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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 5, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 5, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1405)

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one works harder than our agricultural producers. Today, these producers are rallying on Parliament Hill to demand action on the farm income situation. The government is listening.

Over the last six weeks the Minister of Agriculture has travelled across Canada to hear about the desperate financial situation facing farmers. That is why the first thing we did as a government was send out payments under the grains and oilseeds payment program. So far, more than 73,000 cheques totalling nearly \$400 million have gone out to producers.

Additionally, we are committed to replacing CAIS with separate income stabilization and disaster relief programs that are simpler, more responsive and bankable. Until then, we will change CAIS to better suit the needs of producers. Plus, we have committed a further \$2.5 billion in the next five years for our producers.

We will continue to show our commitment to farmers by creating an economic climate rewarding hard work and innovation. Farmers are our people and we are going to support them.

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PAUL DAVIS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I often speak about the great honour accorded me to represent a riding with a large military population. Today, as our men

and women undertake a dangerous mission in Afghanistan, we are more mindful than ever of the sacrifices they make on our behalf. When a life is lost in the pursuit of peace, we all feel that loss.

No one feels that loss more profoundly than the family members of these heroes. On March 2, Corporal Paul Davis was killed while on patrol outside Kandahar. Shortly after hearing the devastating news, I spoke with his father, my good friend Jim Davis, of Bridgewater. In spite of his grief, he affirmed his absolute commitment to and support of our mission in Afghanistan and our military personnel on the ground. He addressed them the same day of his son's death saying, "I want them to know I'm 100% behind all of them".

These words of a grieving father remind us that the men and women of our armed forces stand up for us and that we should stand up for them and support their work to build a better and more peaceful world.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with deep sorrow that we have learned of the deaths of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

These soldiers were participating in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, a country that has suffered greatly and now seeks peace and democracy.

The Bloc Québécois offers its condolences to the wives, children, parents and friends of the men killed during this mission.

The Bloc Québécois salutes the men and women who are still deployed there and urges the Prime Minister to allow a debate in the House of Commons about the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Citizens have the right to know the details of this mission so they can better support the soldiers who are putting their lives in danger there.

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[English]

CHILD TAX BENEFIT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there has been a disturbing increase in the number of women coming into my constituency office who have been abruptly cut off their child tax benefits. These women depend on this money to feed, clothe and house their children.

Statements by Members

They are accused of lying and their private lives are placed under a microscope. They must find three separate individuals who will attest to their living situations, in some cases going back as far as two years. For women living in already difficult situations, this is not always possible, and it is demeaning to have one's private life on display to outsiders.

These women are often struggling. Some come from abusive relationships and are forced to seek proof from sometimes uncooperative spouses. To make matters worse, not only have they been cut off from critical income, but they are also being told to repay upwards of \$4,000 to the government if they cannot prove they lived alone with their children.

Single, hard-working parents do not deserve this kind of treatment from their government.

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CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 23 the Conservative Party of Canada was given the responsibility of bringing Canadians' voices to Ottawa.

Canadians wanted a voice in Parliament for accountability, so we will table the accountability act, bringing an end to the culture of entitlement.

Taxpayers wanted a voice in Ottawa. We will cut the GST, putting more money in their pockets.

Law-abiding citizens have a voice in Ottawa now because Conservatives will crack down on crime and enact new, tougher bail and parole laws.

Families will have a voice in Ottawa. We will establish a child care support program that trusts parents with the best interests of their children.

Canadians demanding better access to health care will see our Conservative Prime Minister, in cooperation with the premiers, cutting down on health care waiting times.

Since 1993 it has been my privilege to represent the values of Kootenay—Columbia residents in Ottawa. I want to take this opportunity to thank my constituents and to affirm my commitment to be their voice in Ottawa in this 39th Parliament.

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● (1410)

[*Translation*]

YOUNG CANADIANS

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the House today in recognition of some young students in my constituency.

On March 27, 2006, I was invited to speak with two sixth-grade classes at the Ecole Saint-Jacques as part of their social sciences unit. During my visit, the young students asked me many questions about the life and role of a member of Parliament.

I was asked many questions, all of them very interesting. This experience also showed me that we must spend time with our youth.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, today's youth have many questions to ask, but rarely do they receive any answers. It is our duty to take the time to speak with the young people of our society and answer their questions, for they are our future.

Once again, I would like to thank all of the students and both teachers, Martine Martin and Michelle Gaumont, for their warm welcome. As I indicated to them, I am always willing to meet with school groups.

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[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada stands up for farmers and has committed to take action to secure a prosperous future for Canadian agriculture following years of Liberal neglect.

Canada's grain and oilseed producers are globally integrated and rely primarily on export markets. These producers are vulnerable to international trade and science based regulation pressures. The Grain Growers of Canada will be in Ottawa from April 10 to 12. I encourage all members to meet with them. Grain and oilseed producers want to discuss their priority issues with Canada's elected representatives, including the need to foster a renewable energy sector in Canada.

Canadians want their own long term, economically viable and sustainable grain and oilseed sector. We also want the value added sectors that rely on Canadian grains and oilseeds. The Conservative Party of Canada is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Canadian farmers.

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[*Translation*]

PAULINE MAROIS

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec, and in particular the provincial riding of Taillon, recently turned an important page in its history.

Pauline Marois announced that she was retiring from political life, but her story will remain etched in our collective memory because of her contribution to the development of Quebec society during her prolific political career.

Pauline Marois will be remembered not only for her convictions, but for her intellect and her dedication to democratic values.

I had the privilege of working with this consummate politician. For women of my generation, Pauline Marois represents everything a woman can achieve. She has been an inspiration to me throughout my political career. Her unflinching commitment to Quebec, her great talent as an educator and her contribution to feminism in Quebec will serve as an example for me throughout my life.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I pay tribute to Pauline Marois, a great woman, and wish her all the best in the future.

*Statements by Members***CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT**

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of Liberal corruption, which threatened unity in Quebec, it is good to have a truly federalist government in Ottawa, a government that understands the importance of being open to Quebec, a government that really wants to work with the province.

The Prime Minister has already taken major steps by announcing that Quebec will have a seat at UNESCO and will participate in decision-making regarding our language and our culture. He has undertaken to deal with the fiscal imbalance faced by several provinces, including Quebec. This will allow Quebec to ensure its growth and prosperity.

Whereas the approach of the Liberal government to federalism was characterized by secret agreements, bribes and money slipped into envelopes, the approach of the present Prime Minister is distinguished by his efforts to achieve transparency and accountability.

With this government and this Prime Minister, Quebec will be integrated, its voice heard and its population united.

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● (1415)

[English]

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES ENCOURAGEMENT DAY

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize Auriele Diotte, a grade 8 student at Holy Redeemer Catholic School in Pickering, Ontario, for her thoughtful and heartfelt idea to create Canadian Armed Forces Encouragement Day, or as it is known by its acronym, C.A.F.É. Day.

Auriele hopes that by the first day of spring each year, grade 8 students across Canada will have assembled photos and words of encouragement inside a special scrapbook to send to members of the Canadian armed forces who are serving our country overseas.

In Auriele's own words, C.A.F.É. Day will enable younger generations of Canadians to come together to appreciate and thank our service men and women who regularly make tremendous sacrifices each and every day while placing their own lives at risk.

Auriele has received considerable support for her initiative. I know members of this House will agree that her efforts are to be encouraged as they show once again the gratitude, respect and appreciation that all Canadians, including our youth, have for the dedication and work of our soldiers both here and abroad.

Congratulations, Auriele. Best wishes for a very successful C.A.F.É. Day 2006.

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SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the Prime Minister for his vision that was laid out in yesterday's Speech from the Throne.

The Prime Minister has been consistent in presenting the five priorities of the Conservative government. The previous prime

minister tried to be all things to all people. In one throne speech he made 56 promises, but kept few. Our government would rather keep five promises than break 56.

Under this government, Canadians will see guaranteed wait times, ensuring all Canadians get access to timely health care when they need it.

Canadian parents will receive true choice in child care with a \$1,200 a year allowance. Unlike the Liberals' institutional day care scheme, we believe parents should have a choice in who raises their children.

Canadians will be able to feel safe in their communities. We will invest in front line police officers instead of a gun registry that targets duck hunters.

We will lower the GST and put Canadians' hard-earned money back in their pockets

We will introduce the federal accountability act. After 13 years of Liberal waste and corruption—

The Speaker: The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have just listened for a while to the farmers who are presently in front of the Parliament Buildings.

They are protesting, and rightly so, the fact that farmers across Canada cannot make ends meet.

[English]

I am encouraged by the statement of the hon. Minister of Agriculture this morning specifically on the need to the replace CAIS, but we need help now.

In my riding our apple growers are suffering because heavily subsidized apples from Washington State are being dumped in British Columbia. If we do not address the apple growers' concerns and those of other primary producers, we will soon be a nation which will lose its food security.

[Translation]

With regard to negotiations with the WTO, one of Canada's priorities must be to maintain our supply management program. Our independence is at stake.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's throne speech outlining the government's priorities contained 2,449 words. Agriculture, Canada's second largest industry, was allocated a meagre 72. That constitutes a paltry 3% of the government's focus, and that level was only attained when pooled with aquaculture.

Oral Questions

Clearly, 3% is unacceptable. Agriculture was already excluded from the Prime Minister's five top priorities list and now it has been relegated to less than 3% of the total agenda. Our farmers are in dire straits and they need our help. To survive, farmers need more than 3% of the government's attention.

Regardless of the amount of ink used in the throne speech, farmers are here in Ottawa today to tell the government that the ink they see is red. They are asking for a public investment in food security, risk management programs that protect against income loss. Most of all, they are asking the government to give to farmers what farmers give to Canadians each and every day: 100%.

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•(1420)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, some one hundred farmers came to Parliament Hill today from the Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean region to protest the Conservative government's inaction in the farm income crisis and in the case of supply management.

The decision by the Federal Court of Appeal to open the door to imports of milk protein concentrate will no doubt mean a significant loss of markets for dairy producers. This in turn will threaten thousands of jobs, not only in the Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean region, but throughout Quebec. I would remind you that Quebec produces nearly 40% of Canada's milk.

The riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, like the entire Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean region, has already been hit hard by the softwood lumber crisis and by plant closures.

I urge the federal government to act quickly to avoid another crisis that could hurt thousands of farm producers and their families.

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[English]

ROBERT COSTALL

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Private Robert Costall who was killed in combat in Afghanistan last week.

Private Costall was born in Thunder Bay and moved with his family to Gibsons Landing, British Columbia at the age of seven. At age 19 he returned to Thunder Bay to live with his grandmother. Shortly thereafter he visited the Canadian Forces recruiting office to offer himself for military service.

When Private Costall was called to serve Canada, he found himself in a foreign land of chaos and despair. His duty was to help the besieged people of Afghanistan in their quest to realize the comfort, safety and freedom that he himself had been blessed with.

He died in the grandest of causes for the simplest of things: the ability to live without fear and without desolation. He died to help the Afghani people to be able to live in peace.

For his courage and dedication, we offer our thanks. We pray, along with his wife, child and other family members, that he will rest in peace.

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CORNWALL COLLEGIATE AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year the Cornwall Collegiate and Vocational School in my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry will celebrate 200 years of providing quality education to the youth of the Cornwall area, making it the longest serving high school in Upper Canada.

To mark this monumental achievement, CCVS will host a reunion from Friday, June 30 to Sunday, July 2, 2006. As a former student of CCVS myself, I am proud to attend this event. I invite all alumni of CCVS to attend, to volunteer and to spread the word to former classmates and faculty. Registration can be done online at www.ccvs200.ca or phone 613-932-8360.

I look forward to getting together with friends old and new to celebrate Ontario's 200 years of public primary and secondary education. I am proud that it all started in Cornwall.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government presented its Speech from the Throne, a somewhat thin document that is short on promise and even shorter on specifics. The throne speech is notable really for what it does not include: education and training, early childhood and development, infrastructure or support for cities, aboriginal Canadians, social housing, arts and culture, and other important issues. But as was noted by the member for Huron—Bruce just now, most shockingly is that our farm families face a crisis this spring. This is a throne speech that found barely any time for agriculture.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why is the state of agriculture in our country not one of his government's five priorities?

•(1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by not just congratulating the Leader of the Opposition on his re-election but by acknowledging his long and outstanding public and parliamentary career, and noting that he is very worthy of the honour bestowed on him by his party of being Leader of the Opposition.

The first act of the government was to release three quarters of a billion dollars the previous government had been sitting on that was going directly to farmers. This is more than the previous government did in its entire 13 years in office.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his response. As we say in English, a soft answer turneth away wrath. Still, I cannot accept his answer that the funding given to farmers under our administration was nothing more than a policy to recognize the problems facing farmers and farming in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister commit to making agriculture one of his government's top priorities?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition says that the former Liberal government promised to spend this money. The former Liberal government promised to do a lot of things, but this government intends to honour its commitments. We have provided this money.

[English]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if that were satisfactory to the farmers who are outside our House today demonstrating their discontent and their concern about their future, I think they would have been happy with that answer, but they are not and neither are we.

The government has no concrete answer for agriculture and our farmers need assistance today. Will it listen to our concerns and the concerns of farmers and commit now to providing our farmers and their families the money they need today, so they can put seeds in the ground this spring and—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I and the government are the first to acknowledge that the problems of agriculture in this country are very serious. They are going to require short term action on the part of the government with the promises we made in our campaign which will be forthcoming. They will also require further work on a long term vision. I remind members that we would not be in this state today had we not had 13 years of neglect and ignoring the agricultural industry.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did the exact opposite of what he said. He said that to become a cabinet minister a person should be elected to Parliament. Then he appointed one of his main political campaign organizers—a non-elected person—to head a high profile department, that of Public Works and Government Services.

How does the Prime Minister explain this inconsistency between what he said in his speech on accountability and what he did?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is essential for the greater Montreal area to be represented in our cabinet and in our new federalist government. For that reason, I used the only option available to me and that was to use a seat in the other place.

If the Liberal Party is against such representation for Montreal, then it should just say so.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that Montrealers do not agree with the Conservatives' views, nor do Torontonians or Vancouverites, but that is not the point.

How does the Prime Minister explain that a minister responsible for \$13 billion in contracts annually is not accountable to this House of Commons?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke of the views of Montrealers and Quebecers. I can tell you that the views of Quebecers are clear. They are not in favour of a centralist government or an independent Quebec; they are in favour of a stronger Quebec within a better Canada. Those are Conservative principles.

* * *

UNESCO

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a speech given in Quebec City last December 19, the Prime Minister promised Quebec that it could participate in UNESCO in a manner similar to its participation in the francophone summit, where Quebec speaks for itself. The throne speech now makes reference to granting Quebec a role in UNESCO, while adding that Canada speaks with one voice in the international community, and hence at UNESCO.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what Quebec's real place will be at UNESCO? Will it be the one to which he committed himself in his speech of December 19, or the one described in the Speech from the Throne, which is very similar to the one promoted by the previous government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would also like to congratulate the leader of the Bloc Québécois on his sixth election to the House of Commons. I hope he understands that, despite my strong opposition to his political objective, he has long had my complete personal respect.

On the question of UNESCO, this government has invited Quebec to participate in that organization. We are presently in negotiation with the Government of Quebec. I am optimistic that we shall have a result shortly.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too hope there is a result. However, there is a difference between the Quebec City speech of December 19 and the Speech from the Throne. At the francophone summit, Quebec speaks for itself and Canada does likewise. Two distinct voices are heard, and there are even two different ways of voting, for Quebec has voting rights in certain matters.

Is that what the Prime Minister has in mind, or is he telling Quebec that it can be part of the Canadian presence within the Canadian delegation, but that it must be quiet if it disagrees with the government, and that there is no question of it being given the right to vote? What is the position of the Prime Minister?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat my response. We are now in negotiation with the Government of Quebec. We are very flexible about arrangements. However, we have to end up with a resolution that conforms to the rules of UNESCO itself. We are very optimistic that we will have a result very shortly.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a speech he gave on December 19 in Quebec City, the Prime Minister promised that Quebec would have a seat at UNESCO as it does at the Francophonie summit. However, in the Speech from the Throne, the government backed away from that commitment.

When it comes right down to it, can the Prime Minister deny that what he is offering Quebec is no more than what the previous government offered?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former government refused to offer Quebec such a role. I can only confirm that we will negotiate an agreement with the federalist government of Quebec.

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.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has shown interest in the Belgian model. According to this model, when the Walloon, Flemish and German communities disagree on a given subject, Belgium abstains from voting at UNESCO.

Would Canada do the same in the event of Quebec's disagreement? Is this the new role this government envisions for Quebec?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec is a federalist government. It does not seek to deny Canada its voice on the international stage. It merely seeks to ensure that the province has a voice of its own and a role to play internationally in its areas of jurisdiction. Those are this government's objectives.

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[English]

CHILD CARE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 13 years ago a Liberal government was elected on a commitment to build child care spaces across the country. Three majority governments, eight surplus budgets and not a single child care space was built.

Therefore, let me turn to the Prime Minister and acknowledge that choice in child care is in fact important for Canadians, but one cannot have a choice if one cannot find a child care space.

Will the Prime Minister commit stable, long term funding for child care spaces to the provinces and territories right across the country?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): First of all, Mr. Speaker, let me also congratulate the leader of the NDP on his re-election. The leader of the NDP managed to substantially increase the number of seats that his party won in the last election. As we know, it is important to everyone, including the government, that we

have an opposition party that is both national in scope and principled in its approach. We wish the member well in building that kind of opposition, as long as of course he remains in opposition.

I wholly agree with the member on the failure of the previous government's child care programs. Ours will ensure that we create real spaces.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP caucus supports the idea of subsidizing individuals and families. However, we believe that this should be done in addition to making child care spaces available. This is of the utmost importance. Statistics Canada indicates today that the number of families relying on child care spaces is increasing.

Does the Prime Minister realize that this situation requires stable funding for day cares and that this system should be established immediately?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member and his party know that this government's policy seeks to provide two things: an immediate family allowance to families with preschool children, as well as a tax credit, an investment credit, for the purpose of truly creating child care spaces.

We should note that the existing program, which will only end next year, has not fulfilled this mandate. However, I am hopeful that our program will create child care spaces and that we will have the support of the member and his party.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today thousands of farmers have come to Ottawa to call for action from the government. They need cash and they need it now.

The Prime Minister knows that the \$755 million booked by the previous government was for last year. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has stated there will be no money this spring.

Will the minister and the government consent to having a debate tonight to explain to farmers here today why the government refuses to act and put cash on the table?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder the farmers out front are calling for action from this government because they certainly did not get any from the last government.

We have taken some action. The \$755 million that the previous government promised but somehow could not deliver is going out the door. Furthermore, we campaigned on a commitment to add another \$2.5 billion to the agricultural budget.

Help for farmers is on the way, and the Conservative government will make sure we deliver it, now.

•(1440)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows very well that record government payments were paid out in the last two years by the previous government. When the minister lives up to that record, if he can do that, then he will be able to brag. However, he is \$1 billion short at the moment.

Is he willing to come to the House tonight to debate the issue so the farmers can see where that minister and that government really are in terms of shortchanging the farm community?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at any time I am willing to debate our plan and their record, but that is not a fair debate.

On top of that, I have been to all 10 provinces. I have met with industry representatives and farmers from coast to coast over the last six weeks. There is a consistent pattern I hear from the farmers: the previous government devised programs that did not work for farmers; it promised money and did not deliver it; it was too late, a dollar short and a plan short at every opportunity. That will change under a Conservative government.

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ETHICS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as industry minister, the new international trade minister signed a declaration removing himself from the softwood lumber file. This was done in 2004, on the advice of the Ethics Commissioner, to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest arising from the minister's ongoing financial relationship as former CEO of a major Canadian lumber producer.

Will the Minister of International Trade commit himself to returning to the higher ethical standard and step aside immediately from softwood lumber talks?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that not only will that minister and all ministers live by the provisions of the last ethics code, they will live by much tougher provisions in the future with the new ethics code that we will be bringing in, including the elimination of the blind management agreements for which that government was so famous.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess the muzzling continues.

I know the Minister of International Trade likes to consider himself above politics while depriving his constituents of democracy, but he should not put his own personal interests above being accountable and protecting the integrity of his own government.

With Canada and the United States set to return to the bargaining table in June, will the minister at least give the Prime Minister his assurance that he will not once again cross the floor and join the American softwood negotiating team?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have declared all my financial positions with all my assets. I had developed with the conflict

Oral Questions

commissioner a recusal that was in effect when I was serving under the previous government. That same recusal has been updated and it applies today.

I shake my head at the hypocrisy of the hon. member. Those hon. members were very happy to have my involvement in softwood lumber and other forest policy business, but now they have changed their minds.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister would like to address the fiscal imbalance. Very well. We all agree that such a problem cannot be solved overnight. However, urgent needs in education require an immediate increase in transfer payments. All stakeholders are calling for a transfer increase to the 1994-95 level of \$4.9 billion annually, after allowing for inflation.

Since the Speech from the Throne does not mention the matter, can the government promise that the next budget will include an increase in transfer payments for post-secondary education and social programs?

•(1445)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

[English]

The budget will be delivered shortly. We have indicated that there will be a paper on fiscal imbalance and the issues relating to that delivered with the budget. I will ask the hon. member to wait for the budget.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when they served on the Subcommittee on Fiscal Imbalance, the Conservatives, as opposition, voted in favour of the recommendation to increase transfers for post-secondary education.

Now that they can go ahead with that proposal and make it happen, why do they not mention it at all in the throne speech?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is one of the issues that has to be addressed in terms of the broader discussion with respect to fiscal imbalance. There not only will be a federal paper with the budget, but the O'Brien report is to be delivered to the federal government probably in the month of May. The Council of the Federation has a report. Various provinces have delivered reports, some with their budgets, the provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba among others. I think the big city mayors and chairs also have a report coming in June.

There will be lots of reports and lots of opportunity for discussion.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hour is dark for the thousands of farm producers gathered today before Parliament. In Quebec and Canada, the agricultural sector has suffered losses of \$6.1 billion in four years, and the average net annual income per farm is barely \$5,600. This is a historical low and further proof that the phenomenon is not a passing one.

What does the minister have to say to the thousands of farmers who have come to ask him for emergency help, asking him to change the way the measures announced in the throne speech are implemented and, specifically, to reveal his schedule?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We agree that there is a short term problem for farmers right now and a longer term problem as well. We are taking steps in some ways to address some of those needs immediately. There will be more forthcoming in the days ahead. I urge the hon. member to wait for some of those announcements in the House.

In the longer term I believe the member is also right. We need to have a long term plan for farmers, working with farmers, to ensure that what we do not end up with is an annual pilgrimage to Ottawa to try to get what I think farmers deserve, which is a decent living from the hard work they do.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, farmers are justifiably worried in view of the statement by Canada's representative to the WTO that he did not feel bound by the resolution adopted unanimously by this House, which calls for the retention in its entirety of the supply management system.

With the minister's promise this morning to producers, will the government get the word clearly and firmly to its team of negotiators that they are not to touch supply management? It is not negotiable.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we supported the system of supply management at our congress in Montreal last year. We supported the system during the election campaign and we will support the supply management system during negotiations at the WTO.

* * *

[English]

CHILD CARE

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadian families with children are on waiting lists for early learning and child care. Yesterday the Speech from the Throne made only vague promises of working with the provinces and territories. This is simply not good enough for those families.

Will the minister commit to honouring the early learning and child care agreements that are already in place, or will she acknowledge that she really has nothing to offer these families?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our program does have two parts. The first part is to provide \$1,200 in cash directly to the parents of preschool age children. The second part is to create incentives to create 125,000 new child care spaces across the country.

[Translation]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the waiting list for affordable places in daycare is growing daily, why is the minister stubbornly refusing to consider real solutions, especially in the case of the 165 places that will disappear in his riding?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are delivering two times as many dollars for our child care program than the Liberals ever did in 13 years. We are going to create 125,000 new spots, and we are going to do it in consultation and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders so we make sure that it happens.

Our choice in child care delivery will take effect July 1, with the permission of the House.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's conflict of interest code states that ministers shall avoid even the appearance of being under an obligation to anyone who might profit from special consideration.

The Minister of National Defence was a registered lobbyist until February 2004, representing at least 28 defence firms. Why did the Prime Minister appoint that minister in violation of his own code?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can simply assure the House and the hon. member that the Minister of National Defence has complied with all aspects of the conflict of interest code and will be an outstanding Minister of National Defence. He brings tremendous knowledge to an area of government that needs a lot of rebuilding after 13 years of that party in office.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims the accountability act as the top legislative priority of his government, but his defence minister's list of former clients reads like a who's who of the defence industry.

Defence procurement represents nearly half of all government procurement. Why did the Prime Minister give that portfolio to a former defence lobbyist?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Minister of National Defence is not only in compliance with all the conflict of interest rules of the previous government but with much more stringent conflict of interest rules that we are introducing.

I will only say that it is about time we had a Minister of National Defence who had some background and some knowledge in national defence.

* * *

DAVID DINGWALL

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been told two different stories about David Dingwall: first, that he quit; and second, that he was fired. Either way, the previous Liberal government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar has the floor. I know that occasionally his comments cause some merriment in the chamber, but it seems excessive at the moment.

The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar has the floor and we will hear his question.

Mr. Brian Pallister: Methinks he doth protest too much, Mr. Speaker. Either way, the Liberal government found a way to pay David Dingwall severance, \$400,000 plus, just before election day and in secret.

The arbitrator's report will clear up many questions surrounding this sordid affair. Will the Prime Minister release that report?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his persistence in this matter. You will know that he has spent months, without success, trying to get to the bottom of the actions of the previous government.

I can confirm that the government has received the arbitrator's report dealing with Mr. Dingwall. Mr. Dingwall has agreed to its release and my officials are first making every effort to ensure that other individuals named in the report will also agree to its release. When we have achieved that, we will be all too happy to table it in the House of Commons.

* * *

●(1455)

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have a democratic right to be represented by the political party that they elect to represent them. The Prime Minister offended all Canadians when he seduced the member for Vancouver Kingsway over into his camp and talked him into crossing the floor.

Floor crossing undermines the democratic process and fuels cynicism. Will the Prime Minister use his new accountability act to put an end to floor crossing and these musical chairs once and for all?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think I have ever been accused of seducing anyone, even my wife.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that what he is asking for is not the position of this party. I explained that in televised debates during the election campaign. There are members of the House who favour that position, and if a private member wants to bring that forward, it of course will become votable in this Parliament.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the government believes in true transparency and accountability any more than the last gang did. The Prime Minister will not even talk to the media. He holds his secret cabinet meetings at midnight in the Diefenbunker and he is stripping out the ATI provisions from the accountability act.

There is plenty of room in the accountability act to answer this serious concern that Canadians have. They care about this. They want the practice stopped. Will he commit today to ending the practice of floor crossing once and for all?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, I believe members of Parliament should have that freedom and be accountable to their constituents for their decisions at the next election. However, in my observation, the only parties that really have this as an obsession are the parties that no one ever crosses to.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to engaging the Minister of Finance in lively but civil debate in the coming days and weeks.

Yesterday, on reading the throne speech, not a very long read, I was puzzled by one point. What is so terribly important in the Conservative agenda to justify increasing the personal income taxes paid by hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the proposal is to reduce the GST by a full percentage point. This is a tax cut for which Canadians voted and on which we intend to deliver. I can assure the member opposite that overall Canadians will pay less tax under this government than they did under the previous government.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the impression from a story today in the *Toronto Star* that the minister might be making progress and seeing the light, that he was perhaps acquiescing, at least in part, to our position that it was wrong to raise the income taxes of Canadians at this time.

Will he confirm the story in the *Toronto Star* suggesting that he will keep the income tax that is now in place which was put forward by the Liberals? Will he confirm that story today and relieve all those millions of Canadians who do not want the burden of their income tax to increase?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member opposite will understand that I rarely confirm anything written in the *Toronto Star* having had some experience in that place over the years.

I assure the member opposite that we do intend to keep our commitment to reduce the GST. This is a tax which a former leader of the party opposite in 1993 said should be scrapped entirely. I cannot understand why the member opposite would be against this government reducing the GST to the benefit of all Canadians by one point.

* * *

• (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the historic Kelowna accord signed by the federal, provincial, territorial and aboriginal leaders was going to greatly improve the standard of living of Canada's aboriginal peoples. In yesterday's throne speech the government was shockingly silent on this matter.

Will the Prime Minister stand up right now and vow to honour the Kelowna accord with its full funding commitments?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the throne speech reflects priorities that are shared by all Canadians. Child care, health care and community safety are concerns I have heard about from aboriginal Canadians in my consultations.

Canada's new government proceeded immediately to begin our work in improving the lives and the health of aboriginal Canadians. We have already taken action with respect to drinking water. We addressed the terrible tragedy that resulted from 13 years of inaction on the part of the Liberals. We will continue to work toward improving the lives of aboriginal Canadians.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is yet another sign of disrespect that the throne speech did not even mention the residential schools agreement. When the agreement was first announced the Conservative critic at that time, now the minister, said that it was long overdue. Now the government is silent on the issue.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House when the victims of this era can expect to see the first compensation cheques issued?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, action with respect to this matter remains unresolved. At the time of the election two conditions were required to be met: first, the preparation of a final agreement; and second, court approval. Neither of those steps has resulted at this point in time. I will continue to keep the House informed.

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the rise of economic powers such as China and India continues to have a serious impact on traditional manufacturing sectors, and older workers are especially hard hit. They urgently need help.

Does the government plan to re-introduce an income support program for older workers, many of whom are unfortunately losing their jobs as a result of globalization?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did not campaign on this particular issue. We have made no commitments. I look forward to receiving recommendations in reports and I will be happy to take them under consideration.

* * *

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and the former federal government signed an agreement on child care that provided for investment of over \$1 billion to recognize Quebec's past efforts. The new government put an end to that agreement, which will deprive Quebec of \$807 million.

How does the government, which says it wants to correct the fiscal imbalance, intend to make up for this \$807 million shortfall?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign we promised three things. One was a transition period. We have taken the original program and extended it to the 10 provinces and territories that had no financial agreements. We extended that for a year which shows our commitment to child care. We are working with the provinces and the territories to develop our new choice in child care construction system which will create 125,000 new child care spaces right across the country in urban and in rural areas to meet the needs of all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

First I want to assure her of our cooperation in the defence and promotion of Canadian culture. Judging by the lack of cultural priorities in yesterday's Speech from the Throne, she will be in great need of our cooperation.

Since not one of the new leaves mentioned yesterday by her government was relevant to culture, could the minister please inform this House of her department's priorities?

•(1505)

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government supports arts and culture. We recognize its importance in the cultural life of all Canadians and in a democratic society. We are committed to providing the support and the resources that artists and creators need to ensure they have the sustainability and security to fulfill their creative endeavours.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reports are indicating that many Manitoba communities are again facing the possibility of flooding.

Could the Minister of Public Safety assure us that the government will be there to assist the people of Manitoba if this happens?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we join all Canadians in watching with concern the flooding that is taking place in Manitoba at this time. I thank the Conservative members of Parliament from Manitoba who are bringing this to our attention.

I can assure the people of Manitoba that we have in place a disaster assistance plan. As it hits certain levels of cost in the province we will be there and we will be waiting for a call from provincial officials.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on December 18, the Canadian Chief of Defence Staff signed an agreement with the Government of Afghanistan concerning the transfer of prisoners.

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. Was the previous Liberal government aware of this memorandum of understanding before it was signed? Why does a very similar agreement signed with the Netherlands allow its government to ensure full compliance with all international conventions while ours does not?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge the previous government knew about the arrangement because it was done under its watch.

With respect to the second question, this is a more mature arrangement than the Netherlands has. Nothing in the agreement prevents the Canadian government from inquiring about prisoners. We are quite satisfied with the agreement. It protects prisoners under the Geneva agreement and all other war agreements.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the agreement does nothing to stop prisoners from being transferred to a third party.

Once Canadians hand a prisoner over to the Afghan government we wash our hands of the entire matter. This is simply not good enough.

Oral Questions

Will the minister ensure that Canadian government officials have the same rights as Dutch officials when it comes to tracking, interviewing and ensuring that no human rights violations or torture will take place?

When will the minister redraft the agreement to better reflect our values as Canadians?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have no intention of redrafting the agreement. The Red Cross and the Red Crescent are charged with ensuring that prisoners are not abused. There is nothing in the agreement that prevents Canada from determining the fate of prisoners so there is no need to make any change in the agreement.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has taken a dismissive attitude toward undocumented workers and immigrant communities as a whole, calling them a low priority.

Undocumented workers contribute significantly to our prosperity. Will the minister apologize for his destructive behaviour? Will he commit to actions to solve this issue?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been in touch with people in that community. I made it very clear that we are concerned about the fate of these undocumented workers. I want to point out that over the last 12 years the previous government continuously promised them all kinds of things that it never delivered on. The Conservative government will never do that.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian producers have lived with 13 years of failed Liberal agricultural policies.

Producers are looking for reassurance from the Conservative government. Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell the House and Canadians what his agricultural priorities are?

•(1510)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for arranging meetings with producers from his area. I have been down there to meet with them. They gave us a shopping list that we are going right to work on. One is that they need some immediate help and that help is going out the door now and there is more on the way.

They also want a replacement for the CAIS program, a program that was designed by the previous government. It simply does not get the job done and we are going to create separate support programs and disaster relief for farmers.

In the long term, farmers need some assurance that what they will have from this government is the support they need both at home and abroad to ensure they are profitable on their farms and we will do that.

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the administration of the Labrador byelection held on May 24, 2005.

[Translation]

This document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

* * *

• (1515)

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2005 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal annual report.

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[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I think you would find unanimous consent to adopt the government motion on the notice paper today regarding amendments to the Standing Orders that will establish new committees of the House of Commons. I move:

That the Standing Orders be amended as follows:

1. By replacing Standing Order 104(2) with the following:

104. (2) The standing committees, which shall consist of twelve Members, and for which the lists of members are to be prepared, except as provided in section (1) of this Standing Order, shall be on:

- (a) Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development;
- (b) Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics;
- (c) Agriculture and Agri-Food;
- (d) Canadian Heritage;
- (e) Citizenship and Immigration;
- (f) Environment and Sustainable Development;
- (g) Finance;
- (h) Fisheries and Oceans;
- (i) Foreign Affairs and International Development;
- (j) Government Operations and Estimates;
- (k) Health;
- (l) Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities;
- (m) Industry, Science and Technology;
- (n) International Trade;
- (o) Justice and Human Rights;
- (p) National Defence;
- (q) Natural Resources;
- (r) Official Languages;
- (s) Procedure and House Affairs;
- (t) Public Accounts;
- (u) Public Safety and National Security;
- (v) Status of Women;
- (w) Transport, Infrastructure and Communities; and,

(x) Veterans Affairs.

2. By replacing Standing Order 106(2) with the following:

106. (2) At the commencement of every session and, if necessary, during the course of a session, each standing or special committee shall elect a Chair and two Vice-Chairs, of whom the Chair shall be a Member of the government party, the first Vice-Chair shall be a Member of the Official Opposition, and the second Vice-Chair shall be a Member of an opposition party other than the Official Opposition party. In the case of the Standing Committees on Public Accounts, on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, on Government Operations and Estimates and on the Status of Women, the Chair shall be a Member of the Official Opposition, the first Vice-Chair shall be a Member of the government party and the second Vice-Chair shall be a Member of an opposition party other than the Official Opposition. In the case of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, the Joint-Chair acting on behalf of the House shall be a Member of the Official Opposition, the first Vice-Chair shall be a Member of the government party and the second Vice-Chair shall be a Member of an opposition party other than the Official Opposition.

3. By replacing Standing Order 108(3)(d) and 108(3)(e) with the following:

(d) Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities shall include, among other matters, the proposing, promoting, monitoring and assessing of initiatives aimed at the integration and equality of disabled persons in all sectors of Canadian society;

(e) Justice and Human Rights shall include, among other matters, the review and report on reports of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which shall be deemed permanently referred to the Committee immediately after they are laid upon the Table.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have unanimous consent to propose the motion on the order paper to the House now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table a petition from residents of my community who want to voice their concerns about the government plan, or lack of plan, for child care. Among other things, they indicate that 84% of parents with children are both in the workforce, that 70% of women with children under the age of six are employed, that a taxable \$100 a month allowance amounts to a child benefit and will not establish new child care spaces, and that child care is an everyday necessity. They call upon the Prime Minister and the government to honour the early learning and child care agreement in principle and commit to fund it for a full five years.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many people which states that undocumented workers play a vital role in Canada's economy, they are usually employed in highly skilled and professional jobs, and their removal would significantly damage Canada's economy. Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to immediately halt the deportation of undocumented workers and to find a humane and logical solution to their situation.

COMMITTEES OF THE WHOLE

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Speaker: Following my election as Speaker, I have consulted with the leaders of the recognized parties regarding the nomination of the other chair occupants. I am now prepared to propose for the ratification of the House a candidate for the position of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole House.

Pursuant to Standing Order 7, I propose Mr. Bill Blaikie for the position of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole. [Translation]

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

• (1520)

APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose, for the ratification of the House, a candidate for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mr. Royal Galipeau for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

The motion is deemed moved and seconded.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

APPOINTMENT OF ASSISTANT DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose for the ratification of the House a candidate for the position of Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mr. Andrew Scheer for the position of Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

[Translation]

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Congratulations.

* * *

[English]

REQUESTS FOR EMERGENCY DEBATES

NATIONAL DEFENCE

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has notice for two applications for emergency debates that I will now deal with. The first is from the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam. She will now wish to address the House.

S. O. 52

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 52, I seek leave to adjourn the House to discuss the agreement signed during dissolution by the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Afghan military. I have reviewed this document and strongly believe it raises very serious concerns about the issue of transference of detainees and Canadian compliance with Geneva conventions.

Your predecessors have granted emergency debates during consideration of the Speech from the Throne. You may well remember Speaker Fraser granting an emergency debate to discuss the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill on April 4, 1989. He cited the caution by Speaker Lamoureux, from February 18, 1972, that for a matter to be considered for an emergency, there must not be “the possibility of the matter being brought to the House within a reasonable time by other means”.

The agreement with the Afghan government is an unclassified document, the full contents of which are kept from the public by the government. It has not been mentioned in the throne speech. I therefore believe that this matter meets the test of Standing Order 52 (6).

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: The Chair received a letter from the hon. member some time ago now, early last week, and has certainly considered the matter with some care. While I appreciate the fact that this matter is of considerable importance, in the view of the Chair it does not meet the exigencies of the standing order in terms of urgency, and accordingly I am going to decline the hon. member's request at this time.

The Chair has a second request, from the hon. member for Malpeque. I will now hear from him.

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 52, I am seeking to call for an emergency debate in order to discuss the growing farm crisis across this country. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada itself has confirmed a further decline in farm incomes of 16% this year.

The uncertainty in the farming community is only increased by the government's announced intention of scrapping the CAIS program in spite of provincial government support and by the government's failure to provide the necessary resources for this spring.

The matter of the collapse of farm incomes and the need for federal government action is urgent. Farmers on the Hill today are further evidence of the serious crisis facing the farm community. I am therefore seeking under Standing Order 52 to call for an emergency debate to discuss this farm income crisis and the government's position on it.

The Address

● (1525)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On this issue that is now before the House, I would suggest to the hon. member that the whole question of agriculture and some of the problems associated with it have certainly been well addressed in question period, and as we know, the whole question of agriculture was addressed in the Speech from the Throne. All hon. members have had the opportunity to raise any matter they want with respect to agriculture and indeed any other issue.

In terms of whether there is adequate time or whether a forum has been presented, I would suggest to hon. members that they use their time during debate on the Speech from the Throne. They can make whatever points they want. I can tell hon. members as well that we can take under consideration and schedule at some time in the future, of course, a take note debate. That can also be a part of it.

We try to accommodate those requests within the government, so I would suggest to hon. members that within the debate today on the Speech from the Throne they can raise these issues. Of course these issues are important. The Minister of Agriculture said that. Everything to do with agriculture is important to all members of the new government. We want to get on and help the farmers of this country.

The Speaker: We cannot get into a debate on the merits of having an emergency debate. The point of order that I thought the hon. member was rising on was something connected with this, but a point of order nonetheless, and I am not sure that was.

In any event, the Chair is going to take this matter under advisement. I am conscious of the fact that during the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne debate members are free to debate any subject they want. In that sense, I think, while this and the other matter are matters of considerable interest, they are ones that are capable of being discussed during the course of the debate on the address in reply.

Having said that, I recognize that today there is a particularly important demonstration taking place here, and having a debate on this subject is one that we have had before and that I have allowed on previous occasions in respect of agricultural issues. I am going to take this under advisement and decide whether or not I should do so. In the course of that, I can have some consultations and see if there is another avenue for arranging for a particular debate of this kind, which I am happy to discuss. I will take this under advisement and get back to the House in due course.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from April 4 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my contribution to this debate by thanking the voters in my riding of Toronto Centre for giving me the

privilege of once again representing them in this our national Parliament. It is their support that has allowed me to continue over 12 years in my political career and today to stand before members in this House as leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. It is an honour for me to act in that capacity to respond formally to the government's Speech from the Throne.

Before I do so perhaps I could offer one other set of thanks. All members of this House know how difficult political life is. We would not be here without the support of our spouses and our partners. I want to pay particular recognition today to my spouse of 42 years, who is here with us in the House today, and to my two children, Katherine and Patrick.

I remember when I was in Europe some years ago and a European politician, or it may have been a judge, said that the great advantage in North America is that important people go home at night and they say to their wives all the things they have done during the day and their wives say to them, "That's nice, dear. Now, could you take out the garbage". Colleagues, it is our wives, our spouses and partners who often do those daily tasks for us because we are so often retained here. I want to thank my wife and my children, and perhaps in so doing I can share with all colleagues in the House this sentiment. I will hesitate to get into the exchange the Prime Minister had with his spouse during question period on other elements of family life.

However, I would certainly like to take this opportunity to commend the Prime Minister for two things. I would like to thank him, first, for his courteous words about my own appointment in this position, but I too would like to commend him. The Prime Minister mounted a spirited and professional campaign. We congratulate him and his party for their success in the election. Second, I would like to commend the Prime Minister for his recent trip to our Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

I have had the opportunity of visiting Afghanistan several times, once in fact when I was 20 years old, but most recently as the foreign affairs minister and subsequently as defence minister. I know that to understand this troubled country one has to see it on the ground and meet its people and its leaders. To understand the extraordinary contribution that our troops are making under challenging conditions there, one has to meet with them, talk with them and listen to them. To understand how much this is appreciated by the Afghan people trying to rebuild their lives after years of war and devastation, one must hear from them.

The Prime Minister took the time to do this and I know it was deeply appreciated by the men and women of our Canadian Forces as an important expression of support for their work and their mission; a support that our party firmly endorses.

That said, colleagues may recall that in his 2004 Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, the then Leader of the Opposition stated, perhaps rather tongue-in-cheek, "I said yesterday that the Prime Minister was so excited about his government's agenda that his first act was to leave the country". Now the Prime Minister has done very much the same thing.

The Address

While I freely admit it was an important thing to do, it may also be a revealing illustration of how his former rhetoric and his present acts may often differ, sometimes in ways commendable and sometimes in ways much less so.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

Before I comment on the Government's Speech from the Throne, I would like to make a few remarks about our Party's approach to this minority Parliament. Historically, Canadians have not had a lot of experience with minority parliaments but as a participant, like many of you, certainly recent experience has been instructive, and has sometimes involved intense hours.

Electing a minority is an expression of the desire of Canadians for moderation and compromise. The fact that no party received an absolute majority not only means that the Conservatives lack a mandate to govern in isolation from the other parties, it denies the Opposition parties to some degree the luxury of opposing just for opposition's sake. The bottom line is that the public expects all parties to make parliament work with a degree of co-operation, respect and even collaboration. As Liberals, we will abide by these principles.

For the government, this means consulting and striking compromises with the opposition parties, in an effort to forge a governing program that can command the support of the House and the Canadian public. In Hansard we find the principle perfectly expressed by a former leader of the opposition:

It is the government's obligation to craft a working majority to advance its agenda by taking into account the policies and priorities expressed by the three opposition parties in the House.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, these are the words of the Prime Minister himself less than two years ago. And members will recall that when the Liberals formed the minority government we did seek to work in ways that our agenda would command a majority in the House.

So, it's understandable that we, the Opposition, are disappointed that the Prime Minister has begun by ignoring his own philosophy of minority government. Because even though the Prime Minister consulted with the three Opposition leaders, it is difficult—at least for us—to find any traces of such discussions in the Speech from the Throne.

The leader of the NDP remarked yesterday that his conversations with the Prime Minister were fruitful with regards to child care. This position is understandable, in light of his decision to bring down the Liberal government before we had the opportunity to implement such an important program. For our part, we are not as optimistic about the promise made in yesterday's Throne Speech.

I must give the Prime Minister a friendly warning that when the leader of the NDP takes credit for the government's actions, as he did during the last Parliament, he is looking to topple the government. The Prime Minister should watch his back.

We willingly recognize that the government does not always need our support for its survival. That being said, we will commend and support the government when they put forward sensible policies that we judge to be good for the country. There are clearly elements of

the Conservative election platform and the throne speech that are worthy of support — and we will give it.

But we will vigorously oppose this government if it acts unilaterally to put forward legislation or adopts radical policies for which it lacks a mandate— policies that do not reflect the balance Canadians voted for when they determined the composition of this House of Commons.

● (1535)

[*English*]

Many of us in the House have heard many throne speeches. For myself, I have observed that most of these throne speeches, particularly inaugural efforts, consist of lists of commitments from the government. They seldom capture the imagination of the public but they do reveal certain fundamental traits of their authors. One only has to look at the Conservative tax plan, one of the central pillars of both the Prime Minister's campaign and the throne speech, to see their limited vision and the simplistic approach of the government.

The government has made much of its proposed 1% tax cut to the GST. The Liberal Party recognizes that taxes can and should be reduced, but we believe this should be done in ways consistent with good economics and in the best interests of Canadians.

A little over five years ago a Liberal government brought in the largest tax cut in Canadian history, a combined \$100 billion tax cut for individual Canadians and businesses that reduced federal personal income taxes by 21% on average and 27% for families with children. We removed about one million low income Canadians from the tax rolls. We significantly improved the tax system for students, persons with disabilities, charities and others.

Our balanced tax cut was a balanced tax agenda. It was economically and socially progressive. It was a tax cut agenda to propel Canada forward in the global competitive information age. It was a tax cut agenda designed to stimulate investment and savings to make the Canadian economy more productive and competitive.

Liberals remain steadfast in their belief that Canadians need continuing tax relief. That is why in November we advanced another major income tax cut that had similar objectives to our previous initiatives, providing a further \$25 billion in tax relief over five years with most of the benefit going to Canadians with low and modest incomes.

The Address

The throne speech presents the Conservative economic agenda. It consists of only one element, a cut in the GST, and so far government spokespersons have indicated that this will be financed by increasing personal income taxes, in a way nullifying our previous measures.

In our view, this tax cut does not advance the economic interests of Canadians. It is a tax cut for the sake of a tax cut. It is a tax cut to keep a poorly thought out election promise. It is a tax cut with no economic or social purpose underlying it, a point that has been made universally by Canadian economic analysts. It was well summed up by my colleague the member from Markham when he said, "If ever there was an anti-growth tax policy, the Conservatives have clearly stumbled into it".

It does nothing to encourage Canadians in businesses to invest in skills training and productivity enhancing equipment. It does nothing to induce savings to make the economy more productive, all of which any economist would tell us should be the central objective of any tax cut. I freely admit to being surprised that it comes from the Prime Minister who is an economist by training.

The freshly minted finance minister must be squirming in his seat as he reflects on this as he poured scorn on such a tax cut when he was in the Ontario government. I quote from the Minister of Finance of Ontario. I did not get this from the Toronto *Star* so he can relax. It comes from *Hansard* of the Ontario legislature. It states:

All you get is a short-term hit, quite frankly...It has no long-term positive gain for the economy.

What a different song we heard sung in question period here today colleagues.

The finance minister will now know that his current department emphatically agrees with what he said then. It has concluded that a GST tax cut is the least effective tax cut and that income tax relief is three times as effective at increasing the well-being and prosperity of all Canadians. The finance minister's original instinct was dead right and the direction from his current boss is dead wrong.

This GST tax cut is also small from the point of view of consumers. Canadians will barely notice it. If it has any effect at all on the economy, it will be to stimulate more consumption at a time when every economist in the country agrees that what the economy needs is more investment in savings, not more stimulus. At worst, the Conservatives have underestimated by hundreds of millions of dollars its cost to the treasury and quite frankly, to the businesses that will have to implement it.

● (1540)

The intention of the government to cancel the income tax cuts that the Liberal government put in place is even worse economics. Those tax cuts are progressive and they are needed to move this country forward. They made Canada more productive.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Why did you not bring them in?

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, we did bring them in. They were part of the fiscal framework and they helped make Canada. They were brought in. The Conservatives are going to have to cut them in the budget if they do anything about them. Do not worry, they are there. They are a problem for the Conservatives.

They are a good thing because they helped make Canada more productive and competitive. They deliver significant tax relief to Canadians, particularly lower income Canadians who need it the most. They are good economics, and no economist has disputed this. Indeed, the Canadian Tax Foundation has calculated that those cuts will benefit middle income Canadians approximately twice as much as the GST cut, twice as much for middle and lower income Canadians.

I heard the finance minister musing on television this morning that because of the full treasury which the government today inherited because of the prudence of the Liberal government, the Conservatives may revisit their position. Today in question period the minister was much more reticent, but I can tell him and the Prime Minister that we sincerely hope they do. We hope that at the time of the budget we will be able to congratulate the finance minister on his conversion on the road to Ottawa.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Let us now turn to the Conservative justice agenda.

The Conservatives do not seem to accept the link between the ease of obtaining and keeping handguns and violent crime rates and the use of reasonable controls on the use and possession of long guns. They also do not believe in the usefulness of the current process of regulating the possession of firearms. As a result, the government has committed to dismantling or otherwise nullifying the gun registry, a critical tool to control and monitor that supply.

It is regarded by chiefs of police and the rank and file who shared their concerns with the Prime Minister Monday as an important initiative against violent crime and a valued policing tool.

Having criticized the costs that were incurred in setting it up, why would the Prime Minister now throw those costs away, particularly as we await the Auditor General's report on how improvements may be made. Why do it now? Let us wait for the Auditor General's report. It should give us an indication of how to go about it.

Why not work to find ways that the registry can be improved? We will support you. But we will vigorously resist its dismantling.

We also expect the government to be transparent in its plans with regard to the gun registry. The Government has suggested in the past they will use regulatory means to get around Parliament to gut the gun registry, recognizing that they lack the votes in the House to repeal the legislation. This would have the effect of changing the very purpose of the registry. The Liberal opposition will resist any attempt by the government along these lines.

The government has also indicated in its Speech from the Throne that it intends to implement stricter criminal sentencing in the form of increased mandatory minimums.

The Address

All members of this Parliament want their communities to be more secure. Many voters in my own riding have told me so. All members of this House want something done in this regard. Therefore, we are in favour of measures that would increase the number of police officers in our communities. However, all amendments to our Criminal Code must be well thought out, balanced and must respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[English]

The Prime Minister has put forward his accountability and ethics package in the throne speech. Of course we agree with elements of this package. We are all committed to finding ways to improve how we serve the Canadian people and earn their trust, but it must be said that all efforts by the government to persuade Canadians that its commitment to this issue might well be measured against its wilful disregard of its own rhetoric on this subject, not to mention its flouting of basic and long-established conventions on these matters.

This is a Prime Minister whose first act was to appoint his political organizer to the Senate while simultaneously informing Canadians that he will only appoint elected senators in the future. The newly appointed senator had already been made a cabinet minister, and not just any cabinet minister, but the Minister of Public Works, which is one of the most important portfolios in the government and the very department of government that is responsible for spending and overseeing billions of dollars of taxpayers' money each year.

What is our basic problem with this appointment? It is simple. This public works minister is not accountable to the House of Commons, Canada's elected chamber with the primary responsibility for the public purse. We find that unacceptable.

Colleagues, I am quite astonished as I look across the floor of the House and I look at the faces of so many colleagues who sat over here and spoke to us about accountability for so many days in the last Parliament that they would look there and be pleased about the fact. Think of it colleagues. You, the Conservative members of Parliament, will have the person responsible for overseeing \$13 billion of spending per annum, billions of dollars, the most important spending portfolio in the government, sitting in the Senate. Are you not somewhat ill at ease with this? Do you really believe—

• (1550)

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition I know is an experienced member. I know he intends to address his remarks to the Chair rather than to certain individuals elsewhere in the House.

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I was thinking as I spoke that you yourself must be extremely ill at ease with this. You personally must be squirming in your place when you think that during question period day after day there will be nobody in this House to respond to this House about the spending of money, which is the charge and the obligation under the Constitution of Canada to the deputies that sit in this place. You must be very ill at ease.

The Prime Minister has also put into his cabinet a Minister of National Defence who less than two years ago was a defence industry lobbyist with a client list that is a who's who of defence contractors. When the minister was asked whether he would recuse himself from procurements that involved his former clients, he summarily dismissed the question.

The Prime Minister enticed into his cabinet a member of Parliament who was elected as a Liberal only two weeks prior. Not only is that inconsistent with the Prime Minister's rhetoric on ethics and accountability, but it is totally inconsistent with any usage known in the House. In fact, because of its timing and the cynical way in which it was handled, it has, in the words of Mr. Shapiro himself, given many citizens a sense that their vote, the cornerstone of our democratic system, was somehow devalued.

As I said the name of Mr. Shapiro, I heard from the other side "who" and "say who louder". Do those members not know that he is the Ethics Commissioner whom they voted for and approved of in the previous Parliament? Do they not recall? This is perhaps why the government has mounted a public campaign to discredit the Ethics Commissioner, an officer of Parliament whose appointment they advocated and approved.

In short, in its first month in office the government has compromised any credibility it had on the subject of ethics and accountability. These are early days for the government and Canadians are asking themselves where it is going, and it is perfectly natural. There has been considerable speculation in the press and elsewhere about the Prime Minister's other priorities.

The Prime Minister made clear his desire to see senators elected, apart from Mr. Fortier of course. He now has mused about constitutional reform. I must say that on constitutional reform, much as we are hesitant on engaging in divisive constitutional debate, it certainly would be preferable to introduce the concept of an elected Senate as a part of a comprehensive constitutional package. Members are fully aware that elected senators will effectively change the relationship between this House and the other place. The Prime Minister fully well knows that. This will involve constitutional ramifications, both from a parliamentary and a provincial perspective.

Whatever the Prime Minister's intentions may be, one thing many commentators have observed is that his style to date has been decidedly centralizing and authoritarian. As one journalist observed recently, the "bunker mentality" and the increasing centralization of power in the PMO already criticized for being too centralized is an awkward fit with his promises of a new era of accountability.

Colleagues, while the direction of this government is not yet clear, and the press cannot get sufficient access to enlighten the public, I think that we can, on the basis of its actions to date, establish one guiding principle for the future. Colleagues, examine the words used by the Prime Minister when he was in opposition and we can then assume that the acts of his government will contradict them in most respects.

However, as I have said, there are measures in the Speech from the Throne that we will support. The government's patient wait times guarantee commitment is an initiative we support and congratulate the government on. In fact, we commend the Conservatives for adopting our former policy.

The Address

It was a Liberal government that committed in the 2004 election to work with the provinces to establish wait time guarantees and benchmarks to measure progress toward these goals. Following the 2004 election, in partnership with the provinces, our government succeeded in moving substantially toward that goal, committing \$5 billion to the initiative.

We also commend the commitment to provide a care guarantee for Canadians. It is a good idea that Liberals have long advocated and we fully support it.

• (1555)

The Liberal opposition remains seriously concerned about the government's commitment to universal public health care. Its failure to respond substantively to the stated intentions of the Alberta government on reforming health care in that province is deeply troubling, especially when most of the country's health care experts judge the Alberta reforms to be in contravention of the Canada Health Act. Here the country expects all parties in this House to be highly vigilant, and we will be.

I would now like to turn to the subject of child care, a policy where the Liberal opposition fundamentally disagrees with the government. The Conservative position on child care brings into stark reality the difference between its party's views and those of the majority of Canadians across the country. Surely all colleagues agree that early learning is absolutely critical to human development and ultimately the success of the individual. It is the modern equivalent of universal primary education. A child's early years literally set the course of his or her life. This is one of the few areas where agreement exists between such disparate groups of people as social scientists, social activists, scientists and even economists.

Many advanced countries in Europe and elsewhere have recognized the importance of early learning and have had the foresight to establish national child care programs. These governments have been commended for doing so by organizations like the OECD that see child care as a critical element of an advanced and progressive economic policy.

The Province of Quebec has been at the leading edge in Canada in developing a child care system. However the lack of a national system in Canada has been a major shortcoming in our social policy framework.

During the 2004 election, the Liberal government committed to working with the provinces to establish such a program. We then successfully negotiated child care agreements with the provinces. Now the Conservative government has come along and it has portrayed this national child care program as more unwelcome government intervention in family life, a restriction of choice. This totally ignores the reality of modern society, particularly the reality, often the necessity, of two parents working. Surely we must recognize their needs and desires to see their children develop to their full potential with reliable, accessible, affordable, quality day care if we are to have a fair society for all.

The Liberal child care plan was not about government telling parents how to raise their children, as the Conservatives would have Canadians believe. It is about giving parents real choices to enable them to balance work and family. It is also about equality of

opportunity to ensure that low and modest income Canadians have similar choices to those of higher income earners in our society.

The Conservatives committed in the election to scrap the agreements we have reached with the provinces and abandon the objective of a national child care program. Now they are launched on this destructive mission. They are set to dismantle added child care spaces that were actually being set up in many provinces. They are replacing a bold initiative that was up and running with a \$100 per month pre-tax payment to families, plus a small tax credit to employers intended to encourage them to create child care centres in the workplace. The latter, frankly, is really an illusion as the vast majority of businesses have no desire to be in the day care business.

The Conservatives claim, with this minor taxable contribution to family income, that their approach is a better way to ensure that children of working families will receive the care they need and will add to the supply of spaces. We just do not understand how that could possibly be.

We believe and continue to believe that Canada must build a national day care system and that the federal government has an important catalytic role to play, as it did in the creation of medicare 40 years ago. This is far too important an issue for the future of our children and our country to abandon. I sincerely hope we can count on the other opposition parties to work with us to ensure its preservation.

I also want to address the issue of the aboriginal agenda of the government or, more accurately, the lack of such an agenda in the throne speech. As members of the House know, the previous Liberal government negotiated an historic agreement with Canada's aboriginal leaders and provincial governments in Kelowna.

• (1600)

The Kelowna accords form a comprehensive, long term strategy to improve significantly the social and economic conditions on reserves and for aboriginal people generally. They are targeted to improve the education levels and health of our aboriginal people and, in particular, the well-being of aboriginal children. They also provide for more and better housing and infrastructure on reserves and economic development initiatives so that aboriginal communities can overcome barriers to their prosperity.

Aboriginal leaders, provincial governments and the Government of Canada came together to sign the historic Kelowna accords and the government of the previous prime minister committed \$5 billion to the initiative.

The Address

We believe that the Kelowna accords are a signal achievement for the country. They are aimed at closing the prosperity gap between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. They are welcomed by provincial governments that wish to see their aboriginal citizens as participating partners in their development rather than marginalized peoples forced to resort to constant litigation to assert their rights. In short, they are progressive social and economic policy, and we believe that any national government should honour those commitments that have been made to our first nations and the first residents of this country.

As I said in my opening remarks, there are positive elements in the throne speech that are sensible and we will support them. However the throne speech says little about the modern realities of a highly competitive, global information intensive economy in which Canadian businesses and individuals must be equipped to compete. It does not recognize the realities of the modern workforce and the dual income household. It does not recognize the need to advance a progressive and fair society. It fails to recognize that the government inherited one of the most healthy economies and revenues in memory. It has today the fiscal capacity to address these important concerns of Canadians.

It is a privilege for me to serve as Leader of the Opposition at this time. I also believe that all members of the House would agree with me that there is no greater privilege than that to be elected by our fellow citizens and to serve them in this our national Parliament.

On Monday, when we elected you, Mr. Speaker, several members pointed out that there was a reason to be concerned about the way our fellow citizens regard how we go about performing our duties here. The esteem, or perhaps more accurately the lack of it, the public has for politicians today is, to some degree, a reflection of how we approach our responsibilities here. Some behaviour in the last Parliament did not, and I think we can all agree, contribute to that esteem.

I can assure all members of the House that our party will work with all parties in the House to make it work for Canadians in an atmosphere that is appropriate to our responsibilities. We will not seek to be partisan when it is not in the interest of Canada and Canadians. We will cooperate with the government to enable it to do the work it has been charged to do by the Canadian people. We will cooperate with the other opposition parties as well so that both in the House and in committee business will be conducted to improve government and legislation for the benefit of all Canadians.

We will seek to oppose in the most constructive way possible and we have no intention of seeking to frustrate by obstruction tactics that all too frequently marked the last Parliament. We will, of course, oppose but where appropriate and we will propose constructive alternative solutions as well.

As I said in my introduction, we recognize that we were elected to oppose government measures that are not in the interest of Canadians and that do not reflect the will they expressed in the last election in voting for a minority government. We will exercise that responsibility as opposition to the best of our abilities.

The old French maxim goes as follows.

[*Translation*]

« En politique comme en amour, il n'y a point de traités de paix, ce ne sont que des trêves. »

[*English*]

In that spirit I hereby move:

That the motion be amended by deleting the period at the end and adding the following:

and, while this House acknowledges the broader agenda mentioned en passant in the Speech, it particularly looks forward to early and meaningful action on such promises as those respecting aboriginal Canadians, new immigrants, greater security for seniors, improvements in the environment, and increased supports for farm families; and, given the strong economic and fiscal situation which the Government inherited, this House sees no reason for tax increases or a decrease in anticipated early learning and child cares spaces in Canada.

• (1605)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. opposition leader for his comments in response to the throne speech delivered by our Prime Minister yesterday. The hon. member brought forward many things that I would like to question but I know my colleagues and others in the House want equal opportunity so I will just focus on one. The one that is certainly near and dear to my heart and to the heart of my constituents is, in my estimation, the unconscionable national gun registry which the party opposite seems to support with an unwavering and unflagging level of support that seems to be completely unjustified.

I would like to focus on one comment my hon. friend opposite made when he said that the national gun registry prevented violent crime. Could the hon. member give me any examples from any police association or any advocacy group of one violent crime which quantitatively has been demonstrated was stopped because of this national gun registry, a gun registry that has cost taxpayers.

My other hon. friend, the one who also portends to be the next leader of the Liberal Party, asks me how there can be a violent crime that we do not know about. The fact of the matter is that the gun registry does nothing to stop violent crime in this country.

The national gun registry, which has cost Canadian taxpayers close to \$2 billion and which I think will be verified by the Auditor General's report coming up very shortly, does nothing to stop violent crime. The fact that we do not seem to be able to get across to members opposite is that criminals and violent criminals do not register guns. Think about that. I just do not know if members opposite can grasp that very basic fact. People who are about to commit a violent crime simply do not register their guns.

The Address

I wonder if the member could please stand in the House and once again assure Canadians that the Liberals will forever support the national gun registry and admit once again that our party and most rational thinking Canadians oppose this unconscionable waste of taxpayer dollars.

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, it is illogical to accept the question because one cannot prove a negative. We all know that. We cannot prove which violent crime was prevented because the violent crime did not happen.

However this is not some sort of “dada” by people. This is something that is supported by the police chiefs and, as the Prime Minister personally knows from his meeting with ordinary policemen the other day, they also support it. It gives them a useful tool to ascertain where guns are located. It is not the only answer to violent crime but it is a contribution to understanding and a tool to managing what is a serious problem in our society.

The House voted on a previous occasion to cap the cost of the gun registry. The Auditor General is studying what changes might be made in respect to it. We should let the Auditor General do her work. Let us look at this with a parliamentary committee that will have a real way to examine it, not make a knee-jerk reaction. Let us ensure that if the gun registry, which is enshrined in legislation, is to be done away with then let the government bring forward legislation in the House and give the opposition parties an opportunity to vote on that legislation. It should not be killed by stealth.

•(1610)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, let me congratulate the leader of the official opposition on his re-election. I am glad to see him back in the House. I thank him for the scope of his remarks today.

I would like to focus my question on a couple of things with regard to democratic and voter reform.

One of the real disappointments in the last minority Parliament was that when the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the government, his government reneged on the whole process of democratic reform. It was an area that the Liberals allowed to slide. Although it was something the NDP put forward very strongly, and Ed Broadbent did a lot of work on this, it was allowed to slide off the Liberal political agenda, maybe because they knew it was not in their political interest. Do the Liberals now have a renewed interest in ensuring that the House truly represents the way people are voting?

Second, are his members giving serious consideration to the bill, which we know will come forward, on crossing the floor? We know the member for Vancouver Kingsway was a Liberal and then became a Conservative. The people of Vancouver Kingsway are outraged, as are voters across the country. Will his members support a bill to be ethical and accountable to ensure that members cannot do what the member for Vancouver Kingsway did?

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her kind remarks about myself. I look forward to working with her and other members of her party as we proceed in this Parliament.

On the issue of the vote on the question of democratic reform in the way in which we elect members to the House, I would like to remind the hon. member of the fact that we were looking at this issue

in the previous government. However, you will recall that like child care and a lot of other issues you chose to pull the plug in November instead of allowing us to continue our work and do what we were trying to do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know the hon. Leader of the Opposition is interested in answering the question from a particular member, but of course he must address the Chair, and he knows I do not pull plugs.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, you personally will recall the plug was pulled and even yourself went down the drain when we went to the election caused by the hon. members. I believe strongly we would have had an opportunity to deal with child care and other issues if we had been enabled to sit in the House longer and reflect on these very important issues. I think now we will have an opportunity.

I can assure the member my party will engage with her party. I am sure we will engage with all parties in the House on what proper reforms are to be made to our electoral system. It is an important issue and we will examine it seriously, as we will examine seriously any proposal that addresses the question as to what should be the consequences of an individual member leaving his or her party to cross the floor of the House or to sit as an independent.

Clearly in our parliamentary tradition, in a Westminster style democracy, this is something that has been handled differently than in other types of Parliaments. It is something we must look at seriously and we must look at how it would affect the manner in which we conduct our business in the House. We will take it in that manner and certainly approach it with a very serious intent.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank our leader for the presentation he has made today.

Also, with respect to the comments on the gun registry, it is evident in all the data that women are generally killed or attacked by male partners or people they know. The statistics show the fact that this has gone down. The Canadian Police Association supports it. It is time we deal with this issue properly.

I also want to congratulate my leader for addressing the issue of child care. Early education and care is not just about babysitting. It is about early development. As for the \$1,200, I spoke with constituents in my riding just last week. They said that \$100 a month did not make up \$1,000. One family is spending \$2,000 a month for their children. This does not create child care. It is like saying we are going to create elementary education by giving people \$100 a month and then trying to build an elementary system. It does not work. It gives choice. This is absolutely unacceptable.

The Address

The cities agenda was also not mentioned at all in the Speech from the Throne. There was no mention of infrastructure of the urban centres in the country. What would the Leader of the Opposition say to us as far as this piece because I find it totally unacceptable that it was also missing?

• (1615)

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated greatly the hon. member's comments in the introduction to her question and I subscribe to what she said. I think her observations were helpful to the House in understanding these issues.

Insofar as the cities and communities agenda, which was debated a great deal in the House at a previous time by the previous government, I would strongly urge the present government to look at what is happening in our cities and communities, particularly in the area of infrastructure. I was in Toronto when the President of the Treasury Board made a welcome announcement and we would welcome further engagement. We would encourage the government to engage with our communities to ensure that they have the infrastructure necessary so they can provide to their citizens everything they need for a modern society.

We had a tremendous agenda in the previous Parliament and the government had an excellent agenda for this. I highly commend it to future governments. I regret the fact that there is nothing in this Speech from the Throne which suggests that is how the present government intends to proceed.

[*Translation*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne, delivered yesterday by Her Excellency the Governor General.

[*English*]

As this is my first speech in the House as Prime Minister, I would like to acknowledge and thank a number of people.

First, I would like to pay tribute to our head of state, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, whose lifelong dedication to duty and self-sacrifice have been a source of inspiration and encouragement to the many countries that make up the Commonwealth and to the people of Canada.

Second, I would like to thank the people of Calgary, particularly those of Calgary Southwest, who have seen fit to send me to this House as their representative since 2002. While Ottawa may be where I work, Calgary is home and it is never far from my heart.

Finally, I would like to thank the people of Canada. I would like to thank them for taking part in the electoral process. I would like to thank them for reversing a trend of declining voter turnout. I thank them for the trust they have placed in my new colleagues and in our new government. We are deeply honoured by the mandate. We recognize in a minority the necessity of working with others. I note that the New Democratic Party and Bloc Québécois have already availed themselves of that opportunity and I will have a bit of time to speak about the Liberal Party in a moment.

On a personal note, I would like also to thank those who have contributed so much to get me this far in life, long-time friends too

numerous to name, but I will name a couple who were here in the House this afternoon. One is a one-time employer of mine and a mutual friend, a long-time member of Parliament, Deborah Grey, who is doing wonderfully in private life. I would also like to thank the former leader of the opposition, a good friend to many in the House, the Hon. John Reynolds, who is also here today.

I would like to thank my brothers Grant and Robert, my mother who is here with us and my father who is no longer with us, but I am sure is enjoying the moment.

I would especially like to thank my wife Laureen, my son Benjamin and my daughter Rachel. As has been observed perhaps all too graphically today, to them I owe a great vast debt for the unconditional support and patience they have shown over the years when faced with the tight schedules and many out-of-town trips that are an all too frequent part of any parliamentarian's life.

On January 23 Canadians voted for change. They overwhelmingly rejected 13 years of scandal and inaction. They made it clear that business as usual was not good enough. They told politicians that it was time for the federal government to turn over a new leaf and to change the way it did things forever. They asked our party to take the lead in delivering that long overdue change.

[*Translation*]

Change is what this Speech from the Throne is truly about: change that cleans up Ottawa, change that delivers real results for ordinary working people and their families, change that keeps building a Canada that is strong, united, independent and free. And we are going to deliver on that call for change.

• (1620)

[*English*]

Still there are some who do not want to see change occur. For example, I watched the new Leader of the Opposition yesterday and I listened intently to his speech. I genuinely like the hon. member for Toronto Centre. He is an impressive man with a powerful intellect and a genuine love for his country. However, to hear him speak, we would think that January 23 had never occurred. While the hon. member spent considerable time critiquing the plans of this government, what he did not do was to publicly acknowledge and accept the message that Canadians sent to his party.

[*Translation*]

There was no recognition or apology for the waste, the mismanagement, the corruption.

[*English*]

Neither was there an apology for the campaign of fear waged by the hon. member's party, which I might add was the only party that ran solely on a platform of what it was against.

[*Translation*]

Worse yet, there was no indication as to when Canadians—including those in Quebec—can expect to get back the tens of millions in taxpayer dollars that were misappropriated over the course of the sponsorship scandal.

*The Address**[English]*

What the hon. member seems to have forgotten is that while the past 13 years may have been good ones for friends and insiders of the Liberal Party, life was not always so easy for ordinary people, many of whom found themselves working longer hours, paying more in taxes, saving less and unable to get ahead.

That is not good enough. It is not good enough for this government. It is not good enough for this House. It is not good enough for the ordinary people who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules. It is not good for this country.

[Translation]

So, I would suggest this to the members opposite: before you complain and before you criticize genuine attempts to clean up government, to help working families and to make our country strong and united, come clean with Canadians on the missing millions. Tell them where it went and, in the spirit of decency, pay it back.

[English]

I suggest this to members opposite. Before they carp, before they complain, before they criticize genuine attempts to clean up government, help working families and make our country strong and united, come clean with Canadians on the missing millions, tell them where it went and, in the spirit of decency, pay it back.

Our government will be one that is able to look forward rather than back. Our focus is set squarely on addressing the many challenges facing ordinary Canadians as they struggle to make ends meet, help their children get a good start in life and build a strong, prosperous and united country that is the envy of the world: challenges like replacing the culture of corruption and entitlement with a culture of accountability and achievement; challenges like cutting taxes so Canadians can have a bit more of their income left over to pay for the necessities of life; challenges like making our communities safe so people do not fall victim to violent crime on their way to school, to work or to shop; and challenges like helping families cope with the many demands facing them such as balancing the pressures of raising children with the necessity of earning income.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Other formidable challenges await us. We must restore the reputation of federalism in Quebec and rebuild Canada's influence in the world.

[English]

These are just some of the challenges facing us and we are ready to tackle them.

[Translation]

We have a plan and we have priorities. And Canadians are with us.

[English]

During the recent election, we laid out our priorities and a plan for change. Canadians have made it clear they support change and they want us to act.

[Translation]

Canadians are tired of directionless government, endless meetings and a political culture of entitlement. They want Ottawa to turn over a new leaf and focus on the needs of honest, ordinary Canadians, rather than allowing friends of the regime to feather their nest.

[English]

We have heard Canadians. We intend to deliver by turning over not just one new leaf but five of them, so we can build a Canada that works for all Canadians not just a favoured few.

Where do we start?

The first leaf we intend to turn over would involve ending the 13 years of waste, mismanagement, dithering and corruption that characterized the previous government.

To address this we will clean up the federal government, and make it more accountable and above board through the introduction of a new omnibus federal accountability act. This act would give more powers to the various independent officers of Parliament, including the Auditor General. They would be able to do a better job of holding the government accountable and ensuring that the \$30 billion-plus in federal grants, contributions and contracts are awarded fairly and provide value for taxpayers money.

[Translation]

The Federal Accountability Act will also give real protection to public servants and other Canadians who want to come forward and report illegal or unethical behaviour they observe in the operations of the federal government.

And it will open up the workings of government to greater scrutiny by Canadians through improvements to access to information laws. We will also make sure that all appointments to public office are fair and based on merit and qualifications. To that end, we will create a public appointments commission.

Building on the work done by René Lévesque thirty years ago in Quebec, we will end the undue influence of big-money contributors in federal politics by banning all corporate and union donations to federal political parties, preventing MPs and candidates from setting up secret personal trust funds, and capping individual donations to federal political parties at a maximum of \$1,000 per year. This will end those \$5,000 a ticket cocktail parties where big donors were invited to lobby the Prime Minister.

[English]

We also intend to eliminate the insider lobbying culture that grew up under the previous regime by banning all former ministers, ministerial staffers and senior public officials from lobbying the federal government for five years; by requiring a full record of contacts between lobbyists and ministers or senior officials; and by putting real teeth in penalties in place to enforce the Lobbyists Registration Act.

The Address

•(1630)

[*Translation*]

We are going to clean up the federal government's contracting system by giving the Auditor General the power to review federal grants, contributions and contracts and to follow the money to those who received it.

[*English*]

Cleaning up Ottawa is just one of the leafs that must be turned. We have to turn over a new leaf when it comes to taxing Canadians. For the truth is that Ottawa, for some time now, has taxed Canadians far too much.

I am amused to listen once again to the Liberal Party become, in its own mind, the champion of some historic tax relief. It has taken far too much money out of the economy and out of people's pockets. Its spending has been out of control so much that it overtaxed Canadians.

Even after billions of dollars were wasted, mismanaged or vanished, still billions remain in the surpluses through overtaxation. Hard-working Canadians deserve a break. They are working longer, paying more and saving less. Canadians are fed up with being overtaxed. We agree with that.

That is why we need to deliver broad-based tax relief for all Canadians and we will do so by starting with the GST. We will cut the GST immediately, from 7% to 6%, and eventually to 5%, all of which makes good sense if we really want to cut people's taxes since the GST is the one tax that every Canadian must pay no matter how little they make.

[*Translation*]

A cut in the GST means that everyone wins, including those people who do not earn enough to pay income tax and so would not benefit at all from a decline in the personal tax rate. The idea here is to leave Canadians with a bit more money so they can pay for the necessities of life and save to cover family expenses.

[*English*]

Let me assure the House that when the government and the new Minister of Finance introduce this and other taxation measures, every single Canadian household in this country will be better off.

Before I leave the subject, we all need to remember that 13 years of mismanagement, scandal and inaction have left some segments of our society in particularly bad shape. It is especially true of those who work in our natural resource sectors, such as our hard working farmers, many of whom, as we know, are just getting by. These people deserve help and they will receive help. It will not be easy. There are no quick fixes, but we are determined to help them recover from the years of neglect by the previous government.

However, we are not finished. We also need to turn over a new leaf in the way the federal government helps families.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Those are cheap words. Let us see the money.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, did I just hear a Liberal member say, "Show us the money"?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Maybe those farmers out there today who need the money can find that stolen sponsorship money and give it to those—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

•(1635)

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, we also need to turn over a new leaf in the way the federal government helps families. The Canadian family is the foundation upon which our society is built and it still represents all that is best in all parts of this country. But the truth is that many families are under pressure as never before. To help them we will provide parents with real choice in child care, so they can do a better job of balancing workplace and home responsibilities. The idea here is to help parents pay for child care that makes the most sense to them, not to some bureaucrat or special interest group in Ottawa. We understand that every Canadian family is different. What works for one may not work for another.

[*Translation*]

To do this we will give each family with a child under six \$1,200 per year per child, which they will be able to use as they see fit to pay for childcare. This might be for private or public childcare or care provided by a neighbour, or a relative or whatever other way that suits them best.

[*English*]

We are also going to provide financial incentives to help employers and community organizations create thousands of new child care places.

Taken together these measures should prove a concrete benefit for many Canadians by providing parents with real financial help rather than just shuffling money from one politician to another. These measures will create real, new, filled child care places rather than just the same old empty promises.

The previous government talked for 13 years about providing a readily available, easily accessible, free universal day care system, but that system and those child care places, free or otherwise, never actually arrived.

Our government is offering \$1,200 per year for each preschool child. Let us not have this House listen to those who would provide families with nothing. Our government is developing a tax incentive plan to create 125,000 at-work day care spaces. Let us not listen to those who just want to create more studies.

The choice this House has is in fact not a choice at all. It is a choice between something and nothing. Our plan creates real child care spaces and benefits ordinary working Canadians.

The Address

In the last few years, academics, experts, lobbyists, researchers, advocates and other politicians got lots of money in the name of child care. They got their money out of the system, but we intend to bring forward legislation that will help parents, children and families immediately, and that is the choice in this Parliament. Members can vote against money for parents, children and families if they wish, but the government will be voting for them.

We also want to turn over a new leaf when it comes to health care. Canadians are worried about the availability of health care, and rightly so. They wonder why it takes so long to get life-saving procedures when so much money is being spent already on health care in this country.

In this country there is a deal between the state and its citizens. The citizens pay their taxes into a public insurance system. They are supposed to get necessary medical treatment when they need it. Canadians kept their end of the bargain. They paid their taxes. They paid and they paid. They have a right to timely medical treatment and they should not have to wait forever to get urgently needed treatment.

We are going to act right away to make things better and faster. We will work with the provincial governments, who have the primary responsibility for health care, not against them, to develop a patient wait times guarantee.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

A good example of how this might work is the recent announcement by the Quebec government of a wait time guarantee. Under this plan, people who cannot get the treatment they need locally within a clinically acceptable period of time would be able to go to a private clinic or a publicly-funded facility in another region—at government expense. To my mind, this represents a new and positive approach to patient wait times—one that mirrors our thinking in many respects.

And to ensure that each level of government can pay for the services it must provide, we recognize that we must tackle the problem of fiscal imbalance.

[*English*]

Families and their various needs do not exist in isolation. They live in the country, villages, towns and cities. What happens in all of our communities does affect all of us, for better or for worse, so it is important that our communities be strong. It is important that they be good places to live and it is important that they be safe. Unfortunately, many Canadians do not feel safe, for good reason.

[*Translation*]

Canadians have told us they want to see real progress in the fight against crime. And they want an end to the violence associated with gangs, handguns and drugs. They do not want more flowery talk—they want action. And that is exactly what we are going to do.

[*English*]

On any given day, local newscasts across this country increasingly contain stories about guns, gun violence, gangs, and drug deals gone seriously wrong. And innocent Canadians have become victims of

violent crime simply because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This is not the Canadian way.

We have long taken pride in our safe and orderly streets, but we are discovering that we can no longer take our peaceful and orderly way of life for granted.

Canadians are tired of seeing gangs settle scores in broad daylight. They are tired of innocent people being killed by street racers in stolen vehicles.

They are tired of governments that seem more focused on the rights of violent criminals than the pain and suffering of their victims. They are tired of politicians who tie the hands of police and prosecutors so they cannot do their jobs.

They are tired of seeing their quality of life slip away as violent crime touches their communities, their neighbourhoods and even the schools their children attend.

Canadians are fed up and they want us to act, which means that it is also time for Ottawa to turn over a new leaf when it comes to ensuring public safety. That is what we intend to do by cracking down on crime.

To begin with, we will put an end to the previous government's practice of giving light sentences for heavy-duty crimes. This will mean mandatory minimum prison sentences for repeat, serious and violent offences, or if they involve the criminal use of firearms.

We will get tough on drug traffickers and sexual predators who prey on our children.

We will put more front line law enforcement officers on the streets of our communities.

From now on, parole will not be a right but a privilege that has to be earned.

We will, to the extent that we are able—and I hope other members of Parliament will think hard about their criminal justice priorities—stop shovelling money into an ineffective long gun registry and reinvest it into real crime control measures.

[*Translation*]

In addition, we will pump new federal money into criminal justice priorities—in particular, programs for youth at risk.

[*English*]

Finally, there are a number of other leaves that will have to be turned over if we are to build a better Canada, including securing the unity of our country and strengthening its influence in the world.

Canada is a great country and that is why we must do all in our power to make her more strong, more united and, above all, a leading example of freedom, democracy and shared human values.

The Address

•(1645)

[*Translation*]

The sponsorship scandal tarnished the reputation of federalism in Quebec. Righting this wrong is clearly a challenge that our new government must tackle. We will favour a new, more open approach to federalism that acknowledges the differences that exist among all of our provinces and territories, including Quebec's unique personality; and we will respect the powers granted to our partners under our constitution.

After all, one of Canada's greatest strengths is that it is a federation. We recognize that the provinces have an important role to play in international relations—particularly where their affairs are affected. We intend, for example, to invite the Government of Quebec to participate in UNESCO.

[*English*]

We also intend to strengthen the country at home by reforming our institutions. We have already increased the transparency of the nomination process for Supreme Court justices, as seen by the Commons committee hearing which examined the selection of Justice Rothstein, and we will bring forth measures to modernize the Senate, an institution long overdue for reform.

We will also strengthen our country's capacity to defend our sovereignty at home, to protect our citizens from external threats, and to provide leadership on the world stage.

We will pursue a “Canada first” defence policy, which will repair the damage done to our armed forces over 13 years of wilful neglect and allow us to protect our sovereignty from the Atlantic to the Pacific and to the Arctic as well.

But we all understand that Canada is not some island on which we can live in splendid and peaceful isolation. This was the hard lesson that this country learned in two world wars—we learned it before the United States—and it was driven home to us again with great force on 9/11.

More recently, I had a chance to see at first hand in Kandahar province in Afghanistan the tremendous job that Canadian troops, young men and women, are doing in standing up for Canadian values abroad, often at the risk of their lives.

[*Translation*]

Canadians there provide irrigation services to owners of family farms, education to children and microcredits to women.

[*English*]

This is the work of our development officers. It is coordinated by our diplomatic officers there and across the world. And it is all made possible by the risks and the sacrifices of our defence and security forces.

We want this country, at home and abroad, to be part of the great challenges and the great problems of the day, worldwide, and it will be.

So there we have it, a bold agenda for change that seeks to turn over a new leaf in Ottawa and start a whole new page in the history of our country.

[*Translation*]

We want to really change things by making the government more open and accountable, by cutting taxes, by addressing crime, by giving parents a child care allowance, by guaranteeing medically reasonable wait times, and by strengthening national unity and Canada's influence in the world.

[*English*]

That is what we promised. That is what we intend to do.

Still, this does represent an ambitious agenda. Implementing it will not be easy, but it will be well worth the effort.

[*Translation*]

When we are done, we will have built a better Canada and a surer future where Quebec will be stronger within our federation.

•(1650)

[*English*]

We will do these things. We will do them for ourselves and for the many generations of Canadians that will follow.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the rural members on the other side are yelling, “Show me the money”. Yes, that is what they should do. They are probably ashamed to go home this weekend with the performance of the government so far.

I listened intently to the Prime Minister's speech. Like the throne speech itself it was very light and very short on substance. That party over there has come into government when the treasury and the fiscal balance are in surplus like never before, a surplus that it should be using to put programs in place for people.

The Prime Minister himself claimed that farmers deserve help. The only help his government has provided so far is the money that the Minister of Finance of the former government booked and put in place. The government has not put a dime toward farmers thus far.

Farmers are rallying on the Hill today because they are in trouble. The Prime Minister left the impression during the election that he would pay more money out to the farm community, yet his Minister of Agriculture in a press conference said today, “Don't talk to me. Talk to the provinces”.

The government has a responsibility to put cash into farmers' hands and to put it into their hands prior to spring planting. When is the Prime Minister going to live up to the intention he left with farmers during the election and put the cash in their hands prior to spring planting, and how is he going to do it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, the first act of this new government was to free up three-quarters of a billion dollars for agriculture, money which of course the previous Liberal government, as it was so good at in so many areas, promised but never delivered.

The Address

This government has committed to delivering an additional \$2.5 billion over the next five years to assist agriculture and we will deliver on that. This government has committed to fix the CAIS program, which even today that member opposite tried to defend. It is hard to find any farmers in this country who will defend that program.

When that member complains about substance in agriculture, farmers can only wish that in the 13 years he spent on the government benches, when agriculture was completely neglected, he had cared something about substance in those years.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened closely to the Prime Minister's speech. Indeed, certain major problems followed from the inaction of the previous government, such as the fiscal imbalance and the acts of dishonesty. The outcome of this election constitutes a judgment that these things have to be changed. We will wait to see what documents and what bills are tabled, what actions are taken by the government, and then determine whether the Speech from the Throne is translated into concrete results.

However, there is one factor which is given inadequate emphasis in that speech, and that is competition and competitiveness in our manufacturing sector. I found only one sentence in the throne speech on this subject: "[The government] will promote a more competitive, more productive Canadian economy".

Can the Prime Minister assure us that this weakness in the throne speech will not prevent us from seeing, in the days and weeks ahead, concrete actions aimed at dealing with the new reality of global competition, as the value of the dollar fluctuates with gasoline prices, exports to the United States and the rest of the world, and the economies of emerging countries which are becoming formidable competitors, in the face of which the previous government did nothing?

Will the government add these elements to the content of its speech? For it is a speech that has nothing to offer our manufacturing industries, which are now losing thousands of jobs. Will the government act to ensure them a place on the international stage and to ensure that our people can keep their jobs? Often these people have devoted 10, 15 or 20 years of their lives to these businesses, and now they are seeing the rug being pulled out from under their feet. What will the Conservative government do for these people who seem to have been forgotten in the throne speech?

• (1655)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking a question on a very difficult, very complex subject which affects everyone over the long term. It is not very easy to discuss this in a few minutes, but I can indicate that our government will have certain plans.

We will start with the budget, which will follow in a few weeks, but we will have plans for research and development, others for worker and apprentice training, and others for tax reduction for businesses of all sizes. In addition there will be numerous initiatives, including our determination to rebuild our relations with our American partners, since the hon. member mentioned our trade relations with the United States.

However, I must again mention the need for political certainty if we are to have major success, if we are to be assured of success, in the area of competitiveness and productivity. In other words, we need a strong and united Canada, and a stronger Quebec within our federation.

[English]

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the five points that is indeed in the throne speech concerns guaranteed wait times and the work the Prime Minister will do with the provinces to encourage guaranteed wait times.

We have seen many examples recently in the public health care system. Alberta has significantly, within a public system, reduced the wait times for joint replacements, knees and hips in particular. In Richmond, the number of surgeries for children has been significantly reduced because of the partnership with the B.C. Children's Hospital. I am wondering if that is one of the things that we will be looking at.

However, I have a couple of other concerns. At some stage there has to be a definition of waiting lists, what are we really waiting for and how is that measured, because I have not seen that come up just yet from the Conservatives. The implication of more surgeries is important to acknowledge. The implication of doing more surgeries because the wait times are guaranteed means we would need more nurses to assist the surgeons.

We do not have more nurses. It takes four years to educate more nurses to provide the service in a public or a private system. The home support would be necessary for the person who goes home after his or her surgery, and home support beds would be necessary for those people occupying hospital beds now waiting for surgery.

Will the Prime Minister work with the provinces to expand proven innovation in the public system in accordance with the Canada Health Act and what is his plan to provide the supports that are necessary in order for surgeries to occur more quickly?

• (1700)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, that is a very big question and I have very few seconds to answer it. Obviously, of the five major priorities we focused on, four are primarily legislative in nature. The other one, of course, is to deal with health care waiting times.

I am pleased to see that the hon. member acknowledges that some provinces have already been working with us to make progress on these issues. These are complex issues, and not just in their definition. They are complex issues in terms of ensuring that our resources are used in a way that would facilitate the outcome. That is the big challenge we have here.

I am not disputing the need for more money, but we are spending a lot of money as a country on health care. We need to ensure that the kind of money we are spending gives us the kind of outcomes that we have a right to expect.

The Address

We will be working on all the issues the member announced in the days, weeks and months to come. I am pleased to say that this effort will be led by our Minister of Health, who is the one person in this House who has actually run a provincial health care system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after more than a decade of arrogance, corruption and dominating federalism on the part of Liberal governments in Ottawa, the election of a new Parliament has created great expectations in the Quebec public, and for some people, a hope of change. The Bloc Québécois, which is a sovereigntist party, has wanted those changes for a long time. We are sovereigntists because we think that the only real path for the future of Quebec is sovereignty.

But anyone who thinks that it is therefore in the interests of the Bloc Québécois to obstruct change is mistaken. It is out of the question that the Bloc Québécois would cut off its nose to spite its face; that is playing politics at its worst. We will support the initiatives of this government that achieve progress for Quebec. We will do this because we are firmly convinced that anything that achieves progress for Quebec brings us closer to sovereignty.

The hope I spoke of earlier arises largely from the government's commitments to Quebec. The Prime Minister has committed himself to practising what he calls open federalism. He has promised to respect the "areas of responsibility as defined in the Canadian constitution". He has promised to offer Quebec its rightful place in international forums where its areas of responsibility are affected, a place that reflects Quebec's status within the Francophonie.

He has promised to monitor the federal spending power, "this outrageous spending power" which "gave rise to dominating and paternalistic federalism". Those are his own words. The Prime Minister has also committed himself to eliminating the fiscal imbalance.

The commitments the government has made are central to the battles that the Bloc Québécois has waged in Ottawa since it was founded. I can therefore assure this House and the people of Quebec that we will support any government proposal that will achieve progress for Quebec. We will do everything we can to persuade the government to honour its commitments to Quebec, because, I repeat, I am firmly convinced that anything that achieves progress for Quebec, anything that gives the people of Quebec confidence, will result in them embracing the sovereigntist option with confidence. The Bloc Québécois, as it always does, will therefore play a constructive role, in order to achieve progress for Quebec.

The public expects that this minority government will act accordingly, that it will respect the House of Commons and the six out of ten electors who did not vote for it. In Quebec, more than seven out of ten electors did not vote for the government's candidates. We see a number of things in this throne speech that suggest to us that the government intends to respect the House of Commons in the actions it takes.

However, many adjustments have to be made to what was said and many important matters were forgotten in this Speech from the Throne. We will therefore be making some proposals to the government in regard to a number of important issues. There were

also some government plans that are contrary to our convictions and to the best interests of Quebec. We will vigorously oppose them.

We intend, therefore, to help make this Parliament work. It must get down to business because there are crying problems that have lasted long enough and could be dealt with.

The first of these problems is the fiscal imbalance. It is a serious malfunction in the Canadian federation. The cuts and transfers have destabilized the health systems in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. The fiscal imbalance has also resulted in the drying up of public funding for post-secondary education at a time when education is more important than ever. Now it is the funding of post-secondary education and social programs that is suffering.

Finally, it has led the federal government to waste public funds, even though there were pressing needs in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. This Parliament has a duty to eliminate the fiscal imbalance once and for all. This means, first of all, a substantial increase in the transfers for post-secondary education, and we expect a clear signal from the government in its next budget.

● (1705)

This also implies a reform of equalization. It must be clear as well that the fiscal imbalance cannot be fixed without a transfer of fiscal resources from the federal government to Quebec and the provinces that want them. Finally, the federal government must give Quebec the right to withdraw from any federal programs in its jurisdictions with full compensation, and this right must be unconditional. The Prime Minister promised to do this as well during the election campaign.

The government can solve this problem, and it should act quickly because the problem has lasted long enough. During the last election campaign, the government promised to eliminate the fiscal imbalance. It reiterated this promise in its throne speech. It is time now to create a program and specify the measures that it intends to take. The government will be judged on the results, and it will not have any excuses if it fails, because with the support of the Bloc Québécois, it has a solid majority in the House that will enable it to eliminate the fiscal imbalance.

This Parliament will also be asked to state its position on Quebec's place in international forums. Since 1965, Quebec has been asking to be directly involved on its own behalf in international relations for areas within its legislative jurisdiction as set out in section 92 of the Constitution. For the past 40 years, the federal government has refused to allow this.

The Address

The Prime Minister made very clear promises during the last election campaign. He promised to give Quebec a seat at UNESCO, just as it has as a member of the Francophonie. This means that Quebec would speak on its own behalf and have the right to vote on issues that fall within its jurisdiction. Quebec has this status within the Francophonie. The Prime Minister could use the Belgian model, a model he himself has suggested in the past right here in this House. But according to the Speech from the Throne, Canada will have only one voice on the world stage. This is a blatant contradiction. One might fear that the Prime Minister has already backed down on this critical issue. He also promised to recognize, and I quote, “the special cultural and institutional responsibilities of the Quebec government.” He will therefore have to formalize symmetrical federalism with Quebec.

That will require the government to negotiate an agreement with Quebec. But the Prime Minister went even further: he promised to extend internal jurisdictions internationally. This means that in all areas within its jurisdiction, Quebec will have as much freedom internationally as it does internally. Needless to say, internally, the Government of Quebec can talk to and conclude agreements with whomever it pleases.

Furthermore, to fully keep its promise, the government will have to clearly affirm that from now on it may not negotiate or conclude a treaty affecting the special cultural and institutional powers and responsibilities of Quebec without the consent of Quebec. We will return to this in the days ahead to give the full details, and so bring the government to respect its commitments.

This Parliament will also have to decide how to go about funding child care services. In the last election campaign, the Prime Minister promised to pay \$1,200 to the parents of a child under six years of age, to put a stop to the intrusions of this domineering federal government, and to resolve the fiscal imbalance. Yesterday, in the Speech from the Throne, the government was less specific. I hope that this is a sign that it is open to compromise. To judge from its electoral platform, what it is about to introduce will not offer \$1,200 to parents. In fact, it will be much less for many parents—because this allowance is taxable—while other parents will see their benefits cut. I am thinking of the child tax benefit and the government support measures for Quebec families. This will particularly affect low- to middle-income families. What is more, this measure constitutes an intrusion into a field of Quebec jurisdiction. Finally, it aggravates the fiscal imbalance, since the government is planning at the same time to tear up an agreement that was supposed to provide Quebec with \$807 million over a period of three years.

• (1710)

With a single measure, then, the government is breaking three of its most important promises. As I said, the Bloc Québécois will act as a constructive opposition. So we will propose a modification to the government: convert the allowance into a refundable tax credit. This change will provide parents with close to \$1,200 and will be much more respectful of Quebec’s jurisdiction.

Government ministers have promised that the \$807 million lost by Quebec with the elimination of the agreement on child care services will be regained once an overall settlement of the fiscal imbalance is reached.

I want to announce to the government that the Bloc Québécois will not agree to the settlement of the fiscal imbalance remaining nothing but an election promise which takes no account of the agreement on child care services that was concluded with Quebec.

One of the government’s priorities is to strengthen the justice system. We have not waited for the arrival of a new government to take action on this subject. The Bloc Québécois was the initiator of the current anti-gang legislation, which has put many members of organized crime in prison. The Bloc Québécois was also the initiator of the reversal of the burden of proof for convicted criminals. Also, if the government is concerned about justice, it should hasten to create an appeal division for refugees, who are presently denied this fundamental right.

Furthermore, the government must promise to conduct an open-minded review of the Anti-terrorism Act in order to achieve the necessary balance between liberty and security. With regard to justice, certain measures proposed by the government are acceptable. However, it should stop trying to convince the public that crime is on the rise, just to advance its political agenda on law and order. Crime rates are falling in Canada and in Quebec. We have the lowest rate of violent crime in North America.

If the government wants to tackle organized crime, fine. However, it will not beat crime by allowing weapons to circulate and simply filling up the prisons. That model is used by the United States, and the result is that many more crimes are committed there than here in Canada.

I therefore urge the Prime Minister to think twice about introducing his program on law and order. I ask him to allow the Auditor General to submit her report before drawing any conclusions about the gun registry. Everyone agrees that the administration of the gun registry is seriously in need of improvement, but that does not mean that it should be eliminated, which would deprive law enforcement officials of a valuable tool and would allow weapons to circulate freely.

As for the remission system, it must not be automatic; rather, it must be earned. The government must go one step further and create an ombudsman position for victims and their families, in order to ensure their rights. We have already made this proposal and we will continue to push it.

As for the age of sexual consent, this Parliament must take the time to carefully examine this issue, for we must be careful not to criminalize relationships between consenting adolescents.

Lastly, the first action taken by the government in terms of security should be to re-open the RCMP detachments that were closed by the previous government, despite the decision made by duly elected representatives.

The Address

While Alberta has experienced a fantastic economic boom, with the help of the oil and gas industry, among other things, this is not the case in all regions of Canada and Quebec. The rapid rise in the Canadian dollar, which is largely attributable to the rise in the price of crude oil, has been welcome news for Alberta, but it is damaging the economies of Quebec and Ontario. As well, it is causing problems in the manufacturing sector in Quebec. We therefore have to be concerned about older workers who are losing their jobs; consider an assistance program for older workers; consider all the textile, clothing, furniture, bicycle and fisheries workers as well; consider the entire question of the forestry industry; revisit the negotiations with the United States, remembering that we must not back down, after the victories achieved under NAFTA.

These are areas where the government must arrange to invest and to invest better. I am thinking, in relation to jobs, for example, of its entire aerospace policy.

The government has also committed itself to creating an independent employment insurance fund. We must create that kind of fund, we must make substantial improvements to the employment insurance program, particularly when there is already \$1.7 million, to date, stored up in the employment insurance fund, after ten months of the last fiscal year.

• (1715)

With respect to the Kyoto protocol, we want to be clear. The government has to honour its commitments. It must recognize that Quebec has to have its own money to apply the greenhouse gas emission reductions itself, because the National Assembly has made the decision to reduce emissions by 6% below 1990. A polluter-pay policy has to be applied, not a polluter-paid policy. At present, the plan proposed by the Liberals, and judged to be too fast by the Conservatives, means that we in Quebec would be paying for damage that occurs mainly in Alberta and Ontario. We will never agree to such a policy. In applying the Kyoto protocol, Quebec's progress must be respected.

There are other important issues, including the role of the army. A foreign policy still has to be defined and the army must be consistent with the policy established. We are in Afghanistan at present. The Bloc Québécois supported that mission. We have called for a debate. As we speak, I know that the debate will take place and I am very pleased that we can debate this issue. In the past, we wanted to put it to a vote. We have held that vote now, but in future, before sending troops to other countries, we are calling for a vote to be held before the decision is made here by this House. That is what the Prime Minister called for when he was the Leader of the Opposition.

We are very pleased that a vote will henceforth be taken in the House on international treaties. That is a step in the right direction. Three times the Bloc Québécois has proposed this.

The government mentioned ethics. It wants to clean things up in Ottawa. I suggest that it start by ensuring that from now on the returning officers in all ridings are appointed by Elections Canada and not by the government in power. That is one of our proposals.

Let us also keep our promises to the first nations, the Kelowna agreements. Let us negotiate from nation to nation, as was done in Quebec.

We should also realize that there was not a word about culture in this Speech from the Throne. It is important to keep the promise to increase the Canada Council's budget to \$300 million a year. Culture is how we express ourselves as a people. Quebec's culture is an expression of what Quebec is, and our creative people need help.

I also encourage the government to deal with the social housing problem. Decisions have been made in this House. There is nothing in this regard in the Speech from the Throne. If we want to attack crime, we have to deal with the ghettos and provide decent housing. That is how to ensure that young people do not end up in street gangs. That is one of the measures to take. That is the best way to deal with the crime rate.

I should also say that the budgets that were supposed to be granted to the Acadian and Franco-Canadian communities must be respected. These people need all the support we can give them.

We say therefore to the government that we will support this Speech from the Throne. In conclusion, I would like to introduce an amendment. Afterwards we will proceed issue by issue. Sometimes the government will win here in the House, and sometimes it will lose, without it being a question of confidence. There is no blank cheque. It does not matter to us whether a proposal comes from the government, the Liberals or the NDP. If it is in the interest of the people of Quebec, we will support it. If it is contrary to their interests, we will oppose it. That is how we have always acted.

I will finish by introducing the following amendment, seconded by the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the words "tax increases" the following:

" , for the lack of a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures"

• (1720)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The debate is on the subamendment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we were very interested in the Speech from the Throne, particularly on the position of UNESCO. The problem right now, underlying what is happening at the GATS negotiations in Geneva, is that the government has been given a mandate to trade away basic issues in terms of foreign ownership restrictions on broadcast and telecom. As well, at the same time we are receiving an audio-visual request to trade away fundamental protections for our domestic cultural industry.

My concern is that Quebec might have a seat at UNESCO and Canada might have a seat at UNESCO but the government under trade deals is trading away right now the fundamental benefits that we receive on cultural policy.

Where does the hon. member stand in terms of keeping the government honest and of protecting the important programs that we have for preferential tax treatment for film, domestic content quotas and cultural quotas that are part of UNESCO and part of what we have maintained in this country?

The Address

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, whether we are talking about UNESCO or the WTO, the government is saying that from now on, all international treaties will not only be debated, but voted on in this House and that the initiatives my colleague is referring to will be subject to discussion and a vote in this House. I believe the government and I hope it will follow through.

We must be clear: respect for cultural diversity is a victory for Canada and for Quebec. This approach must be upheld. Culture is not a commodity like any other, but south of the border there is a powerful giant whose main industry is in fact culture, which the Americans treat like any other sector, even though it is far from it. Culture is the expression of a nation, the expression of a people. The Quebec nation expresses itself eloquently on this planet through its culture. We expect it to be maintained by the policies that will sustain and support this industry and allow it to blossom.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's excellent speech is one of the best speeches I have heard in response to a Speech from the Throne. It had a lot of very innovative ideas and solutions and outlined a lot of things that were missing from the Speech from the Throne.

However last spring the Bloc Québécois, which has these good principles, sort of strayed a bit and to some extent betrayed Quebecers when they voted against things in the budget that Quebecers believed in, such as the environment, international aid, students and aboriginal people. I was getting a bit worried at the beginning of his speech when he talked about how supportive he was of the throne speech and then at the end of his speech how unequivocally supportive he was of the throne speech and a vote.

I would like to know how he is going to stand up for things that Quebecers believe in that were not in the throne speech, things like social programs, historic agreements for aboriginal people, support for students, regional development items and crime prevention. How will the Bloc stand up for these major things that are important to the Bloc and to Quebecers that were not in the throne speech?

• (1725)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, when my colleague began his remarks I thought it was to open a franchise in Yukon for the Bloc Québécois.

We were opposed to the last budget because it had nothing for the workers, nothing concerning employment insurance, with a lot of money in the bank.

I said very clearly that we would support the throne speech that was given yesterday with the amendment put forward by the Liberals and the subamendment put forward by the Bloc. Maybe my colleague's leader will tell him that he should stand and support that and finally to support the throne speech himself. This is what we will do. However we must realize that the throne speech by itself is a motion of confidence but each piece taken one by one is not.

If we think something is not good for Quebec we will oppose it in the same way we did when the Liberals were in government. However when we think it is something good for Quebec we will support it. Whether it is a proposal made by the Tories, the Liberals

or the NDP we do not mind. Whether it is good or not for Quebec is the only reference we have before making a decision.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I wish to convey my regrets to the hon. leader of the Bloc Québécois. One of his colleagues, Richard Marceau, is no longer with us. I personally thought he was a very good MP, not only for his party but for all of Canada as well. It is unfortunate.

My question to him is in regard to the lack of an industrial strategy in the throne speech. His party has been very good in helping the NDP in supporting a national shipbuilding policy so that yards in Lévis, Quebec, in Washington, in Halifax, in Fort Welland and Marystown, Newfoundland will have the access to the jobs that we so desperately need.

I am asking him to verify one more time. Is the leader of the Bloc Québécois and his party still solidly behind a national shipbuilding policy that would help all the yards in the country and their workers?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, of course we will maintain the proposals we have always made concerning the shipbuilding industry. We will do so at the first opportunity. I know that my colleague has supported our proposals.

[English]

However, we will do more in that, and that looks strange. A sovereigntist party will propose a buy Canada act in Ottawa. One day we will have a buy Quebec act in Quebec.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a vague reference in the Speech from the Throne to a concept called fiscal imbalance, which I know is an issue of great interest to the Bloc and Quebecers. I am familiar with the Ontario argument in that regard. One of the aspects that concerned me was that the province of Ontario did not include the valuation of tax points transferred from the federal government to the provinces, that is the taxing authority, in the determination of the so-called imbalance.

Would the leader of the Bloc care to comment on the value of the tax points that have been transferred to the provinces and whether that is a legitimate element in the determination of a fiscal imbalance?

• (1730)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I will tell my hon. colleague that during the debate even his former leader finally recognized the existence of what we call the so-called fiscal imbalance. He said this publicly during the debate.

The Address

[Translation]

There is indeed a fiscal imbalance. There is the Ontario proposal and the series of proposals which will also be made by many other provinces. According to the Séguin report, ultimately, there is too much money in Ottawa for its responsibilities and not enough in the provinces and in Quebec for their own responsibilities and jurisdictions. To be clear, the main budget items are health and education. But the provinces do not have the resources to deal with these.

Equalization must be reviewed on the basis of the ten provinces, and not just five. Non-renewable natural resources must not be excluded, something which would cost Quebec some \$650 million. We must be very clear on this subject.

All of the indices have to be considered. Then we must agree on an equalization policy that is fair, remembering that if certain provinces are receiving equalization, it is often because they have not received the necessary industrial investment.

A dollar invested in equalization may be equal in terms of quantity to a dollar invested in industrial policy, but it is not equal in terms of quality.

From 1970 to 2000, \$66 billion was invested in oil, natural gas and coal; Quebec paid for about a quarter of this. In the nuclear industry, it was \$6 billion; Quebec paid for nearly a quarter. For example, Ontario Hydro operates with nuclear energy. We therefore paid for a quarter of Ontario Hydro's development, while Hydro-Québec did not receive a penny from Ottawa. Over the same period, \$72 billion was invested in natural resources unrelated to Quebec, and \$329 million was invested in clean energies, with not a penny to Hydro-Québec.

So this is the discussion we need to have, and I urge the government and the entire House to have it.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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 and I believe you would find agreement for the following motion. I move:

That on Thursday evening a take note debate will take place concerning agriculture issues and that this debate take place under the format established by Standing Order 53.1(1) except that the debate would begin at 7 p.m. and end no later than 11 p.m. and that the Chair would not receive any dilatory motions or quorum calls during the debate.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the 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)

The Speaker: In that case, I consider the application for the emergency debate brought by the hon. member for Malpeque to be dispensed with and I refuse the request for the emergency debate in the circumstances. That is just to clarify things.

* * *

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.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again I congratulate you on your re-election to the chair.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party caucus, I salute the appointment of the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona as Deputy Speaker of the House. It is the first time that a New Democrat has held such a position and I can think of no better and no more respected parliamentarian for the job.

We extend our congratulations to the right hon. member for Calgary Southwest as he takes his seat as Prime Minister in this place.

[Translation]

We would also like to congratulate the member for Toronto Centre on his re-election and appointment as leader of the official opposition.

Congratulations also to the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who is returning to this House as the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

On behalf of all New Democrats, I wish good luck to all members elected in this last election.

[English]

As I begin my address today, I wish to thank the people of Toronto—Danforth for once again entrusting me to serve as their representative in Parliament. I am deeply honoured.

I am doubly honoured today because I am privileged to lead this larger and stronger caucus of New Democrats. We take up our seats to get down to work on behalf of the working people of this country. This is above all else the place where great things have been achieved, and it is the place where great things can be achieved still.

Sadly, for 12 years the capacity to reach higher and move forward has been wasted. While government coffers have grown fatter, investment in people has grown leaner. While ordinary families are working harder to make ends meet, the federal government offers less in return for hard-earned tax dollars. While federal governments promised great things to the people of Canada, they only delivered great disappointments.

That is why on January 23 Canadians voted for change. That is why they voted for New Democrats to balance that change.

The Address

The history of this place has taught us that minority parliaments function best when there is consultation, cooperation and compromise. Today I am cautiously optimistic to see that the lessons of history have not been lost on the new government, as they were on the last.

Yesterday's throne speech indicated at least some measure of flexibility. We saw a glimmer of this possibility when Her Excellency announced that the government would issue into Parliament a long overdue apology to all those who were forced to pay the Chinese head tax.

New Democrats call on the government to include both redress for head tax payers as well as to extend the apology to include all those who suffered under the Chinese Exclusion Act. This is a step in the right direction, but there is so much more to be done.

•(1735)

[*Translation*]

However, the NDP is disappointed by the omission of some very important issues, such as a clear commitment regarding the poverty of first nations, employment insurance reform, investing in our cities and communities, funding for post-secondary education and skills training, a strategy for the north, and legislation to prevent floor-crossing while holding office.

[*English*]

However, despite this disappointment we are encouraged by the government's acknowledgement that it does not have a majority. In the days and the weeks that follow we will be turning a critical eye to the actual substance of those issues, both absent and so briefly touched upon in yesterday's speech.

I remind members of the House that some of our greatest achievements are the result of minority parliaments, minority parliaments in which the government of the day worked with New Democrats to make a difference in the lives of ordinary Canadians. Canada's flag, old age pensions, public health care and a social program that was the envy of the world were all created in minority parliaments of the past.

Too many problems face Canada today to be satisfied with limiting the ambition of this Parliament. That is why New Democrats will use every tool available to work with Parliament to deliver what we are calling the working families first agenda. With ordinary families working harder than ever to make ends meet, they deserve action on the issues they face each and every day. We are failing our parents and our grandparents, the people who built this country, because too many of them cannot get the basic care they need.

That is why New Democrats will fight in this Parliament to enact the principles in the NDP's seniors' charter, so that seniors can have access to good quality, long term care, so that seniors and people with disabilities can get the home care that they need and so that no senior is ever forced to choose between buying medicine that they need or buying groceries as happens far too often today. Seniors have waited long enough.

In 1993 Canadians were promised a national child care program, but for 12 years, despite majority governments and budget surpluses, that promise was not kept. It is the will of Canadians and a majority

of the House to at long last build a truly pan-Canadian child care program. We call on the government to build upon the current agreements. Working together we can achieve more for child care in the next 12 months than the previous government achieved in 12 years.

Our young people also need help to prepare them for the workforce. In last spring's budget the NDP forced the government of the time to reinvest in transfer payments for post-secondary education and reduce the burden of student debt. The Liberals had preferred a major corporate tax cut about which they never told anyone. However, we must go further than this now because mortgages are for houses, not for education. We also have to invest in skills training to meet the needs of employers and to compete in the global economy. Our children and youth have waited long enough.

In a country as rich as Canada, first nations, Inuit and Métis people deserve better than third world living conditions and second-class treatment. It is an absolute national disgrace that 95% of aboriginal people live below the poverty line. Despite the disappointments of the throne speech, we must follow up on the important and long overdue work achieved at Kelowna and we must quickly deliver settlements for victims of Indian residential schools.

Canada's first peoples must no longer be denied the quality of life that most Canadians take for granted. This means proper housing, health care, basic infrastructure such as clean drinking water. Aboriginal people have waited long enough to be properly considered nation to nation.

•(1740)

[*Translation*]

Canada is headed towards an environmental disaster. Those living in Canada's north can see it and are experiencing it. Climate change has dramatically affected their lives. Sea levels are rising. Pack ice is melting. Our forests are in jeopardy.

[*English*]

Climate change and other factors that we could do much about are even threatening one of the last intact ecosystems on the planet, the great Canadian boreal forest.

[*Translation*]

This government has not only the opportunity but also the responsibility to take action.

[*English*]

Indeed, the federal government has the responsibility to end the cycle of press releases over policy by taking meaningful action to stop climate change. Canadians have waited long enough.

The Address

[Translation]

For 12 years, workers have been promised changes to employment insurance. The Liberal Party has let them down. Today, two-thirds of unemployed workers are not eligible for employment insurance. It is shameful.

[English]

We must be proactive with industrial strategies for this country that stop the hemorrhaging of good jobs. We must stand up for our sovereignty which means not backing down on issues like softwood lumber. For too long Canadians have been denied anti-strike breaking legislation. New Democrats will continue to fight to protect the basic rights of workers.

As millions of baby-boomers prepare to retire, pension protection has never been more important. In the last Parliament we won protection for workers wages. In this Parliament we will fight for the pension security that workers deserve. Working families have waited long enough.

The previous government called protecting health care the fight of its life. The problem was it did not throw a single punch, forgot about the issue and forgot about the fight.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I put this to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Health. Work with us where their predecessors failed. The NDP also has an MP here in the House of Commons who ran a provincial health system. We call on the government to join with us to introduce new rules so that no federal transfers can be used to subsidize a profit-making private insurance system. We have to put patients ahead of profits. We must ensure that doctors and health care providers cannot work in both the private and the public systems at the same time and also ensure that these tough new rules, along with all the provisions of the Canada Health Act, are strictly monitored and enforced. Canadians have waited long enough.

Canada's electoral system predates the telephone. Our country has changed but our electoral system has not. We must take responsibility to reverse the trends of declining voter turnout and the lack of representation of women in Parliament. The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he likes the reforms that were embodied in Ed Broadbent's ethics package.

• (1745)

[Translation]

I call on the government today to begin the necessary reforms, because every vote must count.

Canadians have waited long enough.

[English]

I might add that I am very proud that our caucus has a historic high with 40% of our members in this Chamber being women.

[Translation]

I also want to speak about Quebec, where I come from.

For ten years now, the debate over Quebec's proper place has been split between those who want to leave and those who want the status quo.

The federal Liberal government treated Quebec with real arrogance and disdain. It tried to buy votes there with the scandalous sponsorship program. Quebeckers do not want to be bought. They want respect.

It is time now to speak of reconciliation. It is time to create the winning conditions for Canada in Quebec. It is time to draw people together to create a progressive society and for a more ethical, democratic and transparent government that listens to the people. It must re-establish dialogue and honour its promises and the agreements signed with governments.

[English]

I want to offer our support to the brave women and men in our peacekeeping forces and our civilian forces working with them. We mourn the loss of life. We welcome a full debate on Canada's role in Afghanistan, an effort the NDP has been calling for for many weeks.

As I close today there is one final issue I wish to touch upon. It is an issue that the hon. Ed Broadbent spoke of so eloquently during his last days in the House. He said:

[Members] should see what can be done in the future to restore to our politics in this nation a civilized tone of debate...However we may differ, we are all human and we all have the right to have our inner dignity respected, especially in debate in the House.

We have at this juncture in our history the means and the public desire to achieve great things for this country. History will judge us well if instead of partisan opportunism and games unfit for schoolyard bullies, such as we have seen in the past, we rise above those easy indulgences and truly pursue the good of the nation.

We can choose whether this place is a surrogate for the campaign trail or whether we treat the people's House with the dignity and respect that it deserves. Instead of self-serving opposition, let us instead offer principled proposition. Let us all approach the challenges of the nation with a spirit of goodwill and collective responsibility.

• (1750)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are lots of people who would like to ask a question, so I will try to be quick.

I would like to congratulate the member on a well delivered speech. He certainly believes in everything he said.

I want to be specific with regard to one issue that has been a burning issue in my heart since 1993 when I first came here. I have probably delivered dozens of speeches with respect to crimes against children. I have also probably delivered dozens of speeches trying my best to get government to do everything in its power to abolish child pornography, an evil and terrible thing. Not just a few but literally hundreds of young children across this country are affected by child pornography. Many of the people who belong to victims' societies are parents and siblings of little kids who have been tortured and murdered over the years. Child pornography is getting out of hand to the point today where it is recognized as being a huge multi-billion dollar industry.

The Address

I am specifically concerned about crimes against children and the defences that always seem to come up. We do not seem to be able to get rid of child pornography because we are infringing on certain rights such as the right to freedom of expression and freedom of speech, et cetera.

When it comes to the welfare of our children, I will do everything I can to protect them. Will the member and his party do the same?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, we were, like all members, of course concerned about issues involving the safety of children and the safety of anyone in our society.

I want to draw particular attention of members to the issue of violence against women and children. We saw in this very city, as was raised in discussions with our representative, our member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, the terrible events that took place where a woman and her children were killed, followed by the suicide of a man.

This has happened far too many times before and governments at all levels have been told what needs to be done. Inquests have been held on the countless acts of violence against women and children, and recommendations have been put in place and have been called for by juries. Yet, right across the land, we see the vast majority of these recommendations never acted upon.

It is time that governments stopped turning their backs on the issue of violence against women and violence against children. It is time that the recommendations of these inquests, particularly ones that point out that there are instances of this kind of violence that are known to the authorities and known to the society. The dangerous conditions are known and yet nonetheless, we see these kinds of consequences.

Our party is committed to addressing the issue of violence against women. Our members are bringing forward initiatives dealing with many different kinds of violence against children and against women.

In my conversation with the Prime Minister concerning the Speech from the Throne, I emphasized that it was very important when dealing with crime involving communities and young people that we must invest in the community to prevent the conditions within which vulnerable communities and individuals, youth at risk, can be drawn in to criminal activity.

I was pleased to see a reference to the importance of that kind of initiative in the Speech from the Throne delivered by Her Excellency yesterday. The question will be whether we see action more than words. Will we see investment, such as the one proposed by the New Democratic Party in the election campaign of \$100 million per year for youth at risk initiatives? Will we see those in the budget? That will tell us whether or not the Speech from the Throne and its fine words will actually be transformed into action, action that is desperately needed.

• (1755)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say how nice it is to see you back in the seat in which I have become accustomed to seeing you.

I would like to congratulate the member for Toronto—Danforth on his speech, on his re-election, and on the modest gains he achieved for his party. I am glad those gains did not reach Nova Scotia and specifically Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, in spite of his many visits and best efforts, and the efforts of a very strong New Democratic Party candidate who did serve in the House before.

The member spoke of the achievements of Bill C-48 in last year's budget where the Liberal government and the New Democrats reached agreement on investing in some important priority areas, one of those areas being post-secondary education, specifically the issue of access for Canadians.

In the last seven or eight years we have made huge strides in investing in university infrastructure through research, development and innovation. The challenge now, I would suggest and I would agree with most members of his party, is student access.

Bill C-48 was an important piece of legislation. Unfortunately, when we came forward to implement that \$1.5 billion, in fact it was more than \$2 billion, for those Canadians who most needed assistance: aboriginal Canadians, low income Canadians, persons with disabilities, the hon. member chose to go to an election.

My colleague speaks of inaction. That was action. I say very sincerely, that was an unparalleled historical investment in students, but forces were joined to have an election. That was his choice. I am not here to debate the past, but we had an opportunity to achieve results.

Now we have a government that believes students can tax cut their way to an education at university, at community college, and maybe through apprenticeship training.

Following yesterday's pamphlet from the throne, which was pretty thin on education, how confident is my hon. colleague that the government will actually improve access, will actually make life better for Canadian students, particularly those in the margins who need assistance and who would have received help through our legislation last year?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, if the member considers a 50% increase in seats to be a modest gain, I am not quite sure what he would describe as the accomplishment of his party in the last election. One could also note the 30% NDP vote in Nova Scotia which was the highest we had anywhere. If Canadians had proportional representation I might be addressing another member from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

However let us recall a parallel between the Speech from the Throne we just heard and another document that was tabled in the House in February of last year known as the federal budget. Neither document, one authored by the hon. member's party and the other one authored by the new government, talked about investing in post-secondary education or training and reducing the cost of education to young people.

Thankfully, teetering on a precipitous collapse, the former government decided to accept the NDP's recommendation to cancel the corporate tax cut that it had preferred to pursue and instead to bring forward \$1.5 billion in Bill C-48, the NDP budget bill, precisely to address this situation.

We can try to rewrite history on many different fronts here as the member is attempting to do but I would simply remind him that there were millions of Canadians who decided that there should be a change in government. This had nothing to do with the actions of one party or another.

Second, the money provided for in Bill C-48 was protected and will be going to students, no thanks to the efforts of the Liberal Party.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday by Her Excellency the Governor General.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Essex.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my two daughters, Mélynda and Marie-Catherine, for the support they have shown for me through this adventure, which continues in this House. I thank the Right Hon. Prime Minister for giving me the chance to speak today in this House. Special thanks to all the citizens of Beauport—Limoilou who believed in me and in our government.

I am particularly glad to be able to speak because it gives me an opportunity to address some of the commitments we made for strengthening communities and families, which are, after all, the cornerstones of this country.

As the proud mother of two marvellous teenagers, I am very familiar with the challenges that parents have to meet if they are to raise happy, well-balanced, healthy children who will one day be able to make a special contribution to the communities they live in, and in doing so, strengthen our country.

Among the challenges facing parents, some are financial. Many families have trouble making ends meet, even when the parents are living together and both are working. For those families, there are too many bills. They cannot manage to pay them all. This situation is exacerbated by high income taxes and sales taxes, which cut into paycheques and raise the cost of everything they buy.

That is why I am glad that the speech called for a reduction in the GST, from 7% to 6% and eventually to 5%. That kind of reduction will produce annual savings amounting to hundreds of dollars per family. It will translate into more money for basic needs like food and clothing; more money for school supplies; more money for rent and bills; maybe also a bit more money for starting to save for the children's post-secondary education.

What is even better is that this reduction will benefit everyone, no matter where they live and regardless of what their situation is, because we all pay GST on nearly all the products we buy. To put it simply, everyone will benefit from this, just like Canada itself.

In many families, both parents have to work in order to make ends meet. Many single parents have to work as well. Parents must be able to find suitable child care. Too often in the past, the government unfortunately did nothing. It came up with theories that called for one-size child care, on the assumption that everyone has exactly the same needs. As a result, only public day care centres received federal

The Address

funding. The problem is that families are not all the same. They have different needs.

We have to allow parents to choose the option that best suits them. The present government is proposing to do just that by paying parents \$1,200 for each child under six. Parents will be able to use this money to pay for the child care that is best for them. This is a real plan that will produce tangible results for parents. It is better than a child care theory. But our plan will go ever further. It commits the country to create more child care spaces, not by asking politicians to transfer money to other politicians, but by offering certain measures to encourage companies and organizations to create more spaces.

• (1805)

Let us turn now to the waiting time guarantees for patients. Families face another difficulty: they need quality health care in a reasonable time frame. This is especially important for young children and older people, who often need more care.

Here too, the government has listened, as can be seen in the promise it made to implement a waiting time guarantee. As a result, when essential medical services cannot be provided in public hospitals, people may seek treatment in a private clinic or public hospital in another region at government expense.

Here too, we are providing Canadians and Quebeckers with the health care that they need and have paid for when they need it.

I would like to turn now to youth at risk. We must recognize that some young people do not always make the right choices, as can be seen in the acts of violence that have occurred recently in our country. We can punish crime more severely by giving the dedicated officers in our criminal justice system the tools they need to protect our communities. This was also in the Speech from the Throne.

We must work as well with our partners to help put young people who have had problems with the law back on the right track. We must attack the root causes of the problem to prevent our young people from finding themselves in difficulty.

These measures can be found in the Speech from the Throne under the promise that the government made to strengthen families and communities.

So these are some of the commitments in the Speech from the Throne that should go a long way toward helping to create strong families and communities, which are, after all, the foundation of all that is best in this country.

[*English*]

They include: a cut in the GST so parents have more money in their pockets to pay for the necessities of life; more choice in child care so parents can find the option that best suits their situation; a medical wait time guarantee so family members can get the treatment they need when they need it; and measures aimed at making our communities safer and helping young people stay out of trouble and get their lives back on track when they do get into trouble.

The Address

Taken together, they represent a powerful agenda for change that will strengthen families and communities and ensure that Canadians can continue to enjoy a quality of life that has made us the envy of the world.

It is for those reasons that I support the measures contained in this document.

[*Translation*]

Yes, that is why I support the measures in this document.

I urge all members to work with the government to ensure that we provide families and communities with the assistance they need to be even stronger.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member opposite.

I have a question concerning the issue of our smaller communities. She seems to be quite a strong advocate for our communities and I commend her for that.

In my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador we have a problem in our smaller communities when it comes to sustaining employment. What we need is, yes, more money into post-secondary education but also EI reforms. I am sure this issue is not a stranger to her or her riding. Employment insurance reforms help sustain our smaller communities and we have seen little compassion from the current government for this. It is necessary for small communities that rely so heavily on seasonal employment.

[*Translation*]

This is not just for the benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador, but also for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and—this is important—for Quebec as well.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Could the member tell me about seasonal work in her riding and her province, and how EI reforms are so necessary?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, as for employment insurance, I am familiar with small communities. I come from an area where many people receive employment benefits.

As we have always said, we the government will work together with all levels of government in order to reach a consensus and to find the best approach, especially with regard to seasonal employment.

I am not very familiar with seasonal employment in my riding, as my riding is urban rather than rural. However, I do know that there are ways of dealing with it. We will work cooperatively with everyone to find the best solution.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too need to ask a question about employment insurance. In my riding we have approximately 11% unemployment. We are a riding that has been hit hard by the softwood lumber dispute. We have a

sawmill that closed a number of years ago, the Youbou sawmill, and we now have the Youbou Timberless Society. A lot of older workers had been displaced.

Earlier the member from the Bloc proposed an amendment to the throne speech. I would like the member to comment specifically on plans that might be in the works around reforms to the employment insurance legislation which might consider what we could do for older workers and for communities that do have transitional issues with their industries.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I just said to our colleague. We are trying to find the best solution by working closely with all levels of government. We must work very hard to ensure that employment insurance is the best option for everyone. For 13 years, the party now in opposition did nothing about employment insurance. Thus, we will work with everyone, with all levels of government to find the best elements and to find a solution that works for all Canadians.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Beauport—Limoilou on her maiden speech in this House. The question that I am going to ask her applies as well to her colleagues. This was the first time she addressed the House and she cannot know everything, I realize that. It was the same with all of us. In short, what I have to say applies to her colleagues as well. When they got themselves elected, especially in Quebec, basically it meant they would be in a position to make decisions.

Now that these people are in a decision-making position, what will they decide about employment insurance? First, if I may, I would like to add a few wrinkles to what I have to say since the answer will be the one that the hon. member gave earlier. At least, I suppose so. I mean to say that we will expect a fuller answer, which may even come at another time from other speakers for the Conservative Party.

To finish my question and getting into the subject, I would just like to remind the Liberal member who asked her a question earlier and was still in power very recently that we had these debates and demands in the House and that he opposed them. Can we say today that it is the beaten carpet phenomenon that we are witnessing? It is only when a government is beaten that it comes clean.

I wanted to have him benefit from this occasion at the same time. Here is another question.

First, during the election campaign, the Conservative Party promised an independent fund, but there was no mention of it in the throne speech.

Second, when we held the debate on repatriating the \$48 billion that the Liberals diverted from the employment insurance fund, the Conservatives were with us in the debate while in the opposition.

Third, when we demanded that the employment insurance account be restored in order to help the two-thirds of unemployed people who do not receive any employment insurance benefits—as the NDP leader mentioned earlier—the member's party participated in that debate as well.

The Address

It is important for us to know, now that the Conservative Party is in power, what it will do in this regard.

● (1815)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to be very brief as the time for questions and comments has already expired.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, we will work together with everyone. Yes, during the election campaign, we said that we wanted to give a voice to those who have none, especially in Quebec. We will be that voice here in Ottawa. We plan to talk with all levels of government and with all stakeholders. This will enable us to find the best solution for everyone and to give Canadians and Quebecers an answer that will make them proud of a new Canada.

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first allow me to congratulate you on your new appointment, a well-deserved and certainly a well-earned position for you. Let me also congratulate my colleague the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister on her maiden speech. I say a job well done, bravo.

I want to contribute a few thoughts on the throne speech debate today. I am certainly privileged to the people of Essex for returning me once again to this chamber to continue fighting for them. The throne speech speaks to a number of the issues that my constituents were talking about during the last election campaign. I would like to take a few moments to discuss some of the things that ordinary Canadians expect from us and how the throne speech answers their concerns.

To begin with, all of us in the House would have to agree that historically from time to time some of our deliberations are a little bit arcane, somewhat removed from the day to day realities facing our constituents. Drawing on my experience as an auto worker, someone from the shop floor and not from the corporate headquarters, and drawing on literally thousands of conversations I have had with my constituents over the last two years, I will try to convey to members in the House what it is that ordinary Canadians want, what ordinary people in Essex want, and how the Speech from the Throne is going to take us there.

If my constituents were asked what their main concerns are, many of them would reply that they are concerned about making ends meet and making sure their children get the best start in life. For many people who work in Canada's industrial heartland where I live, one of their concerns is whether Canada will remain a country that has good, well-paying industrial jobs. That is exactly what the throne speech seeks to do.

For example, it is no secret that our government does not like high taxes; it never has and it never will. The reason is simple. High taxes kill jobs by hurting our international competitiveness, which makes it hard for companies such as our auto companies, our auto parts suppliers, our machine tool and die and mould shops to create high paying employment in this country.

High taxes also skim off people's pay and pension cheques that are too small to begin with. It skims it right off the top. That is why I welcome the commitment made in the Speech from the Throne to

start work right away on reducing the GST from 7% to 6% and eventually down to 5%.

Cutting the GST makes sense. It helps to purchase, for example, Grand Caravans and Pacificas which I used to help build on the line at Chrysler. It helps families afford these types of vehicles and by doing that, it also keeps auto workers in our communities working.

It is estimated that GST relief would save ordinary Canadian families hundreds of dollars a year. This will help Canadians' paycheques go a bit further. It will make it a little easier to make ends meet. Best of all, this will be a tax cut that benefits everyone, not just those lucky people who are in a high enough salary range to get serious help from a reduction in the personal income tax rate. The reality is everyone pays the GST, even those with modest incomes. We all win when the GST is reduced. Everyone, including those living on fixed and modest incomes will see a bit more money in their pockets at the end of the week. That is money for family needs, money for food, housing and utilities. In other words, it is money for the necessities of life.

People I meet back home also tell me they want stronger and safer communities. Seniors I have talked with want to feel secure in their homes. Young women say they want to feel safe walking the streets at night. Parents worry about the safety of their children. They want to enjoy the basic human right to be safe in their own community. Once again, the Speech from the Throne has a great deal to say on this subject and getting tough on crime, particularly violent crime by giving police and the legal system the tools they need to do their jobs. It calls on the government to start tackling the roots of youth crime by working with our partners to help young people in trouble with the law to get back on track and also to encourage young people to make good choices so they do not get in trouble in the first place.

● (1820)

People in my riding have told me that they want to be safe from threats outside the country, such as criminals smuggling guns and drugs into Canada or from terrorists who might try to unleash fear and death in this country. This is particularly important for me as I represent a border community with valuable economic targets, such as the Ambassador Bridge, the busiest border crossing in the world.

The Address

The fine people of Essex love all of Canada, not just our particular region, and that is why they want us to protect our nation's sovereignty even in areas such as the high Arctic. All of these elements are contained in the throne speech which calls for both improved border security and a Canada first defence strategy aimed at repairing the damage to our military resulting from 13 years of Liberal neglect.

People have told me that they want us to clean up the mess in Ottawa where in the past political hacks and cronies traded favours and dipped their noses into the patronage trough time and time again. In the past contracts were based on who you knew and not what you knew. This is what Canadians have been saying and what the people of Essex have been saying, and that is what we are going to give them through the introduction of a new federal accountability act.

A federal accountability act will, among other things, toughen rules governing lobbying, give more power to the independent officers of Parliament, such as the Auditor General and the Ethics Commissioner, and provide real protection for whistleblowers.

In other words, Canadians will get the good, clean government that they both expect and deserve. Their taxpayer dollars will be used well and wisely, rather than wasted under the old system where government funds were all too often used by insiders as a sort of political slush fund to advance their party's fortunes. That is a bit of what Canadians have been telling us and that is what we in this government intend to give them.

Of course there will be naysayers who will scoff, probably at least a hundred of them on the other side, at these commitments claiming that we will break our promises just as previous Liberal governments did time and time again. I would reply quite simply that they should just watch us. Our commitments are laid out in black and white in the Speech from the Throne and they are promises we fully intend to keep.

I would urge my colleagues from all parties to put their partisan swords back in their scabbards and instead work with us as Canadians expect them to do on the commitments contained in the throne speech, so that working together we can build a better Canada for ourselves and our children.

• (1825)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your new posting. I also congratulate my colleague from the other side on his re-election.

We could not agree more in putting our partisan swords aside and trying to work continually for the benefit of all Canadians. I think that is a common theme that we have all heard today.

Let us talk about some of the facts with respect to the Speech from the Throne and delve into them. Those will be the basis of the

questions that I have for the hon. member. My first remark relates to a common theme that we all have and that is how we manage to reduce the tax base and the tax burden on the poor and the working poor.

The government has said very clearly that it feels that the best way of doing that is to reduce the GST. Members from the other side have said that hundreds of dollars will be saved by Canadians. Is that actually the truth?

If the hon. member were to look at the facts he would find that 43% of Canadians make less than \$40,000 a year. The savings for those people would be about \$190 per year. If that amount were compared to a reduction in the basic personal exemption, with the lowest base going from 16% down to 15%, an increase in the basic personal exemption by \$500 and a reduction in the lowest tax bracket from 16% to 15%, we would find in the same group that they would save about \$390 per year.

Does my hon. colleague believe that a reduction in the GST by one percentage point will put more money in the hands of the poor and the working poor than an increase in the basic personal exemption of \$500, as the Liberals did the last time, and reducing the lowest tax bracket from 16% to 15%?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to hear the sentiments from members opposite about their willingness to put partisanship aside. I heard the amendment to the Speech from the Throne earlier and it sounds to me like those sentiments are more of the failed direction that Canadians rejected on January 23 and the reason they have asked us to lead the change.

It is clear that the member opposite believes that only the top two-thirds of Canadian income earners deserve a tax break. That is the direction the previous government pursued. We think all Canadians deserve a tax break and that is why we are pursuing a reduction in the GST from 7% to 6% and ultimately down to 5%. That will be felt even more by those who make less income. Every penny, every dime, every dollar, every \$10, every \$100 makes a difference to somebody who has to pay for food, utilities and all of those things.

If we were to follow the way those members want us to go, those folks would continue to pay more in tax. We do not think that is fair. We think the people at the lowest income levels deserve a tax break too. That is the compassionate thing to do and that is what our GST reduction would achieve. I cannot wait to get the budget out so that we can go from 7% to 6%. I look forward to working with the government to get it down to 5%.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 5, 2006

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Agriculture	
Mrs. Yelich	17
Paul Davis	
Mr. Savage	17
Canadian Troops in Afghanistan	
Mr. Bachand	17
Child Tax Benefit	
Ms. Mathysen	17
Conservative Party of Canada	
Mr. Abbott	18
Young Canadians	
Mr. D'Amours	18
Agriculture	
Mr. Sorenson	18
Pauline Marois	
Ms. St-Hilaire	18
Conservative Government	
Mr. Petit	19
Canadian Armed Forces Encouragement Day	
Mr. McTeague	19
Speech from the Throne	
Mr. Preston	19
Agriculture	
Mr. Atamanenko	19
Agriculture	
Mr. Steckle	19
Agriculture	
Mr. Bouchard	20
Robert Costall	
Mr. Boshcoff	20
Cornwall Collegiate and Vocational School	
Mr. Lauzon	20

ORAL QUESTIONS

Agriculture	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	20
Mr. Harper	20
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	21
Mr. Harper	21
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	21
Mr. Harper	21
Public Works and Government Services	
Ms. Robillard	21
Mr. Harper	21
Ms. Robillard	21

Mr. Harper	21
UNESCO	
Mr. Duceppe	21
Mr. Harper	21
Mr. Duceppe	21
Mr. Harper	22
Ms. Lalonde	22
Mr. Harper	22
Ms. Lalonde	22
Mr. Harper	22
Child Care	
Mr. Layton	22
Mr. Harper	22
Mr. Layton	22
Mr. Harper	22
Agriculture	
Mr. Easter	22
Mr. Strahl	22
Mr. Easter	23
Mr. Strahl	23
Ethics	
Mr. LeBlanc	23
Mr. Harper	23
Mr. LeBlanc	23
Mr. Emerson	23
Taxation	
Mr. Loubier	23
Mr. Flaherty	23
Mr. Loubier	23
Mr. Flaherty	23
Agriculture	
Mr. Bellavance	24
Mr. Strahl	24
Mr. Bellavance	24
Mr. Strahl	24
Child Care	
Ms. Bennett	24
Ms. Finley	24
Ms. Bennett	24
Ms. Finley	24
Ethics	
Mr. Dosanjh	24
Mr. Harper	24
Mr. Dosanjh	24
Mr. Harper	25
David Dingwall	
Mr. Pallister	25
Mr. Harper	25

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