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Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

Non-confidence Motion

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to perform what is the most essential job for any Leader of the Opposition: to hold the government to account.

At the end of this speech, I will be holding the government to account in the most direct way possible: by moving yet another motion of non-confidence in this government.

Before I do so, I feel I owe it to this House to explain the reasons why this step has become necessary.

In the normal course of events, the Leader of the Opposition is expected to hold the government to account on particular policies that the opposition

feels are misguided, but in normal times the opposition understands and respects that the government has a mandate from the people to implement its policy agenda in general terms, even while opposing specific motions.

But there are also cases when the opposition must hold the government to account in a more fundamental way and tell the government that it has lost the moral authority and democratic legitimacy to govern this country.

Today is one of those more difficult days, where it falls to the Leader of the Opposition to tell the Prime Minister and the government that they cannot carry on: it is time, for God's sake, to go.

We see before us on the government bench a party that has been almost completely discredited. The governing party has been revealed as corrupt. It has been implicated in the most serious financial scandals in Canadian history, scandals which have so tarnished and destroyed its reputation in the province of Quebec that the very viability of the federalist cause is threatened.

Let us be frank. The most despicable abuse has been committed in the name of national unity and on the backs of Quebeckers. In over 12 years, the governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin have managed to erase everything Wilfrid Laurier—

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Order, please. I remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that members who are sitting in this House must be referred to either by their constituency or by their position and title.

Hon. Stephen Harper: Madam Speaker, within a dozen years, the governments of Jean Chrétien and his second in command have managed to undo everything that Wilfrid Laurier, Louis Saint-Laurent and Pierre Elliott Trudeau tried to accomplish to serve the cause of federalism in Quebec.

They can blame the big bad separatists or the big bad Conservatives, but the federal Liberals are the ones who tried to buy the conscience of Quebeckers with their own money. They are the ones who lied to the people of Quebec. They are the ones who circumvented the laws of Quebec and Canada. They are the ones who diverted the money of Quebeckers and all Canadians.

Secondly, as a consequence, because the government has been revealed in this way, it has now pursued a wasteful and fiscally irresponsible path by engaging in reckless spending and vote buying in a desperate attempt to keep itself alive.

Finally, and as yet another consequence, this government has been revealed as autocratic and undemocratic by throwing aside some of the most basic democratic principles that are essential to our parliamentary system. Let me give examples.

At this very moment I am debating a concurrence motion moved as a filibuster by the government on its own legislation. This is the same day that the Prime Minister tried to claim he wanted to have a vote on the budget. This is the same day that the House leader of the Bloc Québécois moved a motion to have that debate and that vote and the government turned it down.

We are not fooled. We want to see this motion, but I believe the government has no intention whatsoever of having any kind of vote on anything next week.

Just to give an example, we saw what happened yesterday and today. After a trip to Holland, all the party leaders agreed to pass through the House the veterans charter. We gave four-party consent. It was passed through all stages, but no sooner was it done here than the Liberal controlled and Liberal majority Senate found yet another way to delay it and hide behind veterans.

As the official opposition, we can no longer abide supporting a government and a governing party which have been shown to be corrupt, fiscally irresponsible and blatantly undemocratic. Therefore, I will be moving a motion which is again designed to express our lack of confidence in the government.

Before I come to this, I want to outline this case in some detail as to why the government must be defeated because of its manifest corruption, its fiscal irresponsibility and its undemocratic actions.

First, on the issue of its scandals, this budget debate and the recent dramatic events in the House are not occurring in a vacuum but in the

context of a government which has brought upon itself the most serious corruption scandal in modern Canadian history.

We have known for some time that there were serious irregularities in the government's sponsorship program. An internal audit was released in 2000. There is a long story behind the delayed release of that audit for the 2000 election, but that audit release in 2000 did indicate that there were serious administrative problems in the program.

This was followed up on by the Auditor General's report on government advertising, released in February of last year, which confirmed that out of the \$250 million sponsorship program, much of which was spent on activities of questionable value in the first place, more than \$100 million in commissions went to five Liberal friendly advertising agencies with little or no evidence of work being performed for the contracts.

We all remember the famous case where Groupaction received \$550,000 to submit a photocopy of a report identical to a report it had prepared the previous year.

Public anger and outrage over this blatant waste and mismanagement of taxpayers' money was no doubt a factor in last year's election and in part responsible for reducing this government to minority status.

But at the time of that election, while we knew that tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars had been wasted, we did not know where this money had gone. To be sure, there were rumours, but there was no proof. Now, thanks to the work of Judge Gomery, work, I should add, which was not allowed to begin before the previous election was called by the Prime Minister, and work, I submit, which would never have taken place if the Prime Minister had a majority today, thanks to his work, we have proof.

Canadians are coming to know the bitter truth: that millions of their hard earned taxpayers' dollars were spent on illegal donations to the Liberal Party for Liberal Party political purposes and it was done through a sophisticated network and scheme of money laundering.

In recent days, we have been viewing the revolting spectacle of Liberal witnesses before the Gomery commission describing how thick the envelopes of money they received in secret were.

While the rest of Canada is striving to earn an honest living, support their families and meet their obligations, including paying income tax, we can see these Liberal organizers and their friends trying to remember whether they received their dirty money in \$20s or \$100s.

The Gomery commission has become a bad gangster movie. The money in those envelopes, those \$20s and \$100s, is in fact our money. That money belongs to Canadian taxpayers, not to the Liberal Party of Canada.

Over the past few weeks we have heard sworn testimony, backed by documentary evidence, that money from the sponsorship program was paid to advertising agencies which in turn used that money to make both legal and illegal donations to the Liberal Party--and no doubt some of it was pocketed--but to also illegally pay for Liberal election organizers and to pay for Liberal campaign expenses ranging from signs to party videos.

Just last week, as one of a series of confessions, not baseless allegations, not baseless accusations, not even mere admissions, but confessions from senior members of the Liberal Party under sworn evidence, the former president of the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec admitted that he received \$300,000 in cash from Jacques Corriveau, a close personal friend of Jean Chrétien, who benefited from millions of dollars of little or no work contracts from the sponsorship program.

I heard somebody over there calling “order”. We have seen the tactics of some of the members in the last few days, not wanting to have this evidence on the record of the House of Commons, but we will read every bit of it into the record of this House of Commons.

That cash was used to pay for Liberal Party workers in opposition held ridings in direct violation of the Canada Elections Act. We have also heard from many of the recipients of that money, admitting that they received illegal contributions, and we have seen cashed cheques and bank statements confirming that illegal payments were made.

I remind the House that after the release of the Auditor General's report last year, and with an election in the offing, the Prime Minister and his Quebec lieutenant, now the Minister of Transport, promised that the Liberal Party would not campaign with this dirty money. They promised that every

penny that had been illegally donated or diverted from the sponsorship program would be paid back in full, but now we are hearing a different story.

When only a few weeks ago an opposition motion was put forth calling on the government to put aside the money that was stolen, to put it into a blind trust, it was voted on in this House and every one of the Liberals stood and voted against that motion.

I remind the House that the motion was nonetheless adopted and that the government is duty bound to respect the decisions made by the House of Commons.

The Liberal Party fought the 1997 and 2000 elections with dirty money. This is a fact. Since the Liberals did not return any of the money in 2004, they fought the last election with dirty money, and now it looks, in violation of an order of this House, as though they are willing to fight a fourth straight election with money that has been stolen from the Canadian taxpayers.

These past few weeks, billions of dollars have been promised throughout Canada without any discussions taking place in Parliament. The Liberal strategy is clear: they tried to buy the last referendum, and now they want to buy the next election.

The government is not listening to Parliament nor to the people of Canada; it only understands the language of money.

This is unacceptable. The government must be held accountable for this behaviour. Most disturbingly, we have heard serious allegations--well, I will correct the wording--confessions from the former executive director of the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec, again not a rogue operator as the Prime Minister implied, but the chief staff person for the party in the province of Quebec, that Liberal sleaze and patronage extended even to the selection of judges. He has gone on record saying that a member of the judicial advisory committee responsible for selecting judges for the province of Quebec was in the habit of calling him to find out how much money lawyers who are potential judicial candidates had contributed to the party.

These are among the most serious examples of partisan interference in judicial appointments that have ever been heard in this country.

The Liberals have undermined Canadians' confidence in our political system and even manipulated our judicial system.

The Liberal Party of Canada, like the Government of Canada, is a threat to Canadian democracy.

When this was raised in the House, the Minister of Justice said that he will hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. He is apparently not open to any investigation into this potential corruption of our judicial selection process. In fact the minister keeps claiming, in spite of the claims of his own party officials, that appointments are made strictly on the basis of merit.

I would point out that research by journalists and citizens has revealed that 60% of lawyers appointed to the bench in Quebec since 2000 made donations to the Liberal Party. It is frankly hard to take the Minister of Justice or the Prime Minister at their word when they say that politics has nothing to do with judicial appointments.

The essential facts about Liberal corruption are not in dispute. No one is disputing that money was diverted or stolen from the sponsorship program. No one is disputing that it was done by some Liberals. No one is disputing that at least some of that money ended up in the coffers of the Liberal Party or was used for Liberal partisan purposes.

In fact I would point out that the Prime Minister of Canada went on national television to address these allegations and he never once denied them in his speech to the Canadian people. Their only comeback on this as these facts accumulate is to urge the House not to rush to judgment, but as they say, let Judge Gomery do his work so that, in the Prime Minister's words in the address to the nation on television:

There is conflicting testimony; only the judge is in a position to determine the truth.... Only he can tell us what happened and who was responsible.

The government is saying, "I am currently under investigation, I am suspected of widespread corruption, so I have no time for an election".

The real judge of the honesty, candour and competence of the government is the public. The people of Canada are ready to judge this government.

What we know when I referred to that remark of the Prime Minister in his televised speech is that in fact it is not true. The government inserted clause k into the terms of reference of the Gomery inquiry that prohibits Justice Gomery from reaching “any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization”. The government is telling the public to wait until Judge Gomery determines who is responsible for this theft of taxpayers' money, knowing full well that it has prohibited Judge Gomery from making any such finding.

The Liberal request to let them stay in office until the affair is investigated would be akin to the executives of Enron asking that they be allowed to continue to manage the business while they are under investigation for fraud and embezzlement. It is simply untenable to carry on with business as usual when the police are knocking on the door.

Let me say, so that the Canadian people are reassured, Justice Gomery will complete his work. His work is to hear this testimony. He will complete it and he will complete it before the voters render a judgment on the government.

Even more disturbing than any of this is the government's attempt to portray itself as a victim. These acts were not committed by some shadowy rogue group of Liberals. We have testimony from the former executive director of the Liberal Party of Canada, Quebec, and the president of the Liberal Party of Canada, Quebec, testifying that they were part of a kickback scheme. This is no rogue operation. It is the entire apparatus of the federal Liberal Party in the province of Quebec.

The victim line is when the government hears confessions from its own senior officials that it benefited from stolen money, the first act of the Prime Minister is not to apologize or to take action, but to try and claim that the Liberal Party was somehow a victim.

When these officials come forward, the first act of Liberal counsel at the Gomery inquiry is not to get all of the evidence. It is to attack the people

who are coming forward, to attack the whistleblowers, to attack their reputation, to undermine their evidence to discourage them from testifying.

This is proof, and I do not think we need any more proof, that the government will never get, will never hold accountable those among its own who are responsible for this affair. That is why it has no moral authority to govern this country. That is why we need a new government to do what Judge Gomery is not allowed to do by these Liberals, and that is, hold the Liberal Party accountable for its criminal activity.

The culture of corruption within the Liberal Party is evident, but equally disturbing is the fact that the Liberals are now prepared to put the finances of the country into jeopardy for their own short term partisan purposes. In a sense this should not surprise us. The crisis was caused by the Liberal Party spending millions of dollars in an attempt to bribe voters in the province of Quebec. Now that the strategy has backfired, they are attempting to get out of the crisis by spending billions of dollars in the rest of the country to make voters forget about the scandal.

Scandalous waste and reckless spending cannot be allowed to bury scandalous theft and corruption. In February our party in good faith decided not to bring the government down on its budget, not because we thought it was a perfect budget--we were already concerned about rapidly accelerating government spending--but we thought the budget had worthwhile measures we could support.

The original budget repeated a previous agreement that had not been tabled in the House to grant the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia control over their offshore resource revenues under the Atlantic accord. It included a transfer of gas tax revenues to cities and communities to help pay for needed infrastructure. It included modest tax cuts for individuals by raising the basic personal exemptions and tax cuts for businesses that would have helped create jobs and improve competitiveness.

The Liberals say that they are still there. I say they should have been there a long time ago. All these are long-standing policies of this party. We have stuck with these policies long before this Prime Minister flip-flopped on them. We will stick with them now and we will bring them in when we are on that side of the House.

I wonder if the government really ever wanted this budget bill to pass. We now hear its strategy is to be defeated on the budget. What it did right off the bat was it roped the measures that we supported in with other measures including measures such as the CEPA amendments, Canadian Environmental Protection Act amendments, which were not even in the budget and which it knew this party could not support.

A far more serious and reckless blow to fiscal integrity was the new budget cooked up in a hotel room by Buzz Hargrove and the Leader of the NDP. It was then announced that the tax cuts necessary to create jobs and keep our business competitive with the United States would be eliminated. In their place we had \$4.6 billion in new program spending on a grab bag of programs to be paid for out of mysterious reserve funds.

We now have before us a second budget bill. This budget bill has the innocuous title, Bill C-48, an act to authorize certain payments. What it in fact conceals is an unprecedented government slush fund that again allows the government to avoid parliamentary accountability for its spending programs.

Let me quote Don Drummond, one of the Prime Minister's former assistant deputy ministers when he was minister of finance, and how he has described Bill C-48. He said:

--for years government has wanted an instrument that would allow it to allocate spending without having to say what it's for. This act will do it.

Ironically, let me point out to my NDP friends that they have less reason to be pleased with this agreement than they thought. Bill C-43 is still on the government's agenda. The government has not removed any of the tax reductions it said it would remove. Bill C-48 does not actually set aside any money to be spent on priorities they had identified, like post-secondary education, housing and foreign aid. Instead it simply authorizes the government at its discretion to set aside reserves for these general priorities, but only after it has the final surplus figures for fiscal 2005-06, which will be in August 2006.

The bottom line is this bill will not even get money into the hands of groups and programs the NDP wants to support for another 18 months. When it does so, it will happen entirely at the discretion of the Liberal cabinet. The reality is it is the worst of both worlds. We have socialist spending delivered through Liberal undemocratic tactics and financial trickery.

Here is another scene from a bad film, which we are going to have to sit through: a secret meeting between the Liberals and the NDP in a Toronto hotel room in order to consummate the marriage of corruption and socialism and divvy up our money.

Perhaps even more concerning than this fiscally reckless plan is the fact that the Liberals continue to go around the country making announcements based on a flim-flam budget, the full details of which they still have not presented to this Parliament and on which they certainly do not have any approval.

In fact, over the past few weeks, since Jean Brault testified, which I am sure is a coincidence, and since the \$4.6 billion agreement with the NDP, the government has announced \$22 billion in spending initiatives. It is spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars based on an incomplete and unapproved budget. I will list the \$22 billion worth of spending announcements.

The Liberals clap. They can explain it to the people who used to vote for them because of fiscal responsibility.

In our British parliamentary system there is perhaps no principle—

Mr. Speaker, the House will note that the Liberal whip has described the government's promises to the people of Canada in all the constituencies as mere props. That is what they are designed for: to prop up this government so no one will notice its corruption.

In our British parliamentary system there is perhaps no principle more important than that expenditures by the government must be approved by Parliament. It is this principle, more than any other, that distinguishes a parliamentary system from an absolute monarchy or from a dictatorship.

Over 200 years ago, even before Confederation, visionaries like Louis-Joseph Papineau and Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, with the help of Robert Baldwin and other reformers, fought for responsible government. This fight must be renewed today. We must rout the clique of profiteers and take back control of our money.

Josef Redlich, in this great study of the British House of Commons almost 100 years ago, wrote:

The whole law of finance, and consequently the whole British constitution is grounded upon one fundamental principle, laid down at the very outset of English parliamentary history and secured by three hundred years of mingled conflict with the Crown and peaceful growth. All taxes and public burdens imposed upon the nation for purposes of state, whatsoever their nature, must be granted by the representatives of the citizens and taxpayers, i.e, by Parliament.

The government, a minority government with the weakest position in this House and the weakest mandate from the Canadian people in at least two generations, is skirting the edge of this line and is violating the spirit of this principle which underpins the very foundation of our parliamentary democracy.

We are a democracy and a parliamentary democracy. If the government wishes to spend taxpayer money, or promise to spend it, it should be coming before this Parliament, it should have laid its plan before Parliament and sought approval of the Parliament, but it does not believe it has the confidence of this House, which, after last night, it plainly does not.

The government should stop flying around the country spending other people's money without the approval of this Parliament because, besides having no moral authority, the government has no financial authority to do this either.

The reckless and irresponsible way in which the government is spending taxpayer money without parliamentary approval is simply one of a series of steps where the government has flouted the democratic rules of this House.

Essentially, since Jean Brault's revelations, the Liberals have taken every step at their disposal to avoid accountability, even to the point of violating basic democratic and constitutional principles.

After Mr. Brault's testimony, everybody knew that it was only a matter of time before one of the opposition parties introduced a motion of non-confidence in the government. It was at that point, on the eve of our first supply day, that the government abruptly pulled the plug and cancelled supply and opposition days indefinitely. This broke a longstanding convention by which opposition days were allocated about once a week according to a rotating calendar agreed to by the opposition parties.

By denying the opposition its opportunity about once a week to choose a topic for debate and vote, the government is trampling upon one of the most basic democratic practices of this House and it is doing it all so it can avoid accountability for corruption.

In the last few days, since the opposition has been denied its normal recourse of moving supply motions to express judgment, we have been forced to seek other means to hold the government to account. Thus, through the auspices of the Standing Committees on Public Accounts and Finance, we introduced motions that were clearly intended as motions of non-confidence in the government as they expressed the view that the government should resign.

However the government, the same government that initially said that it would consider mild amendments to its throne speech an issue of non-confidence, even when those motions had been worded explicitly not to be confidence, now is saying that it will not consider even a motion calling upon the government to resign a matter of confidence.

Yesterday, a majority of members indicated they no longer had confidence in this government. What we are saying again today to the Liberals and the government could not be more clear. We are proud of our country, but we are ashamed of our government. Get out of here!

We are holding a debate today when everyone in this country knows that the government no longer enjoys the confidence of the House.

In fairness, there are some experts who believe that a motion to refer to a committee, even one that calls upon the government to resign, is not necessarily a motion of confidence. However the experts are almost unanimous that when a motion like this has raised a question about the confidence of the House, the government is obliged immediately to table a new motion seeking the confidence of the House.

I could quote at length the opinions of Professor Andrew Heard of Simon Fraser University, who is the author of *Canadian Constitutional Convention: The Marriage of Law and Politics*, from his website but I will not do that because every one of these opinions is clear: the government should either resign, seek dissolution or immediately put forward its own motion of confidence.

This is what happened in February 1968 when the Pearson government was defeated in the House over a taxation matter. The government moved immediately to bring in a new confidence motion that clarified that the previous vote was not a question of confidence. I will remind the Speaker that at that time the procedure by which that was moved and delayed a couple of days was done so with the collaboration of the then leader of the opposition, not made up itself. I should point out that the acting prime minister, who was responsible for managing that motion, was the current Prime Minister's father, Paul Martin Senior.

If the government believed in the role of Parliament the way Lester Pearson, Robert Stanfield and Paul Martin Senior did, then it would already have immediately moved to table a new motion of confidence, not to try to put off the moment of democratic reckoning.

The government has not done this. It is simply trying to rag the puck to avoid itself being held accountable.

The people of Canada are not interested in the sterile quibbling of constitutional experts. They do not want interminable parliamentary debates. They want nothing more than what is to be found among all democratic governments in the industrialized world, an honest and competent government.

Spending taxpayer money without parliamentary approval, cancelling opposition day debates, ignoring majority votes in the House, filibustering

its own legislation and ignoring calls for the government to resign is not the behaviour of a democratic government. None of it is consistent with the spirit and the principles of parliamentary democracy.

This is the kind of abuse we hear about periodically, not just in dictatorships but in countries with democracies that are struggling. We have seen it in recent years in countries like Venezuela and Russia where the executive, although elected, is willing to run roughshod over the democratic procedures of their legislatures.

A year ago the Prime Minister was promising to slay the democratic deficit. Today he is threatening to slay democracy itself. The Prime Minister, I add, has no moral authority to govern. The government has no financial authority to govern and it has no constitutional or democratic authority after last night to govern this country.

I have outlined reasons why we should reject the government's most recent budget bill, but it is more than that. We must remove the government.

First, the Liberal Party is deeply involved in the most serious corruption scandal in Canadian history.

Second, the government has entered into a fiscally irresponsible, financially unprecedented cash grab, which will gut tax cuts for business, gut debt repayment and allow the government to pour billions of dollars into slush funds without any parliamentary accountability. It racked up \$22 billion in spending commitments in 21 days.

Third, in its attempt to avoid accountability for the sponsorship scandal, the government has resorted to unprecedented, undemocratic tactics to cling to power, including removing opposition supply days and now ignoring a democratic vote and refusing to seek the confidence of the House.

The Liberal Party was caught acting illegally. The government is budgeting and spending illegally and it is governing illegally, all contrary to constitutional and parliamentary convention, I should also add that every day it stays in office it does incalculable damage to the image of this country and to federalism in the province of Quebec. The image of federalism in the province of Quebec cannot be corruption.

Quebeckers have a democratic right and options other than corruption or separation. Without corruption, Quebeckers will continue to vote for Canada and federalism. They will not vote for Liberal corruption.

Since we do not have the direct ability to put a direct question of confidence to the House because of the government's abuse of procedure, I intend to move another motion which will allow the House to express its lack of confidence. I firmly believe the life of the government is over, that it has lost the moral, financial and democratic authority to govern.

Therefore, I invite all hon. members who believe that the government should be removed from office to support the motion I am going to move. The purpose of this motion and its passage is to signal to the Canadian people at large, and more precisely to the Governor General, that the government no longer enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons.

I readily accept that the government has the ability to cling to office, but it has lost its moral legitimacy in doing so. If the government wishes to hang on even in defiance of a second vote of confidence, it may want to heed the words in some of the writings of the late Senator Eugene Forsey. I could quote from Forsey and Eglinton, but more important the essence of the quote is that “any motion in the proper context is a confidence motion, including a motion to adjourn”.

My colleagues and I, on behalf of millions of Canadians who believe the government should be removed from office, that business as usual cannot proceed, that the country can no longer put up with corruption, fiscal irresponsibility and undemocratic tactics, believe that the House needs to decide now and needs to move forward.

Once again, I reiterate that by voting for this motion today, it will be a clear signal to the country and to the Governor General that the government has lost the confidence of the House.

I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.