

[Translation]

SAINT-HYACINTHE DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Hon. Andrée Champagne (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, February 24, the Chamber of Commerce of Saint-Hyacinthe district celebrated its centenary. Over the years it has become a dynamic, prestigious, and influential organization. It was instrumental in creating the economic and industrial development corporation, the tourism and convention office and the MERCI evenings dedicated to recognizing the business persons of the year.

According to the president of the chamber, lawyer Guy Cordeau, the centenary festivities will pay tribute to those who built the organization and their achievements. The theme—100 years of commitment—conveys the chamber's history but also indicates a new focus on innovation and renewal.

I am proud to be among the 600 active members of our Chamber of Commerce. This year we commemorate our past and we will continue to strive to successfully meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. members for letting their Deputy Speaker rise in her seat on this historic occasion in the life of the community where she was born and which she represents in this House.

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[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Communications admitted yesterday that he and his cabinet colleagues have to get off the backs of small businesses. This is after nine years of Conservative government neglect in this vital sector of the Canadian economy.

Small businesses will have few regrets at the departure of Prime Minister Mulroney. Although the Conservative government does not realize it, most other Canadians understand the importance of small business to our country. It is the backbone of our economy.

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These businesses have been badly hurt by this Conservative government. Tens of thousands of small businesses have gone bankrupt or closed in recent years. Free trade, the GST, deregulation, high interest rates, the high dollar and savage restriction by the banking system have all contributed to killing entrepreneurship in Canada. These hard working Canadians need assistance now.

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We all know that in order to help small businesses we will have to do more than change the Tory leadership. We will have to change the government.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Bill Domm (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, over the past 90 days I have received petitions and letters from over 6,000 citizens regarding our justice system, particularly the way in which we deal with violent criminals and dangerous sexual offenders.

They wish to see our current laws amended to ensure that such offenders are not released into any community when they may pose a threat. They call upon the government to enact legislation to see that this is accomplished.

I have long been a supporter of stiffer sentences for those who choose to commit crimes. I believe that as parliamentarians we have been given the responsibility to review the negative impact of these offenders on our society and to act accordingly.

To paraphrase my constituents, the time has come for us to protect the rights of victims of violent crime rather than those who commit it.

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LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGNS

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, at long last the Prime Minister has announced that he is stepping down and the Tories will now hold a leadership convention.

In 1989 the member for Comox—Alberni presented a motion that was debated and passed unanimously in this House. The motion read as follows: