact that a large first nation population in the country is not being given adequate funding for special education needs under federal government funding?

• (1525)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for reminding us of the deplorable situation that first nations children and communities face in the country.

The federal government has a special relationship with first nations. It is a relationship that goes back several centuries and, unfortunately, we have not lived up to our end of the obligation.

In terms of special education, I must say that it has been horrifically underfunded, federally and provincially, all across the nation. All of our children deserve the very best that we can provide for them because they will be the leaders of tomorrow. We talk about the democratic deficit in this place. It will continue as long as we do not see our children receive the kind of support so that they can come to this place and take over the job of leading this nation, and that means people from every community, it means women, visible minorities, the disabled and first nations people.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise for my first speech as the member for Surrey North. I want to thank the people in my community for entrusting me to represent them in Ottawa. I am pleased to share my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

Let me begin by acknowledging the work and the contribution of Chuck Cadman, the former member for Surrey North. When Chuck died last July, Surrey North constituents lost a much loved and respected MP and I lost a friend of 25 years. It seems to me that the friendship between the two of us was an example of the cooperation and civility that has been talked about by all parties in the House over the last two days. Chuck and I were from very different political parties, but it did not matter. We could be friends. We could play Trivial Pursuit together, although he always won the musical questions. We could also find common ground, common goals and common solutions for the people of Surrey North. That is what Canadians expect from people elected to this chamber.

The constituency of Surrey North is extremely diverse. When walking down the streets one will hear people speaking Punjabi, English, Hindi, Arabic, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Korean to name some of the more prominent languages. One would also hear many aboriginal dialects spoken because the constituency has a very high number of urban aboriginal people. Many of those people were educated in their country of birth in trades and professions that this country desperately needs, but they cannot get similar employment here. We need to move ahead with assessing credentials. We are missing the skills of those people and their talents are being wasted.

Surrey is the fastest growing city in Canada. We have the largest number of building starts in the country. There is a rejuvenation in our city centre. We are very concerned about the implementation of the agreement with cities on infrastructure. The south Fraser perimeter road which is desperately needed for our economy in order to move goods quickly around the city of Surrey needs to be finished. We want the government to follow through on the commitment that was made to cities.

The Address

In Surrey North people live primarily in modest homes and apartments. Some people have no homes at all. Many people in Surrey North need skills to get into the workforce. I encourage action on apprenticeship. There is a building boom in Surrey. There is a building boom in British Columbia with the Olympics coming. There are jobs out there for people, if they can get into skills and training programs. That was missing from the throne speech. I do not want encouragement; I want action. I want jobs available for those people.

A satellite campus of Simon Fraser University is located in North Surrey. For many students the costs are prohibitive, whether they be for a skills or apprenticeship program, a diploma or university degree. This is particularly true in Surrey North which has a very low family income. As parents we all want the best for our children. It is heartbreaking to watch parents who cannot provide for their children what they see being provided for other children.

We have a growing number of working poor, people who work but must use a food bank because they do not make enough money to feed their children. At the food bank a few months ago there was a little girl, seven years old, who was tugging on her mom's sleeve saying, "It's okay, Mommy, don't worry. I'll try not to eat so much". That is shameful in a country such as ours. People need skills to get back into the workforce. They want to work.

Many people with disabilities live in North Surrey because it is the only place where there is affordable housing, and even the use of the word "affordable" is questionable. They do not have the supports they need. Not only do they not have the support, as my colleague mentioned, but the community misses out on the special skills and talents they have to offer. The disabilities act must come forward.

● (1530)

Our leader and our party have spoken of the need for a seniors charter. There are not enough long term care beds. I did not hear that issue mentioned in the throne speech at all. The beds that we do have are private and far too expensive for most people who live in Surrey North.

Another concern for many seniors in Surrey North is that of pensions. Seniors from India, a Commonwealth country, who have become Canadian citizens and have lived here and worked here do not have access to a pension and will not have access to a pension until they have been here for 10 years, even though they contributed for many years in India. They do not have access to pensions, as do people from 37 other Commonwealth countries, because Canada does not have a treaty with India. This creates severe hardship for many seniors from India and it needs to be remedied.

The citizens who sent me to this chamber are concerned about crime. They want immediate solutions and long term solutions. They are concerned about drugs and the explosion in the use of crystal meth. They are concerned about drunk drivers and the number of people who have been killed in our community as a result of drunk drivers who leave the scene.

I intend to work with MADD and with the member for New Westminster whose bill did not come before the House. His bill would have reduced the level of alcohol in the blood that is considered legal or illegal. It needs to be reduced at least by .2% so

that we can be sure people are safer on the roads. Legislation needs to come forward. I made that commitment to my community and I made that commitment to Dona Cadman.

As I said earlier, my riding of Surrey North has a low family income. In order to support their families and earn more than \$8 an hour, people need skills upgrading. That means going back to school. Those people need child care. I do not see real action on child care in the throne speech to help these families.

What happens to children over the age of five? Do families suddenly not need child care anymore because their children are over the age of five? Is the government encouraging more latchkey children? I would think it would not want to do that, but the government is only talking about children up to the age of five. That is totally unacceptable. Families will not find the money for before and after school care. Children will be at risk.

One dollar spent on good quality child care saves \$7 later on in schooling, in justice, in the prison system, in job retraining. How can that not be an important investment?

I want to close by talking about health. Surrey Memorial Hospital in my riding is probably the busiest hospital in the lower mainland. Everybody would be encouraged by the phrase "wait time guarantee", including my local hospital. I perceived encouragement in the throne speech, but I hope the action takes into consideration a report released today which indicated that we will have a shortage of 78,000 registered nurses by 2011. I am a bit puzzled about the action that will actually implement wait time guarantees.

I do hope when I see the term "wait time guarantee" that this guarantee also includes the horrendous wait time for mental health beds and for drug and alcohol rehabilitation beds. The wait time for these beds is costing our system millions of dollars and is creating tragedies for families. It is destroying people, their families and people in their communities. I hope the wait time guarantee includes those types of beds.

We do not want or need more encouragement, although encouragement is always a good thing and we all try to give it to each other. What we want to see is action on the part of the government that will reflect the needs of families in my constituency of Surrey North and other constituencies across this country.

● (1535)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, child care continues to be very topical among many of the members.

I was a little concerned when Canada received a report from the OECD that characterized our current child care services in Canada as equivalent to glorified babysitting.

The Address

In terms of providing, or moving toward quality care and early childhood development, does the member think we should be investing money in the current system to bring the standards of personnel within the system up to higher levels than McDonald's employees so that we could take the first step toward establishing quality child care for Canadian children?

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, certainly we should expect people who care for our children to be better educated than those who prepare their hamburgers. The money is well spent on education for all kinds of child care providers.

I take some issue with the OECD saying that it is glorified babysitting. We do have qualified, non-profit, excellent child care in a variety of places in this country, although there is more unsafe and unregulated care. I have no idea what it feels like as a parent to go to work and leave a child who cannot yet talk with someone the parent does not know very well and the child is not able to tell the parent what life was like at the end of the day.

I do believe that whether it is in a larger centre, family care or neighbourhood care, that education for providers is one of the first things we should do. I know from my British Columbia experience that if we offer education to people who have not had it, they will reach out and grab it. They will take advantage of the resources. I have seen this happen. It would be money extremely well spent.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the voters of the riding of Manicouagan for having granted me this fifth mandate.

Like many of my colleagues, I received the introduction to the Speech from the Throne. I am still looking for the Speech from the Throne.

This introduction to the Speech from the Throne included of course the five promises and commitments of the Conservative government.

Where, in the Speech from the Throne, are the Conservative government's policies on employment insurance, the creation of an independent commission and improvements in this program? Employment insurance is insurance in case of loss or termination of employment.

Where, in the Speech from the Throne, are the initiatives aimed at reducing poverty, helping low-income families and senior citizens, and increasing public housing?

Where, in the Speech from the Throne, are the means of redressing the fiscal imbalance and funding the health and education systems in the provinces?

Where is the assistance for municipal and highway infrastructures? There is nothing in the Speech from the Throne.

Nor do we find anything about regional development, aboriginal peoples, job training and job creation, the Kyoto protocol and the environment.

Where is the Speech from the Throne?

● (1540)

[English]

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, if I had an hour and a half, I would probably be able to give a partial list of what is not in the throne speech.

We were very disappointed not to see a commitment to employment insurance. Because it is cut off so quickly, it causes people to move quickly into poverty. We were very disappointed not to see anything on post-secondary education that would make it affordable, regardless of what that looks like. It no longer means just university. We did not see anything in the throne speech about health care, other than a wait time guarantee. What about public health?

Mention was made earlier that there are a lot of places in this country that do not have potable water. What about prevention? What about something for children under five? We know that if they start school by age five, they are bound to be more successful further along. There is research in almost every school across this country to prove that. Where was early childhood development in the throne speech? It was not there. Where was literacy? Where were the other health issues, such as mental health and drug and alcohol addiction, that are destroying our country?

Those are some of the issues, as well as others which the member mentioned, that we did not see in the throne speech at all.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Charlottetown.

I read the Speech from the Throne with a great deal of interest. It struck me that the Speech from the Throne looked essentially like a reproduction of the election pamphlet of the Conservative government during the election campaign. This reproduction of the Conservative government election pamphlet essentially could be summarized under the various issues of the federal accountability act, the reduction of the GST, the crime initiative, the \$1,200 for child care, and a patient wait time guarantee.

For those of us who have reflected upon the issues of the day, on the real issues that I think we need to address if we are to secure the long term prosperity of this country, then I would have to say that the Speech from the Throne perhaps is a good document if we are into retail politics, which I think the Conservative government is into. But I think that if we are to reflect upon the serious issues of the future prosperity of this country, then we need to look at and keep our eyes wide open as to what the challenges and opportunities are for this country.

It is amazing to note that in the 21st century in a G-7 country in a Speech from the Throne we actually do not read very much about issues that will in fact determine the prosperity of our country. By that, I mean that issues like innovation, competitiveness, R and D, and human capital are virtually absent.

There is a question that I ask myself. If we in this chamber are in fact interested in talking about serious issues that matter to the future of the country, then I have to ask myself, what is really the national purpose? What is the objective? What is the overarching theme of the Speech from the Throne? What is it really trying to achieve? How are future generations to find hope within the words that are found in this document?

The Address

I was also struck by the fact that the Speech from the Throne was perhaps written in isolation of what is occurring around the world. What are some of the pressures that we as a country face? Obviously, for those who are following international trends, the pressure is that we have a changing demography in this country, a changing demography that should really ring an alarm bell for the government. There is the low birth rate of the past 30 years. There are significantly fewer workers supporting more seniors. Within 10 short years, there will be three and a half working Canadians for every senior. Today it is five to one.

What does that mean in the sense of our ability as a country to produce, to sustain our social programs? What does it mean for future generations? By the year 2015, which is not far, only a few years from now, our labour force will shrink. If we do not have a plan that speaks to productivity-oriented initiatives, it seems to me that we are going to lack the human and financial resources to maintain the type of citizenship to which we have grown accustomed. These are serious issues.

● (1545)

No, productivity, innovation and competitiveness are not things that we can go out there and sell in the world of retail politics. Focus groups will tell us that words like “productivity” are not something that people respond to very well, but what is this place about? This place is not about being popular. This place is about taking on the challenges that one must face to bring about positive change to people's lives in the future.

This place is the place where we should debate issues that will matter to the future of our country. We can all shrug our shoulders and say that the ratio of working Canadians to seniors is going to be three and a half to one in a few years. We can ask what we are going to do about that and say that there really is not much we can do about it. A defeatist government would do that.

But there are things that we must do. We must look at every single policy through the productivity prism so that we can enhance the standard of living for Canadians, so that we can provide greater opportunities for people—and for our young people as well.

I guess there really are not facile questions for complex issues, but I think that we, within ourselves, regardless of our political stripe, must find the inner strength to address these fundamental concerns. I think there is a strong case to be made that we need to address the eventual skill shortage that we will face as a nation. Governments have the responsibility to come up with those answers.

There is something else going on out there. It is really the realignment of global and political economic strength. We cannot be oblivious or blind to the fact that there are emerging markets: Brazil, China, and India.

There is also the great challenge that we face here within North American economic space. This also goes back to the issue of an aging society. Even within our own North American continent, we face challenges. Why is that? Because there is really one country that is younger than the United States. That is Mexico. We will face economic challenges as a result of that. As Mexico's productivity rises and it invests more money in human resources, as will China, India and Brazil, I think we are getting the picture. I think we cannot

stand still and not even, in a Speech from the Throne, address the issue of human capital.

How can we not in this day and age talk about the importance of lifelong learning when we have fewer workers? How do the members as individuals and as a government present a Speech from the Throne that does not recognize these realities?

And then, we need to understand that clearly for us to maintain our standard of living, there is only one way to do it, and that is to increase our productivity. I do not see it. I do not see it in the Speech from the Throne and it is troubling. I do not see it in the Speech from the Throne because it does not provide hope for people. If we are not able to increase the productivity of our country, if we are not able to generate greater wealth for our country, then we cannot take care of our seniors, we cannot invest in infrastructure, we cannot provide educational opportunities for our people, and we cannot provide opportunities to speak to lifelong learning.

We cannot do any of that if we are not focused like a laser beam on generating greater wealth. That in fact should be the focus, not just on the government side but for everyone in this chamber who cares about the future of our country.

The government is in an enviable position. When I came here in 1988 we were in opposition. We formed the government in 1993. I remember that we inherited high interest rates and high unemployment. We inherited conditions that were really poor.

● (1550)

Today, the Conservative government is blessed with balanced budgets, with surpluses. It has the resources to really bring about the type of change that is required to bring prosperity to the country in the future. We need to seize this opportunity and be responsible, because nothing but the future of the country depends on it.

I look forward to debating these issues in the coming months, not just in this chamber but across the country, because the future does indeed matter.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments and congratulate him on his re-election. However, I note that throughout his entire discourse, when he laid out very clearly the problems of productivity and demographics that haunt our nation, he failed to offer a single, solitary solution to those problems. He ranted about the Speech from the Throne and his displeasure with it. He complained that it was not of the sort that his former government would have written, almost omitting January 23, election day, from the history in his mind.

The reality is that under his past Liberal government our productivity fell further and further behind. The Irish economy grew its productivity at five times the rate of Canada under the last year of the Liberal government. The average Canadian worker has to work five hours to achieve what an American worker achieves in four hours. Those are simple economic productivity data.

The Address

That all resulted from 12 years of Liberal government, so why will the member not now join with our agenda of cutting taxes on capital gains, reducing the GST to encourage more consumer spending, and using tax incentives to get more apprentices into the trades? All of these steps, driven by a small, focused government rather than large fantastic multi-billion dollar schemes, are aimed at creating a more productive economy. Why will the member not join us in that enterprise?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is for me to join anybody. I was talking about productivity before anyone around this chamber, so it is not for me to join those members.

I want to set some conditions, of course, that have helped governments deal with the productivity issues. The past Liberal government, which I was very proud to be a part of, laid out a road map that I think would have resulted in productivity gains.

The point here is that what we are debating is the Speech from the Throne and the issue is absent from it. That is my major concern.

On the issue of the generation of wealth, and not the generation of wealth just for the sake of generating wealth, I think we generate wealth because we want to share it, and we benefit from that type of generation of wealth. We benefit as citizens. But there are many things to look at. We have to maintain a macroeconomic environment, as we did, of low inflation and interest rates. We also reduced taxes. We also invested in infrastructure. We invested in human capital. Obviously the Speech from the Throne did not say anything about that.

In an era where brainpower is going to be the way to the future and the way to generate economic growth so we can sustain our social programs, I do not understand why the Conservatives are not talking about it at all. They are saying that we are going to be calm and maintain our standard of living simply by being.

No. It is not going to happen just by being. It is going to happen with a plan that makes sense and speaks to a productivity enhancement agenda.

• (1555)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague across the way for the history lesson on the Liberal Party of the last 13 years. The Liberals certainly did reduce the deficit, but they created a human deficit.

Right now, with this new throne speech, I do not think we not see much hope of changing that deficit, a deficit that denies Canadians productivity in their own lives, that denies Canadians and their children the opportunity to move past the problems they may have within their own living.

If the corporate tax rate that was in place before the Liberals got in had been in place today, there would have been an extra \$60 billion raised by the government. This year, the corporations have put only \$20 billion of that back into the economy in investment. There is a real loss to our economy.

What does the member think of the tax position of this throne speech? Is it going to change any of the things he and his party did for Canadians during their 13 years of government?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Mr. Speaker, we have lowered taxes and people were better off under a Liberal government.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to participate in this debate on the Speech from the Throne. I want to begin my remarks by thanking the voters of the city of Charlottetown for the trust and confidence they have entrusted in me. It is a privilege to represent them in the 39th Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your position as Deputy Speaker of this House. You are the dean of this House and we are all very pleased that you are in this role right now.

I would like to deal with the throne speech. Everyone in this House I believe agrees that it is thin, it is brief, and it is more notable for what is not in the throne speech than what is in the throne speech. However, it might have achieved more success than perhaps some people give it credit because in a situation like this, as veteran politicians will indicate, the goal or the objective will be to manage expectations, to lower expectations. If the objective of the author of this speech was to lower expectations, then I believe the author has succeeded. In fact, I would submit that the author has basically eliminated expectations. Anyone reading this would have no expectations, or very little expectation of anything positive coming from the agenda of the government.

However, having said that, we have to move forward on a progressive basis. There are things in the Speech from the Throne where I believe, as a member of Parliament, common ground can be found.

First, I would like to speak briefly on the issue of crime. It has become an issue in certain areas of Canada. We have to look perhaps not so much at the crime but the causes of the crime. If the package introduced in the House by the government comprises of public education, rehabilitation and sentencing, I am certainly prepared to look for common ground. In my view, one of the main causes of crime in my area is drugs, and certainly the sentencing of drug offenders is something that we as a Parliament should look at very closely.

On the whole issue of the accountability act, which I understand is going to be introduced in this House shortly after Easter, that is something that we can hopefully find some common ground. It is good to have rules that are clear and that everyone understands. However, what does concern me and I find very unsettling are the actions of the Prime Minister since he was elected.

First, he appoints a lobbyist to be his defence minister. He will not cooperate with an officer of Parliament. He tries to fire the same officer of Parliament. He appoints a person who ran as a Liberal who was against everything the Conservative Party stood for as a minister of executive council. Then, the granddaddy of them all, he appoints his campaign chairman to a position of an unelected senator and then appoints him as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

He is on what I would refer to as an ethics binge and it is very unsettling to this House. I hope and I trust that the accountability act will deal directly with the actions of the Prime Minister.

The Address

I find particularly troubling the appointment of the campaign manager to the position of an unelected senator and then given the position as Minister of Public Works with a budget of \$15 billion. He is answerable to no one in this House. He is accountable to no one in this House.

We do not know where he is. Mr. Speaker, you do not know where he is. The Clerk sitting at the Table does not know where he is. There is no one in this House who knows where that man is. All I know is he is somewhere around Ottawa. Apparently he is wearing a trench coat. He has a black briefcase. He is spending \$50 million every day of Canadian taxpayers money and he is accountable to no one. He is answerable to no one. I find that very troubling. The cord of accountability has been severed and that is deeply troubling.

● (1600)

I do hope that when the President of the Treasury Board introduces his accountability act after Easter, that it will directly deal with that situation and we can put an end, a sudden end, to this very sad spectacle that is going on before the Canadian people.

The issue is, what will we do until then? That is two or three weeks down the road. We have this campaign manager/unelected senator out there, unanswerable and unaccountable to anyone, spending \$50 million a day. What will we do until then? I have no idea. I have thought of it and maybe other members of the House will have some suggestions as to what we can do to stop this spectacle from going on.

One thing I just thought of was that we could create the version of a 21st century posse. You could deputize 10 members of the House, Mr. Speaker, to go out and find him. I know we cannot bring him into the House, but we could lock him to a post outside the House and then we could ask him questions. It would not be satisfactory, but there would be some limited semblance of accountability. That is how crazy this situation is.

I look forward to the accountability provisions. I do believe and have trust and confidence in the President of the Treasury Board that he will deal, through the act, with the situation and put an end to this sad spectacle.

I have listened to the debate on child care and I honestly believe that the debate is off on the wrong foot. We have a situation here. There is merit with both plans. I will talk about the Conservative plan.

First, there is a plan of \$1,200 per month for children under the age of six. This is an income support measure. I think it will be welcome, in most families, or all families I should say. I would be more enthusiastic if it were means tested. However, I do not think we can discuss that. We do not have to create a whole new program or architecture.

Actually, it can be accomplished simply by an amendment to the child tax benefit and the national child tax supplement. It will be made available to all parents. Parents of children under the age of six years old would get \$1,200. It would be very simple and less costly to administer. That is something the government ought to consider.

Parents of a child under six in a low income family are presently getting the child tax benefit and the national child supplement in the

vicinity of \$31 and it means increasing that amount to \$4,300. If it does not compromise, which is the caveat, the national child care agreements that have been signed by all 10 provinces, I will certainly support that sort of income support initiative. However, I do add, that income support initiative has nothing to do with early childhood development.

We went through this. There is an agreement made between the Government of Canada and all 10 Canadian provinces. I do acknowledge that every family in Canada is different, but this is part of our educational system. It has to be expanded and retained. I would be very disappointed if there was any movement in the House to compromise any of these agreements that have the broad support of all Canadians and eight of the 10 premiers in this country.

One disappointment that I do have in the throne speech, and it was touched upon by the previous speaker, is the whole issue of productivity. This goes right into some of the early childhood development agreements. We have to, as a Parliament and a society, look at everything through a productivity lens. We have to invoke measures and put them in place to promote work, make people work, save and invest. That is something we have to look forward to.

● (1605)

In closing, it is incumbent upon us to make this Parliament work for all Canadians. We have to move forward on these and other issues.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague from P.E.I. for his comments and remarks. I enjoyed his speech. He spoke at length about accountability because that seems to be the theme, the centrepiece, of the legislative package we are being promised by the newly elected Conservative government.

He did raise the seeming contradiction of having an unelected senator serving as the Minister of Public Works, with an unprecedented budget for giving out contracts and spending money, and limited access, oversight and scrutiny opportunities for the activities and operations of that new minister.

Another issue along those lines came up as well. We are all filling out our declarations of personal assets to file with the Ethics Commissioner as we speak, but we do not really know what guidelines or unique status the senator may enjoy. Is it the Senate ethical guidelines that apply? Is it the House of Commons ethical guidelines? What declaration is the senator supposed to make?

I understand that senators are allowed to sit on the boards of directors of companies, which MPs are not allowed to do. Senators in fact are doing so. Does that mean that our new Minister of Public Works is sitting on the boards of directors of 10 or 12 different companies, some of which may run into conflict because they seek contracts with the federal government? It is just a bad precedent, in my view, and I would like my hon. colleague's comments on that.

The Address

While I have the floor, I would also like to ask his views on the idea that the federal government has now stripped the access to information provisions out of the accountability act, which I believe will be the kiss of death to this access to information reform package. He and I have seen this movie before. This is like déjà vu for us because we got snookered once by his government on access to information. I want to know if he thinks it is happening again.

• (1610)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the answers to some of the issues. I do not know the details of what the Senate accountability regime is over there. I have never been a senator and probably will never be a senator.

The member made two comments. First, he stated that this is unprecedented. I certainly agree with that. It is totally unprecedented to give an unelected campaign manager/senator a \$15 billion budget and basically have him answerable and accountable to no one.

The member also talked about limited access. I beg to differ. I do not think there will be any access. He is not in this House. We do not know where he is. We do not know what he is doing. We do not know how he is spending this \$15 billion. I guess we do have limited access in that we may be able to see him before a House committee, once the House committees are up, but the member makes a very good point. This is a sad spectacle. It is very troubling. It breaks the cord of accountability in the whole parliamentary system that we operate under.

I hope the President of the Treasury Board deals with this issue and that it is dealt with when the accountability act is tabled. I could write the section in the act. All it has to say is that no campaign manager/unelected member, who is unaccountable to anyone, shall have a budget of \$15 billion. If we put that right in the act, everyone will be happy.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your new position. I would like to thank my esteemed colleague for his insight into how thin the Speech from the Throne is and how it does not really have any new ideas.

However, I would like to focus on accountability. How can a government that comes in saying that it is turning a new page do the things that it is doing, appointing an unelected member, a friend of the Prime Minister, into the Senate and giving him a budget of \$15 billion—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): He will not have much time to reply to the question, so please hurry.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: My question for the member is this. What were the things that were put in by the previous government on which the new government can capitalize?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the member said “a new page”. This is a new page. It is a new page in accountability and how to deal with it. We have never seen this in the House before, that the very first act of business by a Prime Minister would be to appoint his campaign chairman to the Senate and then appoint him as a minister with a budget of \$15 billion—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I realize that we are fairly new coming back to the House in this

session, but the member who just spoke is a veteran of the House of Commons. While I appreciate his new-found respect for an elected Senate, I would like to remind him that it is in violation of the House rules to state disrespectful reflections on members of Parliament as a whole and on senators. The comments made were totally out of order.

I will look forward to the member's support once the expense claims from members are printed by the Chief Electoral Officer and we see what the Liberals also are putting out in terms of lobbyists for campaign managers. We look forward to the proper claims.

• (1615)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I congratulate you on your new position.

I am appalled to hear those comments from a veteran parliamentarian. She uses the word being respectful. For God's sake we sat in this honourable chamber for years in government and we all heard from that party which is now in government, and with the greatest of respect, even though two out of three Canadians voted against it. I remind the members of that. It is trying to teach us to be respectful. It is that party which used words such as “crooks, criminals, thieves”.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I think we are getting a little argumentative, especially on this my first day and first 15 minutes in this chair.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member who raised the point of order I believe is referring to chapter II, Standing Order 18. If she reads it carefully, the reference to speaking disrespectfully refers to the Sovereign. The further point on that relates to the use of offensive words against a member of Parliament. That was not her point of order.

Therefore, I believe the point of order is out of order.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I have the reference.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I will consider the reference later. At this moment I would like to recognize the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to congratulate you on your new responsibilities. I am very proud to be your colleague, here in Ottawa, and I hope to work with you in the future.

[English]

I would like to begin today in this my maiden speech in the 39th Parliament by thanking my constituents who have vested in me the trust and the opportunity to represent them here in this House of the common people. The House of Commons exists precisely to serve its namesake, to be a chamber of the common people who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules. My constituents have made me their representative in this chamber and I will not let them down.

I would like to thank my friends and family and all the volunteers who helped me get where I am today. In particular, I recognize my mother Marlene, my brother Patrick and mon père Donald.

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The reason that we saw such a dramatic change on January 23 of this year was that Canadians wanted to turn the leaf, to see a change in this country and to see the restoration of accountability. That is why I have been working with numerous colleagues to introduce what we will see in the House of Commons in the coming weeks, the accountability act.

The accountability act is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. For example, it will bring in a corruption watchdog to protect whistleblowers against bullying. It will end the revolving door between lobby firms and ministers' offices. It will give the Auditor General the power to shine light in every dark corner in her hunt for waste, theft and corruption. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns. It will end the culture of entitlement which flourished under the Liberal government and replace it with a new culture of accountability.

I would like to recognize some fellow members of Parliament, including the President of the Treasury Board, the member for Repentigny, the member for Ottawa Centre, the member for Winnipeg Centre, among others in the House, who have worked diligently from various partisan backgrounds to provide input and to move forward the accountability agenda.

I reiterate that this law will be the toughest anti-corruption measure in Canadian history. It will bring in a corruption watchdog to protect whistleblowers against bullying. It will end the revolving door between lobby firms and ministers' offices. It will give the Auditor General the power to shine her light in every dark corner in her hunt for waste, theft and corruption. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns. It will be an historic step forward in the accountability of this country.

I would like to talk more about the accountability act.

• (1620)

[Translation]

The accountability act will change the political culture in Canada by removing the influence of rich donors, prohibiting large donations by individuals and corporations to political parties, and implementing stricter rules.

To resolve the lobbyist problem, we will change the system by granting certain powers to officers of Parliament, such as the Auditor General, and by protecting whistleblowers, so that our public servants may speak openly of the corruption they witness in their workplace.

[English]

Once again, this would be the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history, but the work of this government to clean up corruption and end years of entitlement will not stop with this act.

The Prime Minister and the President of the Treasury Board have both authorized me to champion a greater cause, and that is to move ahead with a bill that would similarly reflect what exists south of the border in the informers act, or the false claims act as it is often called.

The Canadian government, at least under the last 12 years, has suffered from the parasitical virus of fraud. Over the last five years alone there have been spectacular examples of blatant waste and

mismanagement such as the ad scam, the gun registry and the billion dollar boondoggle at HRDC. In all cases we saw crafty contractors and grant recipients take delicious advantage of unguarded public loot.

The government has proven to be wholly impotent in cracking down on these thieves. It is time to arm citizens with the legal authority to do the job. It is done south of the border through the informers act, which is based on the ancient British principle of *qui tam*. *Qui tam* is Latin for "in the name of the King". It means that a citizen can take actions to protect the public good or enforce the law. We have citizens arrest in Canada, which is predicated on exactly the same principle.

Here is how it works. South of the border, Joe Citizen has the legal right to launch a civil action against any company that he suspects of defrauding the U.S. government. The case is heard before a trial judge and the government can decide whether to join the action. If the judge finds that there has in fact been a fraud, the guilty must pay back as much as three times the money that was stolen. A commission of up to 30% of the money recovered by the government is then paid to the citizen whistleblower.

I know what hon. members are thinking. What about abuse? What about citizens who would come forward with litigious actions simply out of a hope of making money? That is a fair question. However, we rely on judges to decide whether or not those actions are frivolous and if they are, they can be dismissed. Furthermore, if judges find that the accusations put forward by the citizen whistleblower are false, they will merely be thrown out of court and that citizen will have to pay the legal costs in our loser pay system. In other words, there is a significant financial disincentive for abusing the system.

Some will say that there is a moral hazard in paying people to blow the whistle. "Is virtue not its own reward?", the argument goes. We pay people such as police officers, auditors, soldiers, Crown prosecutors to do all sorts of noble things. All of us in one way or another pay these people to tackle, in many cases, the bad guys. They get paid for it and none of us would consider that to be a problem.

Furthermore, we have systems like Crime Stoppers where we pay people to inform about potential criminals. Just yesterday the police in the city of Ottawa offered a reward to capture a killer who has wreaked havoc on my neighbourhood.

I would argue that the real moral hazard is letting stolen money stay in the pockets of thieves. I would rather pay a reward to a whistleblower, a private citizen who comes forward with a legal action against fraudsters, than I would to leave the stolen money in the pockets of the people who stole it.

In the United States this system has resulted in the recovery of \$10 billion in stolen money. That is \$10 billion the American government can spend on productive projects. That is \$10 billion that would otherwise be in the pockets of thieves.

This is a bold new idea of significant magnitude that would help to end the parasitical virus of fraud that has been undermining the past government and the country for far too long. I ask for all members to support this concept and support true accountability.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his contribution to the throne speech debate.

I have a couple of issues that maybe the member would comment on. First, in regard to the Auditor General, no question an officer of this place who the Canadian people look to for the service that she is authorized to provide. I wonder if the member would identify the particular area in which the Auditor General does not have the authority, the latitude or the resources to do everything that he has already spoken about.

The second issue has to do with the whistleblower legislation which the member sat on the committee that dealt with it in the last Parliament. The legislation was passed by all parties in the House and is waiting for royal assent. The issue of rewarding whistleblowers was dealt with at that time and was rejected by the committee for a couple of reasons: first, because under the Criminal Code there is an obligation on those who are aware of criminal offences to bring them forward and, if they do not, they would in fact be equally culpable because they would be protecting a criminal; and second, there are oaths of office that our public servants take and under those oaths they are to protect the assets of the Crown and are obligated to take all necessary action to do that.

With regard to the second part, if the member suggests that maybe there should be a reward for those who come forward and report, does he also think that there should be a penalty for those who knew but did not report?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member has worked very hard in developing whistleblower protection in this country and I look forward to continuing to work with him on this.

He first asked what powers the Auditor General currently did not have that we would like to extend her way. To begin with, she may not audit foundations. Billions of dollars of public money flowed from the previous government into public foundations which are dedicated to obscure causes. She does not have the legal authority to conduct audits of them. Nor does she have the ability to follow the money. We promised during the last election that the Auditor General would be allowed to carry out audits of grant recipients, those who receive public dollars in order to ascertain whether or not those public dollars are being put to wise use. Those are just two examples of how we will empower the Auditor General to go further in her hunt for waste and corruption.

Second, he spoke of the issue of rewards. He is correct in pointing out that the previous committee rejected rewards for public servants. I am talking about an entirely separate notion that would empower private citizens, deputize private citizens to bring legal actions in civil courts the same way as exists in the United States against companies which are defrauding the government.

For example, just last month two whistleblowers at a military contracting firm caught serious defraud of the American government where \$3 million was stolen. They spoke up and were fired. They then took their action to court under the informers act. They were able to recover \$3 million for the American treasury. The justice department in the United States would not participate in the action because it did not want to embarrass the administration and its goals in Iraq. Without giving private citizens the ability to take forward

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these actions, that \$3 million would never have been recovered and in fact the American government would still be paying it out.

We have seen far greater and more spectacular examples of fraud in this country under that member's government. We saw it with the ad scam where his government did not bring forward legal action against the firms that defrauded the Canadian government until well after it was in the public eye and until it was far too late. To date, the Canadian government has not recovered one nickel of the money that was stolen during the Liberal ad scam.

We look at the gun registry. How many contractors have benefited from this massive overspending? How many of them have failed to repay the money that they spent without any result for the Canadian taxpayer? The billion dollar boondoggle at HRDC? The previous government proved it was totally incapable of recovering stolen—

• (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like to resume the debate at this moment and invite the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London to speak.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize you on your first day in the Chair.

I rise today to praise the Speech from the Throne but first, if I may be allowed a moment, I would like to thank the great people of Elgin—Middlesex—London for allowing me to come back to this great place.

We come to this place at a time when many Canadians think we, as the representatives of the people, are not respected. An attitude of disrespect has fallen over this House. We will change this. We will work hard to earn the people's trust every day.

In this throne speech we bring forward five priorities, five new leaves of change. We must first accomplish these changes.

As we have heard in this debate and from the other parties, there are perhaps over 100 other changes that they would like to see happen. We have seen in past throne speeches 50, 60 or more issues in a throne speech but those were simply issues brought forward not action taken.

We would like to talk about the change in Canada by bringing forward five priorities and acting on all of them and getting them done, rather than 50 priorities, 50 promises made and all of them broken. We are bringing forward five priorities that are the biggest changes that Canadians would like to see.

The change on January 23 was that Canadians said they wanted change, that it is time for a change, a change in the way that we do business in Ottawa by making the federal government more open and accountable. I will speak in more detail to the accountability act later in this speech.

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Canadians also spoke of change in the taxes they pay. They want to keep more of their income to pay for the necessities of life. We have heard, as I have said, from other parties and other members here today of more support being needed and of so many more requests that we could do. If Canadians were allowed to keep more of their hard-earned money, these supports may not be needed. They may in fact be taken care of by fine Canadians on their own.

There is change in how Canadians and communities are kept safe. We must protect victims and not criminals. We must remove gun toting criminals and drug dealers from our streets, not duck hunters from our woods.

We must provide Canadian families with the opportunity to do better in raising their children, the opportunity that families can do better and the choice is that of the parents, not of the state.

There must be a change in the speed at which Canadians can get urgent medical care. In a country as rich as ours, it is a shame that we wait for critical medical procedures. Canadians have called for change and we will deliver. By turning over five new leaves they will form our five priorities.

I would like to speak in depth to cleaning up the government and the use of the accountability act. The first leaf we will turn over involves the cleaning up of a mess left for us here in Ottawa by providing Canadians with open, accountable and, most important, honest government and ensuring that the sponsorship scandal or anything like it can never happen again.

The key to this will be the new federal accountability act which will change the way business is done in Ottawa. How? How it will change it forever is by eliminating the undue influence of big money donors, by banning large personal and corporate donations to political parties, by toughening the rules governing lobbying and getting rid of a revolving door that was so often seen in the past involving political staffers, bureaucrats and, yes, even members of this chamber.

We did not come here so that we will be better off when we leave here. We have seen too much of it. In the past House we saw many examples of people who came here even as members of Parliament and left here very rich as lobbyists. This is not why I came to this House and it is not why the people of Elgin—Middlesex—London sent me here.

• (1635)

We will make the federal government more transparent and accountable by increasing the powers of the officers of Parliament, as was just mentioned by the previous speaker, specifically the Auditor General. We must provide real protection for whistleblowers, those who come forward with information about unethical and illegal activities within the departments in which they work. In a perfect world whistleblowers would not be needed because no one would be doing things wrong. We have learned over the past many years that we do not live in a perfect world. Our government does not exist inside the vacuum of a perfect world and there is wrongdoing. We must be able to protect those who come forward. The idea is to give Canadians the good, clean government they expect and deserve.

We said that the first move of our government would be to clean up Ottawa and that is why the first bill we will bring forward will be the federal accountability act. Canadians expect politicians and public sector employees to conduct themselves with the highest ethical standards. Our goal and commitment is to make government more effective and accountable to Parliament and to Canadians.

The federal accountability act builds on the platform of commitment and takes into account our discussions with officers of Parliament, such as the Auditor General and the Information Commissioner, with public policy experts and with eminent Canadians and unions. The package will address long-standing and difficult issues head on. We must change and become more transparent.

We will increase public confidence in the integrity of the political process by tightening the laws around political financing and lobbying and we will take steps to make government more accountable by eliminating the influence of big money donors and by banning large personal, corporate and union donations to political parties. We will toughen the rules around lobbying and get rid of that revolving door syndrome as we have seen in the past.

The accountability act will be one of the toughest anti-corruption laws in Canadian history. It will bring in a corruption watchdog to protect whistleblowers against the bullying that can happen in their workplaces. It will end the revolving door between lobby firms and ministers' offices. It will give the Auditor General the power to shine, look in every corner and to hunt for waste and theft. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns and it will move from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. We are fixing the system for Canadians.

• (1640)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in making my comments and asking a question I first want to thank the member for what he said, which is, "We do not live in a perfect world". He is so right.

However, in making my comment I will go back to the parliamentary secretary who spoke earlier and said that we were either going to choose to rectify the wrongs that were made, which we all tried to do, or we were going to continue to poison the environment for Canadians. It would be sad to bring out this type of feeling for Canadians in the House. He said that nothing had been done, that there was no accountability and no money was paid back. I do not want to use the words that he lied because it is improper language in the House of Commons but I would say that he was intellectually dishonest and I will provide two examples.

Once he was identified, Mr. Coffin went through the courts and then paid restitution in excess of \$1 million to the country. Mr. Brault is before the courts to be sentenced and, maybe, to pay back money to the country. Once we found out who the culprits were we took every means through the legal system to address the situation. We do not live in a perfect world.

I would encourage those members, as they are the party for which two out of three Canadians did not vote, to stop poisoning this environment with that type of vocabulary. I urge them to stop doing so.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I am not certain there was a question in the member's statement for me but I am sure if the parliamentary secretary were here that he could defend himself quite adequately.

The point the parliamentary secretary made, if I could be so bold as to speak for him, was that from the research of the sponsorship scandal there is still money missing. It is still unaccounted for and of course it is before the courts. All he said was that other money was missing and that it was not coming back. I guess the safest thing that I can say is that I do not believe anyone on this side of the House needs a lecture on accountability from anybody on the other side of the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for my colleague. With regard to the accountability act, he very briefly mentioned the name of the information commissioner.

One of the great problems underlying the sponsorship scandal was the culture of secrecy. That was emphasized by Commissioner Reid of the Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada. He was in fact seeking a major amendment to the access to information legislation, because one effect of the culture of secrecy was that no public servants were keeping any files. Chuck's office would call Alfonso's office which would call Jean's office. There is no paper trail anywhere, nothing.

We are told that the accountability act will carry no amendments to the Access to Information Act. As the parliamentary secretary noted earlier, it is very important that our colleague understand that, even if we want to create a new law so that the people can prosecute the public administration in the name of the king, it must be possible to request records through the Access to Information Act.

If there are no records because a culture of secrecy has been encouraged by the Liberals and maintained by the Conservatives, I do not see how the problem will be resolved, even with an accountability act.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the member opposite that there was quite a culture of secrecy that allowed much of what we saw during the sponsorship scandal to fester because no one could come forward. Within the accountability act will be the creation of effective whistleblower legislation so that people are protected when they come forward. The accountability act will lift the veil of secrecy. The curtains on the culture of secrecy that the

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member spoke of will be parted. People will come forward. It will be transparent. When people do the good that they do or the bad that they do, they will be seen.

He mentioned the culture of secrecy, but we also talked about the culture of entitlement that festered for many years. The culture of secrecy cloaked that even more. It is not so much that it was secret, but there was a culture of entitlement and it was assumed that it was all right. These are things that we must remove. We must move from a culture of secrecy and a culture of entitlement into a culture of accountability and transparency, so that the people in my riding and members opposite can certainly—

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has the floor.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

I first of all want to thank the electors of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for placing their trust in me for a third consecutive mandate.

It is my pleasure to take the floor regarding the Speech from the Throne. I will not dwell on the content of the document, but rather on some of its oversights and silences. As there are many of these, I will be unable to list them all in the 10 minutes allotted to me.

I will therefore focus on one of the most important oversights in the throne speech, which is all of the men and women who are suffering the adverse effects of globalization. Nothing is said on this subject. I am of course referring to the unemployed who have lost their jobs in different sectors and different communities. We are exposed to competition from the emerging markets. I am thinking of Brazil, China, India and Mexico, whose economies, with much lower costs because of an absence of respect for labour rights, permit them to compete with us.

In Quebec, as in the rest of Canada, men and women work in a variety of industries: textiles, furniture, wood processing, flooring, bicycles, iron and steel products and lumber. All those men and women had devoted their lives to those industries, and overnight they lost their jobs, for all sorts of reasons. It may be caused by the strong Canadian dollar, or by a country that does not respect environmental standards or respect human rights regarding child labour and women's work, or a country that does not respect health and safety laws. This creates unfair competition, which may lead to our businesses shutting down.

In this Speech from the Throne there is no provision for the unemployed. Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois is here. Today, a subamendment was passed unanimously, to have the government recognize that an assistance program is needed for workers aged 50 and over who lose their jobs and who, for various reasons, are unable to find employment elsewhere. In many cases, they have devoted 20 to 25 years of their lives to the business. They are soon in need of an assistance program.

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The citizens of Quebec can count on the Bloc Québécois. Even the rest of Canada can be proud that so many Bloc members have been elected to this House. This means that we will be able to represent those workers and to stand up for their interests. Without the Bloc, there would have been nothing in the Speech from the Throne, important though this is.

Employees who work in industries such as agriculture, forestry or tourism often have seasonal jobs. It is not the workers who are seasonal, it is the jobs they hold. Because no independent employment insurance fund is being created and the employment insurance rules are not being improved—fewer weeks worked in order to qualify for benefits—as the Bloc Québécois has been calling for for several years, men and women fall into those well-known seasonal gaps. They have no income because they have not worked long enough. Once again, this is not the workers' fault, it is rather the fault of the type of industry they work in. They have not worked enough hours to draw employment insurance benefits.

The Bloc Québécois has always said in this House that there should be an independent fund managed by employees and employers. In this type of industry, the employer hopes that the employee can draw employment insurance before resuming work the following year. We want an independent fund. Since 1996, the government has no longer paid a penny into the employment insurance fund. That year, the Liberals stopped funding the account completely. So the Liberal government kept the money contributed by companies in the government's coffers.

Today, the Conservative government is holding on to these surpluses, which enable them to make fine election promises. Unfortunately, no promises are being made to those who paid in the money. In the Speech from the Throne, there is nothing for the employees and employers who contributed their money to this fund. In the last fiscal year, the Conservative government benefited from \$1.6 billion. This money was a surplus from the employment insurance fund, paid by workers.

• (1650)

This is \$1.6 billion that the Conservative government will probably announce in the next budget. What we want is for part of this money to go towards helping workers, improving the system so that workers need to work fewer weeks and can avoid those dreaded gaps. We must create an assistance program for older workers, or POWA. That way, people who lose their jobs due to competition from the emerging economies could benefit from assistance until they retired as covered by provincial and federal government legislation.

That is what we want. The men and women who sit as Bloc Québécois members will be here to make the government understand that, in the next budget, help has to be provided for workers and the unemployed, through the surplus money they pay into federal government coffers.

There is nothing either, in the Speech from the Throne, concerning support for the aerospace industry. Quebec is responsible for over 50% of all production in the aerospace construction industry in Canada. Once again, the federal government has not provided any assistance for the aerospace industry.

I had the opportunity to attend an aviation industry convention in Le Bourget three years ago now. I can tell you there are many countries that would be proud to have an aviation industry like Canada's. Many countries would pay to have our aviation firms. Participation in such a convention makes it clear why countries approach Canadian and Quebec representatives to find out what programs we offer to help the industry.

Having an aviation industry is a matter of prestige. It is at the leading edge of technology. There is nothing in the throne speech, however, to help this flagship of the Quebec and Canadian economy.

The public and industry workers can count on the Bloc in Quebec and in Canada as well to defend the industry when the next budget is presented.

I will close by discussing agriculture. It is not a matter of forgetting, because the matter has been discussed, it is a matter of silence. The farming industry is facing a major income crisis. I am happy to discuss the matter. It is not that this crisis gives me pleasure. It in fact causes me deep distress. Nevertheless, I am especially pleased to debate this crisis in the House because my riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel is 70% farmland. Some of my colleagues here are in similar situations, including the member for Laurentides—Labelle, the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the member for Compton—Stanstead and the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. I could name a number of others, since the Bloc is represented in almost all rural areas of Quebec. It is to be found in all regions of Quebec. This is a good thing and what Quebecers wanted.

Farmers put food on our tables. It is not for nothing that Quebecers and Canadians think so highly of them now and currently rank them third on their value system. There are many reasons for this when we consider all the epidemics lately such as SARS, the mad cow crisis or the avian flu. The public is increasingly aware of the fact that farmers are responsible for the quality of the food that ends up on our tables. It is not for nothing that people think more highly of them.

Contrary to the opinion of Canadians and Quebecers on farmers, Canada has cut its investment in the agricultural industry. This is catastrophic to farmers.

I have a few statistics, which do not come from the Bloc Québécois, but from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. It states that farm subsidies in Europe and in the United States allow farmers to sell their products below cost. Here, we do not subsidize farming, but Europe and the United States currently do.

What happens as a result? The value of the products decreases. Our farmers sell their products for less and are therefore less competitive, since Europe and the United States, among others, subsidize the industry directly.

• (1655)

We can maintain the status quo and go before international forums to state that we no longer want the European countries and the United States to subsidize their exports. We can do that. The problem is that in the meantime, our industry is getting weaker and our farming incomes are decreasing. Obviously this makes us less competitive. We are losing jobs and businesses are closing. We will become less and less self-sufficient. We will be increasingly at the mercy of the other industries in the other countries, which will likely affect the health of Quebecers and Canadians who will assume less responsibility and be more at the mercy of foreign producers.

Once again, I hope the government will address this problem and provide the necessary funding. Farmers are calling for \$6 billion over three years. I hope the government will help them and resolve this crisis brought on by global markets. I hope the government will listen carefully—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry, but the time has expired. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for a question or comment.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for raising two issues that are dear to my heart. It serves as an example of how we share many important interests among the provinces.

There are two things my colleague raised that I would like to focus on. The first is the aerospace industry, which I can say for my own riding is a matter of great concern. I represent Bristol Aerospace, Boeing, Standard Aero, quite a few aerospace manufacturers that are struggling to compete internationally and which rely on the support of the federal government to ensure they can contribute in the way that they do.

How would my colleague feel about a policy from the federal government that would ensure a buy Canadian first policy and not the lowest price at all costs policy as we endure today?

Also, how does he feel about the technology partnerships loan program? Even though it was of great value to the aerospace industry, the program was open to abuse in that very few of the technology partnerships loans were ever paid back.

I come from the province of Manitoba, which is obviously a keystone province that is built on agriculture and relies on agriculture. Can we as members of Parliament agree that we will embrace the well-being of our agriculture industry in this 39th Parliament? Can we agree on that cooperatively?

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I will be happy to answer my colleague. I will take his questions in reverse order and start with agriculture.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois will support any measure that assists farmers. Agriculture, the primary sector, always forms the basis of a country's economy. A self-respecting society must be able to feed itself. How we feed people will become increasingly important in our societies for all sorts of reasons, as I said earlier, but

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also for obvious health reasons. Because of the risk of epidemics, we need to control our own agriculture rather than rely on other countries to feed us. Canada has to understand this. Farmers have a direct impact on the health of our societies. We have to start by working with farmers to make sure we have healthy food. Then we can create jobs.

I will now address his question concerning the aerospace industry. My colleague is absolutely right: this industry is struggling. It is true that the Government of Canada loan program guaranteed buyers the money they needed to purchase aircraft. The industry suffered losses, like all industries worldwide. But it must be understood that other countries are doing this. Brazil is and, now, so is Europe. France is not the only country to offer assistance to the industry: all of Europe has decided to guarantee loans to European companies. Our industry must be able to keep pace with the competition and Canada must address this issue.

At this very moment, many parts are manufactured in other countries, such as Mexico or emerging countries. Our industries want to be competitive and, right now, they are not creating any jobs within our borders because they are not receiving enough assistance from our government. They are creating jobs in other countries in order to reduce the cost of building planes and other aircraft. This is unacceptable.

The goal is to be able to buy Canadian. As to whether we can pass legislation with that in mind, yes, as soon as we comply with WTO rules, which is not easy to do. The World Trade Organization has very strict standards concerning aircraft manufacturing. We also need a buy local policy and an industry assistance policy that respects the industries of foreign competitors.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first speech in this chamber, I want to thank the population of Trois-Rivières for granting me their trust for a second time.

After the reading of the Speech from the Throne last Tuesday, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on one of the subjects it addressed, namely early child care.

Quebeckers and Canadians are in agreement that the various stakeholders of society must work together to help families. There is no doubt that children are our succession and our future. We must be able to help parents realize their desire to have children. To do so, numerous support measures are needed. This is essential and necessary.

The Prime Minister spoke about respecting provincial jurisdictions. But he seems to have forgotten that education is a provincial jurisdiction guaranteed in sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act. A family policy is therefore clearly the responsibility of Quebec. Nonetheless, one of the first intentions of this new government is once again to utilize its spending power to encroach directly on the fields of jurisdiction through a child care allowance. And yet a funding agreement had been reached between the federal government and the provinces. Now we are told that this agreement will not be honoured. That means a shortfall of \$807 million for Quebec. This solution is truly unacceptable.

The Address

During the election campaign, the candidates of the Conservative Party of Canada said that a Conservative government would send out an allowance of \$1,200 a year for every child under age six. There would be numerous disadvantages if that measure were introduced. For example, that \$1,200 is taxable. Furthermore, certain parents, among the poorest in our society, will see their benefits cut, i.e. the child tax benefits and the Government of Quebec family support benefits. This will especially affect low- and middle-income families. According to a number of credible studies, this measure would give certain parents much less than the \$1,200 we are being promised.

For example, a single-parent family with two children and an annual income of \$28,000 would lose benefits of all kinds. Out of the \$2,400, there would remain less than \$700.

We in the Bloc Québécois are proposing a change, that is, to transform this allowance into a refundable tax credit. This change will make it possible to give close to \$1,200 to parents and will be much more compliant with Quebec's jurisdictions.

Numerous groups are militating to convince the current government to go back on its intention to drop the agreements concluded in 2004 on funding child care services.

In Quebec, a very large coalition is speaking out. We are talking about the Association des centres de la petite enfance, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants en technique d'éducation à l'enfance, the Chantier de l'économie sociale du Québec, the Fédération des femmes du Québec and the largest central labour bodies. Everyone is demanding this agreement on the funding of child care services.

In Canada, the Canadian Labour Congress, which represents over three million workers, feels that, to give working parents a real choice, the agreements already concluded have to be implemented. The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, which comprises 140,000 members, shares this opinion.

I will add that in yesterday's edition of *The Daily*, a Statistics Canada publication, we read that in the past eight years the proportion of children in child care has increased significantly.

To sum up, a majority of parents, from Quebec and throughout Canada, are clearly expressing the wish to be able to entrust their children to affordable, safe, competent and equitable child care services, services available to everyone.

During the election campaign, the Conservatives also said they would help employers create child care spaces. A tax credit representing \$250 million a year would be offered to employers in order to cover the total cost of creating new child care spaces.

• (1705)

I am rather sceptical about these suggestions. Businesses have many other concerns, do not have a tradition of this, and do not have the administrative skills to do this kind of organizational work.

Women in Ontario tell us that the experiment with workplace child care was already done in that province and the results were negative. Very few child care spaces were created. In addition, the amounts

that the Conservative government is talking about are clearly not enough to really deal with day care services.

Remember that Quebec invests \$1.5 billion a year in its child care system. A taxable family allowance and a tax credit for employers will certainly not make it possible to create educational day care that is high quality, viable, and affordable.

In Quebec, many mothers of young children return to work after their parental leave. Their skills, we should remember, are essential for commerce and industry. In addition, their participation in the paid workforce preserves the equality of chances, the equality between men and women. We must recognize that work for mothers outside the home must be accompanied by affordable, competent day care so that they do not get exhausted and abandon their paid jobs or break off promising careers.

In the throne speech, the government was less specific about the \$1,200 allocation, which is an intrusion into Quebec's jurisdiction. It says in the speech:

In collaboration with the provinces and territories, employers and community non-profit organizations, it will also encourage the creation of new child care spaces.

I hope that this is a sign of openness and compromise and that a solution can be found to avoid infringing on an area of Quebec jurisdiction. Most importantly, methods have to be suggested for ensuring that we do not aggravate the fiscal imbalance because the government intends at the same time to tear up an agreement, which, I remind everyone, will result in an \$807 million shortfall for Quebec.

I repeat, for the Bloc Québécois, the resolution of the fiscal imbalance must not remain just an election promise, one which will not take into account the agreement reached with Quebec on day care.

In conclusion, accessible day care is a very important factor in creating equality between men and women. Furthermore, this support for young families helps prevent many social problems and avoid major health costs. Accessible, quality day care is absolutely essential in order for women to have equal access to the workforce and professional training and for them to participate in public life.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member as she gave her presentation on the child care program. She referred in a kind of a glowing way to the Quebec child care program, yet that program, for a price tag of \$1.3 billion a year, which is what I believe the member said, works for only about 17% of the children in Quebec. How can that be viewed as a successful program? At \$1.3 billion for 17% of the children, it would cost around \$6 billion a year if it were available and used by all children in Quebec, not that this is a goal; I am just saying that the price tag would be so huge it obviously would not be affordable.

The Conservative government's program, which instead will work with business and community groups to provide new child care spaces, along with providing \$1,200 a year for each child under six years of age, seems like a much more realistic package, and besides, it gives choice, choice to parents.

The Address

I would like to ask the member why she feels it is appropriate to deny parents the choice, parents who may choose to stay at home or parents who may choose to have a grandmother or someone else to look after their kids. Why should they be denied the funding from government?

Could the member respond to those two points, first, the choice issue, and second, the cost of a system which is, like the Quebec system, expanded so that it is made available to all children?

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the figures provided by my colleague opposite. According to the 2001 census, Quebec had 450,000 children under the age of six. Of those, nearly 200,000 are in the provincial day care network. It is estimated that 110,000 children are in full- or part-time child care outside of the network. That leaves only 140,000 children at home.

We are not denying women the choice to stay at home and care for their children, but this is not a realistic option with a yearly \$1,200 taxable allowance. For some families, there will be very little left over. Less than \$700, as I explained earlier. As such, how can parents realistically afford to keep their children at home?

Clearly, there are costs associated with creating a child care network. It is estimated that every child in the network costs over \$30 a day. Still, we must consider the educational element, the child socialization element, and the fact that day care helps improve many behavioural problems, thus reducing the cost to society once the child is in the school system. We believe that an integrated day care network is the best solution.

If the Conservative government thinks that families need money—we are not disputing that—and it generously wishes to offer them a \$1,200 family allowance, it may certainly do so. We would like this allowance to come in the form of a non-taxable tax credit so families can keep more of it. However, in my opinion, this is not, and will never be, a child care service.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Trois-Rivières made an excellent speech. I must say I am sympathetic to her very well crafted arguments, in that the province of Manitoba finds itself in a situation similar to that of the province of Quebec. We signed an agreement with the Government of Canada—not with the Liberal Party and not with the Conservatives, but with the government—with the expectation that we would have five years of stable funding to begin to put together a day care system like the one the province of Quebec already enjoys.

Our problem is that we used the money to raise the salaries of all of our day care workers in the public sector, because they were terribly underpaid, and then to open a bunch of new spaces. Now the federal government has unilaterally torn up that agreement. We are in a terribly difficult situation. How do we ask these people to now roll their wages back? We cannot. How do we close these spaces that have filled with children already? We cannot. The province of Manitoba is going to have to come up with this money, as will the province of Quebec.

Does my colleague believe there is any hope of convincing the federal government to change its mind and fulfill the commitments made by the Government of Canada?

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, it is possible to convince the Conservative government to change its mind, especially with all the groups of women, primarily, and parents that are demanding equitable, quality child care.

We have reached a certain point in our society. We do not want any backward steps. For decades, we fought long and hard for these benefits for women. More than 60% of them are now in the labour force.

So we feel it is inevitable. Public pressure will be brought to bear, and the government will have to bow to that pressure.

[English]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

If I may, I will begin by expressing my appreciation to the electors of my riding of Mount Royal for their renewed trust and also by congratulating the Prime Minister and his government on their election and their commitment, as set forth in the Speech from the Throne, to work together in a minority Parliament.

[Translation]

That is where the government will look for shared goals and common ideas that will help Canadians build a stronger Canada.

[English]

The throne speech affirms a series of principles that reflect these shared goals such as safe streets and safe communities.

[Translation]

These goals also include supporting Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

[English]

The throne speech contains a set of policies at a level of generality that one would not oppose, but where some of whose particulars lack definition and destination. Admittedly, this is not uncommon in throne speeches, and so what I propose to do is address the principles and policies that are conspicuous by their absence, as well as the importance of their absence, while pouring recommended content into principles and policies that are enumerated, the whole in the pursuit of the common interest and the public good.

The Address

First, the throne speech contains no reference to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms though we are on the eve of the 25th anniversary of this most transformative constitutional instrument, which has transformed not only our laws but our lives. Moreover, for a government where law and order is one of its five priorities and where the Minister of Justice is otherwise obliged to certify that any prospective law and policy comports with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the absence of any reference to the charter evinces a disturbing mindset about rights, protection and priorities.

Second, and not unrelated, there is only passing reference to aboriginal justice even though the charter and the Constitution entrench aboriginal rights for the first time, while the throne speech's silence on the historic agreement in principle respecting redress for the shameful legacy of residential schools is profoundly disturbing.

Third, the throne speech says that MPs will be asked to conduct a comprehensive review of the Anti-terrorism Act, seemingly ignoring that both houses of Parliament have concluded comprehensive reviews of the Anti-terrorism Act and were at report stage when Parliament was dissolved. Indeed, as Minister of Justice, I appeared twice before each of these respective committees in the House and Senate.

If the government is recommending that reconstituted parliamentary committees will tender a report to government incorporating by reference the review that Parliament has already completed, that is one thing, but if the government intends to conduct a review *de novo*, that may be an exercise in reinventing the wheel and may not be the most efficacious use of parliamentary time in a minority Parliament.

I would hope, however, that whatever be the process for review, the government will anchor itself in the two-pronged, principled approach to anti-terrorism law and policy that the previous government had initiated, the first being that terrorism does constitute an assault on the security of a democracy and the rights of its inhabitants and our individual and collective rights to life, liberty and security of the person. In that context, anti-terrorism law and policy is the promotion and protection of human security in the most profound sense.

But the second principle must not be ignored, that is, the enforcement and application of anti-terrorism law and policy must always comport with the rule of law. Individuals and groups must never be singled out for discriminatory treatment. Torture must everywhere and always be condemned. In a word, we cannot, in the pursuit and protection of human security, undermine human rights, which is a basic component of that human security.

Fourth, we share with the government as a matter of principle the commitment to safe streets and safe communities. Indeed, it was this very principle which underpinned, for example, our own policy when in government, respecting guns, gangs and drugs, and we share as a matter of policy as well as principle the government's commitment to tougher laws, particularly respecting weapons-related crimes, more effective law enforcement, including improved border security, and a crime prevention strategy addressing the root causes of crime by providing hope and opportunity for youth.

But what is disconcerting are principles and policies announced elsewhere but absent from the throne speech, such as five year and ten year mandatory minimums for a host of offences that are both wrong-headed as a matter of policy and suspect as a matter of law, and that would result in more prisoners and more prisons with no appreciable effect in combating crime.

As well, there is no reference in the throne speech to the need to combat racism, hate speech and hate crimes—including the explosion of hate on the Internet—which are increasingly targeting the most vulnerable among us: our young, our religious and racial minorities, and women and the like. I would recommend that the government reaffirm the national action plan against racism, however it may wish to refine it, as well as the national justice initiative against racism and hate.

Fifth, it would be prejudicial to the very principles and purposes of this government in cracking down on crime to dismantle the gun registry, which, as the law enforcement community itself has testified, not only prevents crime but saves lives.

Finally, if the government wishes to act on its stated commitment to supporting Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights around the world, and to support a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, which I welcome, it must address two of the most existential threats and clear and present dangers of our time. I am referring first to the continuing mass atrocity and genocide by attrition in Darfur, which requires a robust diplomatic initiative on the part of Canada and the international community, such as we set forth earlier today in our Save Darfur Parliamentary Coalitions's 10 point "Call to Action" on Darfur.

• (1720)

A second clear and present danger is the toxic convergence in the publicly declared Iranian government policy both to advocate the destruction of a state and the genocide of a people, in its publicly avowed intent to wipe Israel off the map and to acquire nuclear weapons for that purpose. The parading of a Shehab III missile in the streets of Tehran, draped in the emblem of "wipe Israel off the map", underpinned by a virulent anti-Semitism that calls for a new Holocaust, as it denies the old one, and threatens to burn Muslims who evince any support for Israel, constitutes a standing assault on international peace and security, and a clear and present danger to us all.

These two existential threats, Darfur and Iran, constitute test cases of the government's commitment and resolve to defend our core values in support of a more robust diplomatic role for Canada.

• (1725)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to question at somewhat more length than we were accustomed to having during the periods when I would ask the former minister questions during question period.

I want to ask him a little about some of what he said today in his comments. He made reference to a number of issues that are important. I know he takes them very sincerely.

He is a very sincere advocate of human rights, both domestically and particularly abroad. He deserves to be congratulated for that. I am glad he raised, for example, the issue of Darfur, which is a very serious matter and which I know he is pursuing. I received an e-mail from his office today about it.

I have a question for the member about the Anti-terrorism Act. The member made reference to the Anti-terrorism Act. He mentioned that our government had raised the issue in the throne speech. He pointed out that there had been some reviews underway at the time the last Parliament was dissolved.

It seems a little unfair to me to raise this point and criticize us for it, given we get criticized so often for all the things that were not in the throne speech. One could have turned that around and complained there was no mention of it in the throne speech, if it had not been there.

I get the chance to ask this question now that we are in government and they are in opposition. Back when the Anti-terrorism Act was being debated in the House, in a debate that went on all night long, I stood up around one o'clock in the morning and raised the issue of putting in a sunset clause. Other people also got the idea about the same time. Had a sunset clause been put in place, there would have been, by necessity, a review of the law which would have dealt with the matter. There would have presumably been a two or three year sunset and that matter would have been dealt with by necessity. Parliament would have been under very genuine pressure to deal with the aspects of the law that were rushed through.

There was a crisis at the time and we could not be as thorough or as precise in our protection of rights as we might have wanted to be. We all accepted this at the time. That was the merit of putting in a sunset clause. The idea was promoted at the time by a number of us, including I think some Liberals. In the end it was rejected by the prime minister of day, Mr. Chrétien.

Would the hon. member be able to shed some light on that decision to reject the idea, which I think was a very unwise one? That ultimately was what led me to vote against the law. Would the member agree with me that when future legislation of the same nature arises, should it ever arise, that we ought to consider putting sunset rules into place to ensure that whatever restrictions we have to place on individual rights in our country would be restrictions of short duration?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem that the government mentioned anti-terrorism law and policy in its throne speech. I only said that it was unclear to me whether the government wanted to initiate a review *de novo* or whether it would incorporate, by reference, the reviews that had already taken place. Those would be two different approaches by way of a process, but the principal approach concerning anti-terrorism law and policy, as I indicated, should nonetheless be followed.

On that principal approach, I want to mention to the hon. member that I was then a member and not yet a minister. The then minister of justice, Anne McLellan, tabled the anti-terrorism law and policy on October 15. I got up, if I am not mistaken, the next day, October 16, and among my critiques, I elaborated a 10 point critique of the bill. One of them was the absence of sunset clauses.

The Address

I concur with the member opposite that there should be sunset clauses. One of my suggestions at the time, which was accepted, was that there were sunset clauses on two sets of provision in the bill, preventive detentions and investigative hearings. I would have been prepared to have recommended even sunset provisions with respect to the bill as a whole.

• (1730)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe the tragic legacy of Indian residential schools probably stands as Canada's greatest shame. I state for the record that the previous Liberal government spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to paint victims as liars rather than compensate them so they could get on with their lives and deal with the reality of the abuse that they suffered.

I want ask my hon. colleague a question on a different issue. The centrepiece of the accountability act that the Conservatives plan to introduce was to be access to information legislation, meaningful access to information changes to allow us to shine a light on the inner workings of government, so we would have 30 million auditors instead of just one overworked Auditor General.

I know my colleague earnestly tried to introduce similar reforms in the previous Parliament. What is his view on the fact that this piece of the accountability act is being stripped out at this late date?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. It was highly regrettable that it was not included in the Speech from the Throne. I regard it as a cornerstone of any approach to accountability. I regard freedom of information as a cornerstone of democratic governance and, indeed, as a cornerstone of democracy as a whole.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on your new position. It is a significant position for a new member of the House. In the short time we have had to chat, I am sure you will fill it admirably and with respect for this institution and its members.

I also want to congratulate the new government and its members, as well as all members who have been elected to this important place.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the people of my constituency, Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who have once again placed their trust in me as their member of Parliament. I am honoured to represent them and I am privileged to work on their behalf in the House of Commons and, more particular, back home.

I would also like to thank my family, which I am sure is not watching, my wife Darlene and my children Emma and Conor, whose support, patience and love are the biggest part of my life.

I would also like to talk about the election that I just went through in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. It was a positive election, a fair election, in contrast perhaps to the rest of the country. We debated issues and people made their decision. I am deeply grateful to the people who put so much time into my campaign and those who believed that I stood for values in which they believe.

The Address

I also want to acknowledge my opponents in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and recognize them. First, is Peter Mancini who, as people here may recall, was a member of Parliament from 1997 to 2000. Peter was my opponent, but he was not my enemy. I value the contribution he has made to his community and I respect his commitment to principles and party.

Likewise, my Conservative challenger was a decent man by the name of Robert Campbell, a former RCMP officer, very dedicated and committed. Elizabeth Perry from the Green Party spoke passionately on a lot of issues, not the least of which were the national day care program which she supported as well as the issues of the environment.

I enjoyed getting to know all these people, those whom I did not know and those whom I did, and I am proud of the race that we fought.

This place means an awful lot to me. I do not take it for granted and I do not take for granted the privilege of being here. One need only consider the great debates that have taken place in this chamber. We recall the contributions that members of all parties made, people who brought distinction to the House.

Like all members, it is my hope that I can continue to make a contribution to debate and put forward ideas because that is what this is about. We should exchange ideas and debate their merits, and we should do so with respect and with openness, willing to acknowledge that no one person or party has the monopoly on what is right. It is through debate we sometimes find compromise and solutions.

My comments today will be consistent with things I have said before, since my election in 2004. The things in which I believe do not change as I find myself on a different side of the House.

Yesterday the new Conservative government put forth a plan that will be the source of some of these debates. As the government, it is their right and their responsibility to set an agenda, to place it before Parliament and to make a case for it.

None of us here were surprised by the content of the throne speech. We all understood the Conservatives would bring forth five key areas that they believed were important for them and for the country. There will be issues I hope on which we can all find some areas of compromise, the main issues like justice, national defence and accountability. We can work through those and hopefully can find some common ground. It is my intention to make Parliament work.

Today I would like to address the throne speech, both for what was included and what was not included.

First, I will address what was included. I want to comment on two of the issues with which I take exception.

The first is the issue of the goods and service tax. In a column on March 18, 2006, Jeffrey Simpson of the *Globe and Mail* referred to the Conservative commitment to cut the GST as:

—a \$5 billion political bribe.... Cutting the GST mildly stimulates an economy that doesn't need it. As politics, it's great; as economics, it stinks.

I happen to agree with him on that issue, as do a great many economists. I would also suggest that not only was the GST promise

made to score political points, it does nothing to assist low income Canadians. The primary beneficiaries will be those who are wealthy.

What would really help is to have the government help working and low income Canadians and for the government to do the right thing and maintain the commitment made and implemented by the previous Liberal government to lower personal income taxes for low and middle income Canadians, building on a record of one million Canadians who have come off the tax rolls altogether since 2000.

Since being elected I have met regularly with anti-poverty groups in my area. They know that reducing consumption taxes is no way to help those most in need and it is inherently unfair, and I think that is right.

●(1735)

Another issue, and one that has been talked about before and emerged in this House, is the issue of child care. I remember getting a call from the Growing Place: Early Education Centre Ltd. in my riding. People who had never been involved in politics and in most cases people whom I had never met were very concerned about the Conservative plan. They believed it would unravel 18 months of hard work by the Liberal government and the social development minister who, because of his efforts, had signed child care agreements with all 10 provinces. These people were not political activists. They were parents who know the burdens that we all feel and the hopes that we all have for our children.

In Canada we value social programs. We value the common citizenship that they invoke. Child care could be one of those.

Now the new government will disregard the hard work of the provinces and the federal government and replace it with a \$100 a month taxable allowance. The government plan does nothing to address the real issue of child care spaces. The Conservative program does not do anything to support training, or new equipment for child care facilities, or wage enhancements for workers.

Let me be clear. The government proposal is not about child care. It is more about a view that government has no role to play in ensuring equality of access and opportunity. It is that rugged individualistic vision that we often see from our neighbours to the south. I believe the government is wrong on the issue of child care and I will argue that.

Let me talk about what I think is missing most notably from the speech.

Notwithstanding the substantive disagreements I have with some of the five proposals, what is most alarming is the absolute lack of mention of education, environment, international development.

How can the government suggest to Canadians that it is serious about moving Canada forward when one of the most critical issues facing Canada is our need to develop human capital through skills education and training, yet this was not even mentioned in the speech? While most G-8 countries and emerging economies, China, India and Brazil, continue to invest resources and focus on improving skills development, the Speech from the Throne does not mention education. It is inward looking and is the wrong approach for Canadians.

The Address

How will the government follow up on the brilliant record of the previous government in investing in research and innovation, putting Canada at the top of the G-7 in publically funded research, reversing the brain drain and helping to build a strong economy, the one that the government has now inherited for a while?

Today the challenge is student access, a challenge that was being addressed through direct investments in students, especially those in need, those most marginalized, aboriginal Canadians, Canadians with disabilities, low income families. There are those who suggest that skills training is the single most important issue facing Canadians, but it was not in the throne speech. The Speech from the Throne is supposedly designed to help families, but how can it ignore one of the biggest concerns that families have: educating their children?

As well, what are we to think of the absence of any mention of regional development? This is an area that is very important in Atlantic Canada.

Already we have seen this government treat Atlantic Canada poorly. For the first time in modern history there is no cabinet representation from the province of P.E.I., yet the Prime Minister found it fit to appoint his chief fundraiser from Quebec to the Senate to be the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

We see continued neglect shown to Atlantic Canada. The Prime Minister appointed a part time minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, but there are parliamentary secretaries from Toronto and Calgary. The fact that this new government would downgrade ACOA to a minor portfolio led by a part time minister perhaps speaks volumes about this government's view of Atlantic Canadians in general. Perhaps we do not count. Perhaps it is time we were saying that Atlantic Canada wants in, at least in this government.

Further, what are we to think of there being no mention in the Speech from the Throne of the Kelowna accord, an accord that is so important to our aboriginal communities?

What about our place in the world, specifically international development and assistance?

The Speech from the Throne is really not a speech from the throne but a brochure from the throne. It is a tiny document because the ideas are small. There is no vision that will make a real difference for Canada. The agenda of the government is narrow and inward looking and disappointing.

I want Parliament to work and I think all parties need to make it work. I came here to discuss these issues, to debate legislation, to forge a better country, and I will do my part. But I believe the throne speech misses more than it hits. I do not believe that we can address the future of a country without suggesting how we will educate its citizens, how we will develop its regions, how we will care for its children or how we will ensure greater equality for those most marginalized. Those are the issues that I came here to discuss and the issues for which I stand with my colleagues.

● (1740)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take issue with a couple of things the hon. member indicated in his speech. I found a couple of things troubling.

The throne speech should not be noted for what it does not say but for what it does say, which I think is very dynamic. It really is the direction in which the government is headed. What we saw from the previous government was a government that did not have direction. It listed a large number of items that it could not possibly accomplish in any short order. This throne speech is an action plan for the future. I am very proud of it, particularly the five priorities that matter to Canadians that we carried through the campaign.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I did not really detect a question, but I do want to respond.

First of all, I congratulate the member on his election. If he serves in this place with anywhere near the kind of distinguished record of his predecessor from Peterborough, he will be doing very well.

He commented that we are not here to discuss what was not included in the throne speech but what is included. I would not have hit 10 minutes if I had done that. I would have hit two minutes because there really is not very much in the throne speech. That is why I wanted to talk about issues that are of most importance to Canadians.

When I travelled around my constituency during the election and throughout last year, families told me they were concerned about education and where their children would go to school. In my province tuition is extraordinarily high. Nova Scotia has the highest tuition fees. That is a provincial government responsibility, but it is also a federal government responsibility.

In the campaign we came forward with a fifty-fifty plan to ensure that all Canadian students would get half of their first year and half of their last year undergraduate program as well as expanding the Canada access grants in the economic update. This would allow lower income Canadians, Canadians with disabilities and aboriginal Canadians to have access to university. That is very important. I say sincerely that I am not without hope, but I do hope that the government recognizes and keeps some of those things that we brought forward in the fiscal update and understands the importance of education.

I met today with student leaders from the Canadian Federation of Students. I met with a university representative. They had to look long and hard to find any reference to education in the Speech from the Throne. We need to give them some more hope that the good work the Liberal government did last year and in years previous will be continued. I hope that happens.

The Address

● (1745)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour on an excellent speech and I say that without reservation. I would like to repeat the same compliment that he made to the new member for Peterborough. If the member can measure up to the standard of excellence and achievement of the previous member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, he too will be somebody who will make his constituents and his family and colleagues very proud. I urge him to continue to work along those lines.

One of the terrible things about this place is that as much as we all try hard not to be partisan, in the end it seems difficult not to be partisan. I believe the member when he said how devoted he is to access to education, to the environmental initiatives that were promised by his government, to the international development objectives, and so on. The reality is that for almost 13 years we can honestly say that we saw very little delivered on what was desperately needed in this country.

With the Liberal Party now in opposition, does the member feel that there can be some real coming to grips with the damage done to the education system because of inadequate funding? We have made no progress and have backslid in meeting our commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To be fair, the member was not here when the Liberal government presided over the largest cuts in Canadian history to our international development commitments. Is it the view of the member that with the Liberal Party now in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. I would like to recognize for one last time the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, and tell him that this is going to be another one of those very short answers.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments, especially about my predecessor from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Wendy Lill, who was a very distinguished member. I am now tied with her in number of times elected. Of course, she got eight years and I do not have two yet, but that is the nature of the game.

There are all kinds of things we need to do on a lot of issues, but I would say to my colleague from Halifax that we did some significant things last year. We put some significant things in the economic update in November that followed on Bill C-48. I heard a lot from the NDP members last year that they wanted to make Parliament work. They said they would negotiate with the government. Both parties deserve credit for Bill C-48 but when it came time to implement it and the economic update, the NDP fell away and said, "No, we are going to go to an election". The levers of power are now with people who think they can tax cut their way to better education, tax cut their way to child care.

We were making direct investments. It was the right approach. I hope that some of those things will be continued by the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the Speech from the Throne. The government was elected to get things done. We are rolling up our sleeves and taking a workman-like approach to government. I can assure members that we are committed, focused and frugal.

The Speech from the Throne charts a new course for Canada. We will replace the culture of entitlement with one of accountability. We will put the interests of the country ahead of the interests of a privileged few. We will focus on the priorities of Canadians.

During the last election, we promised to take action on five priorities: cleaning up the government by passing the federal accountability act; reducing the tax burden of Canadians, starting with a one percentage point cut to the GST; making our streets and communities safer by cracking down on crime and introducing minimum sentences; supporting families by providing parents with direct financial support to make the child care choices that meet their specific needs while also working with stakeholders to create new child care spaces; and working with the provinces to improve health care by establishing a patient wait times guarantee.

I will return to these priorities in a moment, in particular our promise to reduce taxes for all Canadians, but before doing so there are two principles I would like to talk about that will underpin what our government does in all five areas.

First is fiscal responsibility. I believe and the government believes that balanced budgets and paying off debt are essential to our nation's success. They are not something to be bargained away or compromised. The road to our country's impressive economic and fiscal performance in recent years began with the elimination of annual government deficits. Now is not the time for a U-turn, not only because we have an obligation to the taxpayers of today but because we have an obligation to the generations of tomorrow.

My wife, Christine, and I are blessed with triplet sons and I am not prepared to mortgage their future or any child's future. Deficit financing simply passes tax payments on to our children with accumulated interest piled on top. We must keep our country on the right path and point it in the right direction.

The second principle that will guide us is that the money we manage and spend as a government does not belong to us. It belongs to hard-working, tax paying Canadians. I imagine a number of members know that under the previous government, federal spending jumped by 15% in one year, more than six times the rate of inflation. As the Prime Minister concluded, that kind of spending is simply unsustainable. It is why our government has committed to limiting future growth on federal grants and contribution programs, and limiting growth within federal departments and agencies by reallocating money from existing programs.

Clearly, we must do a better job of controlling government spending, making every dollar count. We must ensure Canadians get results and good value for the hard-earned tax dollars they entrust to us.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

The Address

Our government will spare no effort to review spending and reallocate resources, so that money will only be spent on programs that are effective and efficient, that is, on programs that work for all Canadians. Canadians should not work for the benefit of the government. Government should work for the benefit of all Canadians.

It is in that spirit and with those basic principles in mind that we will keep our word to Canadians on the five priorities that the Prime Minister outlined during the last election campaign, priorities for practical and positive change and for a new era in government.

Our number one priority is to clean up government by making it more accountable. Let us face it. Canadians must be able to trust their government and know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely. We will provide decisive leadership. We will stand up for honesty and integrity in government.

To that end, our first piece of legislation will be the federal accountability act, a sweeping reform plan to make government more accountable and transparent than ever.

● (1750)

Second, we promise to make our streets and communities safer by providing stiffer sentences for crimes involving firearms and reallocating funds from the gun registry program to support the hiring of more front line police officers.

Third, the government recognizes that strong families ensure a bright future for Canada. No two families are alike and parents must have the ability to choose the child care option that best suits their particular needs. Our government will help Canadian parents make these choices by providing them with direct financial support. At the same time we will also work with the provinces and territories along with employers and community non-profit organizations to create more child care spaces across the country.

Fourth, the government promises to work with the provinces to improve health care by establishing a patient wait times guarantee. Our goal is to set wait time reduction targets to ensure that all Canadians are treated within medically acceptable time limits.

Finally, our fifth priority of tax reduction will be front and centre in our first budget. The government promised Canadians that it would reduce taxes, starting with a one percentage point cut to the GST. Delivering on our promise to reduce the GST is a vital component of our plan to put more money into the pockets of hard-working Canadians. The government knows it must create more opportunity for individuals, families and small businesses to get ahead and we believe that starts with reducing the GST. Why? Because a cut in the GST is a tax cut for everyone, whether one earns enough to pay personal income taxes or not.

People in Canada will see the cut in the GST every time they buy something, regardless of age level or income level. Everyone from a newspaper carrier to a senior on a fixed income will see a savings. Unlike other tax measures, no future government will be able to take this tax cut away from Canadians by stealth.

On big ticket items, the savings can be very significant. For example, the GST savings when buying a new car could translate into hundreds of dollars. On the purchase of a new home, it could

mean thousands of dollars. These kinds of savings could mean a lot to young families from one end of Canada to the other.

We believe the purpose of tax policy should not be to give government more options, but rather to give Canadians and their families more freedom and more choice to spend their own money on things that matter to them. That too is government working for Canadians.

Canadians are reminded of the GST every time they buy something. It is clearly itemized on every receipt. Canadians will see it reduced to 6% and eventually to 5%. Of course, a reduction in the GST is not the only tax relief taxpayers will see. The government has also promised to lighten the tax burden for business people. After all, it is investment by businesses, large and small, that generate economic growth and create well paying jobs for Canadians. The previous government promised but did not deliver tax relief for business. We will deliver.

We also want to ensure we support the life blood of Canada's economy, which is small business. We all know it is small businesses in towns and neighbourhoods right across this country, like the grocery store, the corner framing shop or the dry cleaners, that create the vast majority of jobs across the country. As we move forward, we will implement our opportunity plan for small business, a package that will lower small business taxes and create an incentive to hire new apprentices in industries that so urgently need them.

It is estimated that Canada currently has a shortage of some 20,000 skilled tradespeople, an unacceptable situation that we all know needs to be addressed. I heard it in Calgary, I heard it in Surrey, British Columbia, and I have heard it in my own home town of Whitby, Ontario, and the greater Toronto area. This shortage of skilled tradespeople poses a threat to future growth and prosperity and it must be dealt with.

The government is prepared to address this issue head on by offering much needed support for businesses that establish apprenticeship positions. Our plan will also raise the threshold at which businesses have to pay the general corporate tax rate and cut the small business rate itself within five years.

● (1755)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance on both his election and his appointment as minister and welcome him to the House. I was looking forward to his comments when he entered the House because one notices when the Minister of Finance arrives and we especially notice it on budget day of course.

The Address

We are all looking forward to that, but in spite of the fact that it was not budget day, we did look for some more details and there were a lot of vague generalities. We are all anxious to have more details, anything really. We hope we have some soon. There was not much unfortunately in his comments today and I guess we have noted already that the plans of the Conservative government are in fact to raise income taxes.

I really question how the government can come in here and talk about tax relief when in fact its plan is to raise income taxes. We know the government's revenues are up. The Conservatives have been left in a very good situation with the strength of the price of oil, for example, and other factors across this country. The revenues of the Government of Canada are very strong.

If it were not for the fact that over the past 13 years the Liberal government has put the finances of this country on a solid footing and left the government in a very good basis, members would not be able to talk about doing any of these things. The fact is the government is in a very good position and there is no reason, whatever it does with the GST, why it should have to actually raise income taxes for lower and middle income people as it is planning to do. It is entirely irresponsible, so I hope the minister will assure us that this will not happen.

Second, I wish to comment on the point of eliminating the child care agreements across this country. The premier of Nova Scotia and the new Premier Rodney MacDonald were here not long ago and met with the Prime Minister and talked about the importance of maintaining those agreements. I wonder what his plans are in relation to those agreements, when the Conservative premier of Nova Scotia is saying to maintain those deals. What is he planning to do? Let us hear about that.

When he talks about job training and the importance of skills, he is right. Skilled workers are incredibly important in this country. There were a couple of words in the Speech from the Throne about competitiveness and productivity, but not the word "education", not the words "job training". He talks about incentives, but no direct support for apprenticeships, for real training. What is the government going to do for those crucial areas? So far we are seeing nothing from the government in these crucial areas.

• (1800)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the member opposite. He talks about raising taxes and lowering taxes. One has to have a starting point, so I have looked for one. There was a traditional budget last year for 2005 which was one of the longest budgets ever with all the papers that went with it, but it did not last very long. All of a sudden there was another budget, the NDP budget. So now we have two budgets from one government in one year.

Then there were more announcements made after the second budget. This is all in one year by one government, the last government the members opposite were involved with. Then we have three sets of numbers. My friend says we would raise taxes, from where? From the first set of numbers, the second set of numbers, or the third set? But there is more. There was then a fourth set of numbers in the fall. And that is not enough. The numbers the member opposite is talking about I believe are election promises

numbers. That is the fifth set of numbers that we have from the members opposite. The member suffers from the confusion that his election promises are the law of Canada.

Hon. Geoff Regan: No, guess again. It's already passed.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: It wasn't passed here.

There is a fifth set of numbers that we hear from the Liberal members and they expect the people of Canada to figure out what they mean by raising or lowering taxes. I know there were tax reductions in budget 2005, but that was four sets of numbers ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before leaving the chair, I want to thank hon. members. I will allow one more question by the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and a very short reply.

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your new responsibilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the constituents of the riding of Durham for their confidence in enabling me to serve them in the 39th Parliament. I not only share the responsibility to serve my riding but also to work with the Minister of Finance as we both serve the people in the region of Durham.

As the Minister of Finance knows, the people in Durham are hard working, have a strong family heritage and have safe communities. I will continue to work with the minister and my colleagues on behalf of Durham and all Canadians. How will the families in Durham, particularly the youth, be better off under the new government?

• (1805)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Minister of Finance, and my admonition remains.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I am always short but I will also try to be brief.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage and I share the honour of representing two of the ridings in the great Durham region, one of the fastest growing areas of Canada and the greater Toronto area in southern Ontario. We have had the opportunity to work together before on projects that are of great importance to our area and to our communities. I am honoured to serve in the House with her now.

We intend to keep the trust that Canadians have placed in us. Although not all Canadians voted for us in the last election, we intend to be a government serving all Canadians and all families which is why we intend to proceed with tax reductions that will serve, not just people who happen to have income tax to pay but all Canadians every time we can.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to cite Standing Order 16(2) in chapter II which states:

When a Member is speaking, no Member shall pass between that Member and the Chair....

The Address

When the last member was speaking the President of the Treasury Board took the opportunity to cross between the Chair and the speaker in violation of the Standing Orders. He tried to duck down while he was doing it but it is in our Standing Orders and I wanted to raise that point for the Chair.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely apologize to the Chair and in the interest of being able to debate the important issues which our constituents sent us here to do I look forward to hearing the next speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We will consider the matter settled and everyone properly chastized. The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you on your appointment to the Chair. I know you will serve us faithfully and well and I am pleased to see you there.

I also appreciate the opportunity to add my remarks to those of the Minister of Finance in support of the government's vision for the future of Canada. In particular, I would like to express my support for the promise made by the Prime Minister to reduce the GST.

However let me first speak about the government's clear plan for what we want to accomplish for Canadians. As the Minister of Finance has just said in the House, Canadians sent us to Ottawa to get things done, and that is exactly what we intend to do, and we will do it in a manner that is committed, focused and fiscally responsible.

We will also be respectful of the hard-earned tax dollars of Canadians. Working families and business people make responsible decisions about their own budgets every single day. They expect governments to behave the same way: to be prudent, to be accountable and to make the tough but necessary choices.

The government is committed to this approach just as we are committed to keeping our word to Canadians from coast to coast to coast and that starts with our five priorities. They are as follows: cleaning up government by passing the federal accountability act; reducing the tax burden of Canadians by starting with a one percentage point cut to the GST; making our streets and communities safer by cracking down on crime and introducing mandatory minimum sentences; supporting families by providing parents with direct financial support to make the child care choices that meet their specific needs, while also working with stakeholders to create new child care spaces; and working with the provinces to improve health care by establishing a patient wait times guarantee.

These initiatives are important to Canadians and Canadians expect their government to deliver, not just talk. That is why they sent us to Ottawa. Canadians also expect and deserve real progress in reining

in unnecessary government spending so that they receive good value for their money. That is why our government will ensure that the spending of taxpayer dollars will be limited only to those programs that are efficient and effective.

This approach to fiscal discipline will translate into substantial savings putting more money into the pockets of hard-working Canadians. Just imagine people being able to keep more of their own money to invest in the things that matter to them. What a wonderful thought.

As the Prime Minister has said, our new Conservative government will be one where we put the budgets of Canadian families first and the pet projects of politicians and bureaucrats last.

Tax relief is a vital part of our plan and delivering on our GST commitment is the first step in our plan. Why not? Let us consider the facts. Unlike any other tax reduction, the GST cut is a tax cut for everyone whether they earn enough money to pay personal income taxes or not. Canadians will see a GST cut in action every time they buy something, regardless of their age or income level. Everyone from a newspaper carrier to a senior on a fixed income will see a savings. Unlike other tax measures, as the Minister of Finance said, no future government will be able to take this tax cut away from Canadians by stealth.

● (1810)

The benefits of a GST cut for individuals can be significant. Just imagine the thousands of dollars in potential GST savings for young families that want to buy a new home or the hundreds saved on the purchase of a car. No matter how large or how small the purchase, Canadians will be saving money while at the same time contributing to economic growth. It is important to point out that this one percentage point cut in the GST is an important part of our tax relief plans but it is by no means the only one.

The Deputy Speaker: I regret having to interrupt the hon. member but pursuant to order made earlier today, the question on the subamendment is deemed put and deemed adopted.

(Amendment to the amendment agreed to)

● (1815)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Government Business No. 3.

[Translation]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

[For continuation of proceedings see Part B]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, April 6, 2006
(Part B)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 6, 2006

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

[English]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 3, Mr. Blaikie in the chair.)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved:

That this committee take note of agricultural issues.

• (1815)

The Chair: Hon. members, I would like to open this session of committee of the whole by making a short statement about take note debates. This may be the first time some members have participated in such a debate so I want to explain how we will proceed.

[Translation]

This evening's debate is a general one on agricultural issues. As is the case for all proceedings of the committee of the whole, members need not be in their own seats to be recognized.

[English]

Each member will be allocated 10 minutes for debate and each speech is subject to a 10 minute question and comment period. Although members may speak more than once, the Chair will generally try to ensure that all members wishing to speak are heard before inviting members to speak again while respecting the proportional party rotations for speakers.

During the 10 minute period for questions and comments there are no set time limits on each intervention. I will work to allow as many members as possible to participate in this part of the proceedings and ask for the cooperation of all members in keeping their interventions as succinct as possible.

[Translation]

As Chair, I will be guided by the rules of the committee of the whole. However, in the interest of a full exchange, I will exercise discretion and flexibility in the application of these rules.

In turn, I would ask all honourable members to exercise caution during this evening's debate. It is very important to respect the traditions of the House in terms of decorum. The members must exercise judgment in their comments and questions so that order is maintained.

May I also remind members that even in committee of the whole ministers and members should be referred to by their title or riding name and, of course, all remarks should be addressed through the Chair. I ask for everyone's cooperation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

The first round of speakers will be the usual all party round, namely, the government, the official opposition, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

[Translation]

At the end of this evening's debate, the committee shall rise and the House shall adjourn until tomorrow.

We may now begin this evening's session.

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on your appointment.

[Translation]

It is an honour for me to speak to this issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this evening's debate.

[English]

This is an issue of vital importance both to those who work in this critically important sector of our economy and to all Canadians. As one of the protest signs on Parliament Hill yesterday stated "farmer's feed cities", so the future of Canadian agriculture is clearly a matter that impacts us all.

[Translation]

Yesterday, thousands of frustrated farmers gathered on Parliament Hill to tell the members of this House that the status quo that they have been forced to endure for too long is completely unacceptable. I would like to say to them, this evening, that the new Government of Canada agrees with them, and that in the weeks, months and years to come, we will take action to support the Canadian agriculture sector.

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• (1820)

[English]

Our government cares deeply about agriculture and we have deep insight into the problems farmers face in part because so many of our caucus members are from rural Canada. In my own case, I have family connections to agriculture through both my mother and my wife, both of whom grew up on farms. In fact, members of our family still work in agriculture today.

My government's direction for agricultural policy will be shaped by our members of Parliament, people from rural areas across this country who have been deeply involved in farming for their entire lives. We are stronger because of this representation and frankly, have a better understanding of the difficult times facing many farm families today than the previous government did.

[Translation]

In the previous Parliament, almost every agriculture question raised in the House resulted from our efforts as the official opposition. We stood up for Canadian farmers because we are dedicated to maintaining what is best about Canada, our traditions. Nothing is more important than the family farm.

[English]

The family farm has been a critical element in the formation of our nation. We cannot really talk about sovereignty as a nation if we do not have a strong role in the production of our food. That is why the government will stand up for a strong, vibrant farm sector that provides security of income to families dependent on farming and food security for all other Canadians.

To this end, one of the first acts of the government was to begin getting the \$750 million promised by the previous government, but never delivered, into the hands of struggling grains and oilseeds farmers.

[Translation]

In contrast to the previous government, with its negligence and inaction, Canada's new government has a tangible plan to support Canadian farmers. For example, we will overhaul the current inadequate agricultural income stabilization program and implement a special disaster assistance fund.

[English]

Quite simply, the existing CAIS program is not working, a fact that Canadian farmers in every province know very well. That is why the government wants to replace CAISP and urges the provinces to work with us to replace CAISP and introduce a simpler, much more responsive program. The new program should properly address the cost of production, market revenue and inventory evaluation.

We are also going to pitch in when the unexpected strikes by creating a fund for disaster relief assistance over and above income stabilization.

During the recent election we promised to commit at least an additional \$500 million every year to farm support programs, a promise we will carry through on. Let me be clear, this will be new money on top of existing agricultural programs, not reallocation.

[Translation]

In addition, this government will stand up for farmers in supply managed sectors. We will ensure that agricultural industries that choose to work within a national supply managed system remain viable.

Our government will continue to support the three pillars of supply management and its objectives—to offer consumers high quality products at good prices with a reasonable return for the producer.

[English]

We are also going to address what has long been a sore point for many western grain farmers, not having the freedom to make their own marketing and transportation decisions. The government will empower producers by allowing them to have dual marketing options when it comes to the Wheat Board.

No discussion of agriculture in this country would be complete without the mention of diversification as in the longer run Canadian farmers will have to look for new opportunities. The government is committed to facilitating this necessary diversification. As those who make their living from the land already know, there is a fast growing market for agricultural products in the area of renewable fuel such as ethanol and biodiesel. Our government intends to merge environmental goals with those of agriculture by requiring an average 5% renewable fuel content in Canadian fuel by 2010.

• (1825)

[Translation]

Not only will this measure help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it will also protect consumers against the rising cost of fuel. By encouraging the consumption of renewable fuels, we will create new incentives for much-needed investments in Canada's rural regions.

Lastly, my government will work hard to promote Canada's commercial interests internationally. We believe that our entire agricultural sector must be protected, not only by strong international free trade, but also by fair trade practices.

[English]

In order to secure free and fair trade, the government will continue to support rules based trading systems like the WTO which we believe are essential to the interests of countries like ours that depend on trade. The future of Canadian agricultural and agri-food products is also dependent on enhanced market access and to that end we will support the phased reduction of all trade distorting barriers and the elimination of all agricultural export subsidies. Simply put, Canada's new government will go to the wall on the issues that matter to our farmers and rural communities.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

During the last election campaign, we committed to protecting the rights of Canadian communities, both urban and rural. Those in power have ignored the interests of rural communities for too long. Today, I want Canadians to know that the era of neglect ended on January 23.

[English]

No longer will the concerns of rural Canada fall on deaf ears. Rural Canadians from coast to coast to coast finally have an ally in Ottawa. I do not say that we can fix the neglect of a decade overnight, and I know that our producers do not expect that, but in the weeks, months and years ahead, our government will move ahead, not with mere words but with actions.

The government, with our agriculture minister leading the charge, will give Canadian farmers the respect that has been denied to them for too long. For the first time in 13 years Ottawa will listen to Canadian farmers and begin to deliver the results they deserve.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to echo the Prime Minister's congratulations to you, sir, on assuming your new functions as our chairman tonight.

We said we want to make this Parliament work in a different way. A take note debate like tonight is an opportunity for us to exchange real ideas about how we can help Canadians arrive at real solutions to their problems.

I must say that I was a little disappointed in the Prime Minister's speech which really was not unlike his speech yesterday. He emphasized the fact that he is here because of change and then he tells everyone there are huge problems and they are all the fault of the old guys.

He said it himself. On January 23 he took power. When is he going to take responsibility for what he is going to do in the country? I do not think a lot of rhetoric helps by going back and saying they did this or did that.

I sat in our cabinet last year. Our party provided \$5 billion to our farmers last year. The farmers know that. Our farmers know that the \$750 million the Prime Minister is talking about giving them today is money that was promised by us and was there for them because we had booked it for them. Our farmers know that we were working at the WTO. Our farmers know that we put in an ethanol program.

Why do we not talk about how we are going to go forward? I would really like to hear from the Prime Minister and his agriculture minister tonight so they can tell the House when can farmers actually expect to receive cash in their pockets which will alleviate the problems they have to deal with.

The Prime Minister pointed out problems in the world that are caused by subsidies in Europe and the United States and many other problems that we have to work on together. When can farmers actually see some concrete results rather than just rhetoric attacking the previous government?

● (1830)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Chair, I can understand why the hon. member would not want to take responsibility for the last 13 years in the agricultural industry in this country.

To answer the question directly, as the member knows, the cheques from the first \$750 million are arriving now. They have been arriving for the past few weeks because of the immediate action the government took. We will be taking further steps in the upcoming budget.

I would share in the view of the Leader of the Opposition that our government House leader has provided this take note debate as an opportunity to hear the ideas of the opposition as we formulate further agricultural policies, but I did not hear any of those ideas in the comments he just made.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Chair, we are in a terrible situation when it comes to farming in Canada right now. Farmer debt has doubled in the last decade. We have to look at where the responsibility lies here and I will take the point of the Leader of the Opposition that now is not the time to point fingers but to talk about the issues.

Many farmers today are producing the food that we eat at a loss in the big cities or anywhere else in the country. Their family members have to work off the farm in order to subsidize the food that we eat.

I met with farmers out here and I met with farmers during the election. They would take out their accounts. I remember one event during the campaign. A farmer came to us and this was a bit of a surprise. He showed up with the accounts of his farm. He showed that he and his family this year were going to lose \$45,000 that had to be subsidized by his wife and by him taking another job and so on.

My question has to do with whether the government is really going to stand up for farmers. The Prime Minister mentioned the whole issue of the WTO. It happens that on January 31 of this year the government lost an appeal at the Canadian International Trade Tribunal that gave up a right that Canada had negotiated in the last round of the WTO and had to do with the dairy sector. The dairy sector is now open to uncontrolled imports of milk protein concentrates. This is going to hurt our farmers dramatically.

We heard yesterday from the President of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, Jacques Laforge, that there was a meeting and an answer was promised in two weeks. That was two months ago.

My question is for the Prime Minister. When are we going to see action to protect dairy farmers before they go under and we will not be getting milk products produce by them here in this country because they simply will not have the funds to run their farms?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Chair, we are certainly aware of the WTO decision. The government vehemently disagrees with that decision and has fought it through all litigation available. We will continue to do so. We will look at every conceivable option that is available to protect our farmers if and when this rule comes into effect.

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• (1835)

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank the Prime Minister for being here this evening to kick off this debate.

One of the things we have to realize is that we are talking now of the three-quarters of a billion dollars that is going out into the agricultural community. It is being sopped up so quickly that it is not really making a huge difference. It is helping and of course the agricultural producers will take that money.

It seems to me that we have two issues. We have a continental market with which we can work. We can harmonize as much as we can with the huge customer we have to the south but there are also markets farther away. If we are going to work through the WTO, I believe that is the right angle and exactly what you said, but what are we going to do with our closest neighbour to the south? How are we going to enhance the prospects of our agricultural community by getting it more interested in the products that we have?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Chair, one of the many things the Minister of Agriculture is looking at is stronger marketing programs. At the same time we have to be frank here in saying that Canada is caught in the crossfire of an international subsidy war. It is not just going on overseas. It is also the case in the United States, which is one of the reasons that we want to look at every option available to better support our farmers as the battle continues.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, well there was really nothing new in the remarks from the Prime Minister, but I have information from a farmer in the Porcupine and district disaster area which would be in the riding of Yorkton—Melville. This individual, Lee Howse, said that the farmers in the rural municipality of Porcupine No. 395 in northeastern Saskatchewan find themselves in a catastrophic situation. He went to say in a letter to me and others that a request to the Minister of Agriculture and to the member for Yorkton—Melville for a disaster relief program to help the farmers in Porcupine has been unsuccessful. He said that they desperately need our assistance to pressure the government in power.

That farmer in the riding of Yorkton—Melville is saying that the member from that riding and the Minister of Agriculture are not coming forward with immediate funds. He wants pressure put on the government. There is no better person to pressure than the Prime Minister. Will he deal with this issue and immediately come forward with cash to help those cash-strapped farmers?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Chair, what a contrast. We have beside me the Minister of Agriculture who has been consulting farmers around the country and members here have been working hard on behalf of farmers for years. The member for Lethbridge just asked me a question about trade negotiations on the grain subsidy wars. Not only has he been throughout Canada but he was in the United States during the BSE crisis fighting on behalf of our industry and here is that member of Parliament who for 13 years was as quiet as—

An hon. member: Missing in action.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Absolutely missing in action. Now he has found his voice for agriculture and nobody in the areas of the country he talks about is going to buy it for a minute.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, if the Prime Minister thinks I was quiet, he was absolutely wrong because I had consultations with farmers last year. I presented the report to the minister of agriculture. I would ask the present Minister of Agriculture to pass that report on to the Prime Minister. In fact in the last election many of the members on that side of the House quoted from that report. They said that it made a lot of sense to go forward with those recommendations. I ask the Minister of Agriculture to ensure that the Prime Minister sees that report and acts on it as rapidly as he can.

First and foremost, I want to thank all parties for their support in having this debate because there is indeed a farm crisis. Thousands of farmers were on the Hill yesterday, not because they wanted to be but because they had to be to try to push the government into taking some action. As we heard from the Prime Minister's remarks, there is really very little action. The throne speech was much like the Prime Minister's remarks, no action, just words.

The Conservatives say we have to wait for the budget. That is not true. The Minister of Agriculture could have asked the Minister of Finance to use some of that surplus before it went back to the treasury on March 31. That is what happened last year with the previous minister of agriculture when it was coming up to March 31. There was a problem in the farm community. The minister prepared some documentation and he received \$1 billion from the minister of finance. Members opposite could have done the same and could have put cash in producers' pockets immediately.

Those members are talking now about \$755 million that the previous government booked in November. They are bragging about getting it out. The fact of the matter is the government has put out only about \$400 million to producers. What is the holdup? Get those cheques out. Those cheques would have been in farmers' pockets by now had there not been an election. Members on that side of the House talk about a lot of things, but the minister and the government must make an immediate cash infusion to the farmers prior to spring planting.

There is no question that some will wonder why farmers require dollars. Some will wonder why they are in a crisis. What is the real reason? I agree with the Prime Minister's point that a lot of the crisis is due to international trade situations, to subsidies in the United States and Europe, to policies pushing prices down and making our farmers uncompetitive. I had the opportunity to look into that issue a year ago and the real reason farmers are in crisis is a lack of power for primary producers in the marketplace.

I refer the Prime Minister to that document. There are some 46 recommendations in that report. They are not partisan recommendations and members opposite know that. They are recommendations that came from the farm community itself. I would refer that document to the Prime Minister and to the government. I urge him to implement many of those recommendations.

I would ask for unanimous consent in the House to table the report.

● (1840)

The Chair: The member has asked for unanimous consent to table a document. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, there are recommendations in it. I would recommend that the minister take them to heart.

Without government payments, last year farmers would have been in the negative. As the leader of the official opposition indicated, we did put a lot of money out. Last year, over and above normal programming, we put out approximately \$2 billion, totalling close to \$6 billion of all programs, yet farmers still find themselves in difficulty.

I want to make the point that the problem is not the farmers. Some in the public would ask why we continue to put money out to farmers. Canadian farmers are among the most productive in the world. They contribute to our balance of trade. They are responsible for one in eight jobs in Canada. Canada is the fourth largest exporter of agriculture and agrifood products in the world. We have increased our food exports to \$25 billion. Farmers are doing their part. The problem is that other players in the system are gaining the profits.

When we look at our farms and examine the facts closely, every economic indicator is positive: production, revenue, exports, output per acre, output per farmer, cost per unit, et cetera, every indicator that is, except net farm income. As farmers produce more, export more and produce more efficiently, farmers are rewarded with less. That is unacceptable.

The Prime Minister has said that he wants to move to a cost of production program. We have no disagreement with that. In fact, we favour cost of production, but members opposite and the Prime Minister have to understand that we have to get from here to there. In the meantime, the 10,000 farmers who were here on the Hill yesterday need ad hoc funding. They need a program in place to carry them over until we can get to those kinds of policies. We will be supportive in terms of cost of production, but in the interim, farmers need cash and they need it now. We need a commitment from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture to get that ad hoc funding money out there prior to spring planting.

The Prime Minister talked about scrapping CAIS. There is no question that program has to be fixed, but keep in mind if the program was not in place, the \$5 billion that went out to farmers over the last two years would not have gone out. It is not enough to say scrap it; we have to replace it with a program that assists farmers with cash.

In the election campaign the Prime Minister and the Conservatives talked about \$500 million more. The impression was left with the

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farm community by those members opposite that the \$500 million more was actually more, but as compared to what the previous government did, it is actually \$1.2 billion less. I would like to see somebody stand and deny it. The \$500 million is over and above regular safety net programming. It is not over and above what the previous government paid out. It is \$1.2 billion less. I am asking the Minister of Agriculture and others on the other side to commit to pay that \$500 million per year over and above what the previous government actually paid out. That is what farmers require.

The last point I will make before I close is that in an interview the other day, the Minister of Agriculture basically said, "Don't blame me. Blame the provinces". If we are going to develop agriculture policy in this country—

An hon. member: Blame the Liberals.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, they certainly try to blame us, but they cannot get away with that all the time. That will wear thin after a while because farmers know the difference. The Conservatives are in government. They have to be responsible. The government has to do the right thing. It has to put money in farmers' pockets. When will it do it?

● (1845)

The Conservatives cannot just blame us. They cannot just ignore their responsibility and say that it is the provinces' fault. They are the Government of Canada and we expect them, as the government, to come up with an agriculture policy that will make a difference in terms of farmers' livelihoods and the livelihood of their communities so they can get on with being prosperous, with farming in the farm community and with contributing to the Canadian economy. That is what we expect of the government. We need programs that actually mean something and not just the words it is currently using.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Chair, I listened to the member and not even once did he reference his 13 years in government and working to make a difference for farmers in Canada. Suddenly, with a new government in place, he expects the whole situation to be changed overnight. I do not think that is acceptable nor is it rational.

What did the previous government ever do about the ramp up of subsidies by the United States to its agriculture community? What did the previous government ever do with the subsidization in the European community? Why is it that we are being snookered internationally after the Liberal government's record of utter failure to deal with the Americans and the European Union?

The member talks about supply management but under his government's record what happened to supply management? What happened on the international scene? Why is it that we now have foreign products coming into our country under a regime that was set up by the Liberal government not us?

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• (1850)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, the member started off by talking about the last 13 years. I am very proud of what the Liberal government accomplished over the last 13 years. The Conservatives have a surplus but they will not use any of the surplus to give farmers the necessary cash. We did that a year ago. We put record payments out over the last two years because we turned a country that was virtually bankrupt into a country that had surpluses.

Why was the country near bankruptcy? It was near bankruptcy because of the Mulroney regime. The present Prime Minister has taken some of those very people who drove the country to near bankruptcy and has put them in his office and is using them for advisers. My goodness, that is not the way to go. We want to keep surpluses.

As a result of that Liberal record where we put the country and the economy into a surplus position, the present government now has some money to do things with. I would ask the government to consider the farm community in terms of utilizing those surpluses that we left it.

On supply management our record is strong. This party, the NDP and the Bloc have always supported supply management. As for that party over there, do members remember its Alliance policy platform? Do members remember its Reform policy platform? Some of those members sit in that caucus and their policy was not very supportive of supply management. In fact, their policy was to keep it and have a transition program in place while they moved to the market economy. That is not what supply management producers want to hear. They want to have strong support and strong action. When our party was in government we were in support of the supply management industry.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am proud to ask a question of my hon. colleague from P.E.I.

We, in the NDP, remember all too well the drastic cuts to the farm community from 1993 to 1997, which the then Reform Party supported without reservation.

We also know that the problems in the agricultural industry just did not happen overnight. These are long term problems that have been happening to our farm families. The Liberals had 13 years to correct some of those problems but, unfortunately, they failed on most counts.

I have a question for the member who is a farmer himself. A few years ago our caucus had farmers and their families from Saskatchewan visit us. I asked a young 12 year old boy if he planned to go into the agricultural industry or into farming in the future and he said no. I asked him how many kids in his school planned to go into the farming industry and he said that nobody he knew.

Because of the lack of attention paid by previous governments and the current government, we are asking who the farmers of the future will be. What does the hon. member think will be the future of our farm families in this country?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, that is one of the reasons that we did the kinds of consultations we did with the farm community last

year. We came down with a report that identified the real problem in the farm community as the lack of market power.

If we look at this year we will find that while farm incomes are the lowest they have been, even with record government payments that took them out of the red and put them into the black, they are still having financial difficulty. While that is happening, the agri-food sector is having record profits in terms of the chemical industry, the pesticide industry, the fertilizer industry and the grain marketing industry. I might say that in terms of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture advocating doing away with the Canadian Wheat Board, there is a benchmark study that shows that single desk selling actually adds \$160 million per year to farmers' pockets. The parliamentary secretary's position in trying to advocate away that single desk selling will take \$160 million out of those farmers' pockets who are going broke and put it in the pockets of the agri-business sector which is receiving record profits. That is not the answer.

I will quote William Heffernan, a sociologist, who had it right when he said that "economic power, not efficiency predicts survival in the system". That is what we need to do. We need to empower farmers in the farm community through marketing agencies, such as the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management and deal at the WTO, and ensure that a government has safety net programs to assist farmers when world prices are low.

• (1855)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Chair, a famous report that has been referred to today is the Easter report which contains a number of recommendations. Why did the former government not act on those recommendations?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, the member's question would probably be better asked of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food because the report came down in June and it went to a federal-provincial meeting of ministers and deputy ministers who at that time set up a committee to study it and look at ways of implementing some of those recommendations.

I know for a fact that those were federal and provincial Ministers of Agriculture who were looking for ways to implement those recommendations. As it happened, however, an election intervened. I know the Department of Agriculture over at the Sir John Carling building were not too enamoured with the report but I sometimes wonder if they know there is a farm crisis.

I would have to ask the Minister of Agriculture whether or not that committee of ministers and deputy ministers reported back to the next meeting of ministers and deputies and indicated the road map that they would follow to implement that report. I would expect the government opposite is now putting in process that plan of how it will implement some of those 40 recommendations?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is good to add my voice to those who are expressing concern for the crisis in agriculture tonight. The one thing the people watching us on television cannot see is that virtually the entire Conservative caucus and virtually no Liberals are here to show their interest in the debate on agriculture. I wish the cameras would show the support for the agriculture community from the Conservative caucus.

The member pointed out that he had received a letter from someone in my riding. I would like to point out to him that in my riding virtually 100% of the farmers will tell me that CAIS is not working. It is a Liberal-designed program that is not working for farmers. That particular example that was used is a disaster. The way the program is designed it cannot help those farmers.

Why was it not designed to help farmers and why are they so displeased with that Liberal designed CAIS program that we probably will have around for a couple more years? The Liberal government tied the hands of farmers. They virtually have no way to access help.

• (1900)

The Chair: Before I recognize the member for Malpeque, I should tell him that he has about five seconds to answer that question.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, let me put the five seconds this way. We admitted that CAIS was not doing all it should do and we put in place ad hoc funding of nearly \$2 billion last year and nearly \$2 billion the year before. The government can do the same with the surpluses we left and put cash in farmers' pockets now before spring planting.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Chair, first, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker of this House.

Second, I find the behaviour of some of my friends here this evening somewhat deplorable. Just because we are talking about agriculture does not mean that this House should sound like a barnyard.

The farmers who came to the Hill this week came because they are desperate. Some of them do not know what to do anymore. They are not getting by. There is even a higher than average suicide rate among farm people. That is how far we have sunk. Incomes are lower than in previous decades. We ask a lot of farmers. We ask them to feed the people, to live on the land and to be an important economic sector, and we are demanding that they meet a lot of new environmental rules. This is what the farming community is up against.

The election generated a lot of hope among farmers. That is understandable, after 13 years of Liberal neglect. This week, however, they were disappointed. They expected that the Prime Minister would put forward a few proposals and not be satisfied with simply criticizing what happened in the past, or rather what did not happen in the past under the Liberal reign. Criticizing is one thing—we had the election campaign for doing that. This government has been in office for two months. The time has come for action.

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Promises were made during that election, to deal with a crisis. Substantial amounts of money were promised. What is called for now is \$500 million, and the government has that money. We have to act immediately, which does not mean that we are going to solve all of the problems. We cannot wait until we have solved all of the problems before helping farmers. Some of them will no longer be here by then. It is urgent that action be taken.

The problems are familiar ones. Most importantly, there is unfair competition, particularly from the United States and the European Union, which provide subsidies at levels that far exceed what we offer here. We in Canada have actually slashed subsidies. I would like to see us have a policy that reduces and eliminates subsidies, but the balance of power is against us. If we do that while subsidies are being maintained or increased in the United States or Europe, we will find ourselves in a position that is absolutely not competitive.

I am talking about direct, recognized subsidies. Yet we know that in the United States, since the National Security Act, the lands of American farmers are irrigated free of charge by the U.S. army, in case, I imagine, the United States is invaded by Cuba, so the tanks can cross the property of American farmers. Wheat is transported free of charge on the Mississippi, in case the Americans are invaded by North Korea and there is famine in the United States. We have to add that.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: That is the case, Mr. Minister of Transport. I am indulging my imagination a little and exaggerating the situation, but I am not exaggerating when I say that wheat is transported free of charge and lands are irrigated free of charge. All of that is happening under the National Security Act. I am of course exaggerating when I speak of the United States being invaded, as it makes no sense that it should be. However the situation exists, and we are not raising these practices with the Americans. Canada remains silent and accepting of these unfair policies.

So this is a matter of international trade. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tells us that he has to wait on the provinces. I remind him that international trade is a federal matter, a federal responsibility. We sovereignists do not question that fact. So it is with federal money—especially since the government has surpluses—that we have to assist the farmers.

• (1905)

Last June, the Bloc Québécois proposed a motion that the Canadian government and its negotiators in Geneva give unconditional support to the supply management policies. Yet after signing in 1997 a letter challenging supply management, and after the adoption of the motion by the House of Commons last June, one negotiator in Geneva said that he did not feel himself bound by the motion of the House of Commons. That is a position of weakness, and unacceptable. If certain persons negotiating on behalf of the Canadian government refuse the mandates they are imposed by the House of Commons, they should be removed. I ask the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to please put this negotiator in his place.

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Let us proceed immediately with the surpluses. Let us take the \$500 million that they need. There are certainly other problems that must be tackled. We need to have coherent policies.

Remember mad cow. The problem occurred in Alberta, and every region of Canada, including Quebec, was affected. When the outbreak of Newcastle disease in poultry occurred in the United States, the Americans regionalized that matter. They realized that New York chickens had not been infected by Los Angeles chickens. As a result, not all of the U.S. regions were affected.

However, here, on account of one cow in Alberta, all regions were affected. This jeopardized the whole cattle and milk production sector. If we had allocated all the available money to Alberta instead of sprinkling it over all the regions, we would have helped the farmers in Alberta more and we would not have caused a crisis in the other regions of Canada. Like us, the Liberal government in Quebec is asking that these crises be regionalized.

We also have to deal with the problems associated with young farmers. Young people can no longer afford to buy farms. On the one hand, if parents sell their farm for less, they lose their pension and their RRSP. On the other hand, if they want to live out their old age at the standard they deserve, they sell the farm for too much and the children cannot buy it. There has to be a tax solution for this problem.

We must also develop a customs policy with all the tools available to us, including Article XXVIII of the GATT, in the issue of milk protein. This has not been done, no more than it has in the case of butter oil. As for cheese sticks, the Bloc told the Liberals for two years that action was needed. They refused and denied that a problem existed. It was recognized only at the end of two years, after milk producers had suffered losses of some \$500 million. We have to use the arms at our disposal. We can use XXVIII of the GATT. I do not understand why Canada is not doing so.

I would also like programs to be developed that take into account the diversity that exists throughout Canada and Quebec. We have to end programs that apply to the entire country. There are different realities. Some programs in Quebec have been running for several years, such as La Financière agricole du Québec. It has remained in place, whereas the federal government has the habit of every two years implementing a new policy that never lasts more than two years. When a policy has been working well for 20 years, can we respect it? Could we acknowledge the existence of such diversity?

I spoke earlier about the mad cow crisis. When we suggested regionalizing the issue, the Liberals told us that we were all part of Canada and that the same rules would be applied across Canada. When we get to the point where we are making mad cow a symbol of national unity, we have a serious problem.

To conclude, it is time to sit down with the farmers and develop some practical and realistic policies that can be applied according to the diversity and types of production that exist. We should not try to apply policies to the whole country. Right now, we absolutely need emergency assistance. If we wait until we have perfect programs, once we have them, a lot of farmers will not have survived.

• (1910)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Chair, as always I appreciate the members of the Bloc Québécois and not just their interest, but their devotion to issues involving agriculture.

[Translation]

Clearly the Bloc Québécois is passionate about agriculture.

[English]

The Bloc shares its passion with this side of the House. It is always an interesting debate when we get into the House to talk about the best way forward.

To be clear with the leader of the Bloc, I have suggested that our party's position, and I will deal with this more in my presentation later, has been that we want to change the CAIS program, and we campaigned on that. We want to change it so there is a separate stand-alone program for income support for farmers and a separate disaster relief program.

There has been an awful evolution of the CAIS program. Trying to make this work for farmers has been a terrible problem. As I have travelled across the country, what is clear to me is farmers want a separate disaster relief program from that. What I am faced with, and I am not picking on the provinces, is that this is a federal-provincial shared jurisdiction. I need the cooperation of the provinces if we are to move quickly on that.

Right now all 10 provinces and the territories are in favour of retaining the CAIS program. I respect that. It is my hope that by June, when we meet at our next federal-provincial meeting, I will be putting forward proposals to separate disaster relief from income support, and that is what farmers need. I think it will address many of the needs about which farmers are concerned.

On another note, the leader talked about many issues in his presentation. I would like to assure him that I agree with his idea that, when possible, we need to regionalize problems such as disease outbreaks in Canada. We need to take advantage of our big geographic country that makes it possible to regionalize disease and protect Canadian agriculture generally by doing this.

A good example of how that works was the concern raised when some poultry products were imported from France to Quebec recently. We were able to work with the government of France to regionalize the problem in France. We made sure that trade of other products coming into Quebec on an ongoing basis resumed very quickly. It seems to me that the leader is right. Whenever possible, we need to move to regionalize things within Canada so it does not disrupt trade or harm our farmers from coast to coast. When there is a problem, let us deal with it quickly, get help to clean up whatever that problem might be and ensure that farmers across the country continue to do their business.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Chair, I do not have any questions, but I have a few suggestions following the minister's comments.

When the minister says he will meet with the provinces in June, that is great, but there is a problem with that. The farmers told us yesterday that many of them do not have enough money to buy seed. If they wait until the meeting in June there is a problem. Ottawa is in the habit of starting processes. They talk about processes. At the end of the day they often forget the purpose of the process and take things at their own pace. People want us to resolve things immediately. They cannot wait for a meeting in June, which will be handed off to officials at every level of government, with a response expected in November. Harvest time will be over and seeding time is right now. This money is urgently needed, especially since this is an international trade issue. Since this government recognizes the fiscal imbalance, it can understand that the provinces do not have much money.

I am asking the minister two things. One: act immediately. Since he told us he is prepared to opt for quick, immediate solutions, if he allocates \$500 million right now we will applaud him, the sovereignists that we are.

I am also asking him to do something else about the mad cow problem. The issue of cows under 30 months has been resolved, but that does nothing to resolve the problem for dairy farmers, especially those in Quebec. There is the issue of cull cattle. We saw, and I am not kidding, cheques for 8¢ for the sale of a cull cow. Eight cents! Farmers brought these cheques here to Parliament.

There are people starving. Cull cattle is a good example of regionalized politics. As a government, you can take immediate action. We are asking you to do so.

● (1915)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Chair, over the last 10 years, we have had more emergency night debates on agriculture than on any other subject. I have said before it is like the scene from the movie *Groundhog Day*. We always end up playing the same scenario. There are a few new actors in this, but we always end up with there will be a meeting three months from now and something will happen, or we are waiting to get CAIS fixed. Meanwhile our farmers are going under.

Patience is not good enough at this point. We have gone beyond the point of patience.

I would like to ask the member this, particularly in light of the recent meeting with the President of the United States where our government announced that he was our best friend. This is great, but best friends do not put their best friends out of business. That is what is happening now with the dumping, particularly in corn and other products. What concrete steps does the member expect the government to take this year, not next year, to stop the dumping which is putting our farmers out of business?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Chair, when I spoke before I said that money has to be invested immediately. If discussions are to be held

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with George W. Bush, policies have to be adopted for dealing with the United States. I will return to this later. It is important to have those discussions and bring the necessary pressure to bear. However, money must be invested immediately. As well, there are policies that can be applied, such as cull cow policies and using Article XXVIII of the GATT on milk proteins and butter oil. A few years ago, we ran into the same problem with cheese sticks.

I would add that we have to establish a balance of power, not that we should face off against the Americans and the Europeans. Still, practically eliminating subsidies here, while they are maintaining them or even increasing them, amounted to skewing the balance of power. Of course in some sectors that encourages imports.

Here is another example that can easily be applied: there are crops it is impossible to sell here because of the use of certain insecticides. We are right about that. Some insecticides cannot be used on tomatoes, since they could not be sold on the Canadian market. However, if those same tomatoes come from Mexico or the United States, and the same insecticide has been used, they may be sold in Canada. That is completely ridiculous! An insecticide that goes through customs does not cease to be an insecticide. There is a problem somewhere, and it is not at customs; it is in the government's decisions. Those products should be banned, and we should demand that other countries meet the same environmental standards as the ones we impose on ourselves. That is a concrete step to take. These are things that we can say to the Americans.

The same principle applies to lumber. It is fine to tell the Americans that we will keep going, but the loan guarantees that we were seeking and that were promised by the Liberals, up to \$800 million—which is inadequate—were never given. The Conservatives, who were in opposition, wanted more. They now have the perfect opportunity to enjoy being right. We therefore ask that they give more loan guarantees.

● (1920)

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is obvious that our Prime Minister and this government are very committed to farmers. The first act the government did was to release three-quarters of a billion dollars to farmers immediately.

The member and his caucus have supported other initiatives that the Conservatives have put forward, particularly the trade compensation act that was supposed to help farmers and softwood lumber producers in the late fall. Will the member and his party support the government's initiative in relation to the CAIS program, to divide it into two programs, the emergency relief and the income stabilization?

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[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Chair, we must look carefully at these programs. We must sit down and take the necessary time to examine them, together with the provinces. Each case will be different, depending on the region and what is produced. For example, the *Financière agricole du Québec* functions in a manner that may not work elsewhere. Yet, it is appropriate for Quebec. Let us not generalize. We remain open-minded.

That said, before we reach that point—we will talk about that in June—I repeat, this matter is urgent. If we hope to start seeding in June, we are up against a big problem. Since the government is aware of the fiscal imbalance and given that no one can change the order of the seasons, we ask that the government act immediately.

[English]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is an honour to be here with my esteemed and experienced colleagues who have spoken. I am hoping to add a few words to this debate.

Our rural way of life is under threat.

[Translation]

Agriculture in Canada is facing a crisis. And that crisis has a negative effect on rural lifestyles. Indeed, if we do not support our farmers and their families, we will soon see our rural communities disappear.

The NDP places people first. If a farmer is able to earn a living, he can then contribute to his local economy, which ensures the survival of the rural lifestyle in Canada.

[English]

Unfortunately, we in Canada stumbled along for many years without a clear vision for Canadian agriculture. What is the situation out there in Essex County with those farmers I spoke to yesterday, or those in the southern Okanagan or, for that matter, right across this vast country of ours?

[Translation]

I have had the opportunity to live in each of the main regions of Canada and I have seen tiny villages surrounded by thousands of kilometres of farm land. We have no right to contribute to the disappearance of this very vital part of our immense country. Lastly, we are losing our ability to feed ourselves, which means that, little by little, we are also losing our self-sufficiency in the agricultural sector.

[English]

What is happening out there?

In my riding, for example, our fruit growers, especially apple growers, are not able to compete with the cheap, subsidized apples from Washington state being dumped in our markets. Orchards are having to apply for a replanting program to introduce other varieties that might be more profitable—and that is “might be”—or growers will be faced with giving up their farms altogether.

As was mentioned, in the Porcupine district in Saskatchewan, farmers are in a disaster situation due to the 2005 flood. This area

was declared a disaster area in both 2005 and 2006 and as yet there is no program to address the problem.

According to the report put out by the hon. member for Malpeque, the per farm basic average income, which was \$21,000 in the 1970s, has now dropped to minus \$10,000 or minus \$20,000. The farmer's share of retail beef prices between 1981 and 2002 was dismal, according to the report, with \$5.67 a kilogram at the counter for beef bringing the primary producer only 14¢. This is totally unacceptable.

The farm income situation is unprecedented, particularly in the grains and oilseeds and horticulture industries. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada predicts that the realized net income for farmers could fall as much as 54% in 2006.

● (1925)

[Translation]

So, what are they doing? The government has to act, obviously. It is our job to express our vision for Canadian agriculture in the clearest of terms.

[English]

Farmers need an immediate financial infusion now as an initial payment on long term program solutions. The two gentlemen I was talking with today said that Ontario alone needs \$1.5 billion to cover 2005, let alone thinking about 2006 and other parts of the country.

According to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the \$500 million committed in the Conservative election campaign is needed to improve current business risk management programs but will do little in addressing the farm income deficiency.

Any ad hoc money must not be an offset to the CAIS program and should include farm fed grain.

Our primary producers are competing against heavily subsidized farmers in the U.S. and the European Union. One of our priorities at the WTO is to push for an eventual reduction of these subsidies. However, in the meantime, our primary producers need a level playing field.

It is not logical to push for something in the future and not support our farmers now. There must be a long term risk management plan put into place to guarantee our producers a floor price. If Americans want to dump apples into Canada, let us have a minimum floor price they have to charge so our apple growers can compete fairly.

To guarantee the survival of our agriculture industry, we have to stand up for our policies at the WTO negotiations. Under no circumstances should we allow American multinationals or other countries to dictate what we do with our Canadian Wheat Board. I strongly urge the hon. Minister of Agriculture to let it be known that our Canadian Wheat Board single desk seller is not up for discussion at the WTO. It is our farmers who will decide what happens, and nobody else.

[Translation]

What is more, the survival of supply management depends on success in the sensitive products category. We are seeing proposals that would require Canada to abandon up to half of some domestic markets under supply management. This is unacceptable. Supply management interests are top priority in WTO negotiations.

[English]

Our supply and demand system is efficient. It provides our primary producers with income stability. It does not cost the taxpayer one cent. In fact, the supply management system that currently exists in our dairy and poultry industries could be a model for other segments of agriculture that are suffering.

Let us not forget that under the last 12 years of Liberal government, farm incomes set record lows, while multinational agribusinesses made record profits. Between 1996 and 2001, farm employment dropped 26% and Canada lost 29,625 family farms forever.

When the two-year U.S. ban on our beef bled 75,000 Canadian jobs and wiped out farm equity, Liberal support was late and often inadequate, but \$40 million went to multinational meat packers whose profits were soaring.

Today, as they have over the past decade, corporate agribusinesses are squeezing family farmers. They are pushing up input costs, for everything from herbicides to equipment, and paying less for product at the gate as they tighten their grip on the whole market chain.

We have a blueprint for agriculture in Canada, put out by the hon. member for Malpeque. This report can serve as a basis for a national agriculture policy. Frankly, I am surprised it was not done five, six or seven years ago, not just in 2005.

[Translation]

The time to act is now. I promise to work hard with all members of the House of Commons to develop our policy on agriculture in Canada.

Our Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has toured the country listening to what farmers have to say. He is very aware of what needs to be done. We must support him in his work.

[English]

Let us work to ensure the survival of agriculture and our rural way of life. This will benefit not only those who live in rural Canada but all citizens of this great country.

• (1930)

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I listened attentively to what the gentleman across the way had to say. I find most of what he had to say to be the kind of thinking I support.

He is a well travelled gentleman. I think he has spoken to a lot of people across this country, to consumers and producers, and I am wondering what his concept is of what consumers believe they are paying relative to what the farmer gets at the farm gate. Do consumers really understand the reality that is taking place out there? Do they understand that farmers are getting only a very small pittance of the cost of the product ultimately received at the counter in the stores?

Would he agree that in this country we should possibly be considering a food tax, or whatever it would be, so that consumers are ready to pay more in some form for the product, given the fact they could be assured that in the future they would have a safe and reliable food supply? Because I believe that unless we have this, we do not really have a food policy in this country.

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Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Chair, I think we first have to educate the consumer. I do not think we have done enough. Nobody has done enough to show the average consumer what the farmer is getting and where it is coming from.

Parallel to this, I think we have to make it easier to produce in Canada. In the region where I live, we have greenhouses for tomatoes and cucumbers. There is no reason why we cannot grow broccoli and other vegetables and depend less on countries other than Canada. I think that is the first step.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to congratulate the member on his appointment as agriculture critic. I am sure he will execute his duties with great conviction.

In my constituency I have a number of producers, all across the old Osgoode and Rideau townships in South Gloucester and South Nepean, and I can tell members that the situation is really bad. People are really hurting. There is genuine desperation.

I had a number of my constituents on the Hill for this recent rally and I can tell members that they are not taking this much working time out of their day for the fun of it. They are spending a lot of gas and a lot of time coming all the way up here because the situation is really genuinely bad. It is getting desperate.

I have a few comments to make and I want to see how the hon. member responds.

First, I believe that we have to be careful in this country, because over the long term we have seen that supply management is slowly dying the death of a thousand cuts. One exception here, one loophole there, and before we know it, the quota system that has made supply managed sectors the only profitable ones in this country is being whittled away. I believe we need to make a vigorous defence of it and reinforce our efforts to defend the system of supply management that has preserved and strengthened those sectors.

Second, we need some sort of risk management mechanism to deal with the ups and downs of revenue and prices for our farmers, because the CAIS program is just not working.

I wonder if the hon. member would rise in his place and tell me what he thinks about these ideas. I know that he has been studying and researching quite intently. I invite his comments.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Chair, obviously the member has been doing his homework too. His remarks reflect what I have been hearing when I talk to representatives of the agricultural industry and to farmers, which is that we must be very careful. We must not allow our supply management system to be watered down. It works, it does not cost a cent, and at least people in those areas are making money. Also, as I said, perhaps we can use it as a model for other sectors.

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Yes, we need a different program for risk management. Obviously something is not working. That is what I heard today. I have talked to farmers today, and especially yesterday, and to farmers in my riding. The current CAIS program is not working. Other programs are not working. We need to revamp them and we have to do it very quickly.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Chair, I feel as though we are in a strange situation here, because we are all agreed. We are all agreed that agriculture is going down the tubes and that in fact it might already be there. We are all agreed that CAIS does not work and we are all agreed that supply management does, yet we never seem to get anywhere.

Our poor producers went to the Ontario legislature a few weeks ago and asked for help. The Ontario legislature looked at them and said, "We have done our share. Go to the federal legislature". They showed up here. We cannot send them the message that we would like to help them but the provinces are not stepping up to the plate. It is incumbent upon us as the federal House of this country to come together.

It is fairly straightforward. I think this is one area where we would have all-party unanimity. We need to work together as four parties and say that we have to take action now. We have to take action now in the area of supply management. It is fairly straightforward in regard to what our message is and terms that are negotiated. In terms of a basic floor price, we have to look at that. We have to look at practical things that can be put in place now.

I would like to ask the hon. member why he thinks it is that we are all standing around here, all of us caring passionately about agriculture, and arguing with each other when we just need to do the job.

• (1935)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Chair, I appreciate my hon. colleague's question and statements. I would like to commit myself and those in our party to work together with others to do something. The people we talked to today at the demonstration are looking to us for leadership. It is not a time to say that the provinces have to do this or that. We are the ones who were elected. We have to take the leadership. I am committed and I have committed myself as the agriculture critic to working with our hon. minister and the hon. member for Malpeque and others. Let us get on with the job.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his support in the report. I wish to say that really it was not my report. It was the report from farmers because that is what they told me. I thank him for his support.

Even I would recognize that all those recommendations cannot be put in place overnight. The recommendations will take time. I hope the government commits itself to doing that. I know the member opposite is concerned and I know as well that he talked with primary producers who were on the Hill yesterday and no doubt they spoke of an immediate need.

We need to send a message to the Minister of Finance that farmers need help in the short term until some of these other programs are in place. Maybe the Minister of Finance could take a little of that surplus that we left him, about \$3 billion or so. I believe the Federation of Agriculture said that there is a \$6 billion shortage.

Perhaps the minister could come up with at least half of that prior to spring planting, so that farmers get a crop in the ground.

I would like to know what the view is of the member opposite. He talked with the farmers yesterday. How immediate is the problem? Do the farmers need the money right now?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Chair, we are in a crisis situation. I have said this before and I will say it again, we are better positioned this year with our hon. members on this side of the House to work together with the minister, to work together with the cabinet and, yes, let us put pressure on the finance minister. Let us show him that we in fact are in a crisis situation and that this is vital. It is not something that we can put off until tomorrow.

The report is there. Let us use that as a basis. Let us forget about what happened. We can continue blaming the other side for years. Let us forget about what happened and get on with the job. Let us do it starting tomorrow.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on your appointment. With all your experience I am sure you will do an excellent job. I also want to thank my new colleague for being elected. I am sure he will add his voice to the House.

I had many constituents who came to the Hill. I think there were 8,000 people here yesterday. I have a riding that neighbours Ottawa and many of my people came a long way on tractors. They started out at two o'clock in the morning to be here.

These farmers came here to give us a strong message. They need help and they need it soon. They were here five years ago. There was a giant rally at Lansdowne Park. I was there. I was not an elected member, but I was there. They were asking for the same things they are asking for now. The farmers wanted some help. This is why I have sat here and I have popped up so many times.

The agriculture minister was appointed on February 6, two months ago today. The member suggests that we should solve all the problems in eight weeks. That is not going to happen.

There have been 13 years of neglect. We have not even had 13 weeks to solve this problem. Please, and I beg my colleagues, if they are sincere. The former agriculture minister, who thank God was not re-elected, refused to sign FarmGate5. The former government says it supports supply management. That is hogwash. The former government does not support farmers and it was obvious. Ask any farmer who is here.

My hon. colleague is new to the House. He should take note of the last 13 years and what the previous government did to the people who farm this great land of ours. Please cooperate with this government that wants to do something for those good people.

• (1940)

The Chair: The time for questions and comments has expired. The member will have to consider himself instructed by the member who just spoke. The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Chair, again, in a special way, I offer my congratulations to you. I have been in that post in the same kind of situation at many take note debates on agriculture, so I wish you well. You will do a superb job because you have the confidence of the House and the experience to make it work.

I am very pleased that the challenges facing the agricultural industry is the subject of our first take note debate here in Parliament. The fact that agriculture has been chosen as the topic of this debate is an indication of just how seriously people on this side of the House take this issue and how seriously it is being taken on all sides of the House. It is interesting that it is taken so seriously by folks on this side of the House that the very first statement made in this Parliament was about agriculture by a member from our caucus.

The very first action taken by our cabinet was to get money out the door to help producers. An ongoing priority of the government is to ensure that the people that elected us and that we stand shoulder to shoulder with are going to ensure that their priority is our priority and agriculture is finally going to get the attention it deserves in the House of Commons.

I want to begin by saying that we have more farmers and more farm interests represented in this caucus, in this cabinet, and in this government than has been the case in any government in living memory. These people here fight for farmers day in and day out. It is an honour to be included in this team of people who are going to represent farmers with aplomb over the next number of years.

As we said in the Speech from the Throne, we recognize the unique challenges faced by those who make their livelihood from our land and our natural resources, especially agriculture. We will take action to secure a prosperous future for Canadian agriculture following 13 years of neglect. For 13 years the Liberal government ignored the plight of Canada's hard-working farmers.

While the rest of the world poured billions into subsidies, the Liberals stood by and watched. While farm incomes plummeted, they folded their hands. When disaster struck, they promised money and did not deliver and when they did act, they tied up farmers in red tape and complicated rules in the CAIS program.

However, on January 23, Canadians voted for a change and that included change in agriculture. I am here to say we are going to deliver the change that farmers finally deserve today. The very first action of our cabinet was to start sending out the \$755 million under the grains and oilseeds payment program. It was promised by the previous government. I have no idea why it did not send it out but it was not sent. We made it our first action.

Not only that, but we accelerated the amount of money that was going to go out, so that 90% of it would go out immediately and \$400 million is already out. The rest of the money should be out over the next three weeks. In addition, during the election campaign the Conservatives promised an extra \$2.5 billion investment in agriculture over the next five years to the core funding. We are going to address agricultural needs and it is going to be a priority for the government.

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In the short term we are also making changes to the CAIS program. We have heard a lot of talk tonight about the CAIS program, trying to fix some of its problems so that farmers can actually benefit from the program. I have been to all 10 provinces, have had industry meetings in every province and met with all the agriculture ministers across the country. There is one consistent story that I heard from farmers, and I am not talking about the large organizations now, I am talking about farmers. One consistent story was that the CAIS program had not worked for them.

I will quote the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands who is the parliamentary secretary now in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board who said in 2002 that “this program will not meet the needs of farmers. It's going to be a serious problem for farmers and if you go ahead with it, there will be problems from coast to coast because of the CAIS program”. Unfortunately, he hit the nail right on the head.

Farmers knew it would not work: its untimely payments; its complexity; its lack of predictability, problems obtaining credit from banks; and its incapacity to respond to long term income decline. Farmers, especially in the grains and oilseeds sector, said it just did not get the job done. It had serious problems. Farmers were frustrated with it and we are intent on changing it.

● (1945)

We need to have something this year to tide them over and that is why I have said that we are going to continue with the CAIS program. We have no choice. In the middle of a crop year, we have to make changes. The provinces are working with us to make changes, to make it as good a program as we can in the short term, but we are intent on replacing the CAIS program with separate programs for income support and disaster relief. It is time to break those apart and finally give farmers something they can count on and bank on that is predictable and not so complex that they have to have an accountant to fill out the forms.

Other problems that farmers are experiencing are global in nature. Canadian farmers are world class, but they are up against world class subsidies and world class tariff barriers. That is why I and the Minister of International Trade had a round table here last month just down the road. We brought in about 50 key national agri-food organizations to develop our priorities and focus on the World Trade Organization meetings which are coming up later this month and hopefully will be completed this year.

Later this month I will be travelling to Geneva with our negotiators to get those subsidies down so that our farmers, as our leader has said, can compete on a level and fair playing field.

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At those negotiations, and this has been brought up a few times tonight, I want to assure members that this government will stand four-square and solidly behind our supply management system which underpins thousands of family farms in Canada. I voted to stand up for supply management in November when I was in opposition, I voted for it during the campaign, and I will defend supply management when I am in Geneva during the negotiations as well.

[Translation]

I want to be very clear: we will support the supply management system during the negotiations in Geneva.

[English]

However, this does not mean that others will be left out. We are committed to defending the interests of all our producers in the grains and oilseeds sector, the beef sectors, and others who are looking for a way to beat down those foreign and domestic subsidies and tariff barriers that are keeping our products out of other markets.

This take note debate is happening tonight because there is an income crisis in parts of our agricultural sector. Over the past three years, the federal and provincial governments have paid out a lot of money in agricultural support programs, but still many of our farmers are struggling to make ends meet. That is why, as I mentioned, we promised \$2.5 billion more for agricultural support programs over the next five years, but we also know that simply throwing money at the problem, although it is necessary in the short term and there is more money coming, is not the long term solution.

We need to have a fresh look at everything to determine how our agricultural sector fits in to the globalized market of the 21st century. We want to create an environment that will allow our agricultural producers to make a decent living from the market and enjoy future prosperity.

One of these emerging markets is renewable fuels. It is not the only answer but it is kind of symbolic. Soon we will be rolling out our biofuel strategy and I am working with the environment minister to ensure that farmers actually benefit from our commitment to 5% biofuels. We want to ensure that when we move to biofuels we want to help the environment. We want to ensure that we have a good, reliable source of fuel, of course, but we also want to ensure that when we roll out this platform, it is something that is going to benefit farmers, not just big companies, day in and day out for years to come, with a biofuel strategy that is for them.

We will also be taking greater advantage of our science and technological capabilities, an area where Canada has a real and substantial competitive advantage over many of our global competitors. Agricultural research and technological innovation can provide our producers with many new crops and uses for their crops. The real answer in the long run of course is not government subsidies. Farmers do not want handouts. They do not want to farm the mailbox. They want and deserve to make their living for themselves, their children and their grandchildren through the market.

Governments can help farmers at one level when disaster strikes and where steep income decline occurs, but the market will help the farmers prosper. It is my ambition and the ambition of this

government that all sectors of agriculture become stable, our farmers become prosperous, and they understand that this government stands in their corner as we move from where we have been, unfortunately for too long, to a prosperous, reliable farm income that they can get from the marketplace and that they deserve.

The solutions we bring forward will be market-oriented but the government will be there, hand in hand, as we make the transition from where we have been, which has not been good, to where we need to be: a diverse market where farmers can get rewarded for what they do day in and day out.

Producers are facing problems now. We have heard their concerns. We realize they have a cash income crisis. We will be there for them. We have been there for them already and they can count on the fact that this government will be in their corner here and abroad for years to come.

● (1950)

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have been listening intently to the debate. I have to say it is sadly obvious that the new Conservative government absolutely could not care less about Canadian farmers. I have heard a lot of talk from the other side tonight, but that is about it; it has just been a lot of talk and there has been absolutely no action. Worse than that, there has been absolutely no plan of action. The government is stuck in the mud, as I was saying. It does not know where we are going and it does not know how to get us there.

I was recently in the Republic of China, in Taiwan, with a group of parliamentarians. We spoke with the president of Taiwan and representatives from the department of health. My question for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is, when will the government take some action? When will the government open up the market for Canadian beef in Taiwan?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Chair, now there is a summary. The member probably figured that out while sipping cappuccinos at the Starbucks in Whistler Village. That kind of question is just nonsense.

Of course we want to open markets for beef products around the world. As an example, there have just been seven or eight new plants approved across the country for export markets to Japan. We want to improve market access for beef and all of our products. To simply stand and say the solution to the agricultural crisis is to open the beef market in Taiwan is just silly. It is a silly question.

Of course we will pry open markets at every occasion. It is what we are going to do at the WTO. But to think that is the solution for the crisis facing the agriculture industry is just nonsense.

● (1955)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Chair, I am happy that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is taking part this evening in the debate we requested. Obviously, this was no idle request. Yesterday, thousands of agricultural producers, many of them from Quebec, came to Parliament Hill. Thousands more across Canada were there in spirit. This is a very serious crisis.

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Since the evening began, the minister and the Prime Minister have said that the situation is serious. We agree on that. Mention has been made of 13 years of neglect by the previous government. I agree completely. However, this minister and the Prime Minister were part of the official opposition for 13 years. Members of the official opposition prepare for the day when they will take power, and they lay the groundwork. They know what the issues and problems are. When they come to power, they do not just have intentions, they are ready to act.

They knew about this crisis for years. We have serious problems because of huge American and European subsidies and also, of course, because of the decrease in Canadian domestic subsidies. The official opposition was aware of all this. Now the Conservatives are in power. Since the evening began, everyone has agreed that we are facing a horrendous income crisis.

I would like the minister to tell us exactly what he intends to do. He talks about short-term measures, but what are these measures? How much money is involved? What is his timetable? Lastly, how does he respond to the producers who came to the hill yesterday? A media advisory reported that the minister was going to go and talk to them, but he did not. This evening, during this take note debate, I would like the minister to tell us and them exactly what he plans to do. We want action. We want a real answer.

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Chair, I think our leader spelled it out pretty well. I tried to spell it out, but I will say it again. The very first action of the cabinet was to send out three-quarters of a billion dollars.

I realize that people want more, but there are two things to remember. The first is that every dollar we had parliamentary approval for we sent out the door the day that we formed the cabinet. The second thing is there is a clear promise of a major improvement to the base agricultural budget: \$2.5 billion over the next five years. That is not chump change either. That is a lot of money.

When the budget is tabled and we see what our Minister of Finance has in there—and it is going to be a great package; I am looking forward to it—I hope that members opposite will help pass it quickly so that we can get whatever measures that are in there—and I cannot announce the budget today—out to Canadians across the country as quickly as possible.

However, other things are not going to be solved in eight weeks. That is a fact. I wish it were so, but when there are programs that have been badly designed, when a series of decisions made by previous governments have tied our hands in some ways, it will take us time to take corrective measures to design and implement better programs, to get more money into them, which we are going to do, and to negotiate better deals and opportunities for our producers across the country while we build secondary opportunities for them in our own country. These are things like biofuels and nutraceuticals and other opportunities, all of which we plan to do, but it is not going to happen in eight weeks. Some of the money has gone out quickly. There will be more coming fairly quickly, but it cannot be solved in eight weeks and I am not going to pretend it can. The farmers are not silly. They know it cannot be done that quickly, but

as soon as we get the budget before the House, I hope it can have speedy passage.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. minister for his vision on agriculture for Canada.

I have had a concern for the past few years, even before I got into politics. It concerns me when I hear that Canada is trying to play by the rules, that we want to negotiate lowering subsidies in other countries. We played by the rules with the WTO on softwood lumber and we see what has happened there.

I have a concern that if we go to the negotiations and say that we are playing by the rules and we want the European Union and the Americans to lower their subsidies, and let us assume they agree, how can we be sure that the Americans will lower them? The research I have done indicates that they have other ways. They say they are decreasing subsidies in one area, and all of a sudden those subsidies find their ways into other areas.

If we know that there are actual subsidies after we have gone through these negotiations, is our government prepared to subsidize our farmers to make sure we are on a level playing field? Can we be assured that the government will do that?

• (2000)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Chair, I know where the hon. member's heart is. It is with agriculture. I can tell that already. I look forward to working with him over a period of time.

The reason we are going to Geneva to try to get subsidies lowered is that if we want to go head to head with the Europeans we have to talk \$70 billion to \$80 billion to \$90 billion. If we want to go toe to toe with the Americans, we had better ante up \$20 billion. We just do not have that kind of money in Canada. The better thing to do is to try to get international subsidies down, and that is why the serious negotiations are taking place right now, and to try to get rules at the WTO to enforce them.

I agree with the member, one of the weaknesses in the past has been that when someone has a countervailing opportunity, it is peanuts to penalize someone who is breaking the rules.

Part of the discussion and part of the sticking point in Geneva is to make sure that the rules, the modalities that we are negotiating, actually have some teeth to them. That is one of the things we are keen on in our negotiations. It is not just to say that we should all be boy scouts about this, but to say that we do not mind being boy scouts as long as we have an ability collectively to take the big boys out and thrash them when they need it and have it coming.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Chair, we have heard a great deal of debate tonight. I heard the hon. member for Malpeque talk about what the former government did in the last two years. Let us go back a little further. We used to have a couple of programs that actually worked for producers in this country. We had market revenue and NISA. What did the Liberals do? They got rid of them presumably because they worked too well.

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I remember the Liberals promised producers super NISA. That was going to be the next program. What did they do? They did not give it to the producers. They ignored them. Instead they gave them CAIS which we know does not work. They finally admitted tonight that it does not work.

I know that producers are watching the debate tonight and they are judging us according to our platform commitments, and rightly so. We are keeping those commitments.

What are the alternatives? If the Liberals had won the last election, what would have happened? What did their platform say? They did not pledge to get rid of CAIS. They pledged to study changes to it. We would have been waiting for a committee to study changes. That is what producers would have had. The Liberals did not promise to accept risk management, for example. They promised something along those lines. They were going to study it some more. They would be caught in the same situation, not doing anything for producers.

I would like the minister to comment on how we are actually doing something. The Liberals were not going to be doing anything if they had won the election.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I do not know when I am going to get any sleep because I have so many farmers and farm interested folks in this caucus that they keep me pretty busy, Mr. Chair, I must admit.

During a campaign it is easy to promise things. It is easy to roll out numbers and even promise the moon during election campaigns. What we said and what we are going to do, and we are not just talking here, is we will add \$2.5 billion over the next five years to the basic agricultural support system. With that money we are going to replace CAIS with separate income stabilization and disaster relief so that the people in Porcupine Plain whom I actually met with know that they will have some help when they really need it.

What I hear farmers saying again and again is, "It is not just about the money. You need to paint us a road map forward. You need to show us where we are going, tell us how we can fit in, make sure that we get part of the value added opportunities that are there so that farmers are not just the low cost producers all the time. Show us how we can join in and then let the farmers get to work".

If they can see it, if they can predict it, if they can bank on it, if they know it is coming and they know the government is in their corner, the farmers are going to get to work. They are going to be profitable and we are going to make sure that they are.

● (2005)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Chair, our question time is just about finished. In other parliaments with regard to debates with former agriculture ministers the House has given unanimous consent that the minister be allowed to field more questions. I would ask for unanimous consent to extend the question and comment period.

The Chair: The member has asked if there is unanimous consent to extend the question and comment period for the benefit of members having more access to the Minister of Agriculture. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the House for allowing Parliament to hear more from our agriculture minister. I want to thank him for his speech tonight. He did more than just simply point out the failures of the last Liberal government, but he also clearly laid out our plan.

I want to commend all those in the election campaign. We had the plan clearly laid out in the election campaign as well. I think a lot of people in agriculture and a lot of Canadians recognize that when we came into office, we would carry out those promises.

I also want to thank the minister on behalf of my constituency. Since he has been appointed Minister of Agriculture, we recognize that he has travelled across the country many times. I know one Monday when I was in Ottawa at meetings, he was in my riding meeting with people around Calgary. The next day he was in Ottawa for a meeting and the day after I think he was in the Maritimes.

We all recognize the crisis we are facing. When we talk about crisis in agriculture, sometimes we broaden the scope to all of agriculture. At the present time, we are seeing perhaps an unprecedented crisis in the grains and oilseeds sector. I appreciate what the minister said. I do not believe any farmer wants to farm a system or a program in Canada. It is not how can we farm into a program, but how can we eventually leave programs and stand alone? However, in the meantime there is a crisis, and the minister has laid out part of that.

There is another crisis coming down the road as well. The average age of a farmer is 58 or 59 years old. We are seeing a depletion in equity on a lot of these farms, grains and oilseeds farms to be more specific. How can the government give hope to those who will soon move into a transition period? What hope is there for a young farmer who wants to take over dad's farm, if he is still there, or any young person wanting to move into this industry?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Chair, this concerns the whole government, including the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Sometimes we need to bring agricultural workers into the country. The whole government is seized with this issue.

What do we do for this transitional period when the average farmer is pushing 60? We are in danger of losing a generation. Farming is not something that can just be picked up. A person has to grow up around it to understand it well.

Young people need to know whether the government is in their corner. Is the government listening? Are we going to bat for them? We need to assure them of that by our actions and our deeds. We need to assure them of that by what we say and by the concrete measures we take as we go forward.

We have to look at government programming, not just at how it affects farming but how it affects rural communities. A rural strategy is also necessary for the country. That is why we campaigned on things like the importance of a university education and also of training people in apprenticeship work. This would give them hope that the work they were doing would be useful on the farm. We are going to help them get that training. We are going to help them get ahead.

When we talk about child care solutions, we do not just talk about solutions that work in downtown Toronto. We talk about solutions that will work for young farmers who are just starting out with their young families and how they can get a little help.

We have talked about how we are going to deliver health care guarantees. If a farmer moving out to the country asks if he will lose his health care, we can say we will guarantee him health care. We are tired of wasting money on things like the gun registry system. We are going to take that money and put it into useful things, and we are not going to tie things up in red tape. We are going to let farmers get ahead.

We are going to lower the GST so farmers can keep more money. We are going to tell farmers that profit is not a dirty word. We are going to ensure that not only will the farmer get to make money but he will get to keep his money.

Young farmers are looking for deals and we on this side of the House have an obligation to tell them what the deal is. We are going to ensure that they are profitable and that they get to keep their money. We on this side of the House are going to ensure sure that they, their families, their safety, security and position in the world is respected. Farmers can be confident that a handshake deal with this government is going to be kept.

● (2010)

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Chair, first, I congratulate you on your appointment. I know you have had a great interest in our government for many years. It is certainly good to see you here as a member of our House and with the important position that you have.

I have listened with great interest to the Minister of Agriculture. I want to wish him every success as he approaches this farm crisis that we talk about today.

I am very glad he has recognized not only the problems that exist, but the various problems that have been created as a result of the partnership that farmers have had among three different stools of their so-called milking machine.

We know that the farmers who came to the Hill this week have great problems. We know what response they have had from governments in the past years. Not only has it been our federal government, but just as important it has been our provinces and territories, which were part of the CAIS program.

I know our minister certainly recognizes that before the Liberal government came here in 1993, there were certain international agreements on trade which affected the subsidy situation and that Canadian producers, as a result of those agreements back in the

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1980s and early 1990s, have been affected by what governments can do to help them. I am glad he recognizes that.

I am glad above all tonight to hear some solutions from the leader of the Bloc.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: This is where you're going to go to get rid of free trade. This is your success at the WTO.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: We will talk about Nova Scotia later. We will talk right now about the province of Quebec.

I want to recognize in the House again the tremendous response that the province of Quebec has had for our farm community. If all provinces had the interest in farming that they have in the province of Quebec, we probably would not have the crisis that we have right now.

I spoke to a number of farmers on the Hill the other day. Above all, they are concerned with the supply management. They are concerned about the protein substitutes that are coming into our trading system. I am glad to hear tonight that the minister will do something to shut off those protein substitutes.

Second, I am very glad to hear the minister will put more money in our budget. We know what money was put in the budget in 1994 and 1995-96. I am glad to see the minister is getting that money out, and did it in the month of January.

Above all, I want to emphasize tonight that a report was done. The minister's parliamentary secretary was part of that report from the standing committee.

The minister talked about a crisis, distress and the amount of money set aside for very particular problems. I am glad to see he is committing himself to that.

Also, I want to say that the figure the minister quoted in terms of five years is far, far short of the figure that most farm groups see. To think that only an extra \$500 million is being put in over each year is certainly far short of their objectives of seeing a massive amount of money being put into the farm community that would get us beyond this crisis and that would alleviate our problem.

I hope that when we see the budget next month, the minister will see more put into the budget, as he indicated tonight.

● (2015)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Chair, congratulations on the appointment to your post. As I said to the Deputy Speaker, I have been there, done that, and it is a wonderful position to hold. I congratulate you for having it here this evening and for this Parliament.

I thank the member not only for his comments, but also for the constructive nature of his suggestions. I know I do not have lots of time, but I would like to wrestle just briefly with the issue of milk protein concentrate. There is a call by the Dairy Farmers of Canada to use article 28 of the WTO to reclassify that product.

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I am as interested as the dairy farmers to find ways to ensure there is not a flood of product coming into the country. One concern I have is if we invoke article 28, and we are considering that as an option, would it affect the milk concentrate coming from the United States and Mexico? It does not because the NAFTA arrangement supercedes the WTO arrangement. My fear is that we might stop it from Europe, but we might get a flood of product coming in across the 49th parallel.

Second, if we try to reclassify it under NAFTA, then that milk protein concentrate would give the Americans an opportunity not only to challenge the reclassification of the concentrate, but they would use it as an opportunity to challenge the entire supply managed system.

In 1996 we won that court case that said we could protect our supply managed industries. I mentioned already that I want to do all I can to support them now, here and overseas as well. However, I do not want to take measures, and this is a caution for the dairy farmers, that allow a court challenge to not only possibly intervene on the milk protein concentrate, but actually put our entire supply managed system at risk. I am not prepared to do that, and I want to have every assurance before we take steps that we do not compromise supply management.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank you for giving me a few minutes to talk about the crisis in agriculture. But first I would like to congratulate you on your new position. I think it is important to take a moment to thank you.

The agricultural crisis affects a number of sectors: beef producers and grain producers, and some others as well.

It will be apparent a little later what I am getting at. I want to talk about a situation that arises in my riding, in a part of the agricultural sector we should look at and pay particular attention to.

The Speech from the Throne announces the plans of the new government and the priorities it has set for its term in office. When a Speech from the Throne has only a few things in it, this means that some groups, some industries and individuals, will be left out. According to the throne speech and what we have seen over the last few days, many needs will not be met. Supply management is very important for the chicken, egg and turkey industries and the dairy industry. The entire supply management question was overlooked.

I ask myself some questions. We are debating agriculture this evening. But what the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London said in the House this afternoon during the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne was very worrisome. He indicated that his government had certain priorities to address before anything else. For the people in my riding, agricultural issues and supply management are priorities. These are priorities not only for Madawaska—Restigouche, but also for all of New Brunswick and for rural regions across the country.

It is hard for me to understand how agriculture and supply management are not priorities for this new government. It can say what it wants, but as I said, a Speech from the Throne should outline the government's priorities and intentions.

This is definitely not the way to help the agricultural industry nor help it in regard to supply management. Madawaska—Restigouche is a riding in northern New Brunswick, a rural riding—like all of New Brunswick—for which economic diversification is very important. We are not just talking about an industry that produces plastic or gasoline, we are also talking about the farmers.

Total economic diversification can strengthen a region and turn it toward the future. That is the direction it must face, and economic diversification makes it possible. A number of firms in our regions have decided to diversify in order to improve their situation and develop. They did so as well in order to help the people they employ. Thanks to this diversification, families can remain in their community rather than move to urban centres.

Supply management is vital in egg, chicken and dairy production. These three types of production enable the people of this country to eat daily in both the city and the country. We often forget the importance of our rural areas and their contribution to the economy, above and beyond feeding people.

● (2020)

My riding of Madawaska—Restigouche is a special case. It produces 80% of New Brunswick's chicken. You will agree, Mr. Speaker, that in my first term as an MP, this matter was vital to me. It remains a matter of the utmost importance.

Today, I am in my second term. During the latest election campaign, I promised the people of my riding that I would defend their interests in issues of importance to them. You will understand and agree as well that, since 80% of chickens raised in New Brunswick come from my riding, this issue is very important to my electors.

We must also look a little further and consider the question of negotiations and of the WTO. Perhaps there should be some discussion of supply management, since I am not sure everyone in this country is aware of it. The beauty of supply management is that the government does not need to help finance the industry. However, it does need to support the industry and supply management. Crises occur when they are not supported.

This is what my constituents have told me. Every time chicken, egg and dairy producers have come to Parliament Hill, I have met with them. I took the time to talk to them to be sure I understood their situation.

Clearly, as members of Parliament, we do not know everything. We cannot know everything about everything. Yet, when we seek to serve the people we represent, we make the effort to consult with them and understand their needs.

I must emphasize that supply management does not cost the federal government anything. The industry manages its own production; it manages itself. This cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, we must protect producers, the people who need supply management.

A closer look at supply management reveals that it is all about negotiation. These negotiations do not happen only in Canada; they happen worldwide. Nevertheless, supply management itself, as practised in Canada, is not negotiable. We have a supply management system for our producers, and they want us to support them, as I mentioned earlier. However, we must take care not to negotiate what should not be negotiated. We must not make compromises where there should be none.

We have negotiated and made compromises for too long. We have told our American and European friends that they can sell to us in return for a certain percentage, and that we can do the same. This enabled all of us to export our goods. But exporting goods is one thing. If we respect our agreement while our friends do not, we must put an end to negotiations and compromises.

With regard to many other issues, we have negotiated and made compromises. We know today that we are experiencing difficulties in other areas. As I mentioned, supply management is not negotiable and there is no possible compromise. We must promote the existing system and protect it in its entirety, in order to protect our industry.

Here are some very convincing figures that show the importance of supply management. In Atlantic Canada alone, the value of supply-managed products—chicken, turkey, eggs—totals \$440 million. Just think about it—this represents only four provinces that are not very big. However, it is important to the economy of our regions. Even more important, this represents over 15,000 jobs.

• (2025)

If the government begins to soften its stand on supply management, and to negotiate and accept compromises, this will jeopardize an entire industry in the Atlantic provinces, as well as the diversification of our economy.

We must continue to support the people who elected us. I will definitely do so. I am very proud to represent the people in my riding and those who need supply management.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very happy to take the floor during this debate.

[English]

First, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment and, second, I would like to thank my colleague for his well prepared and well reasoned speech. I wholeheartedly agree that we must defend supply management and its three pillars, particularly that of imports. Supply management is critical to the success of five agricultural sectors.

[Translation]

Before I go any further, I would like to say that my riding, Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, has long been associated with farm families. It is a large rural constituency with a proud history.

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The farmers in my riding work hard in the various agricultural sectors. Many of these farmers are in the gallery this evening, and I pay tribute to them.

[English]

They are good, honest, hard-working people and I have the highest respect for them. What we need to realize is that this crisis has been forming over 13 years. I have a list of motions that the previous government voted against but there is no sense reading them and so I set them aside because it serves no purpose tonight.

Let me move on to the essence of the debate which is that we all agree that this is an agricultural crisis and one that spans the country. We need solutions and we need them now and we need to work together. There is no time to lose with needless arguments.

Will my colleague and his party put aside their differences and work together in committees and in meetings in this very chamber with us to the benefit of our farmers?

• (2030)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to answer that question. I would like to thank the member opposite for asking it.

Let us look at the facts. Before the government was defeated last November, the House unanimously passed a motion on supply management. I have always supported supply management, and I can assure all the members that I will continue to do so.

My colleagues on this side of the House certainly take an even greater interest in this issue. Some of them and their families have made or still do make their living from farming and supply managed industry.

Let us look a little further. I am 33 years old. Consider my background. My father was raised on a dairy farm. I did not grow up on a dairy farm, but I understand the industry and what its needs are. Whether the issue affects us directly or indirectly, whether we come from a rural or an urban community, one way or another, we all have links to agriculture.

We have to be able to defend the industry. As I mentioned earlier, we have to understand it and we have to be here to defend it.

I would also mention the need to consider the question from another angle. The whole issue of dairy substitutes was mentioned a little earlier. It is a harsh reality. I personally believe in the development of my community, my riding, my province and my country. When I have shopping to do, I do it in my riding, even if it is often easy to do it in the neighbouring riding or in a bigger city nearby. That is important to me.

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Let us take a look at the whole question of dairy substitutes. When I do the shopping, I put myself in other people's shoes. Is it right for ice cream to contain something other than cream? It is very difficult to make an intelligent choice. We are still in luck, because some companies continue to make ice cream with cream. We have to continue supporting these manufacturers. In addition, the bill advocating taking this approach, which the House was examining in the 38th Parliament, must be revived.

When I buy a product, I expect it to actually be made from certain ingredients. When I buy cheese, I expect it to be made from milk and not modified dairy products. When I buy ice cream, I expect it to be made with cream.

It is this way with the whole issue of supply management. As I mentioned, the system exists to help the industry and farmers, like the ones back home, to support them and make sure they have the tools they need to provide a quality product and limit potential risks. Our industry manages itself very well. It has assumed its responsibilities and manages itself very well.

We must continue to work with the people in this industry, be it in the production of eggs, poultry, milk, turkeys or other products under supply management. We must be there to support them. We must continue supporting them, and I will do so.

• (2035)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I would repeat my first question for my colleague. Will he and his party put aside differences and work together in committees and in this House to the benefit of our farmers, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I have no idea in what way my response was inadequate in terms of clarity. I mentioned that in the last Parliament I voted in favour of a motion supporting supply management, as did all members from my party. We have worked in that direction. I assure the hon. member that this issue is important to us. Hence we will be working to try to find solutions that can provide people with support.

The hon. member came back with another question for me. I am pleased to take this second opportunity to say that it is important to support supply management. I am proud to defend the people of my riding with respect to supply management.

[English]

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to tell my fellow colleagues on both sides of the House and all Canadians that even though I represent a northern Ontario riding, agriculture is very significant throughout northern Ontario. We may not have a supply managed sector as large as the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell or the member for Madawaska—Restigouche but when I meet the dairy farmers in my riding they are as passionate as their constituents are about a very important sector of agriculture and, of course, all of agriculture is suffering these days.

Before I put a question for my colleague I want to take a moment to thank the constituents of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking for their support in the last election. As all of us have said to our

constituents, we will work hard, as I will, to represent them, not only in serving them throughout the riding but here in Ottawa as well.

I commend my colleague, the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, who came to Parliament in 2004. He is one of our dynamic new members of Parliament with a great future. He spoke passionately about the supply managed sector in his riding. Later on, if I have a chance to take a turn in the speaking rotation, I will talk on a broader range of agriculture issues but right now I will focus my attention on supply management.

I have a letter that was given to me by Mr. Keith Emiry, the secretary of the Manitoulin - West Sudbury Dairy Producer Committee. I met with him a few weeks ago and I would like to quote from a March 11 letter, which may be information that has been supplied to other members in the House. It states:

WTO talks will continue this spring and Canada's supply management agriculture sector continues to meet with the new government to ensure that our voice as a valuable economic sector will be heard. Canadian government officials need to continue their support of our trade policy and its strong defence of supply management production at this critical juncture in trade relations.

He goes on making a very excellent point. I think the most important item among the several requirements they have in order that supply management survive is that dairy and poultry be listed at the WTO as a sensitive product category. I think members may be aware of that.

He goes on to talk about the flexibility to achieve zero tariff reductions and recognition of the market access Canada has already given up over the past years.

I wonder if on any one of those, but particularly the sensitive product category, the member could expound a little bit more about that and again underline the importance of the supply managed sector in his riding and all of Atlantic Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I understand that I probably do not have a half hour to make a response. I want to thank my colleague for his question. It will allow me to elaborate further on sensitive products, which is a very important question, and one to which attention must be paid.

In the past, some room to manoeuvre was allowed on sensitive products. There were certain elements and certain negotiations that made it possible to permit the importation of certain foreign products. There was some importing. On our side, in principle, we were supposed to be able to do the same. However the situation did not necessarily unfold in that way. That is why we must be extremely careful when we are talking about sensitive products such as eggs, poultry and dairy in general. We have been unable to command respect. For that reason, I say we must not negotiate or offer any compromises. We must support our industry and enable it to move into the future. It must continue to offer us quality products, products that will limit certain problems which may arise in today's world.

At present, the industry is doing a very good job of managing production methods and general operations. We must continue to work in this direction and support it. That way we will have a better industry which will continue to prosper and to create progress in all of the rural regions of our fine and great country.

• (2040)

[English]

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. We are in danger of actually losing the last Bloc speaker because we extended the question period time for the Minister of Agriculture. I would seek the unanimous consent of the House to extend the proceedings if need be to get the last speaker at the end of the night.

The Deputy Chair: Does the House unanimously agree to extend the time which will be for 10 minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to congratulate you on the appointment to your position. I also want to thank the constituents of Cypress Hills—Grasslands for giving me the privilege of returning once again to the House to represent them.

There is a story of a mountaineer whose name was Yvon Chouinard who was going out with a group of his friends to climb Mount Edith Cavell. They got out on the mountain, set up their tent in front of the big rock face and a storm settled in and they sat in their tents for about a week. Eventually the storm subsided and they were able to go on. After he was done with that climb, he said that it did not pay to look at a great wall for too long.

With agriculture I think we find ourselves up against a great wall but I am thankful that this government is not one that will sit and look at that great wall for too long. This government is prepared to move and to begin to improve the situation for our farmers and producers across Canada.

I am a farmer and am proud of it. I grew up and spent my life on a farm. I live in the farmhouse that my great uncle built in 1918. I will continue to have an interest in our farm. I understand the pressures. I started farming before I was out of high school and farmed through the seventies, eighties and nineties and I understand the pressures that farmers and producers are under.

We find ourselves here again tonight discussing agriculture in a late night debate. I look around and see some familiar faces and some new ones. We have talked time and again about the fact that we did not want to find ourselves back here. I see the former chairman of the agriculture committee nodding his head because he knows that we have had those conversations.

Nobody in the country wants agriculture to be a welfare case but it almost seems to have been the intent of the previous government. We have the opportunity to make substantive structural changes to agriculture that will give it a chance to succeed.

Earlier tonight we heard the Leader of the Opposition say that it was time for our party to take responsibility for agriculture and we are prepared to do that but I think it is important, first, to talk about the state of agriculture that was left by the previous government. It is

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important that people understand what was not done and from where we have to begin.

I think the state of agriculture looks like an old farm house that has been abandoned out on the prairies with the roof leaking, the windows gone, the doors hanging off it and the shutters broken. Some have an expectation that it will become a mansion overnight. We need to tell people that it will take us some time to make the changes that will make a substantive difference for farmers. Our job is to make it liveable first and then restore it to its proper place, and our intention is to do that.

Things were in worse shape than we realized. We found that the farm income support program has basically been universally rejected by everyone. The provinces at one point said that they wanted to continue it and now we hear them saying that they do not want it continued either. The main farm income support program that farmers had in the country has been rejected by virtually everyone in the industry.

We had a reorganization of the agriculture department a couple of years ago which was a fairly quiet thing. A lot of people did not realize that it happened. The effects of that are still being felt through the department. Research and development capabilities were stunted by that shift and that is something that people need to understand. I had a chance to spend some time talking to some of our folks who work in that area. As of last week, late March, they still had not received their budgets for this year. Obviously some changes need to be made in order to begin to move ahead. Actually I found that scientists were having to raise their own money to fund their projects.

We talked a little tonight about bilaterals. Nothing has developed in that area. People have talked about the fact that we need to move ahead on that, and we believe we do, but we have had no movement or development by the previous government on that front. It takes a while to get that up and running. We have had about two bilaterals versus about 40 that the United States has signed since the year 2000. It has moved ahead and it has started to take some of our markets. We need to move on those issues.

Biofuels is now a big issue in our country. Everyone is talking about biodiesel and ethanol. We need to have a national fuel standard. We do not even have that. The previous government never did the groundwork to lay down the standard that we needed.

Earlier we heard someone talk about the ethanol expansion program. That was intended to go to farm communities, to rural areas, to small and medium sized projects so that farmers and producers could be involved in that. The previous government rerouted that money to the large companies. The small projects in the small rural areas where producers wanted to be part of those projects were left out of that project. There needs to be some work done on that as well.

• (2045)

We have a huge job ahead of us and we might as well tell folks that right now, but one of the things I want to say is that agriculture is not dead. Those of us who have been in agriculture know that it takes a lot more than what we are facing right now to chase us off the farm and to kill agriculture.

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When I was campaigning before the election, I asked people what they were doing on their farms and in their communities that was successful. I want to read for members a few of those things.

I know farmers and producers who are running seed-cleaning plants and who actually told me that last year they had a very good year. I know farmers who are growing specialty crops who are making unique profits on very low acres.

I had people tell me that they have diversified and switched to herbs and spices. Even in dryland Saskatchewan they are growing them and marketing them around the globe. I had people tell me that they decided to try tourism along with farming and they have been able to do that on some real high end levels.

I had people tell me that they have set up hunting camps in Saskatchewan and internationally and those camps have helped them with the farm.

We have manufacturing in our riding, both on the farm and off. We have food processing. A young couple in my riding developed a new lentil pasta. They now have it on the market, are trying to find shelf space for it and are finding success with it.

We have specialty meats. Actually, some people had gone out of producing beef and chicken because they were making money processing that product.

We have organic specialization. We have producer owned co-ops. We have seed growers. We have retail operations that are owned by farmers and producers.

Agriculture is not dead, but we need to be able to give farmers and producers the opportunity to succeed.

I believe that another thing we need to do to give them an opportunity to succeed is to reach a good trade deal at the WTO. We depend seriously on trade, with 80% of our agricultural products exported. Producers desperately need a rules-based international trading system that is fair to them. We want to be able to support free trade and fair trade. The farmers in my part of the world need a good, aggressive free trade agreement if they are going to do well in the future.

We are told that they can gain up to \$20 a tonne on their wheat if we can get a good trade agreement. For canola, which is grown in a lot of our areas, they say they can get up to \$70 a tonne if we get a good trade agreement. It is important that we have a level international playing field. We need that. Involved in that are the three things we have talked about over the last few years as we have been involved in trade talks. We need to eliminate trade-distorting domestic support. We need to reduce export subsidization. We need to assure real market access to other markets.

In order to give them opportunities, especially the western Canadian farmers, I think we also need to give them marketing choice. We need to move to a situation where they are able to begin to make choices about marketing their own products, especially grain. Western Canadians need the opportunity to succeed. They need to be able to dream about success. Why not?

I did a study about four years ago. We had 120 specialty crop processing plants in our province. We had 14 flour mills, 12 of them

owned by two foreign companies. There are opportunities in specialty crops. There can be in grain as well. This government is committed to the transition of the Canadian Wheat Board and giving farmers the choice on how they market and process their own grain.

We continue to get a strong message from our farmers in a designated area that they want marketing choice. The industry tells us they are ready for a change. Producers are creative and have demonstrated their ability to adapt and succeed. We will stand beside the board as that transition is made to ensure that farmers who support the board will have it as a continuing option for them.

We believe we can work with the board. In fact, we have worked with it to get the initial prices increased. That was announced yesterday. Wheat and feed wheat prices increase by from \$13 to \$23 a tonne, while durum will increase by \$15 to \$19, and barley by \$10. This change obviously will not solve 13 years of Liberal rule, but it will be a good start.

Obviously we have a lot of problems to deal with. One of the bigger problems is farm income. We have heard a commitment tonight that we are going to deal with that. We are going to deal with that as we promised in the election campaign. We have said we will replace CAIS. We are committed to doing that. We have said that we will implement a new disaster assistance program and we are committing to adding \$2.5 billion to farm income over the next five years in order to give farmers the beginning of success in agriculture.

•(2050)

I want to finish with a short illustration. I am reminded of a cartoon, a picture of a little duck, with a ball glove, standing out in the middle of a ball field. The ball gets hit and he waits for the ball to come to him. He is anticipating it and the little bulb over his head says, "Success is when skill meets opportunity". The ball goes over his head and hits the ground. Then he thinks, "Failure is when fantasy meets reality".

We have had enough of that. We believe we can do better. We know what needs to be done and we have the ability to do it. We can and will do that so we can achieve success for our agricultural producers across Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to congratulate you on your new appointment to this august body.

I would also like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his intervention. Both he and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food have been very available this evening. We appreciate that because this is an extremely important debate and these are important issues.

The people in the gallery tonight watching us and the people watching on television from coast to coast to coast are as concerned as we all should be about the future of the agricultural sector, the future of rural Canada. I can renew the pledge from this corner of the House and the New Democratic Party caucus on behalf of our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, that we will be working with members from all four corners of the House to make sure we get results for and solutions to the farm crisis that Canadians are living through right now.

One of the key elements of this, as the parliamentary secretary well knows, is the system of supply management. A number of members have spoken to that tonight, to the importance of keeping the supply management sector whole and viable.

I had a somewhat chilling conversation with the chief negotiator for Canada at the World Trade Organization negotiations last fall. During a briefing, he talked about the fact that the supply management sector is basically about 11% of agricultural receipts and the Americans were pushing to reduce that to 1%. The chilling phrase he said to me was that “the compromise is somewhere in between”. What that means is that there was consideration of selling out half of the supply management sector, selling that out and giving it away in WTO negotiations.

My question to the parliamentary secretary is very straightforward and clear. Will he commit today on behalf of the government that he or the government will walk away from any negotiations that reduce the supply management sector? In other words, will the government refuse to sign any WTO proposed agreement that hurts supply management and, as a result, hurts communities across this country that depend on the supply management sector to make ends meet?

• (2055)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, you have been sitting here throughout the evening and have heard the enthusiasm with which both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food spoke about supply management. As you know, this party supports it. It was in our platform. It was passed at our convention last year in Montreal. The member can be aware that we support supply management and we support our agricultural producers across this country.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, tonight there were a lot of words missing from those we heard from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, that is for sure. On the Canadian Wheat Board issue he talked about marketing choice, but what he is really talking about is that we cannot have single-desk selling when we are doing other things, when are dual marketing.

There will be another time to debate that, but what those members are really doing if they do away with single-desk selling is disempowering farmers, taking power away from farmers, taking \$160 million out of farmers' pockets and transferring it to the grain companies. That is exactly what they would do.

There will be other times to debate that issue, I hope, but what I want to know on that point is this. Will the parliamentary secretary assure us tonight that before there are any changes to the Canadian Wheat Board they will be debated in this House by way of legislation?

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Secondly, what we are trying to do here tonight in this debate is force the government to deal with the immediate problem of putting cash in farmers' pockets prior to spring seeding, and what the parliamentary secretary said does not cut it. The Prime Minister never said there would be. The Minister of Agriculture never said there would be, and the parliamentary secretary, to basically cut through what he said, has said that there would be \$500 million more than current safety net programs. The current safety net programs are the programs that he claims do not work.

The previous government paid ad hoc funding over and above those safety net programs to the tune of \$1.7 billion. Is he willing to commit here tonight to at least match, prior to spring, that funding which the previous government put in place for farmers so they could get a crop in the ground in the spring?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, when the hon. member is discussing agriculture, he reminds me of a steer attempting to breed. There is a lot of noise but it is pretty well useless.

He stood across here earlier and said the reason they were giving out ad hoc money was because the programs were a complete failure. I would like to talk about the Canadian Wheat Board. He knows as well as I do that western Canadians love nothing better than having someone from 3,500 miles away tell them what is good for them. Our farmers need some choice. They need some opportunity.

The dual system works in a number of places. One of them is Ontario, where the system has actually been gaining ground and gaining market share. The second one is the system that has been set up in Australia over the last few years, although it has run into a little trouble in the last few months; it has been set up in a system that is different from ours. It gives farmers the opportunity, both domestically and in export markets, to be able to do something with their own grain.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, farmers from both Quebec and Canada have been asking the federal government for help for some time now. Despite the fact that it feeds everyone here in Canada, the agricultural sector is still the poor relation of the government.

This evening, all of us here recognize that we must act urgently on the question of assistance for farmers. We have to stop talking about what was done wrong or what was not done.

We also recognize that there are an enormous number of changes to be made. The parliamentary secretary may well say that things were good in the agricultural sector last year, but there were still thousands on Parliament Hill yesterday, 3,000 of them from Quebec, here to tell us that they had been pushed to the brink.

Perhaps the parliamentary secretary can answer my questions. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food has just told us that \$750 million was recently paid out to Canadian farmers. I would like some details about this. First, did this \$750 million come from the budget that was passed last year? Second, can he break those amounts down and tell us where they will be going? Third, given that we are agreed on the urgent need for action, in particular on the question of the spring seeding, will it be possible to do something in the next two weeks?

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• (2100)

[English]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, as far as I understand, the money was an ad hoc payment and if my understanding of the budgeting process is accurate, I believe that would have been found in the supplementaries that went to grains and oilseeds producers. It was determined that they were the ones who needed that help.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture spoke about our commitment to agriculture. I am proud to stand as the parliamentary secretary representing agriculture across Canada. I look forward to working with my colleague from Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière on agriculture and I look forward to working together with the rest of the caucus here, because this is important to us.

Most of us come from agricultural ridings. We have a majority of farmers in our ridings. It is important to us that we protect and look after our farmers, but at the same time, we need to come up with some longer term planning that has been lacking over the last while that will give our farmers long term success, so they are not going from hand to mouth year after year. Farmers would like to make their living. They do not want to be coming back to the government.

Virtually everyone with whom I spoke told me they did not want to have to come back to the government, but right now they are forced to do so. They asked if I could change the system, so it will work for them so that they can make money from the marketplace and be proud again of what they do.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Chair, congratulations and I am sure the constituents of Ottawa—Orléans are very proud of you in your new position.

The parliamentary secretary was my seatmate in the last Parliament. He was so helpful in teaching me about the problems that the farmers of our country are facing. This man knows about agriculture, I can tell hon. members that.

I want to talk about a personal event which happened about eight or nine months ago. Three farmers came to my office on a Saturday morning. One of the men was 75 years old and he happened to be sitting very close to me. He came very close to me and held out his hand, a calloused hand that seemed as big as both of my hands. I could tell this man had worked hard all his life. He said to me that this was the second time he had to come with his hand out. He asked if I could not do something so he would never have to do so again.

I ask the parliamentary secretary to please give that man some hope. I know he is not here tonight, but he might be watching on television. If he is watching on television, can the parliamentary secretary offer the poor man and any others who might be in that same fix, some hope?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, that is a difficult question to answer and it is not one that I take lightly. We find ourselves, those of us who live in agricultural communities, understanding this desperate situation.

The government has been given a responsibility. We feel that we have begun to meet that by bringing out the \$755 million as soon as we possibly could. We have committed other money to the budget.

We are talking about other options as well. We want to put in place a long term plan. We want to help people in the short term and keep them going until we can get a long term plan to change the direction of agriculture in this country, so farmers have a chance to survive, to do well and be proud of the fact that they produce the food that this country eats.

• (2105)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few seconds to thank the voters of Richmond—Arthabaska for placing their trust in me for the second time on January 23. That is all I will say for now about that. I will come back to it when I speak another time, because I think that tonight's subject is too important for me to talk at length about anything but agriculture.

I would therefore thank Parliament, the other parties, for agreeing to hold a take note debate, as was requested in response to the demonstration held on Parliament Hill. Those thousands of agricultural producers did not come here for nothing, they did not come to Ottawa to sightsee; they came to express their distress.

Those thousands of farmers on the Hill yesterday sent the new government a number of important messages. First, "welcome to the real world". We could see that the real world had come to say that it was in dire need of assistance at this time. The honeymoon is over as well. It is time for the government to stop and think about what it can do when emergencies arise like the one they came to tell us about in that demonstration.

The time has therefore come to take action. The time has come as well to fulfil the commitments made in the election campaign and also in the Speech from the Throne. I will come back to that a little later, because we are talking about agriculture.

The Conservatives' election promises implied that they would support agricultural producers. I heard it personally when I took part in a debate during the election campaign, a debate organized in Toronto by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. In fact, the Conservative critic for agriculture said that some commitments had been made to that effect. Now we are waiting for the goods to be delivered.

In the Speech from the Throne, on page 11, at the very end, it says:

This Government recognizes the unique challenges faced by those who make their livelihood from our land and oceans in our vital natural resource and agriculture industries. It will take action to secure a prosperous future for Canadian agriculture, following years of neglect.

We are waiting for the action. The time has come to demonstrate good faith and to fulfil the commitments made not only in the election campaign and over the years when the party was in opposition, but also in this Speech from the Throne.

This government must walk the walk. Yesterday, in question period, the minister acknowledged that there was a short- and long-term problem. Tonight we have heard the Prime Minister acknowledge it. Once again we have heard the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food say it, except that we have not had a formal commitment, unfortunately, from either the Prime Minister or the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The minister said that his government would take action to meet their needs immediately. For me, "immediately" means right away. Earlier, the minister said in response to the questions and comments that the budget was coming, that we could not take measures very quickly, or too quickly, either, that the problem would not be solved in eight weeks. I understand that the problem of the farm income crisis will not be solved in eight weeks. However, this government has the means, the power and the ability to establish ad hoc measures, one-time measures to provide immediate assistance to agricultural producers before they seed their crops.

I think that all of the parties agree on this. At any rate, the government members who rose understand the situation. The official opposition, the Bloc Québécois, and the NDP—everyone here tonight—all seem to be saying more or less the same thing. We do not agree on everything, but I think we are all on the same wavelength when it comes to the urgency of the situation. Unfortunately, we do not have a clear and firm commitment from the government to act immediately.

When the minister says "immediately," what I hear is "now". Yesterday, he could have gone out to the agricultural producers, as his office said he would, to announce that immediate steps would be taken to help address the farm income crisis. Not to resolve it right away—immediately—of course. But that would have been a step in the right direction.

Here again, the government must walk the walk, as I said before. Furthermore, given that a person's effectiveness is measured by what he does, not by what he says he will do, agricultural producers' concerns are understandable.

The Conservatives have promised to replace the dysfunctional Canadian agricultural income stabilization program. I have been hearing this over and over tonight. This program never worked. It was rammed down the throats of the provinces and agricultural producers by former minister Vanclief. At the time, everybody said there would be problems implementing and managing a pan-Canadian program and making it work properly.

• (2110)

The evidence is in now; there are problems with this program. It is time to change it. In his latest speech, the minister is asking farmers to help him convince the provinces to agree to change the program. This is something new from the minister because they are going, and I say it in English, "to scrap the case". Now they say that they have to talk to the provinces and get them to agree.

It is no longer time to talk; now it is time to act. The provinces fund 40% of the CAIS program. The federal government simply cannot ask the provinces to reach into their pockets once again, whether to fund this program or another one. It is out of the question. They cannot be asked to do more.

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The government just announced a \$10 billion surplus. It can meet the needs of farmers. The arrival of a new government has not changed reality with the wave of a magic wand. As we have always said, the means are in Ottawa and the needs are in Quebec and the provinces. So do not come and tell me that it is time to talk to the provinces and ask them to do more. They have done their part. Now it is time for the federal government to keep its promises and change the program.

In Quebec, the pressure on the programs is becoming unbearable. If nothing is done, it is estimated that La Financière agricole du Québec could end the year with a \$170 million deficit. Is the minister reversing himself now? Is he going back on his promises?

During 13 years in opposition as the Reform Party, the Alliance and even the Conservative Party, I cannot believe that the new government did not have time to take a serious look at the CAIS when everyone agreed how ineffective it was. The only change that was made was to replace the deposit with fees. This was not received very well by farmers in Quebec or elsewhere. I have not heard very laudatory comments about this change in the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program. In the face of a crisis of this kind in farm incomes, this is no longer the time for improvisation.

The thousands of farmers who came to Parliament Hill yesterday were not here to play tourist. In order to get to Parliament Hill, I walked with the Quebec farmers over the Alexandra bridge. The comments to be heard and what was being shouted over the microphone were not very laudatory of the new government.

In any case, farmers have much more important things to do than come to Parliament Hill. What they love is to work on their land. They must be given the means to continue loving their work, given the means to have an agricultural succession. The way things are going, we are at risk of having no choice but to buy our products elsewhere, because no one here will be able to afford to run the farms.

Because they can no longer manage to meet their needs, many farms are having to close down their operations. The farmers came yesterday to deliver four very clear messages. The current agricultural programs are not responding to the income crisis. Immediate support measures must be established, until we have a new agricultural policy framework. The present agricultural policy framework has never been accepted by the agricultural community as a whole, whether in Canada or in Quebec. We are in the process of preparing one. The government has already spoken about this. Until such time as we have a new agricultural policy, we need domestic support programs to compete with the Americans and the European Union, which are subsidizing their agricultural industry with all their might. We will never reach that level of subsidization, and neither should we. We would not be capable. There is no doubt we can offer some domestic support to limit the damage.

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The funding must be flexible and adapted to the needs of the provinces. The government must maintain the marketing structures such as supply management. I have been so glad to hear the many speeches this evening defending the supply management system. Last November, just before the election, the Bloc Québécois tabled a motion which was adopted unanimously, before the negotiations held in Hong Kong. Thanks to that we managed to keep our supply management system in place. It was not easy to get that motion passed unanimously—luckily we were going into an election.

The crisis we are talking about is serious.

• (2115)

The year 2003 was a bleak one for the net income of farmers. The year 2006 promises to be just as bleak.

For 2006 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is predicting a dramatic decline in producer income—of over 50% from last year, and 81% from 2004. Debt has risen 90% in the ten years from 1995 to 2004. Producers have no more cash. They are in debt and no longer able to deal with this situation.

The government has to act now. That is what we are demanding this evening. All of the parties are together here, and I hope they are here in good faith. They acknowledge that there is a farm income crisis. What we are now asking the government to do is to take action.

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Chair, as this is my first opportunity to speak in the House, I would ask your indulgence as I direct a number of comments to my constituents, the people of Abbotsford. They have given me the privilege of serving them and representing them in the House, and I am deeply grateful to them for their confidence and trust in me. I hope to introduce them to the House more fully in the coming weeks.

I heard from across the floor earlier some promising comments from the leader of the official opposition. It appeared to be the suggestion that his party would be willing to work with ours in resolving the agricultural crisis. I was however astounded to hear from the member for Malpeque that somehow there was an expectation that our government would have solved the crisis in agriculture over the two months that we had been in power, yet this House has been systematically dismantled over 13 years by a Liberal government, brick by brick, block by block, timber by timber. To expect this problem to have been resolved overnight after 13 years of neglect is ridiculous.

I am decidedly encouraged by the comments I have heard from the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture and his parliamentary secretary. We have some critical issues facing agriculture in Canada.

As some members of the House know, Abbotsford is in its essence and in its substance a farming community. It is the heart of agriculture in British Columbia, producing the largest farm gate revenues in the province. From poultry to raspberries, from chickens and eggs to dairy, my community is directly impacted by the actions of our federal government in the area of agriculture. For 13 years we have had Liberal inattention to those concerns.

The soil-based farmers of Abbotsford are seriously impacted by a shortage of seasonal workers during harvest. We have been devastated by avian influenza. In fact there is no community in Canada that has been impacted like Abbotsford has been. A whole industry has been virtually destroyed overnight. There is also the impact of inadequate compensation to our feather industry under the CAIS program.

My farming community is keenly aware of the negative impact which the WTO trade talks could have on the viability of our supply managed commodities. That is why I applaud the minister, the parliamentary secretary and the member opposite for taking the time to listen. The many farmers I have spoken to are heartened by our government's commitment to replace the CAIS program with separate income support and disaster—

The Deputy Chair: I would like to ask the hon. member for Abbotsford to give me a moment for a point of order. The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Chair, I simply wish to point out to you that the member has been speaking for four and a half minutes. He could perhaps ask a question as we are also in a question period.

• (2120)

The Deputy Chair: I appreciate the observation by the honourable member.

[English]

Perhaps we could get to the question.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, I preface my comments and my question to outline the significant concerns my community has and also the investment that my community has in agriculture. Before anyone can ask questions, we have to understand the context in which that question is asked, particularly when we have a community that is so deeply dependent on farming, especially the supply managed commodities. It is important that the House understand my community and many of the communities across the country, which are in a similar situation.

My question was actually put earlier to members opposite from the official opposition, but we never received an answer from them. It was a refusal to answer.

I now ask whether the member for Richmond—Arthabaska will join our government in defending supply management at international tribunals and to defend our farmers against unfair trade practices and subsidies abroad.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to welcome all new members in this House.

The Minister of Transport felt we were intolerant for not letting him do anything but ask a question. I merely wanted to ensure that he was not making a speech without being aware that we were in the period reserved for questions and comments. It was not at all our intention to prevent him from speaking. On the contrary, his speech was excellent.

I would like to tell the minister that I agree completely with him on the matter of supply management. As he is a new member, perhaps he is not aware that last November 22 the Bloc Québécois introduced a motion calling for the protection of the supply management system in its entirety during negotiations with the World Trade Organization. This has always been a key issue for the Bloc Québécois.

I am happy to know that the minister is defending the supply management system in his riding. Not all representatives of the Conservative government are doing so. Take, for example, the industry minister. Back when he was working for the Montreal Economic Institute, he declared his opposition to the supply management system. I hope the minister will enlighten his colleague in order to ensure that the entire Conservative cabinet and all of his colleagues will be behind us when the time comes, once again, to protect the supply management system.

The negotiations are not over in Hong Kong. The terms and conditions must still be determined. We are still very worried about what is going on, particularly concerning milk protein imports. Members who have dairy farmers in their riding surely must have heard about this. Indeed, it is currently posing a very serious problem. We have asked the government to act, as soon as possible, under article XXVIII of the GATT, or to amend the rule in order to put an end to such milk protein imports. These imports are costing our dairy producers not less than \$70 million annually.

We therefore consider this a matter of the utmost importance. My colleagues can rest assured that we will always cooperate with any party that protects the supply management system.

[English]

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to start my question with a bit of a preface and introduction so the member know where I am coming from.

I represent a rural Saskatchewan riding and I come from that background. In 1929 my great grandfather first purchased the land, which is still in our family. Therefore, it is very personal to me to watch the devastation in the agriculture industry, in particular the grains and oilseeds sector which is suffering greatly and at great magnitude after many years. It is an industry, in particular the grains and oilseeds and agriculture in total, in which the government will stand behind farmers in every way possible.

One thing was mentioned tonight on which I would like to get the member's opinion. Young farmers are exiting or not entering the industry. I grew up on a family farm. I still go back to help my father swath and harvest. The option was not there for me. Financially it would be impossible for me to take over the farm from my father.

It has been observed that instead of worrying about exit plans for older farmers, if we had an entry plan for younger farmers, the problem of exiting would be solved. We need to build this industry.

The major problem with the CAIS program was, with the reference margins, young farmers were left out. People did not have enough years to meet the reference margins.

Would the hon. member and his party support the government's efforts to ensure that provincial agriculture ministers come on side to

help make changes to get rid of the CAIS program and build a program for younger farmers? Will the hon. member and his party support programs to help bring young farmers in and make changes to eliminate the CAIS program so young farmers are looked after?

• (2125)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Chair, I will be very brief. The Bloc Québécois has always been concerned about the plight of young farmers. I am pleased that the member raised the issue of grain producers, who are also suffering greatly in Quebec. Many of them were on Parliament Hill. I assume the member heard them too.

With respect to the CAIS program, it is clearly not working. This has been said over and over, and I think everyone agrees on this. We are here tonight to discuss the income crisis. We must resolve it immediately. We must offer targeted assistance.

I hope that the member and his party will support our request to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who was here tonight to talk about it. This is something that should be important for them. We must help agricultural producers experiencing an income crisis. We need that support now.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I recognize that you are new in the chair, but it is common practice in these kinds of debates to allow all parties a question. The government has had two and its questions tend to be soft. This is just to inform you that is the practice.

The Deputy Chair: I appreciate the member's comment, but it irritates me a bit since I have given him plenty of leeway today.

[Translation]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to speak to you about the supply managed sectors in Canada, our dairy, poultry, turkey, egg and hatching egg farmers who work hard across Canada day after day to provide Canadians with tasty, high-quality and affordable food.

Over the past few decades, supply management has contributed greatly to stabilizing the sector not just in my home province of Quebec but throughout Canada.

The system has been successful for the entire value chain. In a consumer based sector, supply management is advantageous to all parties: consumers, processors and producers.

As far as consumers are concerned, I feel they are often forgotten in our discussions about supply management, and yet they are the cornerstone of the entire sector.

Government Orders

At a time when “consumer is king”, supply management has delivered a wide variety of food products to consumers while respecting the environment—food that is innovative, varied, safe and of excellent quality.

How did supply management fulfil this mission? By being aware of the needs of processors and producers, by enhancing the ability of the system to react to the changing needs of the market and by taking the necessary steps to develop in a modern, effective, efficient and forward-looking sector.

Producers under supply management have always listened to the consumers. They have offered the diversity and broad range of products that consumers were looking for, even demanding. They stayed committed to quality. They stayed committed to value.

They are industry leaders when it comes to implementing food safety and quality assurance systems on the farm. They have also effectively combined these programs with similar initiatives in the processing sector in order to create a true system of food safety from the farm to your plate.

In terms of the processing sector, supply management has given processors a constant and predictable supply of products that satisfy and exceed Canada's strict standards in food quality.

Insofar as producers are concerned, there is no doubt that supply management has provided them with a stable, predictable income and a reasonable return on their work, which has enabled them to raise their families and guarantee that the market will be supplied. At a time when agricultural incomes are at some of their lowest levels in history in certain sectors, supply management remains a productive, viable approach in Canadian agriculture.

Against this background, as we all know, Canada is facing considerable pressure in the agricultural negotiations at the World Trade Organization, dealing with some key points for the supply management system in Canada.

I want to assure this House that our government is determined to defend Canada's ability to choose how its products are marketed, including through such orderly marketing systems as supply management.

The Government of Canada will continue to work closely with the provincial governments and the full range of stakeholders in this sector to advance these matters and all other facets of Canada's negotiating position at the WTO.

Similarly, we are following the negotiations at the WTO closely and intend to do everything in our power to eliminate the trade-distorting international trade subsidies and unfair practices of some of our international competitors.

● (2130)

We are searching for solutions that benefit everyone, which means that we feel very strongly about defending the interests of all producers.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food as well as the Minister of International Trade have adopted a policy of openness and consultation with the directors of GO5 Coalition for a Fair Farming

Model, Supply Management, and will continue in this approach in the weeks to come, as talks in Geneva intensify.

Last month, the two ministers met with leaders of major groups in the national agri-food sector to share their views on Canada's approach to negotiations with the WTO in 2006.

As pointed out by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on that occasion, Canada continues to work very hard at the WTO to ensure that international rules are as fair as possible for Canadian producers and processors.

WTO negotiations are entering an intense phase as Canada and other members of the WTO work towards completing the Doha round by the end of the year.

The stakes are high for Canada. Canadian farmers are world-class competitors. We must protect and defend the interests of the entire Canadian agriculture sector by supporting strong international trade rules that contribute to fair trade.

Farmers and the entire sector play an important role in cooperating with the government to help it achieve, at the end of these negotiations, a positive result that will strengthen the Canadian economy and benefit the entire agriculture and agri-food sector. For this reason, the ministers will continue to work in close cooperation with the sector during the weeks and months to come.

In conclusion, I would like to say that supply management is an appropriate, effective approach to agricultural production in domestic-oriented sectors.

Supply management not only allows farmers to obtain reasonable prices on the market but it also guarantees consumers the quality of their food supply. It also offers a forum in which all members of a value chain can work together for the common good.

Supply management has proven its effectiveness over the years by achieving its goals and objectives. It has evolved and has been improved in the interest of farmers and consumers alike.

Supply management has been the preference of dairy, poultry and egg producers, and I can assure my colleagues that Canada will continue to support this choice.

● (2135)

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, I welcome you to your new position. I am glad to see you are wearing your Legion pin, sir. It is always a good thing to support veterans and their organizations.

I had a very lovely supper this evening and I want to thank the farmers who produced it. I thank them very much. It was a very healthy and substantial dinner. I greatly appreciate their efforts and their families' efforts in providing the nourishment for members of Parliament to debate their issues in order to make their lives a little better.

This is a take note debate. The first thing I want to note is that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the minister himself are honourable, decent, hard-working family gentlemen. I will provide them with a few notes in order to move this issue forward and get control of that department. I have said for many years that the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food is running amok with the lives of our farmers.

I will provide a little history lesson on what is happening to farmers and businesses, especially small ones, in the province that I come from, Nova Scotia. There was a company called the Dew Drop Gardens, which produced hydroponic tomatoes and cucumbers, and was doing everything it could to cut its costs. The problem was it could not get its products on the supermarket shelves. Why? Because the competition among the supermarkets themselves had shrunk from six to three and then to two major supermarkets in the province of Nova Scotia, Sobeys and Superstore, and that is it. It pains me.

I can assure everyone that agriculture issues are not easy to solve. The minister is going to have a tough row to hoe, as they say in the field, in order to move this file forward. Things such as international competition, domestic concerns dealing with provinces, and weather concerns make it very difficult. He will not solve all the problems. I can assure everyone that we in our party will do everything we can to support the initiatives on a proactive basis.

The government will not solve the crisis unless local small family businesses and producers can get their products on the shelves. It will not solve the farm crisis when a box of cornflakes costs \$3.60 and the producer only gets 7¢. It will not solve the problem of the farm crisis unless the farmer gets more than double or triple that amount. If farmers were getting 25¢ for that box of cornflakes, they would not be here.

If we do not solve the problem of domestic market access, corporate control of agribusinesses, delivery and everything else, the next time farmers come here, they will leave their tractors, trailers and combines with the keys in them and a note saying, "They are all yours. We are done. We are finished".

In 1986 I went to the exposition in B.C. The most popular pavilion was the green and gold grain elevator from Saskatchewan. I visited it twice. It was wonderful. More people, especially the foreigners, visited that grain elevator than anything else at expo, but at the same time, grain elevators were being destroyed and taken down in the prairie provinces. Instead of having a close enough elevator where the farmers could bring their products, they ended up having to truck their products much further distances on very bad roads.

All of these various concerns have caused farmers and their families tremendous problems.

Supply management is extremely vital to this country, but the Conservative Party from 1993 onward was never a big supporter of supply management. In fact, the position of that party has changed over the past few years. By the way, I greatly appreciate that the Conservative Party has done that. Farmers have a right to be nervous when representatives appear before international boards, the WTO and others in order to move this issue forward.

Government Orders

Not only does the government have to defend the interests of supply management, but it has to get the industry minister to also say very clearly that he supports supply management. The government also has to deal with the agribusinesses and get corporate control of the domestic supply of stores and everything else in this country so that our farmers can deliver their products locally and get a fair price.

● (2140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, I thank my NDP colleague for his wise question.

In my short life—I am 42—I grew up with supply management, having been a dairy producer on my father's farm. Supply management came into being when I was four or five. I can remember the whole business involved in supply management. I grew up in this sector and intend to remain there.

As a representative of the Conservative Party, I attended the convention in Montreal. The first resolution passed unanimously by the party was to defend supply management.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the topic that is under discussion this evening is a very complex one and no one would disagree with that. The answers are not easy. I have had many conversations with the parliamentary secretary. I have had many conversations with the minister himself and we all agree that the answers are very complex.

We also know that in Quebec there is a program which the province has had for some considerable years, ASRA. We also know that in Ontario the various commodity groups have agreed that a program of risk management has been put on notice to the minister and to the former minister as a formula for disaster relief. I do not know whether the parliamentary secretary has seen that or not, but I am wondering whether he would find that a program that might become acceptable for his government to move forward. I think tonight the farmers who are watching this debate are going to want a little more than \$500 million.

The \$500 million is going to trigger about \$14 relative to the \$755 million at \$21, so that is not going to do it. I am wondering whether he can go beyond that, and I realize we will not get numbers out of the budget. However, can we be told clearly tonight and can farmers be assured, after we have had this debate tonight, that there will be money going forward, so that they can go to the banker in order to put seeds in the ground this spring?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

Let us look back over the past 13 years. I was a producer throughout that period. The previous government's farm policies ruined two generations of farm producers in ten years. The opposition can teach our government nothing.

We can assure the House that our government is very much aware of the current reality. We will do all we can to meet the needs of farmers in Canada.

Government Orders

● (2145)

[English]

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I too want to congratulate you on your appointment to your new role. I want to quickly thank the people of Leeds—Grenville for sending me back to this chamber. They are many of those people who are involved in the agricultural industry. In fact, many are involved in supply managed farms. In fact, we have the largest egg producer in Canada within Leeds—Grenville, many dairy farms, and so many people that depend on supply management.

My party and I, along with all parliamentarians in the 38th Parliament in fact, voted in favour of supporting supply management. Yet, many of our supply managed farmers are concerned. Regularly they are in my office wanting to know what the situation is. They want to know what is going on at the trade agreements. In fact, we had the round in Hong Kong only a few months ago. Throughout that there was concern among our supply managed farmers that Canada was not standing up for supply management.

The concern was not among parliamentarians, but that the trade negotiators were doing something different than what was being supported in Parliament.

I have a question for the hon. parliamentary secretary. In the ongoing discussions coming up in Geneva in the next few weeks, is the government giving clear direction to our trade negotiators that supply management is non-negotiable and that they will stand up to ensure that the supply management system in Canada is maintained?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question. We are following the WTO negotiations daily. I can assure you—and my colleague—that we have done everything to protect supply management in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to lend my voice to this important debate this evening. I sincerely regret that there continues to be a need for such a debate in the first place. The matter of declining farm incomes is an issue that is not new. In fact, the problem is growing and while debate is important, talk is always cheap.

I know that each of my colleagues here in this House join with farmers from across Canada in wishing that the problems facing our agriculture industry would be resolved in a way that would permit farmers to concentrate on farming, not on lobbying governments.

Unfortunately, world economic trends, international trading considerations and various government policies have helped to transform our agriculture sector from a fiscal powerhouse into the only industry in the world that buys retail and sells wholesale. I may not be an economist, but I know full well that this strategy is a recipe for disaster.

Do members know that when we buy a \$2 box of crackers at the grocery store the farmers receive only 8¢ for their work? That is right, the farmer who is responsible for providing 100% of product, excluding the packaging, receives less than 4% of the spoils from the sale of that product. Likewise on a box of cornflakes, as has already

been mentioned this evening, that would cost us \$3.50, the farmer would reap only 3% of that. My number was 11¢. My colleague tells me 7¢. So, so somewhere in between. Is it any wonder that farmers are having difficulty paying their inputs?

Our farmers are facing the single greatest economic challenge in the past two decades and they are in dire financial straits. In just two years, many farmers have lost more than a generation's worth of equity in their business and for many of these men and women, the wolves are at the door.

In my riding, families that have been working on a specific plot of land for almost a century are being forced off of that irreplaceable piece of their heritage by foreign subsidies, low commodity prices and skyrocketing input costs. As someone who continues to live on the farm in which he was born, I can only imagine the terrible anguish that a loss like that would represent.

The toll is being felt not just by farmers and farm families but by the whole of rural Canada. Hospitals, schools, churches and small town main streets are all deteriorating as a result of the farm income crisis.

Yesterday we witnessed a tangible manifestation of that frustration when thousands of farmers and members of farm families gathered peacefully on the front lawn to tell each of us, regardless of our political affiliation, that they need our help and they need it now.

Before I continue I need to be clear. I am not seeking to play those partisan games that can often permeate our debates in this place. It is true that the Liberals were in government between 1993 and 2006. It is also true that the Conservatives were in government prior to that, and the Liberals before that. Regardless of who is in power today and who was in power last year, we need to focus our attention on the men, women and children who were out front yesterday. Canadians should expect no less from their elected officials.

I have never been afraid to criticize Liberal ministers, the agriculture minister included, when I felt that the criticism was justified. While I believe that this minister is also genuine in his desire for positive change, I promise him the same candour.

Tonight we have a choice. We can talk about the past, we can talk about blame, we can talk about who did or did not do something years gone by, or we can talk about the problems facing farmers today and we can earnestly work together to resolve them.

On February 6, I sent a letter to the Prime Minister. The letter was not intended to be critical. In that letter I said that while I am now an opposition MP, I cannot accept that my job is simply to criticize government plans and priorities. Contrarily, I believe that in addition to putting forth an alternative position on certain issues, the role of an opposition MP is also to propose workable and constructive solutions to problems facing Canada.

Government Orders

It is from that perspective that I intend to frame my remarks this evening.

Since the installation of the new cabinet, I have also forwarded two letters to the Minister of Agriculture in which I suggested a range of options for consideration. I would like to take a few moments to place those suggestions on the record tonight.

First, I unreservedly support the risk management program that was designed and proposed by the Ontario White Bean Producers' Marketing Board; the Ontario Canola Growers' Association; the Ontario Coloured Bean Growers' Association; the Ontario Corn Producers' Association; the Ontario Soybean Growers; the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board; and, finally, the Seed Corn Growers of Ontario.

• (2150)

My party has indicated our solid support for this proposal and I would urgently call upon the government and the other political parties in this House to affirm their support for the same. A fully funded risk management program is essential. The province of Ontario is on the record as supporting the risk management program. The federal Liberal Party is on the record as supporting the RMP. Farm groups are on the record as supporting the RMP. Numerous backbenchers from various political parties are on the record as supporting RMP.

The time for discussion on this matter has passed. Let us move forward with the implementation of a fully funded RMP without further delay.

Second, I would urge the government to move forward with the plan of November 25, 2005, agreed upon as a result of the tripartite industry-federal-provincial round table meeting held in Regina, Saskatchewan. Among other measures, stakeholders and governments agreed that Canadian agriculture needs policy that leads to growth and profitability, not just volume. As outlined by the CFA, there are already solutions on the table. According to the proposal, the said solutions should be enclosed in a Canadian farm bill and I would encourage the minister to adopt such measures.

Third, and as a continuation of my second point, we must move to immediately develop a long term national agriculture policy. Simply put, we do not have a national direction for agriculture and our industry is suffering as a result. Ad hoc programming is cumbersome and has proven inadequate when it comes to overcoming many of the challenges facing our farmers. Farmers need support and investment that they can count on and plan for.

Fourth, Canada is a trading nation. With a relatively small population and a large resource-based economy, Canada must trade with our neighbours in the international community. That said, when it comes to issues like the WTO and NAFTA, Canada must work to protect our agricultural sector. Marketing systems such as supply management are domestic structures that must be shielded from foreign attacks.

The current system has consistently provided supply managed farmers with a fair return for a quality product. I believe that this must continue. Attacks on our supply managed system can take many forms. Government must be vigilant on issues like butter, oil,

sugar blends and milk protein concentrates as they represent serious and calculated challenges to the industry.

Next is the issue of food security, perhaps the most important. This is perhaps the most holistic subject that I can raise. In my opinion, national sovereignty cannot be boasted or preserved without a safe and reliable food supply. A nation that cannot feed its population has a fictitious sense of national security at best. Canada has never been hungry and as a result we have failed to grasp that food security is paramount. That must end if we are to ensure that Canada never goes hungry in the future.

Lastly, we hear much discussion about the 60-40 federal-provincial split in responsibility when it comes to agriculture. To me that seems like we are fighting over who must spend money on agriculture. I would suggest that governments should not be racing to meet minimum requirements but we should be giving agriculture the profile that it truly deserves.

Farmers feed cities. More accurately, farmers feed Canada.

It may not be technically possible, given certain constitutional realities, but I believe that ownership of domestic food production should be federalized. Food production is of national importance and as such I believe that the federal government has a moral duty to foster and preserve the long term strength and viability of the industry.

I would never suggest that the provinces should abdicate their responsibility to the industry. I simply believe that we, at the federal level, should be leading the charge.

As an aside, I believe that it is also worth mentioning that farmers must finally unite. The industry continues to be seriously fragmented and that divide has not served farmers well. I applaud any real efforts to attain an actual unified voice for agriculture, but I fear that the unity that is required to prompt actual change and progress is still beyond the immediate grasp of our farm leadership. So long as that is the case, governments will struggle to ascertain the best tools and delivery methods that the industry requires.

I have just articulated six specific points that I believe would be of benefit to Canada's farmers and I would call upon the government to move swiftly to implement such policies. I would also call upon the opposition parties, mine included, to move with equal speed to ensure that such initiatives are brought about. Farmers do not care what party we are with. They want, need and deserve immediate action.

Government Orders

● (2155)

I met with the Minister of Agriculture earlier today and I thank him for taking the time to meet with me. I believe him to be a sincere man and I would ask him on behalf of the farmers of my riding of Huron—Bruce to see that these matters receive the attention they deserve within the House and at the cabinet table. Farmers are counting on us. They are the foundation on which this nation was built and they are the lifeblood of rural Canada. If our agricultural economy fails, then so does the rest of the national economy. The 39th Parliament represents a clean slate for government. Politics aside, I stand ready to offer whatever assistance I can.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Chair, before I begin my first speech as a new member, I want to thank the electors from my wonderful riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry who put their trust in me. I also want to send out a special thanks to my parents, René and Andréa, engaged citizens and staunch sovereignists. They taught me about passionate commitment.

I also want to send a special greeting to the older workers in the textile industry who are impatiently waiting for help from the government.

The Prime Minister came tonight and made more promises to the farmers. He talked about weeks, months, years. He does not understand. Farmers need help right now for spring seeding. The agriculture sector is in crisis. Farmers are waiting for concrete action, not promises.

Does the hon. member acknowledge that the government should give the farmers the money they are asking for immediately?

[English]

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Chair, in some sense the member's question was directed toward the minister. Even though she is a sovereignist, I believe she would have the interest of all Canadians in mind when she speaks about what the minister would do for a part or all parts of Canada. I trust that the intent of her comments were that all Canadians should be equally treated and that farmers should receive and deserve immediate attention to these issues raised this evening and in days previous.

● (2200)

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to join in this important debate tonight. I listened very carefully to my hon. colleague across the way and I certainly share his sentiment that what farmers do not need is to have a bunch of politicians looking back. We need to look forward and they are looking for some forward looking vision for the future. I think that is what the Prime Minister articulated tonight and my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, certainly intends to work closely with farmers and the farming industry to develop a vision of a brighter future for our farmers and agricultural producers.

I speak with some authority because, like quite a number in the Conservative caucus, I come from a farm background. I farmed for 20 years and I say that quite proudly. My brother still farms the family farm in the Peace River country, some 3,000 acres of grains and oilseeds, so I know firsthand from my brother, cousin, uncle and

many of my friends and supporters just how serious this income cash crisis is on the family farm.

I cannot speak too passionately about the crisis that is facing our family farm. In fact, I find it very difficult to speak on this topic without getting emotional, as do many of my colleagues. When I say colleagues, I do not mean just Conservative colleagues. I mean colleagues with a farm background from all of the parties. When one knows of the suffering on the family farm firsthand and one sees the little children who see mom and dad struggling to pay the bills, it brings it home in very clear terms how our farmers and our farm families are being affected.

At one time, when I was involved in farming and farm producers organizations, I was the president of the B.C. Grain Producers Association. One of the things I learned very early on was that what farmers did not need were assistance programs designed by bureaucrats for bureaucrats. What works really fine here in Ottawa in some ivory tower does not help the farmer at the farm gate, which is part of the problem. All politicians have heard that part of the problem has been the CAIS program. When I was involved, many farmers put a great deal of effort into designing a program called NISA, the net income stabilization account, which worked quite well but it was done away with.

Does my hon. colleague not see that part of the problem has been that too often governments of all types, certainly the past Liberal government I would suggest, and not trying to be too critical, but have listened to what the bureaucrats wanted and what they said was possible rather than listening to what the farmers really wanted and what they felt was the best program to deliver the best assistance to them in a timely fashion?

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his passionate consideration of the comments I made this evening and certainly as he relates to his constituents. I, too, have farmed for well over 30 years. I still own the farm, I will continue to own it and my sons will own it some day.

The question the hon. member put to me in terms of have we been listening to the bureaucrats, I have not been at the level where I really dealt with bureaucrats. I can only attest to what I have been told which is that bureaucrats do have a large voice in the direction of government. I suppose it will be up to the hon. member's government to determine whether or not it will listen to the bureaucrats and whether or not they will give his government better information. If we got bad information, I hope his government will get better information.

I would like to say that farmers truly should be listened to when it comes to creating programs. The risk management program that was put forward by the farmer organizations in Ontario has been unanimously supported by all of these organizations where farmers choose an entry level in which they want to support the realized net return on a commodity. Those farmers will make a choice when they pay the premium whether they pay in at \$3.50 for corn, \$3.75 or \$4, as an example. That is a program that is ready to be accepted.

Government Orders

I have talked to the minister about this and he has a copy of it. I hope he takes this very seriously. It is a program that can be applied. It runs somewhat similarly to the ASRA program in Quebec. The Quebec farmers today are much better served by their programs and by the Province of Quebec than are a lot of provinces in this country. I think we need to learn from those who have tried and tested. Where there have been failures, we need to avoid those. We need to look at the successes of others and try to apply them to best suit our case.

• (2205)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in asking my question this evening, let me begin by extending, from one Regina to another, my congratulations to you on your new role here in the Parliament of Canada.

There has been a good deal of discussion this evening, a lot of it very useful discussion, about the urgency of special attention that needs to be extended to farmers and farm families this spring. The government has spoken about the provision that it intends to include in the next budget and, obviously, farmers will wait very anxiously for that news.

It is to be hoped that perhaps as the days go by the government might see its way clear to actually taking action on this matter before the budget. There is some precedent for that. If that can be done, I am sure that would be welcomed across the country.

In the last question there was discussion about the issues related to program design. In other words, what is the best structure of agricultural programming that can be of the greatest urgent assistance to farmers?

The other side of the question, of course, is the issue of quantum: How much money needs to be put into the program? However well it may be designed, what is the cash needed to back it up?

The common experience over the course of the last several years is that over and above the basic safety net funding, whether that be one particular kind of safety net or another, and they have changed from time to time over the years, the requirement from year to year has tended to be at least on average in the area of \$1.5 billion per year.

Does the member for Huron—Bruce have a quantum figure in mind that would be required to make a meaningful contribution to the resolution of this problem, at least for the upcoming season and perhaps even more for the longer term? Does he have a minimum estimated figure that would be required in order to take at least some of the sting out of the hurt that farm families are feeling?

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Chair, that was a very good question and I am not sure if even farmers would have the answer to that question.

However when we look back and look at the level of income expected from agriculture this year which is another 16% reduction, it will take a considerable amount of money.

I want to go back to the statement I made a few moments ago. I am very passionate in my belief that food security is as important to this nation, that a nation that has the ability to feed itself, as what it is to have a military. We know that Russia had a strong military but ultimately it could not feed itself, so it had no strength in their economy.

We have to take a different approach. We have never had an agricultural policy in this country. We have never had a policy where we have really said that we will make a commitment to agriculture in the long term. If we believe that, then I believe agriculture has to become a federal department, as it is now, but where it takes responsibility for the whole of agriculture in Canada with some association of course with the provinces, but I think we have to take the responsibility.

• (2210)

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to rise tonight and represent the constituents of Battlefords—Lloydminster in this ongoing contest we have with how we keep farmers on the land.

Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and I would ask that you let me know when I am getting close to the end of my time.

Agriculture has been the backbone of every civilization for 6,000 years. In the last century technology has propelled Canadian agriculture from a subsistence activity to the point that each farmer can now feed 130 people. Our total output has increased by 350%. There will always be a Canadian agricultural sector. We are going through some really rough times but we are resilient. We will survive.

What is the key to our future in which we draw younger generations who will want to participate and present generations can make a decent living and ensure growing prosperity? One major strategy that has been talked about is the move from low cost high volume commodities to the production of high valued goods derived from agricultural products. Crops can now be made into fuel, industrial compounds, building materials, plastics, pharmaceuticals or a multitude of products we have not yet imagined.

Canada must use this opportunity to move to the production of high value speciality products either as food, fuel or pharmaceuticals. The future of Canadian agriculture in part lies in making that shift to a biobased economy. Biomass production addresses three consumer concerns: health, energy security and environmental sustainability. Studies show some pulse crops and flax can reduce the risks of heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

The government has committed \$3.2 million into Pulse Canada's pulse innovation project. The idea is to kickstart a partnership of industry, producer research and government to bring new and better products to our domestic and foreign markets. We are offering the same support for soybeans, potatoes, dairy and even maple syrup.

We can no longer afford to commit a million dollars on paper and find at the other end that the producer only saw 40¢ on the dollar or that some lawyers or consultants got fat contracts while researchers spent two years trying to get six months worth of grants on their own.

Government Orders

The government is prepared to streamline processes, direct real money to the source and let the producers, innovators and marketers take their ideas all the way to that production line. If Canada had committed to ethanol and biodiesel when we talked about it years ago we would of course been that much further ahead. Countries like Brazil that started in the mid-seventies are now light years ahead of us.

We must take the approach that the marketplace be flexible and innovative, that the government is there to facilitate, not dictate.

The International Energy Agency predicts that the world will need 50% more energy by 2020. We know that India and China can certainly use access to cleaner burning fuels as they develop their economies.

The government has pledged to ensure that all motor vehicle fuel in Canada will contain an average of 5% renewable fuel content such as ethanol and biodiesel by 2010. This will require 8 million tonnes of grains and oilseeds.

Not only can we reduce emissions but there is a positive energy balance in that situation. Combusting ethanol produces nearly twice the energy required to produce it and biodiesel is even higher than that. By 2010 the production of 1.4 billion litres of ethanol will displace 1.2 billion litres of petroleum based gasoline. That is great for the environment.

The new Conservative government faces many unresolved issues of the recent past and many choices for the immediate future. We will support research, facilitate market access, open up opportunities and relieve many regulatory burdens for producers.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Chair, my colleague had a lot of facts with regard to biodiesel and ethanol. This would be a great move in the future. This would give agriculture not only the short term bounce it needs to get through the difficult time it is in right now, but it would also provide a brighter future than what we have seen in the past. We have heard a lot about that in the debate tonight and it is absolutely critical.

I know quite a bit about agriculture. I have lived it going on 50 years. We have a fourth generation farm which our oldest son has taken over. I could probably be accused of child abuse for a thing like that considering the state of agriculture right now.

There is a bright future in biodiesel. Also, there is the idea of getting rid of trans fats in Canadians' diets. This would drive another market. It is really important when getting rid of trans fats that they not be replaced with highly saturated palm oil fat. It is a great opportunity for the canola industry in Canada to have a 7% saturated fat instead of a 50% saturated fat. Canola could fuel another market the likes of which has never been seen before. We have to take a serious look at this. Lots of studies have been done. As health care has been my portfolio, I know we would save \$1.9 billion per year in health costs alone if we did this as well. This is something we really need to do. It is a win-win situation for everybody. I wonder if my colleague agrees with me.

• (2215)

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, there are some great statistics there. The member for Yellowhead is certainly correct in stating that Canadians are demanding healthier food. They want to eat healthier.

We had that debate a couple of years ago in the House of Commons. A lot of changes have been made in the trans fat area.

It would be a tremendous possibility for Canadian canola growers if they could export that type of a product. Domestic consumption would be great, but it would be a drop in the bucket compared to what we could do on a global scale. Part of what we need to do is to export our commodities in a different way into different niche markets and that is certainly one of them. It is said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. That is basically what we have done here for the last couple of decades with respect to agriculture.

I went to my first farm meetings when I started farming in 1972 and I am not hearing anything different now from what I heard then. I have access to my grandfather's journals that he kept when he went to the homestead in 1918. He talked about the same concerns and the same situations at that time that farmers are facing now such as weather conditions—

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: The same price for wheat.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, the member for Crowfoot said the price of wheat is the same and he is absolutely right. We just truck it further to get the lesser price. We do need some changes to be made.

There is a glowing future out there for Canadian agriculture, but not by doing it in the same way that we have always done it. This government and this minister are going to take the lead in getting us past those hurdles and into a brighter future for our producers.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I cannot disagree with the comments of the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. I cannot disagree with the importance of helping the agriculture industry to diversify. The member went on at length about the potential for ethanol. We have heard some really good ideas and we have to share those ideas, but at best that is a mid-term and long term objective. It is an objective that we have to strive for, but I would bring him back to the present moment, the days and few weeks ahead. We had evidence in front of the House of Commons yesterday. Ten thousand farmers are really having a difficult time. My colleague knows that. There is no disagreement here on that fact.

As was mentioned by the member for Wascana, there is a precedent for dipping into a current year's surplus to create an ad hoc assistance program. The previous government has done that. We left the new government with a tremendous set of books, thanks also to the member for Wascana and his predecessor.

Could my colleague talk about the urgent need for help for our farm community?

Government Orders

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, certainly there is a need for some sort of cash injection. We have already done that. We have made sure that the money that was supposedly pledged as an election gimmie by the past government actually cleared the hoops and hurdles and got out to producers. We are well underway with that exercise and we know it is going out.

It is a drop in the bucket. There is a \$50 billion farm debt across the country that has accumulated and doubled over the last 10 years. Those guys over there may have gotten the books in order for the federal government but they downloaded on the agricultural sector, the provincial governments, the municipal governments and everything else. We are paying that piper now.

Certainly we have to sit down, scratch our heads and come to terms with getting some sort of cash out. We will do our damndest to do that. No one I have talked to has seen this exemplary set of books the member talked about. I am certainly looking forward to that. If there is a pot of money that has not been squirreled away in a foundation or sent out through some Quebec ad agency, we will make use of it and farmers will benefit.

• (2220)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is very good to be standing here in the 39th Parliament addressing the subject of agriculture. I congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your new appointment. I wish you well.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the fine people of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for sending me back to represent them in this great place of tradition. Many of the people in my riding are farmers as am I. Many others were raised on farms. There is a connection that is very dear to them.

I heard some members from the other parties talk about traditions on the farm. I have three sons at home. They are sixth generation. I do not have such a pleasant story. They have chosen to go in directions other than agriculture. I certainly do not hold that against them. I remember the day that my youngest son said to me, “Dad, I do not want to work like you, 18 or 20 hours a day and not really know if I am going to get paid for it”.

In reality it is a sad state of affairs when it gets to that. That is a decision that generation is making. My sons are not the only ones; many people all over this country have made that decision. We have to end the tide that is taking our young people off the farm.

There are many problems facing agriculture and farmers. Most of the problems are not their fault. Over the last year and a half I have heard from many of my constituents about the problems in agriculture. They all keep coming back to CAIS and the fact that it did not work in any way, shape or form.

During the last session of Parliament I joined with our then agriculture critic in demanding that the government drop the CAIS program cash deposit requirement for farmers wishing to trigger CAIS payments. Last week this government announced that we are getting rid of that deposit requirement and replacing it with a fee process. This means that producers will no longer have to tie up working capital. We are able to look at the savings this change is going to provide for the farmers.

In the past, farmers have had to set aside 22% of the value of their reference margins in a CAIS account in order to have full protection under the program. With that process a producer with a \$60,000 reference margin had to put \$13,200 up front in an account. Someone who had \$13,000 would not need this program. That is gone. With the fee system a producer will pay \$4.50 for every \$1,000 of reference margin protected. The fee amounts to \$270, but again, that has been waived for 2003, 2004 and 2005.

During the election campaign the Prime Minister pledged to scrap the CAIS program and replace it with separate farm income stabilization and disaster relief programs. We have heard that again tonight. However, he has run into a roadblock. There is a 24 month notification period or opting out clause that the previous government put in, in conjunction with the provinces. Because the provinces do not want the possibility of being hit with more payouts, they are saying all of a sudden that they have not heard from any farmers that there is any problem with CAIS. The provinces want to stick with the program.

Until that happens we are stuck with CAIS for a while. Our minister, who has been here all night, is working to find ways to make this program work, streamline it a little bit, at least in the interim while we are stuck with it, and make it a little easier for farmers.

The minister has had meetings with his provincial counterparts. I know that in June, as the minister stated earlier, they will be coming back with some suggestions. I sincerely hope that the 10 provincial agriculture ministers will come back with something constructive that our agriculture minister can work with.

Our national CAIS committee, which includes 22 producer members, is looking at all options to improve this program in order to ensure stability. Hopefully when the members report, the program will be improved. The members on the committee are agriculture producers. They have their feet on the ground. They are active in agriculture. They should be able to have some input.

• (2225)

I have not finished my remarks, but I see that I am out of time. I would be glad to answer any questions.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the hon. member's remarks. It is a pleasure to have worked with him on the agriculture committee.

I do want to make this point because of what has been said several times tonight. The Prime Minister said in his remarks tonight, with a bit of a preamble, that the government will ensure that it properly addresses “the costs of production, market revenue, and inventory evaluation”. If we are moving to a real cost of production formula, plus a fair return on labour and investment in terms of safety net programming, members can be assured that we will be there, but we want to see costs of production plus a return on labour and investment. Members can be assured of that: we will be there. That will be a huge step forward.

Government Orders

But that is for the longer term, and as the member said, we have an immediate problem. He said we are stuck with CAIS. That member used to quote the provinces, saying that the provinces were asking us for more money and asking why the federal government would not come through.

We know it is not all roses and sunshine, but the previous minister got ad hoc funding above and beyond the CAIS program. That is what we are trying to get from this government tonight. We are trying to get a commitment from the government to at least come up to that and then add a little more because there is a further 16% decline in income, to at least come up with cash before seeding in terms of ad hoc programming over and above the CAIS program. I ask the government not to use the excuse of CAIS and the provinces. We got ad hoc funding and the government should be able to do the same—only it should make it a little more money.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Chair, the member across the way mostly had comments. There really was not a question there. I know that his heart is in the right place. I think that even in the last government there may have been one, two or maybe three of his members who actually agreed that they should do something with agriculture, but in 13 years, what actually got done?

We have heard about some report. I think it must have been delivered on Easter Sunday by the Easter bunny, because that was the name on it. I presume that is what happened. We are hearing about that and other things, but where were the Liberals? They have all these ideas now that they are no longer in government. Where were they for 13 years? My sons would have loved to have seen some of it, I can tell members that.

I say, do not be hypocritical. All of a sudden they can say whatever they want when they are on that side, and that is not good enough. All kinds of policies could have been brought in over the last few years and not one of them was. Maybe that member wanted to see it, but there sure as heck were not enough members in his caucus to see that it actually went through.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the hon. member's comments, but today in the Saskatchewan legislature farmers were giving away loaves of bread for 6¢. A loaf costs 8¢ to produce and regularly costs over \$1 to buy. So my question is quite clear. Just what is next? Ethanol and all of that will be great, but eventually the fuel companies will do exactly what big agribusiness is doing to our farmers.

What is the plan of the Conservative government to ensure that we do not see any more headlines that say agribusiness is making record profits and farmers are making record losses? What will be the plan to eventually put more money from the initial product into the hands of farmers and their families? For example, instead of 6¢, why are they not getting 20¢?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Chair, I would be glad to address the member's question.

This has been and is part of the big, overall problem. As for increasing the share from 6¢ or 7¢ to 21¢ or whatever, I do not disagree with the fact that this is where it should be, but again, how we end up getting there is part of the whole package. Hopefully, with some of the consultation and ideas coming out of tonight, there will be some ideas we can work toward. I am not going to stand here and

tell members that I have all answers on it, but I do know that the minister is consulting and is trying to get answers.

Earlier tonight it was mentioned, and I am not sure who said it, that in the food business we have gone from six to two grocery companies. It is the same in Ontario. It is bad. A good friend of mine who is a farmer but also has a grocery store is suffering big time because he is bringing in beef from a local abattoir that is helping out on the kill in our riding and he is being chastised by the big company. He is bucking those people and I wish him all the luck, but I have a feeling that he is fighting a losing battle. I hope the government can actually step in and do something about that kind of stuff.

• (2230)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Chair, I welcome you in your new position.

I always feel like what the great Tommy Douglas said: that there is something about a fight that makes me want to get up in the morning. People here know me as someone who likes to get at it, but I have to say tonight that I really have to move beyond that because I am tired of this debate.

My very first debate in the House was on this crisis, and we have had so many since then. I really do not want to be here two or three months from now replaying the same thing over and over. I have a sense that we all know what the problem is, but the question is, where are we going to go with it?

I can give members an example. I represent the great riding of Timmins—James Bay. We have an amazing agricultural base there. I think it is the promised land. And there is still promise in the promised land. We were talking with farmers the other day about encouraging farmers to come over from Europe and settle because the land is still fairly cheap. We have wheat, sheep and a great dairy and beef industry, and it can be sustainable, but what we are seeing is the problem of farmers who are now slipping under. And these are the most efficient farmers in the world.

I got a call at home on Sunday night; people know I am at home on Sunday nights. A man said, "Mr. Angus, I don't want to bother you because I know you're a busy man". Of course he could bother me, I said. He said he needed something to help him. He said he did not have enough feed, that he had not made it through the winter. He said, "I can't feed the cattle snowballs any more". He said, "There's got to be a government program that can get me through just to spring".

I asked if he had tried CAIS. He said he tried but got nothing out of it. I asked if he got the cattle set-aside. He said he got a little bit from that but it did not get him any feed. I said the only choice would be Farm Credit, but he cannot go to Farm Credit. Nobody is going to give him any more credit.

The story I have is the story that each member who is here tonight has. We know CAIS does not work. We have talked about it a thousand times. We had farmers from across Ontario show up at the Ontario legislature two weeks ago. They surrounded it, like they have done here. They surrounded it for four days. They said they wanted action.

Government Orders

We saw that government down in Toronto stand up during its budget with its government members slapping themselves on the back and telling the whole province what a great job they have done for farmers by telling farmers to go to Ottawa, because Ottawa is their problem. That is not leadership. And here, tonight, we cannot tell our farmers that we have a problem with CAIS because the province of Ontario or the province of Saskatchewan or every other province does not want to help. We have the will if we want it.

I would like to suggest that in the 39th Parliament we do something fundamentally different from what we ever did in the 38th Parliament. I would say that we have unanimous consent: we know that program does not work. I would refer to parliamentary precedent. The great member for Elmwood—Transcona told me about the time the debate was going on about the bill on the firefighters' pension. He stood up and said, "What are we all arguing about? We all agree and we can get unanimous consent".

I would like to say that we could get unanimous consent tonight such that within a year we are going to have a risk management program that works. If the provinces do not want to come along, we will defy them. We can do that as a Parliament. We can make that commitment to our farmers that we will go through with it. Of course, the minister cannot stand up and say he can deliver it, but what he can say is that they will try to get this into this budget.

If we sent that message, we would send a message that this Parliament is committed to actually doing something about the farm income crisis. Because I really have to say that I do not want everyone here putting out our 10 percenters saying that we stood up and fought for farmers while knowing that nothing changed.

We can do it tonight. I am asking the minister to make that commitment. I am asking each party to work with us. Let us put it aside. Let us get it done. We have a year to get a risk management program that works. We will stand up to the provinces if they do not want to come along, because we know what it is about. We know it is about passing the buck so that no one has to pay the cheque at the end of the day. That is my recommendation for this evening. I am asking for action on it.

• (2235)

I have a few other comments that I would like to make in terms of the overall direction, and we have had some interesting promises. I am concerned about the belief that we can move to a market-driven solution. Our farmers are the most efficient in the world and yet they are failures because we know that there is no such thing in agriculture as an open market. There is no such thing as a fair market and there is no such thing as a free market.

We have to address those fundamental inequities, internationally and domestically, and we have to be realistic about our ability to deal with that. There is no fair or free market when it is controlled by Cargill, Tyson and ADM. When farmers in my region in northern Ontario bring grade one canola down to the crushing plant and it gets dumped by ADM and there is no place else to sell it, that is not a free and open market.

My good friend from Sackville—Eastern Shore pointed out the lack of access for our domestic producers to get into the grocery stores. When we set up a milk co-op and it is successful, we know

that it will be shut down because not a single independent grocer or other grocery chain will touch it when it is a local product. We have to address that.

We cannot talk about the market handling the problems at the domestic level because farmers are in a fundamentally unequal relationship. The question is whether there is a desire to deal with the problems of the agricultural crisis because agri-business is making better money now than it has ever made. That has to be confronted at the domestic level.

When we talk about the international problems, we have to be realistic. Again, I am trying to do this in a conciliatory fashion where we can bring change in the 39th Parliament. There is no way we can have a market-driven response when Ontario wheat is sold into Egypt and we cannot sell because as soon as France finds out, it throws a subsidy on its wheat and undercuts us. It is not possible to have a market-driven response when U.S. corn is coming across the border, subsidized at \$2 a bushel. We cannot compete and we should not have to compete because it is fundamentally not right.

I have faith that our minister will go to the WTO and represent our interests, but no one should suggest for a second that the E.U. or the United States will drop subsidies on their rural programs. It is not going to happen. That would be the quickest ticket to political oblivion in the United States today. We have to be realistic in facing that.

What is happening with the subsidies is not just damaging us on the domestic market, it is wreaking havoc with the international economy. The economies of developing nations are being put under. Countries like Jamaica are being flooded by the E.U. What is being done to promote the farm economies of the E.U. and the U.S. is fundamentally wrong for anyone who believes that a producer should be able to take their goods to market and sell them. We can say with pride in Canada that we have not gone out to undermine third world agriculture. We have not gone to bury them with a Wal-Mart approach. We have taken our domestic markets and tried to make them work. Because we are successful, we are suffering attacks at the WTO.

I have to suggest to the minister that we need to have an articulated plan B. As much faith as I have in his willingness to go fight for us, the U.S. is not going to play on a level playing field nor is the E.U. Without a level playing field, there is no talk about a international market response. It is not going to happen.

I will leave it at that. I would love to speak for my full 10 minutes and I usually try to squeak out an extra few minutes. I feel tonight that we have had a lot of talk. I ask the minister and I ask for all-party consent to come out of tonight with an agreement that within one year we will bring back to the people of Canada a fully funded risk management program that works and we will tell the provinces that we want them to sign on or they will face the wrath of the farm community of Canada.

• (2240)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Chair, congratulations on your posting. I know you will do a good job and you will enjoy it as I did in a previous incarnation.

Government Orders

Again, I appreciate the hon. member's passion for agriculture. As he says, there is consensus that there are problems, especially in grains and oilseeds, and we all acknowledge that. Parts of the farm sector are doing well and those farmers are to be congratulated.

I did not set out in the morning to pick on the provinces when it comes to the CAIS program. They say that they want to transform it and that they want to try to make it work in the interim.

We had suggested during our campaign that we needed to replace CAIS with two separate programs, one for disaster relief and one for farm income generally. I am making that case as strong I can to the provinces, and I will make it over the next couple of months.

I agree with the member. I do not want to wait a year. We will be coming forward with proposals at our next federal-provincial meeting in June. As we agreed at the last federal-provincial meeting held here last month, between now and then we will making efforts to transform CAIS to ensure that in the interim we do all we can to improve the CAIS program.

It is the flagship program we inherited and we have to use it. I encourage farmers to involve themselves in it. We are going to try to make changes, some of which were talked about tonight. We are going to try to improve it in every way we can. We started last week and we are going to continue to make changes to try to make it more effective and so on. Again, we are not going to wait a year. There will be proposals in June for a replacement for CAIS that would involve separate disaster relief and support programs. I think that program will be winsome. I think farmers will like it, and I hope the provinces do as well.

Part of my task and part of the challenge that has been given to me by the Prime Minister is to make sure that we use the \$500 million a year, the \$2.5 billion, to properly fund the program, the core program so to speak, with a separate disaster relief program. I think we can do a good job with that. There may be other programs necessary from time to time for other crises that come along, and we will deal with that. We have seen it in the BSE problems. We have already sent out \$755 million this year because we understand there is a crisis.

We are not waiting a year. The program changes will come and proposals will come. Because it is a federal-provincial shared agreement, I hope we will have consensus by June. Certainly we are going to have proposals by June.

I agree with the member we cannot wait long. That is why we are getting right at it.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I have heard it all before. Last June we were going to have consensus on fixing CAIS by dropping the deposit. Perhaps it was March. There is always decisions coming down. It seems to me that seeds have to be put into the ground before June.

The government campaigned on a promise that it was going to get rid of CAIS and replace it. It seems to be very simple. The government campaigned that it was going to get rid of child care agreements. It came in and said that it was going to do it and it did not have to talk with the provinces about it.

I would be glad if they had it in June, but the commitment I want to hear from the minister is that within a year there will be a program

whether the provinces sign on or not. That is the question. It is really straightforward. Everything else I am hearing really sounds to me like a replay from the 38th Parliament.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the hon. gentleman spent some time in his remarks talking about the difficulty of trade negotiations. They certainly are a huge challenge, especially with the subsidy levels in the United States and in the European Union and oftentimes the determination of those two major trading entities to get together in trade negotiations at the last minute and to cook a deal between them. Oftentimes it is the interests of other countries, both developed countries like Canada and many lesser developed countries that get compromised in that process.

As we contemplate the further discussion in the Doha round, which is supposed to be the developmental round of international trade negotiations to particularly assist lesser developed economies to catch up, many of those economies are entirely agricultural economies.

Would the hon. gentleman see as a trade negotiating strategy for Canada that we might examine the opportunities to make common cause with some of the lesser developed economies which are perhaps not in the same league when it comes to agriculture as we are in Canada, but whose problems, when we look at the actual producer level issues, are magnified manyfold? It seems to me that some of those lesser developed countries may in fact have an interest in joining Canada and perhaps some other nations in saying to the Americans and the Europeans that we are not going to let them get away with it yet one more time.

In the development round, which is the Doha round, the lesser developed economies have a particular amount of clout and influence and emphasis in the flow of discussion. Where the Americans and the Europeans might try to brush Canada aside, they would have a much greater problem in trying to brush a coalition of some of the lesser developed economies aside. I wonder if there is not a coalition, a tactic, a strategy where those of us who take exception to the policies of the Europeans and the Americans might well be able to put together a useful international coalition.

• (2245)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I certainly agree that we need allies at the international level. Unfortunately, it seems to me that we have not had allies at the international level, and that has been a major failing.

Some of our farm people who have been at the previous rounds have come back and told us that Canada is alone. When we talk with the negotiators, they say that Canada is alone. Why is Canada alone? Where have our trade negotiators been in terms of building this coalition because we do have common interest? Where is CIDA in terms of working on development by showing supply management as a system that works, supply management run by farmers, not supply management run by some dictatorial regime, something that actually gives grassroots development in these countries.

The problem we have had is that we have not built those alliances and we have suffered for it. We have not been out there marketing our systems that work to other countries. There is still grave misunderstandings about what supply management in Canada is and how we operate it, so I fully agree with the member.

This is the message that our government team going in will need to have. We can build allies, but there has to be a willingness of government to get those allies.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Chair, farmers of today carry a heavy debt load. Some even have to mortgage their land simply to produce or survive. It is time for the government to assume its responsibilities.

In fact, several farms have filed for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

Even if we amend the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, does the member agree that the government should offer urgent, immediate aid to farmers?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her comments. I appreciate her interest in farmers and their families in Quebec and throughout Canada.

[English]

Yes, definitely, we need the intervention now. The \$500 million that has been talked about is a drop in the bucket. We need \$1 billion. That is something that is understood at least. We need that money now. We need the seeds going into the ground before June. That is important. That message needs to be sent to our producers across Canada so they get some confidence when they go to the bank.

• (2250)

Mr. Harold Glenn Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, since my election on January 23, I have taken time to meet with dozens of farmers in my riding. There is no question about the sense of desperation that exists in our agricultural community. There is on the one hand very strong support for the supply management system, which I also support. At the same time, there is total and absolute frustration with the CAIS program.

The system is so cumbersome that farmers and even their chartered accountants cannot manoeuvre the complex maze. This program needs a major overhaul or it needs to be scrapped altogether and replaced with the two part program that was outlined by our agriculture minister tonight.

I am proud to serve with a caucus which cares deeply about farmers and I am honoured to serve under the leadership of an

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agriculture minister who took weeks of his time travelling across this country listening to farmers. I am confident that the farmers in my riding and all across Canada will finally have a sense of hope for the future of agriculture in this great country.

Recognizing the failure of the CAIS program, can we count on the member and his party's support to implement the two part program that was outlined by our agriculture minister earlier this evening?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, the record of the NDP has been very clear on our desire to work with producers to ensure a risk management program that works. I would ask the government to work with and listen to producers and implement the programs they have asked to be brought forward.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to congratulate you on your appointment and also for coming in earlier in the week to welcome me to the House, and I thank you for that as well.

Agriculture is not only a fundamentally important aspect to Saskatchewan economic life, it is also a critical part of Saskatchewan's identity. Many of the people in Saskatchewan have a link to its fertile soil, from the seeders that announce the beginning of another year and the combines that harvest the wealth of the land, to the tending of the livestock that gain their life's sustenance off of it. It has long been understood that Saskatchewan has the unique status as being known as the breadbasket of the world. This has shaped Saskatchewan's identity.

However, it is also deeply understood that this way of life has been gravely threatened as well. It is this tremendously important and crucial aspect of Saskatchewan life that we have come here to debate, to discuss and to find solutions for. I am proud and honoured to be able to take part in this debate and I know all members are as well.

Agriculture, as the recent farm forecasts have shown and as the producers can attest to, is in an absolutely dire situation.

Saskatchewan's realized net farm income has been locked in a downward spiral in recent years. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada released numbers which illustrate this in grim detail. In 2004 realized net income was \$44 million which was off considerably from the 2000-04 average income of \$336 million. In 2005 this number plummeted to the depths of a negative \$77.1 million. This was in spite of record high farm payments for Canadian farmers, payments which totalled \$1.1 billion in Saskatchewan alone.

With these devastating income numbers it is clear that there is a crisis that threatens farm families. However, these numbers cannot capture the true anguish they must face day to day, holding off payments to make other payments, squeezing the most out of every dollar, and perhaps most tragically, watching their livelihood and their lives being auctioned off to salvage something from the wreckage of their dreams.

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Yet, to all of this, there is still more hurt. This year is projected to be the worst yet. Saskatchewan's 2006 realized net income is forecast to drop even further into negative territory to a collective loss of \$203.4 million. What is more, these dismal projections even factor in the \$755 million that was already allocated but could not be delivered until after the election which was unfortunately called in November.

Clearly more action is needed. Kevin Hursh, a noted consulting agrologist and farmer stated in a February 8, 2006 article that "it would take an additional billion dollars just to get Canadian farm income back to the level of 2005, a level that everyone agrees was adequate". One billion dollars. If this does not give the government pause for serious thought into acknowledging agriculture as a top priority and a serious crisis that needs immediate attention, I truly do not know what will.

Further to that, although I am glad the Conservatives delivered the \$755 million the Liberal government booked before the election, I am dismayed, to say the least, that they continue to hold that money over the heads of producers. I say this because as of yet, to my understanding, the government has still not made a decision, a crucial final decision, on how that money will be treated under CAIS. Producers must wait to see whether money that is already being delivered is money given in good faith because of the hard times or whether it will be clawed back. This is money that will be desperately needed just to pay the bills of production.

During the election the Liberals made a commitment that the money would not affect CAIS applications. I ask that the Conservative government meet us on that commitment as well.

Conservatives made promises in their election platform for \$500 million in additional funding. It is clearly not enough to deal with the crisis but it would be a start. Even if they do deliver on the \$500 million, Mr. Hursh in that same February 8 article noted that the program payments in 2006 are expected to be \$4.2 billion. Add \$500 million to the 2006 total and the 2005 total of \$4.9 billion is still not matched. Yet now, they are backing off on that modest start. Now we never hear about the \$500 million let alone whether it will ever be delivered.

• (2255)

In fact, the minister went as far as telling the provincial agriculture ministers that he lacked even the authorization to make any commitments to them. This is unfortunate. On top of that, all he offered was a complete dismissal of their concerns. In a March 21 *Leader-Post* article, he stated: "I'm sure if the feds just want to trot out a bunch of money, that provinces won't mind but that's just not in the cards". The minister is talking about money that would go to farms and farm families. This is not about throwing a bone to the provinces.

This led the Premier of Saskatchewan, who has all party support behind him on this issue, to seek an audience with the Prime Minister. He spoke with him about this issue and, as the premier put it at that time:

I hope I'm speaking tomorrow to the individual who will have the authority to say yes. The producers in Canada, particularly in Saskatchewan and the West are facing some very difficult times and we need to see that money flow this spring to help with spring seeding.

In that meeting with the premier, the Prime Minister heard about the negative forecast facing farmers and their families. He knows about the troubles grains and oilseeds producers are experiencing and the uncertainty that livestock owners must grapple with. Every word uttered in disdain about the past only wastes the time and expense of the necessary efforts that must be made now to address the crisis that the farmers are facing.

Farmers and their families need action. They need real assistance that will at least match what was done in the past. Moreover, they need guarantees that the grains and oilseeds payments will not be clawed back on their CAIS applications. Most of all, they need the government to consider the plight of farmers a priority right now. A crucial aspect of Saskatchewan's economy and identity is in the balance.

We all know that the treasury is flush, so it is not a matter of a fiscal challenge. It is a matter of choice and it is a choice to help farmers.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on your position.

This year my family will celebrate its 100th year on the family farm. In 1906 my grandfather moved here and cleared a lot of the land. He cleared the brush, the trees and everything else. He worked extremely hard. We are celebrating our 100th anniversary. As hard as he worked to make a go of it, I just do not know whether anyone else in the same position that we are right now would be able to make it after 100 years. One would think that by the fourth or fifth generation the family farm should be able to make it. It is very difficult.

I sold 3,000 bushels of wheat when I was home just before Parliament opened at around \$2 a bushel. Last fall was a very wet year and the elevator ended up having to dry some. It was tough. I sold it for around \$1.70 or \$1.80 a bushel. I am receiving all kinds of calls from farmers who are very frustrated with this and see no light at the end of the tunnel.

The calls that I get are in respect of a CAIS program that is not working. The calls that I get are in respect of a transportation system that is not working. We have bins full of grain and railways that seem very slow in moving the grain.

We had a previous government that built a program that we had high hopes for. I remember standing in the House together with other members and the parliamentary secretary saying that this program would not work. Even some of the people here tonight were defending it as being the answer to the crisis.

I would ask the new member of the Liberal Party across the way, luckily not the government any more, who just spoke and who is from a rural riding in Saskatchewan if he would stand with the Conservative government in a non-partisan way and agree that the CAIS program is not working, we need to split it, we need to have the income stabilization plan, and that he recognizes what was said in the past is correct and that we also need a disaster component? Would he stand with us and support us when it comes before the House?

• (2300)

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, the questions posed to me by farmers and my thoughts given to them by myself over the last little while have been quite serious. It comes back to the point that they need help now.

Yes, we have talked about the CAIS program in the past and the problems that it has created. The Conservative government and the opposition on this side have stated before that they are prepared to move forward. My concern and the concern of the farmers is whether the government will show up and help the farmers today. Will the government be there today for the spring seeding to help? There are farmers who say that they fully support the discussion on CAIS in the future and other transportation issues but that they may not be around to face them. They would like to be around to face them so they want the support now.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to welcome and congratulate the new member representing his riding for his party.

I certainly will not get into what 13 years of Liberal neglect has done but I will ask the member some pointed questions about the future of the farm family, especially in his area. As he knows, the cities of our country are the engine of our economy but it is the rural areas that fuel those cities. I have been working on fisheries issues for many years and I have seen the plight of plant workers and fishermen who have lost their livelihood because of government policy.

A few years ago our caucus introduced ourselves to some Saskatchewan farmers. They told us that thousands of families were leaving the farms as we spoke. This was over a couple of years ago. We know that many of those lands are still producing because it is the large agri-businesses that now have that control.

Some of our farmers are now reaching the ages of 58 to 60 years old and many of our young people are saying that agriculture is not for them because they do not want to suffer the way their parents have suffered. I will throw a lob ball to him because the member is fairly new and I may end up liking the guy in the future. I want to help him out. I would like to give him the opportunity to give advice to the government. First, how would he entertain the possibility of enticing young people to take up agriculture as a livelihood, the very proud livelihood that it is?

Second, what would the member do to prevent the agri-businesses from having complete control of the farms and bring back some semblance to the family farms so that those family farmers who are independent and proud businessmen can carry on that tradition now and in the future?

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Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, the only answer is to put \$1.5 billion from the fiscal framework into the farmers' hands today and allow them to survive and move forward.

Second, I heard today that the University of Saskatchewan may potentially have portions of their agriculture program funding cut. We have to talk about getting young farmers into the industry and staying in there for the long term.

• (2305)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to congratulate you on your new promotion. You are going to do a great job.

Since this is my first time to rise in the 39th Parliament, I want to thank the great people of Selkirk—Interlake for putting their faith in me one more time.

Agriculture is extremely important to my riding. There are over 5,000 farm families in Selkirk—Interlake. I understand this agriculture crisis all too well. I am a farmer. My parents are farmers. My brothers and their families are farmers. I hope that my children will have a career in farming as well. My daughters are very passionate about agriculture and are thinking about studying agriculture and coming back to the family farm. I want to make sure they have that opportunity. The way things were going under the Liberal government, I was not sure that was going to happen. Now I see there is some hope for the future because the new Conservative government is bringing in policies that mean there will be a long term, prosperous outlook.

Since I was elected in 2004, it has been a familiar occurrence in this place to have late night debates on the future of agriculture and the issues facing us, such as BSE, agriculture income, avian flu, and the list just seems to go on and on. We know there is a problem, but finally we have a Minister of Agriculture who has taken the time to be here with us all night. He is a minister who understands the problems and is going to bring in policies and the changes to make sure that we do have that prosperous, long term outlook.

I also want to thank the Prime Minister who took the time to be here and address the committee, to talk about the problem of agriculture and his vision of agriculture, where we need to be going down the road to make sure that there is long term sustainability. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture have been very open to talking with members of the caucus, to sitting down with the parliamentary secretaries, with the ag committee members and with members from caucus here who have a great deal of knowledge in agriculture. They have been talking about the future, the problems and the possible solutions that we can bring forward.

We have heard a lot tonight about the farm safety net programs that are in place today. Farmers in Selkirk—Interlake and across Manitoba and Canada absolutely hate the CAIS program. It has not worked. The only people I get phone calls from who seem to enjoy it are the accountants. It is way too complicated. We have to move forward and find a new program that is a lot easier to administrate, that can be done at the farm and that is a lot more responsive to the needs of farmers.

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This government has responded very quickly. There was money that had been budgeted by the last Liberal government, but for whatever reason it had not been sent out. Finally when we came power, that three-quarters of a billion dollars was sent out to farmers in an expeditious manner. It is getting out there right now as we speak. Another \$500 million per year over the next five years will also be going out to ease the pain on the family farms, but there is no doubt that that still is not enough. We have to look at other ways to restructure the industry.

The biofuel strategy is one which a lot of us are getting excited about. There are great opportunities in the biofuel industries. We need to use those competitive advantages. We know that the WTO is important. We have to have a successful negotiation if we are going to address the needs of agriculture. We have to have a balanced approach that takes into consideration the protection of our supply managed industries but also makes sure that we free up markets for the other 80% of agriculture in this country. Ninety per cent of farmers in Canada are dependent upon grains and oilseeds and the markets for beef and pork. They need a world global market. We have to address that.

This government will address those issues. We are going to make sure that the regulatory impediments are removed so that we continue to advance the agriculture industry. I look forward to the future as the new government and the great new Minister of Agriculture move forward in addressing the problems facing our farm families.

Mr. Chair, I would ask for the consent of the House to waive my question time so that my colleague from Leeds—Grenville could have a chance to speak on issues facing the farmers in his area of Ontario.

• (2310)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, we agreed earlier that we would allow a Bloc speaker. We would agree to two or three minutes from another speaker from the government, but we definitely want to abide by the agreement that there be one more speaker from the Bloc.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Is there unanimous consent for the proposal from the hon. member for Malpeque?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on your election to your new position.

It was a little over a year ago in the fall of 2004 upon my election to the 38th Parliament that I was here late one night talking about the farm income crisis. This debate tonight hardly does it justice. It is great that we are here talking about these important issues. Unfortunately I only have a few minutes but I could stand here for hours and go through all of the problems in agriculture sector by sector in my riding from beef producers and the BSE problems, dairy issues to do with supply management, and the grains and oilseeds issue that we are dealing with. However I will limit my comments to just one of the most urgent issues in Leeds—Grenville today.

Leeds—Grenville has a diverse agricultural industry. It is one of the leading economic engines in my riding. Working with my colleagues in government I will do anything and everything I can to make sure our domestic agricultural industry remains viable. I do want to talk about the most important issue in my riding today, the biggest crisis we are facing, and that is our corn producers who are agonizing over their options and in many cases their options do not include farming.

Unfortunately, our corn producers, who are competitive with any producers anywhere in the world, are dealing with everything that is going on in terms of all the subsidies and the corn countervail. Corn producers are losing money on every bushel of corn they are producing. A plant in my riding called Casco produces many corn products and sells its products into the United States. With prices going up through the countervail, it has to compete in the United States which could put 150 jobs at risk.

I do want to commend our Prime Minister and our Minister of Agriculture for stating tonight that we will solve the problems and we will come forward with programs that will work for our farmers. We should also thank our Minister of Agriculture for staying on tonight. It is great that he spent the whole night with us.

I really hope we can be standing here in the very near future with solutions for the agriculture industry. I know that many of the farmers who are visiting Ottawa stayed very late tonight. They want answers. I am really happy to hear that our Prime Minister and our Minister of Agriculture are coming forward with firm commitments to help our farming sector.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for giving me an opportunity to speak before the debate ends.

I will begin by quoting Laurent Pellerin, the president of the UPA,

There will be two choices, because we have reached a dead end. Either we are told to stop production or we are given the equipment and the same tools as our American neighbours. It is not possible to go on living beside a giant like the United States and not adopt policies similar to those on the other side of the border.

That statement sums up the reasons our farmers' incomes are bottoming out. The past three years have been the worst in the past 100 in terms of net income for Canadian farmers, while they have been the best years that American farmers have enjoyed.

All that is just numbers. The fact of the matter is these are families that have operated a farm for several generations. Today they have to dip into their meagre savings, go into debt and, for many, invest all their assets just to survive until this government assumes its responsibilities. Do not think it is because they are not competitive. If we compare production costs on American and European farms, we can see that our farmers are often the best.

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The situation can be explained by the amount of support the Canadian government provides to the farming sector. In 2002, according to OECD figures, support per capita to the farming sector in Canada was US\$192, whereas it was US\$317 in the United States, US\$304 in the European Union and US\$438 in Japan.

Farmers in Quebec want the minister to come up with real solutions to improve their income. They want to have a decent income again, to regain their dignity and their pride in being farmers. They also want the government to put in place real solutions that, in the long term, will offset the effects of American farm subsidies and the international trade rules that threaten the very existence of farms in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

• (2315)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: It being 11:15 p.m., pursuant to the order made earlier this day, the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 3 reported)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 11:17 p.m.)

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