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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1355)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by a quartet, the hon. members for Abbotsford, Avalon, Brandon—Souris and South Shore—St. Margaret's.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

RON BORN

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and honour to rise in the House this afternoon to acknowledge Mr. Ron Born, retiring manager for the city of Kelowna.

For 30 years Ron served the city in a number of capacities, most notably the past 18 years as city manager. Under his leadership Kelowna has seen record economic growth and has become one of the jewels of the Okanagan.

In fact, Ron Born's influence is felt province-wide. As a testament to his contribution, Ron will receive the prestigious Lieutenant-Governor's Silver Medal for Excellence in Public Administration, an award made more meaningful because the recipient is selected by his peers.

On behalf of the people of Kelowna and B.C., I wish to thank Ron for 30 years of hard work and commitment, of always conducting yourself with honour and integrity, and for making our city and province the place we are proud to call home.

To Ron, and his wife Leona, we wish him a happy, healthy and well deserved retirement. Here is to plenty of fish on his hook and many moose on the end of his call. God bless.

HIKE FOR HOSPICE

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, May 7, more than 200 members of my community participated in the second annual Hike for Hospice, an event which raised \$32,000 for the Stedman Community Hospice located in Brantford, Ontario.

I would like to commend all the staff and volunteers associated with the hospice, especially Executive Director Cheryl Moore, who has dedicated her heart and soul to making the hospice such a wonderful and important resource to members of my community.

I would also like to recognize Constable Cy Villa, the honorary chairman of the event, Olga Consorti of the St. Joseph's Lifecare Foundation for her hard work in promoting and organizing the event, and the Brant Men of Song who provided exquisite entertainment.

The importance of a compassionate, comfortable and supportive palliative environment cannot be overstated. The Stedman Community Hospice is a true blessing to our community.

* * *

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this week the 114th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is being held in Kenya.

Many subjects will be debated there, including environmental management and combating global degradation of the environment, promoting effective ways of combating violence against women, and strengthening the control of trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

Over 600 million small arms and light weapons are now circulating in the world, and a good many of them are being used in the wars raging in Africa, particularly in countries with natural resources such as diamonds and petroleum. These countries do not manufacture weapons. The weapons come from elsewhere, for the sole purpose of supplying these wars.

Oxfam launched a 100-day campaign last March to mobilize against and denounce armed violence in the world. Light weapons kill over 800 persons every day. There is no international agreement to combat the sale of arms.

The federal government must denounce these violations of human rights at the UN summit on small arms and light weapons in June.

Statements by members

[English]

CHINESE CANADIANS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, between 1885 and 1923 the Canadian government collected \$23 million through a head tax on Chinese immigrants to Canada. These racist and discriminatory policies of the past tore families apart and caused incredible financial hardship.

In 1984 Margaret Mitchell was the first MP who brought this issue before the House of Commons. In 2004 Parliament debated my motion asking for an apology and redress for head tax payers, their families and representatives. The NDP has championed this cause from day one.

I recently met with families and representatives in Vancouver who told me once again the importance of fighting this injustice by ensuring there is an official apology and redress for the remaining head tax payers, their spouses and descendants.

The government must do the right thing, and commit to an apology and redress for the thousands of Chinese Canadians who have been waiting so long for this injustice to be amended.

* * *

PAUL BOGE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate my constituent, Paul Boge, on the upcoming launch of his third book entitled *The Cities of Fortune*.

Paul Boge is a novelist, filmmaker and practising engineer. His first novel, *The Chicago Healer*, won the best new Canadian author award. While balancing work and writing, Paul has been active in public speaking and inner city rescue work, and has also taught at an orphanage in Kenya.

Paul is a young, dynamic and talented individual who exemplifies inspiration. His official book signing takes place tomorrow evening in Winnipeg. I would like to offer my congratulations and best wishes to Paul on another successful endeavour.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada should consider granting amnesty and legal status to the estimated over 100,000 undocumented workers currently in Canada who do not have a criminal record.

Canada needs more immigrants and it needs for more immigrants to succeed. We must address the plight of undocumented workers. Canada has more than 100,000 undocumented people who cost the economy billions in unpaid taxes.

They live far from their families and toil in Canada's underground economy, earning sometimes less than the minimum wage as cleaners, nannies, construction workers or other professions. At present, they are being denied basic human rights because of their undocumented status.

I would ask that my colleagues consider the merits of granting legal status to these thousands of undocumented workers and

allowing them to adjust their status to "permanent resident". Immigrant workers contribute greatly to Canada's economy and society. They deserve the basic safety net protections that all other workers enjoy.

* * *

FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently I had the pleasure of welcoming a constituent of mine to my Ottawa office. His name is Tom Wilkinson.

Diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD, 28 year old Tom has just completed, for the second time, an 812 kilometre walk from Windsor to Ottawa to raise awareness of and funds for the treatment of this devastating condition.

Individuals with FASD live with attention and memory deficits, hyperactivity and poor impulse control. As a result, adults with FASD have difficulty maintaining successful independence. They have trouble in school, keeping jobs or sustaining healthy relationships.

FASD is the leading known cause of mental retardation in Canada. More babies are born with FASD than with Down's syndrome or spina bifida. Most remarkably, it is 100% preventable, simply by abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy.

I am very proud of Tom's accomplishments and thank him for all he has done to bring about greater public awareness of this disorder. Thanks, Tom.

* * *

●(1410)

[Translation]

LE HAUT-SAINT-FRANÇOIS NEWSPAPER

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a regional community newspaper in my riding, *Le Haut-Saint-François*, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

Founded in 1986, the newspaper was born of the common desire of all the municipalities in the RCM of Haut-Saint-François to have a regional information vehicle. We owe the paper to a collaborative effort by the area municipalities which, 20 years later, continue voluntarily to support it financially.

Distributed free of charge twice a month to every household in the RCM, this newspaper is recognized for the quality of its information. Over the years, its team has won many awards from the Quebec community newspaper association. This determination typical of the region's people .

The Bloc Québécois wishes a long life to *Le Haut-Saint-François* newspaper.

[English]

ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every now and then, an event will take place that requires special recognition. One of those events happened a few days ago in the community of Branch, St. Mary's Bay, located on the southern tip of the Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland and Labrador.

On April 28, Austin and Agatha Nash of Branch celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary, a tremendous milestone that I want to share with hon. members here today and the people of Canada.

Married in their home community 64 years ago, Austin and Agatha still reside in Branch surrounded by family and friends. I would like to extend my best wishes to them on this magnificent occasion.

I have known both these people all of my life and can attest to their love for each other and their devotion to their family and community. Two finer people one could never meet. God willing, we all look forward to joining them in celebrating their 65th in 2007.

I ask all members to join with me today in congratulating Austin and Agatha Nash of Branch on their 64th wedding anniversary. May they enjoy health and happiness in the days ahead.

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MAPLEHURST

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize the designation, under the Ontario Heritage Act, of Maplehurst located at 14 St. David's Road West in Thorold, Ontario.

Built in 1885 by Hugh Keefer, Maplehurst has long been a landmark in Thorold and a source of pride to the community. Located at a high elevation providing excellent views of the Welland Canal and surrounding areas, it boasts many significant architectural features.

On the exterior its Richardson Romanesque style, iron cresting, stone chimneys, double hung wood windows and gable decorative barge boards are all impressive architectural features. I especially like the wraparound porch. In addition, the interior features the skylit former billiards room in the roof space on the third floor and a unique stairwell to the roof deck. It is truly a classic building.

The fact that Maplehurst is the home of one of Thorold's founding families and its connection to the development of the Welland Canal solidify its position as an important part of Thorold's heritage.

I compliment Heritage Thorold LACAC and Keefer Developments for their continued interest in the history and architecture of our region. Maplehurst will continue to be a destination place in the future for generations to come.

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ATLANTIC ACCORD

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just last week I stood in the House and spoke of how a Liberal MP was suffering from amnesia. It looks like it is contagious. All the Liberal members are infected.

Statements by members

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor is now trying to claim that the Conservative government is somehow a threat to the Atlantic accord. Imagine that, threatening the Atlantic accord which we created, developed and forced the Liberals to implement.

It is the same member who felt his own Liberal Party was a threat to the Atlantic accord. He voted in favour of a Conservative motion to condemn the Liberals for their failure to implement it.

The Conservative Party created and supported the Atlantic accord, and all the amnesia in the world will not make that go away.

* * *

NATIONAL ELIZABETH FRY WEEK

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to publicly acknowledge the fact that this is National Elizabeth Fry Week and to celebrate the significant contribution the Elizabeth Fry Society and its volunteers make to the lives of women who have come in conflict with the law.

The theme this year is "Women in Community". Events are taking place across Canada to raise awareness for change in the way our criminal justice system treats women.

In Winnipeg I will be participating in the Missing Women Walk organized by Sisters in Spirit to bring attention to the 500 women currently missing in Canada.

Sisters in Spirit is itself a powerful witness to the strength of community and the refusal of women to be victimized by the inadequacies and biases of the system as it exists, a system in which aboriginal women are disproportionately high in numbers and more likely to serve time in prison.

National Elizabeth Fry Week affords us the chance to learn more, understand better and demand answers about a system geared more to building walls than building communities. I urge all Canadians to support the Elizabeth Fry Society's work this week and throughout the year.

* * *

● (1415)

BADDECK ACADEMY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as many of my colleagues know, my riding has some of the most beautiful landscape in this country.

At the start of the Cabot Trail nestled on the Bras d'Or lakes is the much admired village of Baddeck. Baddeck is the site of the first flight in the British Empire. This happened when Alexander Graham Bell flew the Silver Dart almost 100 years ago.

Today we have students with us from Baddeck Academy who live in various parts of Victoria County. Under the leadership of Jerry McNeil, they have come to Ottawa not only to see the beautiful tulip festival and landmarks, but also to learn and understand how the parliamentary system and government works. When they return to Baddeck, they will be relating their experiences to their fellow students and families.

Oral Questions

My understand from speaking with the students is that so far, their mission has been successful.

I ask my colleagues in the House to welcome my fellow Cape Bretoners and wish them success in the rest of their journey.

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[Translation]

ALCAN

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 27, 2006, I attended Alcan's annual general meeting, during which I spoke with the president, Mr. Richard Evans, who appeared very optimistic about the future of the Jonquière industrial complex.

Yet, Alcan announced yesterday that it is closing the chemical and alumina plant, as well as laboratory 109, which together employed 85 employees. This change of attitude on the part of the aluminum giant surprises me.

I would remind the House that Alcan employees wish to cooperate with the company to find solutions. Furthermore, a regional survey indicates that the public is asking Alcan to create jobs in exchange for additional energy.

Alcan uses our energy resources extensively and has a social contract with the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region. This is why it must take concrete and positive measures to reaffirm its commitment to our citizens. The economic future of our region is at stake, as is respect for the people who work and live there.

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[English]

FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maternal consumption of alcohol during pregnancy is the leading known cause of mental illness in Canada. Fetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol related birth defects are incurable but are 100% preventable.

Today a young man, Tom Wilkinson, is visiting Parliament Hill. Tom suffers from fetal alcohol syndrome. He and his dog, Shadow, just completed an 812 kilometre walk from Windsor, Ontario to Ottawa to promote public awareness of the risks associated with alcohol consumption, especially during the early stages of pregnancy. Having shared his message with 23 cities during his walk, Tom has done his part.

Today I call upon the national media to do its part and to share Tom's story and message with the people of Canada. I am also sure that all hon. members will want to rise to join me today in acknowledging Tom Wilkinson for his courageous initiative to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome.

We thank Tom. We are all very proud of him.

* * *

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore stood in the House and

pretended that he was interested in research and development in Canada. The member has been out of the country for the past 30 years, which might explain his lack of understanding about what the Liberals have done, or more accurately have not done, for research and development in the past 13 of those years. Here is a quick refresher.

The Liberals broke their 1993 red book promise to double research and development. Instead, the Liberals cut spending on science and technology. Under the Liberals, Canada's productivity growth lagged behind that of our largest competitor. Liberals also cut funding for education. They cut social transfers to the provinces by \$25 billion. Liberals starved the Canadian post-secondary education system of much needed resources, resulting in the doubling of tuition fees.

This Conservative government is committed to research and education. Maybe the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore should have taken a lesson in Liberal history before he signed on.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT STANDING COMMITTEE

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bizarre saga of the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin continues to trouble Canadians. Today he issued a rambling self-congratulatory exculpatory and somewhat ambiguous statement.

Will the Prime Minister finally put closure to this unfortunate affair and confirm to the House and to Canadians that the member will no longer serve as the chair of the aboriginal affairs committee, or for that matter any, other committee of this honourable House?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day the Leader of the Opposition has a different position on whether I should appoint chairs of committees or I should not appoint chairs of committees.

The fact of the matter is that the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin has decided himself to step aside as chair of the committee. I have not actually read the resignation letter but I gather his view was that the committee and the opposition members on the committee should not be fighting over the chairmanship, that they should be working on aboriginal issues.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all hon. members can understand why the Prime Minister is trying to distance himself from this matter. This issue has now far surpassed the matter of the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin. It is now the credibility of the office of the prime ministership that is in question.

Why did it take the condemnation of the Canadian Bar Association, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, aboriginal leaders and a host of other Canadians to get the Prime Minister and the member to act in the best interests of Canada?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is obviously if the Leader of the Opposition believes someone with the views on judicial activism of the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin should not chair a parliamentary committee, surely he also believes they should not be senior critics in his own caucus.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Official Languages expressed her fears yesterday. She stated that she has serious doubts about the will of the government to respect the bilingualism policy. The Speech from the Throne and the budget provided no reassurance. The Prime Minister has often expressed his reservations with regard to bilingualism, and it is clear that it is not a priority for his government.

Can the Prime Minister tell this House whether or not he intends to respect the bilingual nature of this country and accept the recommendations of the Official Languages Commissioner?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can quote from a letter that the Official Languages Commissioner wrote to me after the election:

During your campaign, and in your election platform, you set forth your commitment to protecting and promoting official languages and seeing that English and French have equal status in all the institutions of Parliament and in the government. Your party also supported Bill S-3 amending the Official Languages Act, and for that I would like to congratulate you.

That is the opinion of the Official Languages Commissioner. Yes, we support official languages as well as a formal and direct role for Quebec in UNESCO.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to see the date on the letter the Prime Minister just mentioned.

Yesterday, the Minister of the Environment said in this House that countries that did not sign the Kyoto protocol were responsible for 73% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. But in order for the Kyoto protocol to come into effect, the signatories had to be responsible for more than 55% of emissions. With the addition of Russia, they account for 61%.

Can the minister simply explain to us how she reached the conclusion that 100% minus 61% equals 73%?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to is the number of countries globally that do not have commitments to reduce greenhouse gases.

Within the Kyoto protocol, the specific countries that Canada is concerned about are China and India. China and India within the Kyoto protocol's members are considered developing countries, but as all of us in this chamber know, China and India have booming

economies. Today we learned that China and India alone have increased global emissions by 15% in just a short decade. This is a grave concern to us. We think China and India should take on commitments.

● (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we knew she did not know her stuff. Now we see that she does not know how to count. It is pathetic.

Canada is about to become the laughing stock of the international community because of this government and its Minister of the Environment. The world's most influential and most credible environmental groups are threatening to boycott Canadian products if the Minister of the Environment persists in refusing to honour Canada's commitments. What is more, they are on the verge of demanding that Canada resign as president of the conference of parties.

That is what they are saying.

Does the Prime Minister agree with Steven Guilbault of Greenpeace, who says that if that were to happen, his Minister of the Environment would be nothing but a figurehead?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is being honest and transparent with Canadians about the mess the Liberals left us when it comes to our Kyoto targets. Today we will release Canada's greenhouse gas inventory and it will show that Canada now is 35% higher than the Kyoto targets that the Liberals set.

To put this into perspective, it would mean that today we would have to take every train, plane and automobile off the streets in Canada. That is not realistic. Is that the kind of solution the hon. member thinks is a good idea?

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is currently on a trip to Afghanistan, suggested yesterday that Canada might continue its mission there beyond February 2007, the date on which Canada's present commitment in Afghanistan is to end.

Can the Prime Minister make a commitment that any extension of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan will be conditional on a debate and a vote being held here, in this House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc knows, as everyone knows, that during the federal election campaign we committed ourselves to holding votes on new commitments. We are already in Afghanistan.

Obviously, I prefer to have the support of all parties in this House for this important mission. I hope that the Bloc Québécois will support us and support our troops in the future as it has in the past.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to hear an answer about holding a debate and a vote, but I will move on.

Last November, the Minister of National Defence, who was at that time his party's official critic for national defence, asked a number of questions in the House regarding the mission in Afghanistan. More specifically, he said that some elements such as the criteria for the mission's success, how long the mission will take, the condition of the troops and equipment, should be discussed here in this House to see whether we genuinely have the resources to achieve success in Afghanistan while continuing to meet our responsibilities on the international scene.

Would the Prime Minister agree to the Standing Committee on National Defence putting consideration of this entire question on its agenda, in the days, weeks or months to come, so that it can report to the House before a debate and vote are held here, in this House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only answer that the committees are capable of making their own decisions about their agendas. However, I would note that this government has already held a take note debate in the House on this subject.

What is more important is not debates and votes, but the support of this House for our troops who are engaged in a military campaign. I hope that the Bloc will state clearly that it will continue to support our troops in Afghanistan.

* * *

HUMANITARIAN AID FOR PALESTINE

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, humanitarian aid is another way to restore democracy. In the case of Palestine, members of the Middle East quartet, including the UN and the United States, said that they are ready to undertake the establishment of a temporary international mechanism to send aid to the people of Palestine.

Does the government support this international strategy? Does it plan to adopt the same approach to send Canadian aid to Palestine?

[English]

Mr. Peter Van Loan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have looked, with great interest, at the announcement by the Quartet on the question of humanitarian aid to Palestine and to the Palestinians and how that could be maintained. We will be examining whether that represents an option for us.

The fundamental position of the government on the question of Hamas and how these aid problems could best be resolved would be if the Palestinian authority would commit to renouncing violence, to recognizing Israel and to ensuring that agreements of the road map were actually followed to establish long term peace.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during her recent meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on April 24, 2006, Ms. Achraoui, a prominent Palestinian and negotiator of the Oslo accords, suggested that Canada should take

the initiative to restart the peace process in Palestine by sponsoring an international conference. Apparently the minister was open to the suggestion.

Does Canada intend to ensure and assume this leadership role?

[English]

Mr. Peter Van Loan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government did assume leadership when it led the world in a statement on Hamas after the elections in the Palestinian lands.

In terms of openness to the approach being followed, we are looking forward to the development of a mechanism by the European Union and we will see if that represents the potential avenue for dealing with the humanitarian issues there, with which we are very concerned.

* * *

[Translation]

DARFUR

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP proudly supports our troops. Try as the Prime Minister may to denigrate our important questions, these remain important questions. A vote should be held in this House on whether or not our troops should be deployed. There are questions about our role in Afghanistan, and there should be a vote on this, as we have been requesting for weeks.

There are questions about the government's lack of commitment vis-à-vis Darfur. Why does the government not take a leadership role in launching a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is not the one that sent these troops to Afghanistan, but they have been there for a long while, with the support of the vast majority of the members in this House.

The NDP cannot say that it supports the troops while opposing their mission, as they face danger in the course of a military campaign. One has to support the mission to support the troops.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard that kind of language before, south of the border, when it comes to debating the role of our soldiers. We support our soldiers, and it is our responsibility to ensure that we thoroughly debate what we ask them to do.

The Prime Minister said yesterday that we had not had a formal request for involvement in Darfur. Give me a break. We have had a statement directly from the Secretary General saying that the country should be getting ready.

Why has the Prime Minister refused to take a proactive role to deal with a peacekeeping plan in Darfur? Is it because, as his minister said yesterday, Canada is too far involved in Operation Enduring Freedom to do peacekeeping in Darfur?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to hear people who will passionately talk about the necessity of supporting our troops in the field, he needs only go to the field and talk to the troops themselves and hear that from any country in the world.

As I said before, the government stands ready and is in consultation with our friends in the international community to do whatever is necessary to advance the peace process in Darfur. If that involves sending troops, this will be an option that we consider.

However, I will say this. It is not an option of this government, or the NDP, or any party that wants to be responsible to change its mind on a military mission once the shooting starts.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a letter to the Prime Minister, the president of the Canadian Bar Association said that the views of the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, “bring the administration of justice into disrepute and seriously threaten judicial independence”.

My question is for the Attorney General of Canada. Why did he remain silent on this vicious attack and why will he not take his responsibilities seriously and defend our well-respected Supreme Court justices and judicial independence?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has every respect for our judiciary, including the Supreme Court of Canada. We have demonstrated not only the respect for the Supreme Court of Canada, but we have demonstrated an openness to an appointments process for a Supreme Court of Canada judge, which that party would never support.

•(1435)

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was not to the point of the question. Canadians expect the Minister of Justice to show confidence in the judiciary and the administration of justice. He stayed glued to his seat and never jumped to the defence of the judiciary in this debacle. The minister must show leadership and condemn the remarks made by his colleague. Staying silent is simply not acceptable.

Why will the minister not defend our highest court and the independence of the judiciary?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the member has not been listening. I stated very clearly that our government supports the Supreme Court of Canada and the justices in Canada. We want to ensure that the justices remain independent. We are committed to that. We are also committed to reform to which that member is opposed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin attempted to intimidate the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and violated judicial independence. Moreover, he has reserved for this evening a room in

this very building, which he is making available to anti-women's rights groups, groups opposed to our rights.

How could the Prime Minister approve that appointment?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have made it very clear that our government supports the independence of the judiciary. We respect the judiciary. We work together with the judiciary in our country. We want to ensure that this independence and strength remains. Everyone will see that kind of continued support for the judiciary by this government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not get my answer. In Quebec, where I am from, women fought for these rights. Now, they are being taken away.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, by condoning his MP's actions, he is actually condoning that member's position and impairing women's rights? The Prime Minister did not answer my question. Women have a right to know whether or not he condones what the member has done?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can answer for the government, and the position of the government is clear. We respect the judiciary. We respect the equality of rights in our country, including the equality of rights of women.

I am proud to serve in a cabinet that respects those values and principles, and we will continue to do exactly that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HUMANITARIAN AID TO PALESTINE

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for two days now I have been asking the Minister of International Cooperation about humanitarian aid for children in Palestine. I have yet to receive a satisfactory response.

The minister should in fact be aware of the problem. She must have spoken with her deputy minister. My question is simple: what concrete action has Canada taken to facilitate a humanitarian donation being sent to children at a daycare in Palestine so that this donation arrives at its destination?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out in this House to the hon. member that at this time, CIDA is not funding any Palestinian YWCA projects or any Medical Aid for Palestine projects in the West Bank or Gaza.

This case is about a private donation from a Canadian wanting to help Palestinian children. That said, the immediate problem of transferring funds has already been resolved by Medical Aid for Palestine. Furthermore, we are in contact with this agency to determine whether the Canadian government can help them and how it can do so.

Oral Questions

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is reassuring to see that the minister is better prepared today. One thing is clear: the money is not getting there. The Bloc wants to know how she will ensure that the money will get to the right place in the future and that humanitarian aid will be sent to the Palestinians.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that the hon. member prepare her questions better too.

I just told her that the immediate problem of transferring funds has already been resolved.

* * *

• (1440)

CANADA POST

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, who is responsible for Canada Post, has received information regarding the postal sorting station in Quebec City. He has ignored it, suggesting instead to his two colleagues they contact the Quebec City police.

Why has the minister refused to assume his responsibilities and what is the justification for choosing to ignore the situation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question. We did in fact assume our responsibilities. When our two colleagues reported this information, these allegations, they did what they should have, they alerted the police to what was happening, or in fact to what was being alleged. It is my intention, in fact, to meet the chair of the board of Canada Post in the coming week to review this matter.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister must do more.

If the minister finds the situation serious enough to submit it to the Quebec City police, does he plan to declare a moratorium on the closure of the postal sorting station, at least while the investigation is carried out?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would hope the member would have done just what our two colleagues did. I would have liked her to congratulate our two colleagues on reporting these allegations where they should be reported.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Margaret Robertson is a widowed senior living on a fixed income in Pickering. She applied for and received conditional approval under CMHC's EnerGuide for low income household programs.

On April 7, Mrs. Robertson was informed that she was eligible for \$3,500 to make her home more energy efficient. However, along came the budget and she has now been told that the program has been cut and so has her promised assistance.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources explain how his government can be so callous to a senior citizen trying to do her part to save energy and make ends meet?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Mrs. Robertson has applied for the program she will receive all the benefits of that program.

We were elected to take great care of and have respect for every taxpayer dollar. This is a program to promote energy efficiency and yet almost 50¢ of every dollar goes to inspections and administration and never reaches the homeowner.

That is not in the taxpayers' interest. It is not economically efficient nor environmentally efficient, which is why the program had to end.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the program was about accountability. What he refers to as administrative costs were to ensure that the assessments were done so the taxpayer would not lose. More important, only 22 weeks ago that member and his party voted for the program unanimously. How can the minister now say that suddenly he has changed his mind because it was not a campaign promise?

Could the minister now explain how the Conservatives have the money to expand prisons but nothing for widowed seniors wanting to save energy? Why is Mrs. Robertson being left out in the cold by the callous Conservative government?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member is suggesting that for every single program of the previous government it took 50¢ of every dollar to ensure accountability, it is no wonder the old Liberal Party was thrown out of office. That is not how this government is going to function. We are going to ensure that taxpayers get value for every single dollar that they send to Ottawa.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, energy development goes hand in hand with increased greenhouse gas emissions. Despite this, the Conservatives are doing nothing to address this serious problem.

When will the government announce a real program instead of uttering platitudes?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, today we will be releasing our greenhouse gas inventory that shows that Canada now has a 35% higher target than was set by the Liberals.

Just to put that into perspective for the hon. member, that would be equal to four times the amount of greenhouse gases for every individual Canadian household that we would have to shut down today.

I would like the hon. member to tell me if he thinks that is the solution.

Oral Questions

•(1445)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the questions and I will ask the minister to answer but that was no answer and no assurance for Canadians.

We also have some problems with our water resources. According to the Pembina Institute, energy development is having a negative impact on our rivers, streams and lakes. Action is needed immediately to stem the growing drain on our water resources.

What is the government doing right now to address this serious problem?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's water is an important resource to all Canadians. A very emotional debate is emerging in my own home province of Alberta and we are watching it closely.

One of the things we are concerned about, after inheriting Environment Canada from the Liberals, is that there is no national water strategy in place. We are starting to work with the provinces on sharing information and looking at concerns from the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Minister of Agriculture has acted to stop CAIS program clawbacks. I agree with Canadian Federation of Agriculture president, Bob Friesen, who is one of my constituents, who said, "This move shows that the federal government has clearly listened to farmers on this issue".

Could the Minister of Agriculture tell Canadians if he has any further plans to change the failed Liberal CAIS program in order to help Canadian farmers?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the shortcomings of the CAIS program designed by the previous Liberal government. We also are convinced we need separate assistance programs for farmers and separate disaster relief and we are moving ahead on those.

In the meantime, not only have we moved ahead to stop the collection of CAIS overpayments until 2007, but we have made that interest free for farmers as well. I am also pleased to announce that we are extending the June 30 deadline for submitting final CAIS forms by another three months.

We are going to make programming work for farmers. We are making it work this spring and we will make it work into the future.

* * *

INDUSTRY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, at the close of trading, the Canadian dollar hit a 28 year high, topping out at 91¢ U.S. Many analysts believe it will continue to rise, maybe even to par.

We know that workers in Canada are being hit hard. We have lost almost 200,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector since 2002, 56,000

in Ontario alone in the past year. Last week's Conservative budget just continued the Liberal legacy of ignoring working families with nothing to help protect manufacturing jobs.

What is the government's plan to protect working families who depend on these jobs?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Jobs in Canada are very important and are one of our priorities. That is why we took the necessary steps in the budget to reduce the tax burden on Canadian families and businesses. This will encourage businesses to create productive jobs. We believe in a Canada that can compete internationally.

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the loonie's rise to 35% in value has taken years, not days. Surely those Conservatives heard the train coming. They have no long term plan for day care and no long term plan for the environment. Now we learn that they have no plan for manufacturing jobs.

Is the government too caught up in navel gazing at its five priorities to have even noticed that the manufacturing sector in our economy is in crisis? What is the government going to do about it?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we are concerned about any job losses. I am pleased to report to the House, as the member probably knows, that the unemployment rate in Canada has not been this low since 1974. We have had tremendous—

Some hon. members: More, more.

The Speaker: Order, please. I remind hon. members this is not a hockey game. The Minister of Finance has the floor, not skating.

•(1450)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, we have reduced taxes for small business and large business. In the province of Ontario alone, as a result of these measures, the people of Ontario will pay \$3.5 billion less tax in 2007 than they paid under the previous government.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Conservative government has been in office it has repeatedly misled the Canadian public.

The Minister of Public Works stated yesterday that he would promote fairness, openness and transparency in the bidding process and yet we find that the Department of Public Works has reached a \$600 million agreement with Minto Development after the company submitted an unsolicited proposal.

Is this a case of Conservative hypocrisy or is this what happens when we have a minister who is not accountable?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of speculation and rumour about this file but there is one fact. The fact is that no deal has been made on the former JDS Uniphase building. The member's speculation about the \$600 million is in fact not true.

What is true is that this Conservative government will do what the Liberals did not do, which is get good value for taxpayer dollars in every deal we sign.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the early 1980s, the Government of Canada has had a policy whereby 75% of public service jobs in the capital region are on the Ontario side and 25% are on the Quebec side. The Minister of Public Works and Government Services recognizes that policy. At present, the actual ratio is roughly 81% to 19%. And now, the government is preparing to increase the number of jobs on the Ontario side, reducing the percentage on the Quebec side to about 15%.

Can we know when additional space will be leased or built on the Quebec side of the national capital region in order to reach 25%? I would like an answer from the Minister of Transport, who is the minister responsible for Quebec.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government agrees with the longstanding principle that 75% of the jobs should be on the Ontario side and 25% on the Quebec side. In fact, the opposition member is mistaken. Today, 77% of the jobs are on the Ontario side and 23% on the Quebec side. These figures were the same when the Liberal government was in power.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, reporters have indicated that in the lead-up to the federal budget there were a series of conflicting lists from the military, the minister's office and the Prime Minister's office.

Of the key priorities for the armed forces, none of these lists won out, which is why the budget did not address the urgent needs of our men and women in uniform.

Medium logistics trucks are a top priority for our troops in Afghanistan. Could the Minister of National Defence inform us of the status of the truck purchase?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should not always listen to reporters. We have a complete defence program and, once it is approved by cabinet, we will process a number of projects. We will wait until cabinet approves the projects.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of National Defence tell us, yes or no, if he served until 2004 as a lobbyist for Stewart & Stevenson, one of the leading contenders for the \$1 billion truck purchase?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clearly on the record that I registered as a lobbyist for a number of companies. I did register under Hill & Knowlton Canada for Stewart & Stevenson and I was a representative of theirs until late 2003.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the day after the government announced financial assistance in the budget for the agricultural sector, we learned that a portion of this sum would be allocated through the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program by retroactively applying adjustments to the current method of calculating inventories. The UPA demonstrated that, if this is the case, there is a good chance that Quebec might not receive any money.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food guarantee that his department will ensure that the intended portion of this financial assistance will be given to Quebec farmers and that they will not be penalized by the calculation method?

● (1455)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. Not only did Quebec administer some of its own CAIS programming but, in my opinion, it had a better system in place than the Liberal program which had flaws.

We are correcting the program with this one time adjustment here in the House of Commons, which means that we will enter into negotiations with Quebec to ensure it gets the money that is coming to it.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec often has a better system. Yet, it is always penalized. The Quebec agricultural minister shares farmers' concerns and hopes that there is flexibility such that assistance can be directed first to those areas that need it most.

Can the minister promise Quebec and the provinces the flexibility needed to ensure that money is given first to the farmers who need it most?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada of course we have federal-provincial agreements that cover payments to farmers. Some provinces choose to administer their own plans.

In the case of the retroactive fixing of the CAIS program, the Quebec government has already paid out its share. It will be getting money, and there will be a large degree of discretion for the Quebec government to spend on behalf of the farmers in that province.

* * *

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ACOA has become a political football in the hands of the Conservative government. The part time minister for ACOA announced a project to provide clean water for the citizens of Canso, but can he give his assurance that the one-third contribution by the town is in fact in place? Or is the glass only two-thirds full for the very deserving people of Canso?

Will he assure the House that if Canso cannot provide its share he has developed some other source of funding to help the municipality? Or is this just another political deal designed to assist his Conservative pals in Nova Scotia in the run-up to this week's expected provincial election call?

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ACOA is there to do good things for Atlantic Canada, and we will be consistent, not like the former party, where all the decisions were political decisions.

We are going to act in the best interests of all communities in Atlantic Canada, and the evidence is out there in the last couple of months to prove exactly what I have said.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen the effects of the lenient Liberal approach to crime and justice in this country. While the former Liberal justice minister spent time flip-flopping on his position on mandatory minimum sentencing, this party took action.

The introduction of new measures last week will lead to safer streets and communities for Canadians. Can the justice minister explain to the opposition why these measures are necessary?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's legislation is

targeted at criminals who use firearms to commit serious offences. Despite the former Liberal justice minister saying that he is opposed to mandatory minimum prison sentences, during the election he said that they are sometimes required. Indeed, the Liberal Party said it would double the present mandatory minimum sentences for serious gun related crimes.

Now members of that party say they do not support mandatory minimum penalties for serious gun crimes. I cannot keep track of their flip-flopping, but during the election our party said we would get tough on crime to protect our communities. That is what we are doing.

* * *

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are furious with the details of the deal for the new Mounties headquarters, a deal that we have learned will cost 20 times the original price.

Yesterday the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works told the House that we would be shown the details of the deal to purchase the building before the deal is finalized. However, the unelected minister responsible for public works is on record as saying that Canadians will only be given the details after they have signed on the dotted line.

Who are we to believe? The parliamentary secretary sitting in the House or the unelected minister in the Senate?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two days in a row and three questions in a row, the member for Ottawa Centre has his facts completely wrong. The member went out to the lobby in the foyer of the House of Commons and handed out documents that were out of date and incorrect.

The facts are that the deal has not been done. Taxpayers' dollars have not been spent.

The former minister of public works missed an opportunity to purchase a building for \$30 million. What we are doing is getting the best deal possible for taxpayers. When that deal is completed, Canadians will be able to see it, and the hon. member from the NDP will see what a good deal looks like.

● (1500)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): With respect, I will reserve judgment, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling

Let me repeat: Canadians have a right to know the details of this deal now. First, is there a link between this deal and a developer who has given \$73,000 in the last 13 years to the Liberal Party? Second, is there a good reason why the Conservatives are so anxious to put this deal away without showing Canadians what they are paying for? Will we get answers to these questions before Canadians have to pay for it?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will make it clear to the member for Ottawa Centre for the third time today: there is no deal.

If there is a deal, this government will do what we have committed to do, which is that we will get the best value for taxpayer dollars. I see the member is holding up a sheet of paper. If it is the same one that he had yesterday, it is wrong, and if he asks the question again tomorrow, he will still be wrong.

We will do what is right for taxpayers and we will get them a good deal.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence confirmed earlier that he indeed was a registered lobbyist for Stewart & Stevenson, a company that was bidding for the billion dollar trucks contract. As such, the minister was responsible to lobby the defence department and various others through a series of meetings and telephone calls.

Did the minister ever meet with any members of the Canadian Forces, or with DND civilian officials who now work under the authority of the minister, in his capacity as a lobbyist for Stewart & Stevenson?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is that to the best of my knowledge, I do not think anyone is there, because the people I dealt with a number of years ago were junior officers and I believe they have gone. I have no idea if they are there or not.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have such respect for the Minister of National Defence.

The former Liberal government cut funding to official languages programs, which the Commissioner of Official Languages condemned, and I quote, "The budget cuts made following the change in government in the 1990s set language rights in Canada back significantly".

For a party that claims to defend the interests of linguistic minorities, is this not scandalous?

Could the Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for the Francophonie and Official Languages explain to this House what she plans to do to promote the official languages of Canada?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The Official Languages Act, which was recently amended, has our government's total support, which shows our commitment to full recognition of linguistic duality and this will influence the next steps we take.

During the first 100 days of our term in office, we have concluded multi-year agreements in education worth over \$1 billion with the provincial and territorial governments and we have concluded upgraded agreements regarding the delivery of services with 12—

The Speaker: The time for question period is over.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the Prime Minister responded to a question from the Leader of the Opposition on official languages by citing an excerpt from a letter of the Commissioner of Official Languages. Could the Prime Minister table this letter, as required by the Standing Orders?

• (1505)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly do so.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT FLAGS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on Thursday, April 27, by the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, alleging that the privileges of the House as a collectivity had been breached by the government's refusal to lower the flags within the parliamentary precincts to half-mast to mark the deaths of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this matter, as well as the hon. government House leader and the hon. opposition House leader for their interventions.

To recapitulate briefly the arguments presented, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre contends that it is the Speaker of the House of Commons, on behalf of the Parliament of Canada, who has the authority to determine when the flag on the Peace Tower is lowered and not the Department of Canadian Heritage or the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

The hon. member cited a passage from page 170 of the second edition of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, which states:

Speaker's Ruling

Each House of Parliament is entitled to the administration of affairs within its own precincts free from interference....Control of the accommodation and services within the Parliament Buildings is therefore vested in the Speakers on behalf of their respective Houses.

The hon. member then argued that control of the accommodations and services of the parliamentary buildings, including the flagpole, is vested in the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons. He concluded that the government had overstepped its authority by dictating whether or not the flag on the Peace Tower should be lowered, thus usurping the privileges of the House.

The hon. government House leader argued that the lowering of the flag is the prerogative of the Crown and that it is up to the Government of Canada to exercise that prerogative. For his part, the hon. opposition House leader requested that the Speaker seek a legal interpretation of the authority of government departments vis-à-vis Parliament.

[Translation]

Let me clarify at the outset that it is not the role of the Speaker to give a legal opinion. Furthermore, I need hardly remind members that ours is a bicameral Parliament so that, were I to find that as Speaker of the House of Commons I have some role in this matter, it would follow that the other place would also need to be consulted on any decision concerning the flag that flies on a building shared by both Houses.

For the moment, though, this matter has been raised as a question of privilege in this House and my only role is to determine whether the privileges of members have been breached.

[English]

I believe it would be useful to all members if I summarized quickly the status of the Parliament buildings from an administrative perspective.

As I noted when the matter arose, the House of Commons and the Senate are tenants of the Department of Public Works and Government Services. Title to the buildings and land is in the name of Her Majesty in Right of Canada. By virtue of section 10 of the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act, the administration of federal property falls under the jurisdiction of the minister of that department.

That being said, because the Senate and the House of Commons are not government departments but constituent elements of Parliament with the right to administer their own affairs free from interference, the Speakers of the Senate and of the House of Commons have control over the accommodation and services within those areas of the parliamentary precinct occupied and used by senators and members.

[Translation]

These areas are defined in the second edition of Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, at page 163, as, and I quote:

—the premises that the House of Commons and the Senate occupy from time to time for their corporate purposes. It includes those premises where each House, through its Speaker, exercises physical control to enable the members to perform their parliamentary work without obstruction or interference.

● (1510)

[English]

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre argued that the House's collective rights were breached because the government assumed direction and control over the parliamentary precinct. The House of Commons has a number of rights which it claims and which have been accorded to it by statute. The right to regulate its internal affairs is the collective right that is pertinent in this matter.

The essential question is whether the half-masting of the flag on the Peace Tower is an internal affair falling within the privileges of the House, or an external matter under the jurisdiction of the owner of the building.

It appears clear to me that this is a matter falling within the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada since the Department of Public Works and Government Services has administrative responsibility for the building. Just as that department, as our landlord, carries out the upkeep of the parliamentary buildings, so too an official from Public Works and Government Services Canada is responsible for raising and lowering the flag each day on the Peace Tower.

The protocol for the flying of the Canadian flag falls under the Department of Canadian Heritage, which is generally responsible for Canadian symbols. Members can find on the heritage website the rules concerning half-masting of the flag on federal buildings, including the Parliament buildings. These rules and their application are a matter for the executive; they are not matters over which the Speaker has any control.

While it is my role as Speaker to protect the House's control over its premises and to protect the access of members to these premises, I cannot find that the government's control of the flag on the Peace Tower infringes on the privileges of the House. Specifically, this is not a matter that relates to the internal affairs of the House in that it does not prevent the House from carrying out its work or prevent members from carrying out their parliamentary duties.

Accordingly I cannot find a *prima facie* case of privilege. I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for bringing this matter to the attention of the house.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, would you be willing to seek unanimous consent of the House to put forward a motion that would see it as the exclusive jurisdiction and purview of the Speakers of the Houses of Parliament to direct and control the flying of the flag at half mast on the Peace Tower?

The Speaker: The hon. member will have to get the motion drafted and seek consent in the usual way or, alternatively, move it as a motion under private members' business and see if it could be carried unanimously then.

This is a matter that will have to be done in a proper written form, with a draft motion, rather than the suggestion that I seek consent to adopt such and such a thing in the House. I know the hon. member will pursue the matter, if necessary, and come up with a draft.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the House that a final Indian residential schools settlement agreement has been approved by all the parties, including the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

I am pleased to inform this House that a final Indian residential schools settlement agreement has been approved by all parties, including the Government of Canada.

● (1515)

[English]

The Hon. Frank Iacobucci, the government's representative, has very capably led these intense and complex negotiations with legal representatives, including former students, the Catholic, Anglican, United and Presbyterian Churches and the Assembly of First Nations and other aboriginal organizations. I think it important that the record of the Parliament of Canada note that Grand Chief Fontaine of the Assembly of First Nations deserves special recognition in this regard. Together the parties have achieved a fair, lasting and historic agreement.

[Translation]

Together, the parties have reached a fair, lasting and historic agreement.

[English]

The settlement agreement must now be presented for approval by the courts in nine jurisdictions across Canada over the coming months.

I am also pleased to announce today, together with my colleague, the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is with me, the immediate launch of an advanced payment program for eligible former Indian residential school students 65 years of age or older, when the settlement agreement negotiations were initiated on May 30, 2005.

[Translation]

The government recognizes that many former students of residential schools are growing older and that the funds must be distributed as soon as possible. Former students eligible for the \$8,000 advance payment may apply by completing the application form, which is now available.

[English]

The government recognizes the sad legacy of Indian residential schools. We hope that this settlement agreement will bring closure to this unfortunate chapter in our history and help us to move forward in a new spirit of partnership with aboriginal Canadians.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to welcome the government's decision to honour the Liberal agreement on Indian residential schools and the funding that was provided for this purpose last fall.

Working cooperatively toward the well-being of the first nations, the Métis nation and the Inuit was a high priority of the previous Liberal government. It has remained a prime concern for the opposition from the very beginning of this new Parliament.

We are pleased to see that the current government has endorsed the agreement in principle, signed in November 2005 by the then Liberal government, the Assembly of First Nations and church leaders.

By taking this step, the government ensures that the honour of the Crown can be restored.

However, there is a more important matter. By honouring the agreement, Canada continues its responsibility to help bring closure to the painful legacy of Indian residential schools. Survivors must be recognized for their courage to come forward to remember this most painful chapter of their lives, the stories of abuse they suffered while in residential schools.

Many of us in the House are familiar with the hearings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which uncovered many such tragedies. Many of us know these stories, as they are the stories of our own families and communities.

Today residential school survivors, their families and communities have begun healing journeys to put this ugly chapter behind them. The impact of the Indian residential school system is a legacy that must and will be overcome. The honouring of this agreement will help.

The work of the previous Liberal government to reach and to fund this agreement helped develop some goodwill and a sense of optimism on all sides. Particularly helpful was the effort made by the Hon. Frank Iacobucci. We thank him dearly for helping to bring people together.

It must be said that while the government stalled, some elder survivors of the residential school passed on, forever ending their chance to find justice. However, it now appears that for many others a resolution is now at hand. The government has finally chosen to look beyond partisan barriers and implement the Liberal agreement on residential schools, along with fast track payments to the elderly. For many, this day provides recognition of their ordeal and may, I hope, become an important step in their journey toward healing. It comes not a moment too soon.

Once again, we welcome the government's decision to implement the residential schools agreement. We thank the individual survivors, who fought so hard to keep this issue alive. We also thank National Chief Phil Fontaine of the Assembly of First Nations and all those who have participated in the work leading to this day.

● (1520)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to comment on the announcement made by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development concerning the final Indian residential schools settlement agreement.

This is a great day for the victims of the Indian residential schools. It is also a great day for all those who care about justice, respect and compassion.

Over 150,000 native people went through hell in the residential schools. Too many victims have already left us, and the number of survivors is estimated to be 87,000, of whom an average of 30 to 50 are dying each week without being entitled to fair compensation.

With this agreement, the Government of Canada is tackling the worst examples of human rights violations in its history, is coming to terms with its shameful past and is finally repairing the wrongs it caused to too many victims.

Let us not delude ourselves, the final Indian residential schools settlement agreement is a salve on the wounds of broken lives, and it will not make up for the ravages which many native people will never get over. Nevertheless, I am firmly convinced that the agreement is the foundation for restoring social justice and promoting reconciliation and healing.

Today's agreement is the product of the perseverance, courage and patience of native people; of first nations leadership; of the recommendations of the Erasmus-Dussault report, endorsed by the Bloc Québécois, which demanded the holding of a public inquiry into abuse in the residential schools; and of the work by members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, which led to the signing of the agreement in principle on November 20, 2005.

Finally, the Bloc Québécois is delighted with the announcement and hopes that these long-awaited developments will meet the victims' expectations.

I now ask the Prime Minister to seize the opportunity of this announcement to offer today, in this House, his apologies to the former residents so that they can turn this sad page in history.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, on behalf of all New Democrats, to acknowledge the pain and the suffering of generations of victims of Canada's Indian residential schools, an insidious institutional plague that ravaged Canada's first peoples for more than 100 years.

Today we remember the childhoods that were destroyed, the lives that have been forever changed by this intergenerational tragedy. We acknowledge the terrible burden of the Indian residential schools, the emotional scars and the economic impact being carried to this day by Canada's first nations, Métis and Inuit people.

The words of survivor Flora Merrick help us to understand the lifelong pain endured by victims. She said:

During my stay at Portage la Prairie residential school, I witnessed the injustices of beatings and abuse of other children, some whom were my siblings. We were treated worse than animals and lived in constant fear. I have carried the trauma of my experience and seeing what happened to other children all my life.

New Democrats welcome the announcement today by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. We are pleased that at long last an agreement has been reached and advance payments for aging survivors can begin to be made.

I want to salute, as well, the organizations representing first nations and the victims for their tireless and endless efforts in this regard. I also want to mention the work of our own member on this file over the years.

Routine Proceedings

However, this is by no means the end of this sad chapter in our collective history.

[Translation]

We still have work to do. We have to begin the process of restoration and pardon, and we must make sure that all victims finally receive compensation before more individuals die while waiting. We must not forget the Métis victims, like those from the residential school of Île-à-la-Croix, who are still struggling to be recognized.

[English]

Today survivors, their families and all Canadians look to the Prime Minister to rise in his place and offer an apology on behalf of the Government of Canada, an apology for the grave injustices, abuse and trauma inflicted by the Indian residential schools, an apology that is decades overdue.

[Translation]

If the Prime Minister does not apologize, this government will be showing that it is no more capable than the Liberals of assuming responsibility for past wrongs and doing what is needed to right them.

• (1525)

[English]

Canadian aboriginal people have waited long enough. We want no more excuses or delays. We call upon the Prime Minister to take the next step and apologize, so that we finally might repair this difficulty that has existed between our nations.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), to present to the House reports from the Canadian branch, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, concerning a workshop on the parliamentary committee system in Trinidad and Tobago, March 20-24, 2006.

It was a great pleasure, on behalf of the House along with the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, to collaborate with both houses and staff of the parliament in Trinidad and Tobago to develop statements of principle and recommendations to update procedures and resourcing for the house and committees in that sister parliament.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the delegation of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the 51st annual session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Copenhagen, Denmark, November 11-15, 2005.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the delegation to the OSCE, Canada Europe Parliamentary Association, respecting its participation in the winter session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held in Vienna, Austria, February 23-24, 2006.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, which attended the meeting of the Education, Communications and Cultural Affairs Committee of the APF, held in Antananarivo, Madagascar on March 21 and 22, 2006.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian delegations of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, respecting their participation at the Bureau meeting of the APF, held in Noumea, New Caledonia, from February 2 to 4, 2006; at the Co-operation and Development Committee of the APF, held in Delémont, Jura, from March 14 to 16, 2006; and lastly at the Conference of Presidents of the Americas region, held in Augusta, Maine, from March 22 to 23, 2006.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present in the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group respecting its participation at the National Governors Association Healthy America Forum at its winter meeting that was held in Washington, D.C., February 25-28, 2006.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-271, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (personal identity theft).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells to introduce this bill entitled an act to amend the Criminal Code respecting personal identity theft. Identity theft has become one of the fastest growing crimes in North America. A growing number of Canadians are victimized by criminals who have assumed their identities and destroyed their credit history and financial details.

With this legislation, the federal government would protect Canadians by clearly defining identity theft in the Canadian Criminal Code. It would make it illegal for anyone to unlawfully possess or transfer another person's personal information or documentation, such as a driver's licence or credit cards.

In our increasingly technological world where criminals are using ambiguous laws to avoid prosecution, I hope I can count on support from all sides of the House. I thank the hon. member for Cambridge for seconding my bill.

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

● (1530)

STATE IMMUNITY ACT

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-272, An Act to amend the State Immunity Act and the Criminal Code (terrorist activity).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to introduce this private member's bill. This bill calls for the amending of the State Immunity Act. This bill, which is long overdue in Canada, would permit any person who has suffered loss or damage as a result of terrorist activity to be legally capable of suing the person or state responsible.

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

* * *

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS ACT

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (products made with dog or cat fur).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to introduce this private member's bill. This bill calls on the government to amend the Hazardous Products Act by adding all products made in whole or in part of dog or cat fur. While banned in countries around the globe, including the United States, dog and cat fur can be imported, exported and legally sold in Canada without any identifying labels. This practice is unacceptable to Canadians.

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

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-274, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (Schedule 1).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to introduce this private member's bill. This bill calls on the government to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to add brominated flame retardants and polybrominated diphenyl ether to the list of toxic substances.

Recent studies have identified that these chemicals commonly used as flame retardants have been found in our house dust and in breast milk. Europe has already taken steps to ban these dangerous chemicals. Here in Canada, studies have been completed which highlight the high level of this chemical presently in our environment. It is time to ban these products to protect the health of Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the 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 will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of this House, following the vote on Ways and Means Motion No. 1 tonight, the House proceed to the putting of the question on Ways and Means Motion No. 5.

The Deputy 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)

* * *

●(1535)

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure once again in this Parliament to present a petition from residents of Nova Scotia who are very concerned about the cancellation of the child care program.

I would like to acknowledge Cathleen Hilgenberg-Madgett from Nova Scotia who went out and collected these petitions, following up on her great concern. She suggests that 70% of women with children under the age of six are employed. A taxable \$100 a month allowance amounts to a small child benefit. Child care is an everyday necessity. She calls upon the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreement in principle and to commit to fund it for a full five years. I thank Kathleen and I am pleased to present this petition.

[*Translation*]

REFUGEES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition containing over 700 signatures. The petitioners call on the government to establish a procedure to facilitate the granting of permanent residence to all persons who have been in Canada over three years and who come from moratorium countries.

I would like to thank the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées immigrantes and the Ligue des droits et libertés for collecting these signatures.

[*English*]

AUTISM

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the 39th Parliament to present my first petition on behalf of my constituents of Sarnia—Lambton.

This petition calls on the House of Commons to amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include IBI/ABA therapy for children with autism; and secondly, to contribute to the creation of academic chairs at a university in each province to teach IBI/ABA treatment at the undergraduate and doctoral level.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present to the House petitions from hundreds of residents across Canada regarding child care. The petitioners call upon the House to achieve multiyear funding to ensure that publicly operated child care programs are sustained in the long term, and that child care is protected by enshrining it in legislation. The petitioners also request an end to child poverty by using the \$1,200 allowance to enhance the child tax benefit without tax and clawbacks.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in order to present several petitions. The first is on behalf of the residents of Ontario who are calling for the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreement that was reached between the Government of Canada and the provinces in November 2005.

HEALTH

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I wish to present is on behalf of the residents of my riding and across the province of Ontario calling on Parliament to provide Canadians with greater access to drug, non-drug, preventative or medicinal options by clarifying the currently vague definition of food and drug in the Food and Drugs Act.

JUSTICE

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thirdly, I wish to present two petitions on behalf of residents in Nipissing—Timiskaming and across Canada calling upon the government to allocate funds to ensure protection and assistance to victims of human trafficking. In particular, they also want the government to raise awareness of the issue of human trafficking, especially in terms of women and children.

I respectfully submit these petitions to the Clerk of the House.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, after meeting with the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, it was encouraged that I would be presenting this petition on behalf of early learning and care for our young people. I am pleased to do that as the list grows and grows. Hundreds more people have been signing this petition on a regular basis, pleading with the government to please reconsider its position and help young people.

*The Budget***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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 ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement government orders will be extended by 12 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1540)

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I will take the opportunity to salute the population of my riding, Rivière-du-Nord. I thank them from placing their trust in me as a member for the fifth time.

The Bloc views this as a transition budget. It contains some measures which will satisfy certain needs in Quebec. The Bloc Québécois will therefore support the Conservative budget.

This budget contains certain things on which the Bloc Québécois has been working for many years. One of them is the fiscal imbalance. In the previous Liberal government, the Bloc succeeded in having the fiscal imbalance included in the throne speech.

At last, this budget recognizes the existence of the fiscal imbalance, first of all. Next, it also recognizes that there will be negotiations and timetables. For Quebec, this measure alone is of critical importance. For the Bloc, timetables show that the government is serious about this measure, the principal measure for which the Bloc has fought here for years. You will recall that a few years ago, when we spoke the words "fiscal imbalance" here in this House, it was as if we were talking about something that did not exist. Now it is well defined, and the government recognizes it.

The Bloc is eager to see the negotiations unfold and to see what this government truly intends to do, whether it does its homework. We will be watching it very closely.

So this important measure is to be found in the budget.

We also find the whole issue of post-secondary education. Money is being allocated for the students. As we know, this House has even seen the tabling of private members' bills to provide measures for post-secondary students. There was never any movement from the government on this issue. Finally, we are seeing some initiatives, even though we do not know as yet how they will be formulated. Everything will be tabled here, in the House of Commons, and then we will all of us be able to discuss whether they are reasonable or not. At last there will be these sorts of initiatives.

There are also measures on social housing. The CMHC has a surplus of over \$4 billion. That surplus might already be allocated to social housing. The budget refers to some \$800 million in measures. That is a step in the right direction. It remains to be seen how this will be formulated, what will be given, how it will be distributed to the provinces and how it will be managed.

It should not be forgotten that the various provinces have their own programs to administer social housing. Quebec wants this money to be transferred so that it can administer its own programs, since they already exist. We shall have to see how all of this will be distributed and negotiated.

We will also have to see how long this will take. It is fine to make promises, but if this is to happen in four or five years, it will be of no use. We want real promises, not empty ones. Furthermore, we want to see whether this government will move as quickly as we want. You and I know that that is not always the case. We have witnessed many budgets. For me, this is the thirteenth. We know that sometimes, despite the promises, things do not move forward very quickly.

Nonetheless, there are some measures in this direction.

Obviously, some things that we had hoped to see in the budget are missing, particularly as regards employment insurance. The Bloc is firmly committed to this issue. Everybody knows that. In fact, we have repeatedly brought forward bills on employment insurance. We want to see an independent employment insurance fund. Even a majority of government members voted to create such a fund.

There is \$48 billion in the existing employment insurance fund. We have to be able to recover that money so that we can reinvest in our programs and not just reduce the premium payments of employers, but also increase employee weeks of benefits.

● (1545)

We have that \$48 billion available. We do not know what the previous government did with it. I hope that the present government will be able to track that money down and will then do something to help unemployed workers.

Just to note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you that I will be splitting my time with the member for Trois-Rivières.

The Budget

Self-employed workers are also one of our priorities. At this time, they are not eligible for employment insurance. All of these measures are extremely important. We have introduced bills so that self-employed workers can, if they so wish, pay EI premiums so that they can benefit from that program if the need arises. Self-employed workers may find themselves in very difficult situations. They do not necessarily earn a lot of money. If they have an accident or if their contracts dry up, they find themselves with no income and quite simply have to go on welfare. We would like to avoid this kind of situation, we would like to eliminate it, even. We want to improve the situation for everyone.

Employment insurance is a top priority issue for us. Unfortunately, there is nothing about it in the budget.

As well, the \$1,200 allowance is somewhat disappointing. It has been decided that it will be given directly to families, when we know perfectly well that in some cases, at the end of the day—and people will realize this—families will be paying tax on that \$1,200. If a true tax credit of \$1,200 had been created, as the Bloc Québécois had called for, everyone who genuinely needed it would have received it.

On that point, perhaps the government will want to change things for the coming year. I do not know whether this is an on-going program. We have not been given any more information about it. Time will tell. The government will also see how the public reacts to it. When taxpayers fill out their tax returns, they will certainly realize that they do not have much left out of that \$1,200, perhaps even nothing at all, or barely \$200, and that it may not have been a good idea to do things this way.

Our child care program in Quebec is extremely important. I have not heard the government express its political will to negotiate with Quebec to allow this program to continue. The Bloc Québécois will never stop fighting for this issue. My colleague from Trois-Rivières will do so with vigour, I am sure. This is really important for us. Otherwise, Quebec will have a shortfall of \$807 million and this will be unacceptable.

This is not a bad budget, but there is room for several improvements. The real budget will be the one in 2007. Then perhaps we will see different measures on which we can make a different judgment.

Also, there is the matter of the program for older workers. We have been talking about it for years. It has to be put back in place. As we know, we are living in the globalization era. At present, many manufacturing businesses are closing, particularly in the textile sector. The lumber industry has also suffered a great deal. But older workers have no program to help them make the transition. We have been demanding such a program for a very long time. We have asked the minister to restore it. We got a pilot project, but she does not seem to want to restore this program. It is extremely important that she do so.

I could go on longer, but I will try to summarize.

The final element that seems to me of great importance is the Kyoto protocol. We cannot disregard this. We see that the government does not really intend to respect the Kyoto protocol. It wants to completely transform things. It is trying to make us believe that it will deal with the matter of climate change and so on. The

government wishes to transform everything in a rather ridiculous way.

It is extremely important that we respect our commitments. Canada should set an example. Quebec, for its part, has done its homework. It has hydroelectricity. It has done its work and will continue to do so. It is important for Canada to set an example for the rest of the world. Unfortunately, it is setting the opposite example. The government will have to pay the price sooner or later.

• (1550)

I sincerely hope that the measures announced in this budget are really put in place and that they are put in place quickly. For the needs of Quebecers, we have to sit down and negotiate as soon as possible all the promises made in the budget and which we need in Quebec as quickly as possible.

[English]

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned a number of issues that I am quite concerned about in the budget.

Kyoto is the number one issue. Many people now know much more than they ever did about what we need to do for the environment and for our children and our grandchildren. I know that the leader of her party for a long time supported Kyoto and really believed in it.

I am quite concerned that this budget has nothing in it. In fact it not only has nothing in it, but it actually has cutbacks in it. It has eliminated \$2 billion worth of programs that were working, that were helping individuals learn how to do things better and to conserve energy. Those programs are gone and I am quite concerned.

The second issue I am concerned about is EI. The member touched on EI. For a long time I have worked on behalf of EI in this House and the member also has worked diligently on behalf of EI. There are serious deficiencies in this budget. As the member herself has worked for so very long on EI, I need a good explanation of how the member can feel comfortable in supporting a budget that is so deficient.

The member mentioned other issues, one of which was aboriginal affairs. Today the chair of that committee had to resign for making inappropriate comments. The member also raised the child care issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that Kyoto is extremely important. The hon. member is completely right, there are significant cutbacks, but at the same time, this budget has good stuff in it for Quebec and my riding. In my region, we are experiencing a very serious and severe social housing crisis. One municipality in my riding is a regional capital. We have to find ways to help.

The Budget

Ultimately, the solution to all that is Quebec achieving sovereignty. Having achieved sovereignty, Quebec will be able to administer all its programs on its own. It will be able to look after its employment insurance scheme and ensure that programs are in place for its people and for older workers. It will be able to ensure that no one is dipping into the employment insurance fund and that the money is truly reinvested for the benefit of the workers. It will ensure that our workers are treated well, and that our environment is conserved properly.

In the meantime, however, we have to live with what we have and vote for the budget, if only to resolve the fiscal imbalance. This will greatly help Quebec make strides towards its ultimate goal: sovereignty.

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke about affordable housing.

We know that in the early 1990s the former Conservative government began the trend of eliminating the national housing program. Then the former Liberal government decided to completely remove it and downloaded affordable housing to the provinces and eliminated the program. As a result, we have seen thousands of Canadians without homes. Some of them in fact are living on the streets.

Last year the original Liberal budget had no new money for affordable housing. It was only because of the NDP and Bill C-48 that \$1.5 billion was assigned to affordable housing.

This year I see that there is only \$800 million for affordable housing, but it is for one time only and some of this money will go to rent subsidies.

I understand the hon. member talked about the CMHC surplus and that surplus is not going to be used to fix affordable housing or build any new units unfortunately.

How can the hon. member's party support this budget that is in front of us? The \$800 million is for one time only. After one year, are Canadians going to be pushed out onto the streets because there will no longer be affordable housing?

• (1555)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this budget has allocated \$800 million for affordable housing. It is true that CMHC has \$4 billion, but we must not forget that the House has other ways of trying to get money back. We can go about it through a bill. Her own party introduced a private member's bill to recover the \$4 billion from CMHC.

We have also introduced a bill. There are other ways of making progress here.

Obviously, it will never be enough. I would rather hear that the \$4 billion will be given back, but that is not the case. What we get is \$800 million.

Let us fight for more. Let us keep up the fight here in the House by all means available to us, including private member's bills and government bills. That is how we fight the battles.

Remember that this is a minority government. If all of the parties agree, we can move forward. If we work toward that goal, we will get results.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I take the floor in this House on the budget. Certainly for us, the Bloc Québécois, this is a transition budget. The real budget will be the one in 2007. Although we see numerous irritants in this budget, of which I will speak shortly, certainly it offers some openness, some commitment toward the fiscal imbalance.

For us, this is a concept which is important. We in the Bloc Québécois were the first to introduce this concept in this House. The previous Liberal government refused to even mention fiscal imbalance. Finally it is now recognized. We will be watching developments closely, for we want a real resolution of the situation. We truly want the money to be returned to the provinces, where the needs are, so that Quebec can truly solve its problems in its own way, for it is very familiar with its population's needs.

For me, much of the role of a member of Parliament consists in analysis and judgment. Certainly, as members of Parliament, we have to be very knowledgeable about the needs of the people in our ridings and the needs of the population. Based on what we hear from them, we have to make a judgment. We have to assess the extent to which all the bills proposed in this House and everything that happens are balanced and make this a fairer society, where the distribution of wealth is appropriate and where there is a balance between rich and poor.

Unfortunately, this budget gives a little to everyone, it sprinkles a little bit everywhere. But one does not sense an overall plan, one does not really sense this judgment and this balance which might afford a vision of the type of society that this new government wants to develop for Canada.

Certainly in this budget there are some major oversights, including workers. There is nothing for older workers and nothing for improvement of the EI plan. No one is talking about the independent EI fund. There is nothing for the manufacturing industries, even though this is a known problem of adjustment to globalization. In my riding of Trois-Rivières, many workers are having a hard time, particularly in weakened sectors such as clothing. The same applies to bicycles, textiles and furniture. So we were expecting some remedial action so that we can cope with globalization.

Nor is there anything on industrial research. We all know how necessary research is for major economic development. So it is important to invest in industrial research and in research and development. Not to do so in this budget is to lack judgment and vision.

My colleague from Rivière-du-Nord talked earlier about the environment. The government told us it has a plan. We are still waiting to see what it looks like. In the short term, we seem to be giving up the struggle against greenhouse gas emissions. This is therefore problematic.

The Budget

During the last parliament, I had the pleasure of sitting on the committee dealing with the status of women. I am very disappointed that there is nothing in this connection. And yet we know that the status of women throughout Canada is appalling. Many groups have come to see us. They needed additional funds to fight against violence towards women.

No measure has been proposed respecting pay equity. This is an issue, however, that Quebec is dealing with. Once again, Quebec could serve as a model. It is too bad that there is not the political will to deal with things.

The francophone communities also have some demands. If we want to make sure that we really have strong francophone communities, additional funds are necessary. There is absolutely nothing in this budget to address this.

Among the great oversights of this budget, there is the average family. For this typical family, that is, two spouses, two children, a family income of \$65,000 or more, many dramatic events may arise. For example, for people living on a very tight budget, the rise in the cost of gas can be tragic.

• (1600)

In cases such as this, people in our ridings ask us what we are doing as members of Parliament to deal with this.

This budget does not give us any answer.

Let us talk about child care needs. A family with two children needs child care in order to carry on. Women are in the labour force because they have the right to be. Women who work make a significant economic contribution, but often they work because they have to.

Women need support measures in order to be able to enter the labour force. This government's lack of commitment is increasingly clear. The \$1,200 allowance is certainly not a child care measure. As my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord said, we will fight to recover the \$807 million that Quebec was deprived of when the child care agreement was terminated.

We truly value our child care, and we are determined to support families. It is important to us, and it should have been reflected in this budget.

It would seem that this average family I have described has been forgotten. When it is hit hard by a job loss, what support measures can it count on?

It was my pleasure, in the previous Parliament, to introduce a bill to improve the employment insurance plan by increasing the number of weeks and the amount provided as salary replacement.

Employment insurance has become a sort of lottery, open only to a few. It is not a privilege. Just as you insure your house against loss, you protect yourself in the event of difficulties. The family I have been giving as an example finds itself with only one salary and employment insurance benefits for fewer weeks with little replacement income. So this family finds itself in difficult straits and will end up in debt for many years.

Workers are therefore making legitimate demands, and people expected answers. It is a fact that \$48 billion has been taken from the employment insurance fund. This money belongs to workers, let us give it back to them. It is not charity. It should go back to the workers. They are entitled to it.

There has been talk of POWA, the program for older workers. In my riding there are massive layoffs in the manufacturing sector and there is no adjustment formula for workers 55 and over.

We know how difficult it is for someone with little formal education to upgrade. These people need initiatives as a bridge to pension benefits. An adjustment period is therefore necessary for these workers; we have been calling for it, and the government should seriously consider including something along those lines.

There will be a feasibility study, we are told. That is not enough, as far as we are concerned. The program used to exist. The money is there. It is just a matter of implementing the program.

The pilot project providing five additional weeks of benefits in regions where the unemployment rate is above 10% will end in June, and we are still waiting for it to be extended.

It is tragic for the families of workers affected by the spring gap, making it all the more important to successfully deal with these problems.

It is my responsibility as the intergovernmental affairs critic and I would like to address the numerous invasions resulting from this budget. The \$1,200 allowance definitely invades provincial jurisdictions. Since Quebec already has its own security regulator, that is no use to us. As for the Canadian agency for assessment and recognition of foreign credentials, these come under provincial jurisdiction. And the list goes on.

This is all very disappointing, especially from a government that had promised to respect provincial areas of jurisdiction. The public has to realize what kind of government we are dealing with. This is certainly a government which, like Ulysses, will want to fill our ears with wax so that we cannot hear the song of the sirens.

• (1605)

Such invasions are unacceptable, and we will continue relentlessly to demand full autonomy for Quebec and the transfer of the money we are owed, with no strings attached.

[*English*]

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member talk about a lot of things, a lot of people and a lot of groups that were forgotten. She talked about the older workers, EI people, Kyoto, the aboriginal people, children, the environment, status of women, the average family and all families being neglected in some fashion. It seems to me that there were so many groups that it is hard for me to understand why the member supports the budget.

I know there is one thing that people in Quebec really want in this budget, and perhaps they are getting a tidbit, but nothing has been spelled out. It is just empty promises to get support. I feel saddened about that.

The Budget

One issue she talked about was the increase in gas prices. I know my constituents are really cross about the high gas prices. We know before the election that the present Prime Minister said that if gas prices went over 85¢ he would take away the federal tax. He has not done that.

Does the member not think the Prime Minister should take that tax away when he promised he would?

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, naturally since I gave many examples, the member has many questions. For the Bloc Québécois, resolving the fiscal imbalance is what is important and is a key government promise. Since its inception, the Bloc Québécois has asked for the return of moneys held by the federal government and the exclusion of the federal government from Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

For many years, the Liberal Party, among others, has been infringing on provincial areas of jurisdiction. These intrusions have constantly undermined the place of the provinces in Canada. For the Bloc Québécois, the government's statement that it wishes to avoid intruding on provincial jurisdictions and to solve the issue of fiscal imbalance is a breath of fresh air and is convincing enough to give it the benefit of the doubt.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both the member and the Bloc member who spoke immediately previous to her commented on EI. However I think there was some misunderstanding with regard to the facts related to the EI fund. EI had a \$48 billion surplus and the member implied that somehow we did not know where that money went.

The fact is that the EI fund used to operate on a deficit basis. It was a separate fund and therefore was not included in the financial performance of a government in a fiscal period. Accordingly, the Auditor General required that the employment insurance plan be run through the consolidated revenue fund which would be a determinant in terms of the deficit or surplus for a year.

The statutory instruments that guide this require that about two years' worth of EI benefit levels remain in the fund so there should be a surplus of some \$12 billion to \$15 billion a year. There are provisions also in that statutory instrument for the reduction of any additional surplus which is dealt with annually, either in terms of premium reductions, new programs or increased benefits. It is pretty clear how it works.

The principal concern of the member who just spoke was with regard to who was eligible for benefits. The plan actually is run in accordance with guidelines that are produced. There are different levels for a first time collector versus those who are recurring collectors. There is a provision, depending on the region people are in and the unemployment rate as to how many hours are required. The only reason that some people do not receive benefits is simply because they do not have enough hours.

How many hours does the member believe someone needs to work in order to collect EI benefits? What is the answer?

• (1610)

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, my comments are being somewhat misconstrued. When we say that \$48 billion was taken out of the EI fund, that means that indeed this money was allocated to the consolidated surplus and to paying down the debt. That is why we are calling for an independent fund, to keep this money in the hands of workers.

If \$10 billion is needed in reserve to maintain the integrity of the fund, then a \$38 billion surplus still remains. That is how this should be settled.

My colleague addressed another aspect of this issue and that is the employment insurance benefits that workers receive. Hon. members know that the rules have changed over the years. The percentages of benefits and the number of weeks they are paid have continued to decrease, with the intention of giving less to workers. Therein lies the problem. It is the employers and workers who contribute to employment insurance. The government contributes nothing. The fact remains that when workers fall on hard times they cannot even count on a good income replacement. That is what we find unfair.

For this reason, when we talk about improving the employment insurance scheme, it is a matter of increasing the benefits workers receive and the number of eligible weeks. The debate is about how to ensure fairness and a decent income for people who truly need it.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

I am pleased to stand today on behalf of the people in my riding of Durham and speak to budget 2006. It is a focused budget that will deliver benefits to the families, students and seniors in Durham.

Those in my riding know their tax dollars will be used in a more transparent, accountable and disciplined way; used to make our families stronger, our streets safer and our businesses grow. The budget will provide more than twice as much in tax relief as in new spending. It delivers on our five priorities while paying down \$3 billion of our national debt.

Durham is a fast growing community, building on a long tradition of farming and industry. It is a community that is welcoming more and more new families each week. During my last weekend visit to the riding, I attended two openings of two new housing projects.

The young families that will move into those new homes this year will see the benefit of the 1% decrease in the GST, not only on the cost of that house but on the many other purchases they must make as they settle in. Their children will take active part in the many organized activities Durham has to offer. The sports fitness tax credit will help these families as their children participate on soccer, hockey and baseball teams throughout the riding.

The Budget

I have spoken many times in the House about the unique child care needs of families in the small towns and hamlets and in Durham. Their day care needs would not be met by a nine to five institutional approach because they are commuters not able to meet nine to five limitations. Many are shift workers and many choose to rely on family members or neighbours for day care.

Our day care program respects their needs and leaves the choice in the hands of parents and the family. It allows our smaller communities to work together with businesses and community organizations to create new day care spaces where they are needed.

The budget will not only help Durham families but the many small businesses in the region by increasing the amount of the small business income eligible for the 12% tax rate to \$400,000, while decreasing the 12% tax rate to 11.5% in 2008 and 11% in 2009.

The government also heard the voices of the agricultural community in Durham. I know that for generations the farmers in Durham have been feeding their families, the community, cities and Canada. The government is standing up for farmers by providing an additional \$2 billion for agriculture as it works on longer term solutions for the farmers in Canada. In fact, I would like to read a quote from a letter to the editor by a local farmer. He says:

To be reasonable and fair the government has reacted timely and responsibly considering the length of time that these individuals have been a government.

The announcement in yesterday's budget provides an opportunity to survive a little longer and the opportunity to work towards a better tomorrow both for the primary producers and you the ultimate consumer.

Budget 2006 is about our future. It reduces taxes and it benefits families, students and businesses. It supports our seniors who have worked hard and deserve to enjoy their retirement. It will enable the municipalities of Uxbridge, Skugog and Clarington to address their infrastructure needs with the continuation of the gas tax transfer. This is a budget that works for Durham.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage, I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes the importance of the arts community to Canadian society and to our quality of life. The increase of \$50 million to the Canada Council was welcomed by the arts communities across the country.

In addition to the extra funding for the Canada Council, the budget proposes a significant new tax measure. Donations of publicly traded securities to public charities will no longer be subject to the capital gains tax. This could inject up to approximately \$300 million annually into the non-profit sector. This measure will have an important positive impact on the arts sector and will stimulate private participation in the arts and cultural communities.

●(1615)

This measure will have an important positive impact on the arts sector. This will stimulate private participation in the arts and cultural communities.

As stewards of Canadians' hard-earned tax dollars, our government believes that public spending on arts and culture must be focused and generate clear results. I will be working hard, along with my colleagues, to deliver on our promises to ensure true benefits for all Canadians, not only in the arts but in all aspects of Canadian life.

I want to conclude by pointing out once again that this government is focused. This government does not make outrageous promises. This government was determined to tell Canadians what it would deliver on when it became government, to limit that to what it would be focused on and to identify clear priorities.

I want to thank the people in Durham for their confidence in me and this government. As Joe Hickson and the farmers pointed out, for the short period of time we have been in government, we are delivering. They are seeing results.

As we go forward as the Government of Canada, we will continue to demonstrate good projects, good benefits and real results.

Most importantly, we have satisfied and will continue to satisfy the public's concern about responsible use of their money. I know the taxpayers in my riding of Durham. They are willing to pay taxes as long as the money is being used in the responsible way they believe government should use it. They want to see those dollars benefiting Canadians. They want to see those dollars going to the people they were intended to help.

The people of Durham sent me here to work on their behalf. Their support has given me the opportunity and the responsibility to work on their behalf to deliver a responsible tax system, a focused government and a responsible cabinet, to ensure that there is beneficial spending and, consequently, a better life for all Canadians and a better Canada for all.

●(1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

She says that Canadians are ready to pay taxes, but that they want good services. Why did the government cut the GST by 1% in its budget? We know that this will cut every riding's budget, including my own, by \$13 million. This money could be invested in cultural activities, in heritage, in things that are really important. We get \$13 million less for a tax cut that means more to people who buy expensive things than to those who have lower incomes and have to buy diapers and books for their children.

That is not what is important. I would have supported cutting income taxes, but the 1% tax cut takes money out of community coffers, which make it hard for them to support heritage.

I would like the minister to tell the House just how prepared people are to pay taxes. Why the 1% tax cut?

The Budget

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, a responsible government recognizes that it has responsibilities right across this country. We believe and we know that the 1% decrease in the GST is for all Canadians, including those in Quebec. This 1% decrease in the GST, and then the subsequent 1% decrease, will help all families. It is direct tax relief. It will stimulate the economy. We know that the rising prices of things like electricity, hydro and gas will be affected by this 1% decrease in the GST.

Consequently, in order to be responsible, we have to give relief, but we have to make sure that at the same time the spending we provide is going to good projects that benefit the people of Canada. We cannot just keep spending and spending. We have to also make sure for the long term future of Canada that we stimulate the economy, that we stimulate a growth in business and in the industries.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on becoming minister. I served with her on the heritage committee. It was a great time and we did some good work.

That being said, the current chair of the heritage committee brought up a point in committee just the other day when he talked about museums, smaller museums, especially those in rural communities. I have quite a few museums in my riding, and the financing and operational costs have become a bigger issue.

I was wondering if the minister could comment on the heritage department's role in these smaller museums and whether or not it will be there for them with the funding they need. I know that the minister talks about stimulating growth and everything else, but the problem is that I do not have all these bigger companies in my own riding, it being as rural as it is, so I was wondering if she could talk about some money and obviously some good support for many of these smaller cultural institutions around the province.

Perhaps I am being a bit of a braggart in a way, but I come from a province that I consider to be brimming over with culture. I was wondering if she would comment on that issue.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his acknowledgement of how we worked together in the committee in the last session and for his question.

As he knows, our party and this government will continue in the tradition of working in a positive way in trying to move things forward, as we have before, for the betterment of the creators and the performers in the cultural industries across Canada.

He brings up an interesting question. As he knows, we are at present undertaking a review of the museums policy for the government. We acknowledge that we have responsibilities, and not only for the national museums that are located here. We try to exchange and make sure that those artifacts we have are going to be available and accessible to all Canadians.

I have been a great admirer of the amount of talent and culture that your province of Newfoundland and Labrador has generated as part of this country. I know that your heritage is important, as it is in every small community and every province across the regions and territories in this country.

Every community wants to value its heritage and its history. This is why we have an abundance of smaller museums in every community. We know there are challenges facing these small community museums. As I said, we are reviewing our programs. We are looking at not only our large national museums; we are looking at our historic participation in working with the provinces and municipalities. I am confident that when we come forward the committee will be looking at the new museum policy. We will continue to work together as good members in support of the museums and the culture of Canada.

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, let me note that I hesitated to interrupt the minister, but there were a couple of occasions on which she talked to the hon. member straight across the floor, referring to him in the second person. We try not to do that. The rules are that we refer to each other in the third person and address our remarks through the Chair.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way they address each other is a result of the collegiality they enjoyed on the committee they served on together, although I know we are supposed to address each other through the Chair.

I am very pleased to stand today in the House and speak to budget 2006. In the almost 10 years I have been here, I have spoken to just about every budget as it came along. On the opposition side, of course, a lot of comments are made that point to the holes, or at the missing bells and whistles, or to the different way things are being done.

I was a part of that too, but in all fairness, I think this budget has struck a chord with Canadians from coast to coast to coast. My colleagues and I have received letters and e-mails from every aspect of the Canadian public, from ethnic groups, cultural groups, business groups, farmers and ranchers. In general, everybody is saying that this is a fantastic budget.

Canadians are finally seeing a paradigm shift. Spending is finally going to be under control. We are at less than half of what it was creeping up to last year, and the tax cuts have doubled. More Canadians are going to be able to keep their hard-earned cash. They are going to be able to make the decisions that benefit them and their businesses rather than flushing their money to Ottawa, then saying they are not getting this and not getting that and asking, "Where did the money go?"

A lack of accountability permeated the old Liberal government that had been in power a couple of years too long. Those Liberal members are going to spend a little time in the penalty box. I think even those members recognize that there was a major problem at the end of their tenure—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gerry Ritz: We are going to shift things a little bit more to the accountability side. I know those members over there are going to hoot and holler about that, but that is where we have to go. We have to be far more responsible with taxpayers' money. I think this budget does that.

The Budget

As I went around my riding after the election, when the great folks of Battlefords—Lloydminster saw fit to send me back here again and continue the work of the last 10 years, I was asked one question repeatedly: “What is it like to be on the government side?” I could not really answer that.

It was not until we were here in the House and starting to work on the projects we have had in our hip pockets, projects that we came here for years ago, starting to see some of those projects come to fruition and starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel, that I could answer that question. We are starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel on a lot of the different issues that drove us into this House of Commons to take part in debates like these.

I did not really get a sense of the huge undertaking that we are taking on as a government, but I started to see consistency between what the Prime Minister campaigned on, what the throne speech outlined, and now the budget. I am seeing that consistency permeating all of this and Canadians are really thrilled with that. We have cut the flowery language and the jargon, the language that always went along with the thrust and drive of political debate here in the House.

This budget document is focused, it is highlighted and it is detailed. It is a fantastic document. It is not a big document, but there is a lot of information in its few pages. Canadians took it upon themselves to have a look at it either in print or on the website and their comments were unbelievable.

When I did my press release at home about the budget, there was a young newspaper reporter who has been hit or miss with support. That is fine. He is fair. He told me it took him an extra half a day to follow up on my press release because he wanted to do a really good balanced report. In order to do his report, he talked to about 50 or 60 people on the street in the largest community in my riding. He found as broad a spectrum of individuals as possible. He talked to everybody who would answer him. He said that not one person had a bad thing to say about the budget. They saw the news releases and they said things like: “this is great for me” or “this will work great for my aunt” or “this will be great for my mom and dad in the seniors' complex”.

He had not looked in depth at the budget himself at that time, so he went home and pencilled it out. He found that for him, his wife and his two young children, this budget will save his household \$2,100. That is what he explained to me. With the education his wife is undertaking and with other things, he is going to save \$2,100. He was ecstatic. He said he had never seen that before.

This young man is also in the military reserves and he loves the direction we are taking by putting some power back into our military and giving them the respect they need and have always deserved. He is happy that we are giving them the equipment they need to do the job they are so proud of doing around the world and here at home.

There has been a lot of discussion about our child care plan. Of course we campaigned on that and Canadians saw fit to send us back here to implement our child care plan and do away with the Liberal one.

There was a problem with that Liberal plan, and the Liberals seem to forget this in a bit of revisionist history. They forget that they only

had a one year agreement, an agreement with 10 provinces in principle, but only three had ever bought in. Yet they were planning on moving along with it. Their program addressed 7% of the need. There was no plan to create child care spaces like they rant and rave about, but our plan does create them.

● (1630)

There is funding in the budget so that businesses, community groups and so on can start to develop 125,000 child care spaces. That is fantastic news.

In the rural areas that I represent the \$1,200 a year creates a cash flow situation. The local parents can use the institutionalized child care if they so desire, or stay home and look after their kids, or grandma, grandpa or someone else can do it. However they decide to do it, it is their choice and the cash flow is theirs. It is taxed back at the rate of the lowest income earner.

The NDP members have gone from saying families are only going to net \$190 to \$800 or \$900. At the end of the discussion they finally got their calculators to work right. There are instances in many lower income homes where the amount will not be taxed at all. That is a wonderful thing. Some 650,000 people will be coming off the low end of the tax rolls with our tax proposals.

There has been a lot of discussion about the 1% reduction in the GST and a lot of screaming and howling from the party that was never going to implement it. Now we are taking it backwards and ratcheting it down, as we should do and can do, and they are screaming no, we have to keep it. What hypocrisy.

The great thing about the GST cut is it affects everyone. I do not care if one is a senior on a fixed income or a guy earning \$100,000 and his wife earns another \$100,000. It does not matter. It is going to affect everyone in the same way. Whether we rent or own our home, whether we lease or own our car, or whether we do not have a car at all and we ride the bus, there is GST on everything we eat, see and do. That tax is hidden in everything, the telephone bill, power bill, heating bill and tax notice. It does not matter what it is, there is that little gouge and screw tax on the end of it.

Taking one point off the GST is going to make a huge difference to everyone. As I said, whether one is on a fixed income or one is a huge megabuck earner, everyone is going to benefit from it. That is great. That will inject cash back into the economy which we have not seen for quite a while. We know this is so good that we are going to do it again. We are going to lower the GST by another point just as soon as we can make it financially doable.

Get used to good things from this government. Being a minority government our days might be numbered, but they are going to be good days. When people ask me what it is like to be in government, I can say that it is thrilling because we can finally deliver back to people the tax cuts and programs that people want to actually to make use of.

The Budget

There is a lot of hue and cry from the NDP members. They cannot support this budget because there are tax cuts for big corporations. Of course there are and there have to be. Who do they suppose creates the union jobs and the bulk of the jobs in this country? It is business. They cut off their nose to spite their face when they say they are not going to support a budget because there are tax cuts in it. That is ridiculous. It creates a little thing called profit which lets business hire more people, or rehire them in the case of the softwood lumber industry.

This budget is a breath of fresh air. This is an economic stimulation for the country.

There is great news in the budget for agriculture. We saw a lot of things going sideways. There is \$2 billion over the next two years which will go directly into agriculture. That does not rule out ad hoc payments if we have another crash and burn, but it certainly gives stability to the industry. It gets the financial sector looking more positively again at agriculture. Lines of credits are a tough thing to come by in my area of the country. We have been hard hit, but with a \$2 billion injection, already the bankers are phoning me saying, "This is great. We can see when this comes in it will make a positive impact".

We are forced to do it through the CAIS program because the provinces are not ready to let that go yet. We are buying into that warts and all, but the \$2 billion will let us go back in there and cut off some of those warts. We can go back in and adjust reference margins and little things where they were jerking around the inventory values, things that will actually trigger money back out to farmers who were hard hit. We can go back retroactively to 2003 which stimulates the 2004-05 payments. Farmers are ecstatic about this. They love it and all the other little things that go along with it.

Ten minutes is just not enough time to talk about all the great things in the budget. There are super components in it for post-secondary education for young people who want to go on to university. There are tax incentives on books. We have \$1 billion for infrastructure for universities because we know the kind of shape they are in after years of neglect.

We are carrying on with the infrastructure program so that our highways can be rebuilt. We have to wear seat belts in Saskatchewan just to keep us in our seats because the roads are so rough. We are going to go in and fix these things.

The Liberal government talked about it for 13 years. We have been here for four months and we are getting the job done.

• (1635)

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my friend across the way. My suggestion would be that 10 minutes may be more than enough to deal with the good things in this budget, but we would need a lot more than 10 minutes to deal with the bad things in this budget.

I am not sure if he does his own income taxes, but a lot of people go to H&R Block and other organizations to have their taxes done. With great respect to the family that he referred to that claimed it was going to get a \$2,100 tax break with this Conservative budget, I find that hard to believe.

Is he actually aware that a tax credit is really not in our pockets what it is says it is on a piece of paper? For example, with a \$500 tax credit for sports programs, take about 15.5% of that, and we would get \$78 or \$80, something like that.

I am wondering if the member is aware that the dollars in the budget that the treasurer talked about, or I should say the finance minister, but I guess at one time he was a treasurer in Ontario, and not that good at it, actually, not that I recall, but those were the Mike Harris government days in Ontario. This budget is very much like if somebody promised to hit me on the head with a 2x4 and kept his promise, I do not think I would be very happy. I am just wondering if my friend across the way is aware that a tax credit is really not worth what it says it is? It is actually worth about 15% of the amount, or 15.5% because there is a tax increase in this budget.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite had his elbows up last night in the hockey game we had and he still has them up. The unfortunate part is we won and they lost. It was a great evening. We had a great time out there.

I think he must have taken a real bump on the head with his helmet off at one point, because the bottom line here is this gentleman is telling me that under our tax programs and our working of the budgets and so on, his household is going to be much better off than it had been under the Liberals for the last 13 years.

The Liberals can talk about all the wonderful things and the deathbed conversions that they had on the way to the election campaign, but their promises were never implemented. They said they were going to lower the rate to 15% and they even had Revenue Canada print up the forms, but it never passed. It is one thing to talk about lowering the rate and it is another thing to actually do it, and we did it.

Also tied in with whether their rate is bigger than ours or whatever, we could go on with that forever. We have a basic personal exemption increase. We have a myriad of things in the budget that everybody is better off with.

I would take our policy across the country any time. The member should look at the polling numbers out there and there is acceptance by Canadians on the whole. If he wants to take this to the electorate tomorrow, I would be happy to do that.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I can only react to what I have heard. I have the feeling that the hon. member is trying to impress someone. I would ask him to be a bit more modest about the budget. It is not a cure-all. One swallow does not make a summer. This budget contains some good measures, particularly with regard to the fiscal imbalance, and I will vote for it.

I could talk in particular about microbreweries. The budget will affect a microbrewery in my riding, on the Magdalen Islands. The company will save or recoup about \$30,000, which is significant.

The Budget

But there are also many things missing from the budget. Just because the Conservatives have had a minority government for a few weeks, that does not mean that they can fix everything in one shot and that all is well. The Conservative Party will have to go back to the drawing board on the Kyoto protocol. The same is true of employment insurance.

I would ask the hon. member to curb his enthusiasm and settle down. He is giving the impression that the situation is rosy and everything is fine, when that is not true. We should stop thinking that way. I would ask the member to take a long-term view and admit that this budget does not solve every problem.

[English]

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, the one thing the member opposite seems to forget is there is a budget every year. We will get to do this again next year. Then we will get to do it again the year after that and the year after that. This is a start. This is a huge paradigm shift. There is no political panacea. There never is. Any of those groups that say, "The government should do more" and "The government will" and "The government has to" do not realize that the government does not have 5¢. The government manages the taxpayers' money.

The member talked about a microbrewery in his own riding that has ascertained from this that it is going to save \$30,000. I would say that is 30,000% higher than it had the week before or the year before under the Liberal government. That is good news. Of course one wants to get up and be a cheerleader for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, National Defence.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to address the budget today. It is also a pleasure to share my time with the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, which is a very large riding with a very long name.

I would like to begin, lest we forget, by recalling that when the Liberal government came to power in 1993, we faced a tremendous task, thanks to nine years of Conservative fiscal mismanagement. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you would agree with me, but I am sure that the NDP would never have left the country in the shape that the Conservative government did in 1993.

We inherited a \$43 billion annual deficit. Our national debt equalled 70% of our gross domestic product. Deficit financing had become a budgetary mainstay. Interest rates were skyrocketing, job creation was negative and unemployment reached double digits. However, a change was wrought under the Liberal regime over the last 13 years and that is the reason the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster could make the speech that he just did.

We were left with the daunting task of setting Canada's financial books straight, and we did just that. We did what the Conservatives could not or would not do. We took on the required difficult task. It was painful, but the Canadian people stuck with us in our decision making and it amounted to short term pain for long term gain. In just four short years the finances of this country began to turn around. We brought the government out of the red and restored our fiscal sovereignty.

Over the next eight years we brought down eight consecutive surpluses and projected at least five more. We reduced the national debt by more than \$63 billion, thereby saving \$3 billion in interest rates. We brought the unemployment rate to a 32 year low. Inflation was lowered and interest rates were at the lowest for decades. We renewed the federal government's capacity to increase the standard of living of every Canadian. We did this through investing in social programs, through economic development programs, skills training and job creation, low interest rates, regional development programs, new municipal infrastructure programs and tax reduction. To be succinct, we successfully orchestrated the maple leaf miracle, the envy of every G-7 country.

When the present government came to power with just 36% of popular support across Canada, to use a baseball analogy, we were sitting on third base financially with nobody out and the Conservatives scratched at one single and, coming out of the bushes after 13 years, they came in with a very, very disappointing budget.

Never in the history of Canada has an incoming government inherited such a tremendous record of surpluses. Certainly, in the history of Canada, no outgoing Conservative government has ever left such a tremendous record.

We worked to ensure that all Canadians held on to their hard-earned money. We lowered the income tax rate. We reduced more than \$100 billion in federal taxes since 2000. Just last year we initiated a six year tax cut that would have seen savings of over \$50 billion to Canadian taxpayers.

We lowered the employment insurance rates for the 11th consecutive year to half of what they were in 1993. In 1993 the EI rate was \$3.07 per \$100. It was going up to \$3.30 per \$100. Today it is \$1.87 per \$100. In this budget it was never mentioned. An EI rate reduction was not mentioned for employers and employees. We were being accused of accumulating huge surpluses. Apparently these huge surpluses are now welcomed by the present government.

We worked with the provinces and territories to establish a \$5 billion deal that would ensure that every Canadian from coast to coast regardless of age, income, gender or race could access quality public child care.

We concluded a \$41 billion agreement on health care.

We worked to build a consensus around a new equalization agreement, a \$33 billion 10 year agreement which implemented a constitutional commitment to the equality of Canadians across the country regardless of region.

The Budget

•(1645)

We developed an unprecedented agreement with first nations across Canada, through the Kelowna accord, which heralded a new era of cooperation and commitment to increasing the quality of life of aboriginal peoples. Alas, I do not believe that agreement is any longer in effect.

These are just a few of the previous Liberal government's successes.

In my time remaining, I want to discuss two issues of particular importance.

First, I want to point the lack of vision for Atlantic Canada, particularly there was no mention of an immigration policy for our region. The demographics for Atlantic Canada are very disturbing. With our out-migration, our aging population and low birth rates, Atlantic Canada will not have the number of people required to not only grow the economy in the future but to fill the jobs that are there now. Yet each province in Atlantic Canada knows these numbers. They know that an immigration policy has to be put in place in cooperation with the immigration department of the federal government.

Under the ACOA program we made some initial starts on that, working with the provinces to create a fund. We are not used to going out looking for immigrants. Immigrants, who come into our country, go to Toronto, Calgary and the large cities. Many of the immigrants who do come to Atlantic Canada only stay for a short time and they migrate to places of better opportunity. We no longer have the ability to look at this in a lax way. We must address it because the future of Atlantic Canada is in the balance if we do not get serious about an immigration policy that will not only attract immigrants to the region but to retain them for the future economic development of our region.

I do not have to tell anyone here of the importance of the economic development of the outlying regions of our country. Each region as a part contributes to the success of Canada as a whole.

Although it was not mentioned once in the budget, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency is critical to the development of the Atlantic region. Its programs fund small and medium sized business by providing repayable loans and providing risk capital. It also encourages job creation through enterprise development and it promotes community development. It has a proven track record of success in lowering unemployment, creating jobs and generating value for money outcomes. In the first decade, since its creation, each ACOA dollar invested created \$5 in the GDP of Atlantic Canada.

As well, over the past decade, the Atlantic Canada Liberal caucus has been very active in developing a plan that has focused on strategic investments that make good business sense and help the region. These politicians know that proper economic development planning takes time and requires sustained commitment. They cannot simply follow the short term time span offered in the calendar year.

That is why the Liberal government five years ago responded with a \$700 million Atlantic investment partnership and a renewed

investment of \$708 million in 2005. Although still being implemented, these strategic investments have already begun to yield positive results with the Atlantic economy. Funding to support research and development has attracted over \$800 million worth of investment in the region. Investments in community economic development boast a leveraging percentage of over 100% or more. More than \$36 million in sales have been directly attributed to trade missions funded through this initiative.

Strengthening economic and community development is key to reversing current trends of underdevelopment and out-migration. However, keeping in mind Prime Minister Harper's comments damning regional—

•(1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows better than to refer to the Prime Minister by his name.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's comments damning regional economic programs as nothing more than ineffective corporate welfare and his current preoccupation with satisfying other regions of Canada, I am concerned that he was conveniently ignoring economic development in the Atlantic region.

Without sufficient investments in this area, the region will never again achieve the economic success it enjoyed when it joined Confederation. This does not seem to bother the Prime Minister. A true commitment to regional development of Canada would have been demonstrated by some mention of it in the budget. Obviously Atlantic Canada is not a priority of the new government.

To conclude, the Conservative Party came to the plate in 2006 and it cannot seem to get the ball out of the infield. It is positioned with a world-leading economy, the best fiscal record in Canadian history. Despite the boons blessed upon it, left by the previous Liberal government, we discover the Conservatives cannot make it to home plate. Nowhere do we see the commitment to a national vision articulated and implemented by the previous Liberal government and nowhere do we see the fiscal commitment continuing the prosperity trend established by the previous Liberal government.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way started his speech by talking about 1993, so I would like to do the same for a moment.

When the Liberal government came to power in 1993, it announced that one million children were living in poverty and that its budgets would take care of the problem. In 2005 1.5 million children were living in those conditions.

When the Liberal government came to power in 1993, it talked about scrapping the GST. Sheila Copps resigned because it did not keep its promise. John Nunziata voted against the budget and was sent across the way because it did not keep its promise. In 2005 it was the Liberal GST policy.

In 1995 the gun registry was created for \$2 million, which would take care of the weapons problem. Nearly \$2 billion has been spent.

The Budget

During the 1990s, \$1 billion was lost in HRDC somewhere. It was an absolute boondoggle. Where did the money go? No one knows.

In the 1990s there was poverty on the reserves. There were third world conditions. All the budgets promised to take care of that. In 2005 the conditions were the same or worse. In fact, bad water has increased to a great degree.

The Kyoto agreement was established in the 1990s and the government spent billions of dollars. In 2005 emissions were up 36%.

There was the culture of entitlement. Mr. Dingwall made off with a big haul. There are \$1.7 million for which Mr. Ouellet does not have to account. There are no receipts for expenses.

All of this was on the Liberal record. Well done, Liberal guys, because in 2006 Canadians voted and said they wanted change. I do not blame them. I certainly want change.

Today Canadians are cheering our budget and our policies. I am afraid the member is completely out of whack when he talks about the great job the Liberals have done.

• (1655)

Hon. Joe McGuire: Mr. Speaker, if he wants to go back to 1993, I would like to remind the member that the Canadian people returned two Progressive Conservative members to the House. That was the judgment of the Canadian people in 1993. That was the judgment of nine years of Conservative government. The Conservatives came back with two MPs. One is now the Liberal Premier of Quebec.

At the same time, the Conservatives created the party that was represented by the member who just spoke, the Bloc Québécois. That is what they did to our country in their nine years of mismanagement of our economy and country.

The Liberals may have lost a minority government after 13 years. We cannot stay in government forever. However, we came back with 104 seats, not 2 seats. We came back within striking distance of a minority government ourselves.

He talked about the \$1 billion boondoggle. It turned out, after all the accountants went through it and after spending millions of dollars to get to the bottom of the so-called boondoggle, that \$70,000 were unaccounted for. The Conservatives created the situation where Canadian taxpayers spent millions of dollars trying to find out what was there when there was nothing there at all. For any financial institution in Canada, that would have been a banner year for handling any kind of money.

The member, who came in here as a Reform Party member, has no legs to stand on right now.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about \$42 billion in deficit in 1992. The reality was \$38 billion of that belonged to the previous Liberal government. In 1993 the government was elected on two things: getting rid of free trade and abolishing the GST. Those were the two promises to Canadians. The government kept neither one.

As far as paying down the deficit, the Liberal government plundered the civil service pension plan for \$32 billion. It never put a penny back and did not ask for it. There was no vote on it. It did it

behind the scenes. It took the money from the pockets of superannuates, ex-Mounties, ex-service people and ex-civil servants.

First, I would like a reply on what you did with the money and second, how you ever intended to put it back, because you never intended to put it back.

The Deputy Speaker: I will give the hon. member for Egmont just a brief opportunity, but again, I say to the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's, we refer to each other here in the third person. Remarks should come through the Chair, even when you are wound up.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is getting confused between deficits and debts. The deficit was \$43 billion annually. The debt they ran up was close to \$400 billion. That was in addition to what was already there. It doubly accumulated.

In our last tenure we reduced that debt by \$63 billion and we saved \$3 billion annually on debt payments. That is the difference between what they did and what we did.

• (1700)

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I start my remarks, I would like to follow up. The debt grew quite large under the administration of the Conservative government of Mr. Mulroney. Under our administration, the debt as a percentage of GDP dropped from 68% to 38%. That is a substantial accomplishment. We started out, as my hon. colleague from Egmont said, with a \$40 billion plus annual deficit. In fact, this is a great segue for my own remarks.

My own very large and beautiful riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking in northern Ontario, some 110,000 square kilometres, is an area filled with creative people, about two dozen first nations communities and Métis people. We have tourism, forestry, mining and a potential for the future, which is fabulous. However, the budget, introduced for the first time by the government a few days ago, is one without any vision. In fact, when I was contemplating whether it was a vision that was a bad vision for the future or whether there was any vision at all, I really was not certain.

Let me just build a bit on some of my colleague's remarks. We should consider what our administration did over the last 12 years with the national unemployment rate. In 1993 it was at 11.5%. Now it hovers in at just over 6%. I mentioned the huge drop in the debt burden of the country. Employment insurance premiums dropped from over \$3 per \$100 of earnings back in 1993 to now under \$2 per \$100 of earnings. It is a fabulous boost for small business and workers across the country.

The Budget

I could go on and on. In fact, a very important statistic is that Canada's foreign debt as a percentage of GDP dropped from 45% in 1993 to only 17%. We were able to put the books of the country in shape for the first time in a long time, I think eight successive surpluses. Thankfully, the Conservatives now are the beneficiary of a great set of books. We encourage them to use those funds wisely. Do not bring us back into deficit. That would be the worst thing for the future of the country, and I worry about that. Conservative governments in the past have proven to be fiscally incompetent.

For example, Conservative governments in the U.S. have proven themselves to be fiscally incompetent. The competence that the Liberals brought to the financial affairs of the country is a model for the world. Ask our G-7 and/or OECD colleagues about that. That is not even to mention inflation.

Over the time that we were in office, inflation was brought under control. This was not done just by the government itself. Nor can the new government take all the credit for what it does, bad or good. It does involve a lot of other people. Canadians worked hard, along with us over the last 12 years, to accomplish what was accomplished.

I would like to go back to the division thing. What really concerns me is that the budget is much more about short term expediencies, what will happen in the months ahead. I am, as are my colleagues, more than ready to face the electorate at the appropriate time.

I mentioned that I had roughly 24 first nations in my riding. We had the Kelowna accord, an accord that was signed, sealed and delivered by the premiers of the provinces and territories, by the aboriginal, Métis and Inuit leadership and by the prime minister of the day. To see that accord tossed out the window is a damaging for the relationship between Canada and its aboriginal peoples.

• (1705)

Our aboriginal people deserve respect. They deserve to be at the table. It was a historic meeting in Kelowna where provincial, territorial, national and aboriginal leaders were together for the first time. They made breakthroughs that were historic. I really hope that the very small down payment that the government made in its budget is followed up with further action and a commitment to follow through on the over \$5 billion that was committed to in Kelowna. We are really counting on that. We will give the government the benefit of a little more time, but it is barely 20% there on that commitment.

I am worried about our regions. There was no mention that I recall about regional economic development. In northern Ontario—

Hon. Joe McGuire: Or anywhere else.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: For that matter, anywhere else, but in northern Ontario, FedNor does a lot to assist our communities with improvements and its ability to attract new people, tourists and industry.

We have had no negative words so far, but I hope the absence of encouragement is not a bad thing. I really hope that we will see more encouragement from the government in future budgets, should we get there, and in other future announcements. We hope to see more encouragement that FedNor and programs like it in the Atlantic provinces and the west will be there to support our communities and

to promote small, medium and large businesses right across this country, especially in our rural regions.

In forestry, there has been a recent agreement, not a good agreement but an agreement made to put aside the softwood lumber discord with the U.S. Sadly, \$1 billion is going to be kept by the U.S., half of which will be paid out to the softwood lumber industry in the U.S. to be used to compete and fight with our own industry here in Canada. It is a deal that is regrettable, but in stepping back and looking at it, given the fact that the U.S. administration has treated previous administrations no better than it has treated this administration, it was about all we could actually expect.

I had hoped that in the budget there would have been more support for the forestry sector in terms of diversification, co-generation and R and D, the kinds of things that are needed to ensure that the moneys their American competitors are keeping can be compensated for here in support of our own industry.

When it comes to health and the agreement made by our previous administration with the provinces, which made major commitments of billions of dollars to help the provinces and territories with health care, all this government has done is really parrot what we had done previously. There is no new money in this budget for health care, particularly for waiting times.

It is very important that we back up what we say with actual resources. The provinces and territories are basically on their own now when it comes to waiting times. We had made a \$42 billion commitment over 10 years to health care. My colleague can nod his head and tell me if I am right or wrong, but I think it was \$42 billion over 10 years, a fantastic investment. Clearly, this government was satisfied with what we did because it did not add a nickel more to that undertaking.

Let me talk a little about the importance of productivity in this country. The basis of our productivity is in education, R and D, and investment in bringing to commercialization some of the great ideas that come from our enterprising entrepreneurs and scientists in this country.

There was a modest investment made for textbooks. I think it is about \$78 a year for textbooks for students. Every little bit will help, but compared to the billions that we had committed for R and D to continue our race to become the world's leader when it comes to brain power and raising the standard of living not only for ourselves but the rest of the world, I am afraid the government has sidelined us on that effort.

Hopefully, if it gets another budget under its belt, the government will address this major failing which is in the area of education and development of our brain power, including bringing into the fold the aboriginal youth who are so important to the future of this wonderful nation.

The Budget

On tax cuts, let us compare the efforts we made over the years with tax cuts of \$160 billion targeted to the low and middle income Canadians. With this GST cut, people who are rich are going to get a bigger GST savings than those who are poor. If I could afford to buy a \$100,000 boat, I would save a lot of GST. Unfortunately, I cannot afford that, but some people can and they will save a lot of money.

• (1710)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have listened to the members opposite in this debate and they frequently go back to 1993. It is unfortunate that part of their memory does not really include the big picture in 1993.

Among the other things that the previous Liberal government inherited in 1993 was a free trade agreement, the GST, and a budget laid out by the previous government that directed the future. It was also in 1993, when we were near the end of perhaps the worst recession the world had seen since the 1930s. The Liberals happened to inherit a changing economy and a changing world. Employment was going up in all the free world. It was not a great deal of what the Liberals did; it is what happened in the rest of the world.

The member opposite talks about what the Liberals would have done and what that party was going to do. He comes from a riding that is fairly broad, as he says, and well laid out across a great part of our country. It is an important part of our country. The Liberals were prepared to put \$5 billion into child care spaces. Would the member opposite tell us how many child care spaces were to be created in his riding?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Mr. Speaker, first of all, going back to 1993, with the exception of a few people, most people believe in protectionist free trade. Sadly, with the softwood lumber agreement, if he wants to call it that or a cave in, there is no free trade in softwood lumber. I believe in free trade; I also believe in fair trade. I believe in trade where both sides treat each other with respect and equality, and that we obey the laws that we have both signed on to.

The member refers to a changing economic or financial paradigm around 1993. I do not recall that things changed overnight. Conditions did not go from bad to good overnight. Presumably, the economy is good now. There were bad times. Presumably, the government, with the cooperation of Canadians, put in place the right policies which allowed for the sails of the country's ship to be filled and for this country to sail forward very quickly.

However, when it comes to child care, I am surprised by the number of people who have written to me in my riding complaining about this government's absolute rejection of any notion that a public—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry, but I must give time to other members who wish to ask a question. The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question. Perhaps we will get some more questions. The member talked about the Kelowna accord. The member never talked about the fact that during the 1990s there was money in Liberal budgets every year to deal with the squalor, unemployment, addictions, and terrible conditions that existed on many reserves across the country, and how the Liberals would fix that.

That party had 13 years to fix these problems. Now it is no different; nothing has changed. Why did the Liberal government not deliver on its promises to help these natives and aboriginals on their reserves over those 13 years? The Liberals failed dismally, and I would like to know why?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I totally reject the notion that nothing has changed. I am proud of the fact that during our time in office the budget in support of aboriginal programs for first nations increased every year. The member makes the outrageous suggestion that the money disappeared and was not invested. I can tell the member that sure enough there never was enough for all the housing, but houses were built.

There are more young people from our first nations now going to college and university than we have ever seen. It is difficult to keep up with that. We are glad that there are more young aboriginal people going off to college and university, but more has to be done. That is what the Kelowna accord was all about. It was an acknowledgment that, in addition to the investments, more had to be done. That is what we have to agree on, with great respect to my friend from Wild Rose.

• (1715)

Mr. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for St. Catharines.

Before I commence my remarks, I would like to formally thank the residents Blackstrap for once again granting me the distinct privilege of representing them in the House of Commons. I would also like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, for your appointment as Acting Speaker. I had not had the opportunity to congratulate you. I am humbled by the continued confidence and trust that the electorate of Blackstrap has shown and I offer them my continued dedication to represent their views.

On May 2 the new Conservative government presented its first budget and with it began the change that Canadians voted for on January 23. The French poet, Paul Valery, once noted that, "Every beginning is a consequence. Every beginning ends something".

In many ways this budget embodied that saying, for its existence was the consequence of Canadians rejecting a tired Liberal government with tired ideas. Replacing it with a Conservative government fueled by innovation and guided by the desire to build an even ever greater Canada, it does not try to do so by being everything to everyone and it does not make so many items a priority that the word loses its meaning. It does so by focussing on the pressing concerns of Canadians and delivering real solutions to them in a significant and fiscally prudent manner.

While the budget is focused, it does not lack ambition. It presents Canadians with multifaceted solutions that will help restore accountability to our governing institutions, foster opportunity for prosperity, ensure safe and healthy communities, and support our families.

The Budget

A widespread grievance among my constituents throughout the years has been the excessive taxation that is levied on them by all levels of government. That is why it was particularly gratifying to see the governments commitment to deliver \$20 billion in tax relief for over two years, more tax relief than the last four federal budgets combined.

These tax reducing measures will permanently remove 655,000 low income Canadians from the tax rolls. It will impact Canadians on a daily basis. It will impact every day Canadians like a father driving a daughter or son to hockey practice in his new minivan. He will benefit on multiple levels. First, he will save on the price of that new minivan and the fuel to run it with a 1% reduction to the GST. Second, the new \$500 tax credit for sports registration fees will help cover the cost of hockey practice.

To stimulate a vibrant and growing economy, the budget proposes new measures over the course of the next few years that will make Canada's tax system more competitive in the international arena, including a commitment to reduce the corporate tax rate by 2% along with the elimination of both the corporate surtax and federal capital tax.

Likewise, as Marilyn Braun-Pollon of the Saskatchewan Branch of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business remarked, "Small business owners should really love this budget. This budget exceeds our expectations". For good reason, this budget introduces measures to support small businesses by phasing in a 1% reduction in their tax rate to 11% and increasing the income eligibility for the rate to \$400,000.

I am happy to report such pro-growth initiatives that have elicited upbeat responses from my home province because of the positive signal it sends to Saskatchewan business owners.

Again, Ms. Braun-Pollon said, "When you look at the corporate tax, the income tax and the GST reductions—there is a lot here to be pleased with".

The budget seeks to help out Canadian workers as well with, for instance, the new Canada employment credit for employee work expenses on items such as home computers, uniforms and supplies. This will not only further boost labour market participation but also provide relief to a broad range of current professionals.

• (1720)

Just recently the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation petitioned the federal government to provide tax deductions to teachers for materials they put in their classrooms. Saskatoon teacher, Robert Tessier, who spends nearly \$1,000 annually on classroom supplies noted that:

You get things to make your classroom look nice. Or in some cases the children don't have supplies...so you provide extra notebooks, pencils, crayons and glue.

The Canada employment credit recognizes that and it seeks to ease the burden on teachers like Mr. Tessier.

The budget further recognizes the acute shortage of skilled labour throughout Canada, addressing it through proactive and pioneering measures. A recent manpower survey noted that two-thirds of Canadian employers are reporting problems in recruiting suitably skilled or qualified workers.

As Neville Nankivell noted recently in *The Financial Post*:

—government, employers, and educational groups "can do a lot more to help improve skills levels and increase the supply of qualified workers".

I submit to Mr. Nankivell that the Government of Canada has taken a tangible step in that direction in the recent budget.

We have introduced a new apprenticeship job creation tax credit to assist companies in hiring more apprentices. A new apprenticeship incentive grant will encourage Canadians to enter into economically strategic skilled trades. These measures will aid approximately 100,000 apprentices.

The budget represents a new beginning for our agriculture producers. It is a new era of respect. For far too long the previous Liberal government ignored the plight of our farmers and for far too long Canadian farmers were left out. In the first budget of this new government that changed.

The budget firmly established that the new Government of Canada is committed to a vibrant and sustainable agriculture sector. It provides an additional \$2 billion over two years to the sector, \$500 million for farm support and a \$1 billion investment in effective and efficient programming for farm income stabilization and disaster relief.

The people of Saskatchewan are thankful for a government that is finally ready to substantially support agriculture. Provincial politicians of all stripes have applauded this budget's support to agriculture. It is a truly remarkable achievement in Saskatchewan. The NDP agriculture minister called it "promising" and he thanked this government for hearing the message delivered by provincial farm leaders. Brad Wall, the leader of the Saskatchewan opposition party, was so pleased with a budget that exceeded existing agricultural commitments that he called it "significant positive news".

There is considerably more in the budget: more to ensure the safety of our communities; more to address the medical needs of Canadians through the short term, like the patient wait times guarantee, and through the long term, like the Canadian strategy for cancer control.

I am proud to be a member of the government that delivered this budget. It delivered on its commitments in a manner that will get results while respecting the hard-working taxpayers of Canada.

On February 27, 2001, I stood in this House and gave my maiden speech as a member of Parliament. I stood and said to Canadians that the residents of Blackstrap were frustrated with a federal government that did not manage the country's economic situation with the same diligence that it managed its personal finances. I also told Canadians that the people of Blackstrap wanted balance brought back into the taxation system.

The Budget

This time I want to tell residents of Blackstrap that the days of unfocused priorities and mismanagement are over. A focused and prudent government has risen in its place and every beginning is a consequence, every beginning ends something.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member, one with regard to wait time guarantees and the other with regard to transit pass tax credits.

The Government of Canada entered into a \$42 billion health care accord with the provinces which would have provided a 6% increase annually to the provinces and territories for health care. However that 6% increase is not reflected in the finance minister's current budget.

One of the five priorities of the government, as laid out to Canadians, was to address the issue of and the promise of wait time guarantees. However the budget contains no new money for the guarantees. These are the actions that the government would take to cover the health care costs of transferring patients to other provinces, or even to the United States, along with their families, et cetera. Why is it that wait times was a priority in the five priorities but absolutely no new money was included in the budget for wait times?

The second item concerns transit passes. Since climate change issues do not seem to be a priority of the government, it strikes me that there is a transit pass tax credit. It is \$1.3 billion of spending. In fact, 95% of that will go to existing transit riders and, of those, it is only those who actually have monthly transit passes. People who pay cash fare or do not have a monthly pass are not eligible because they have no receipt. The government expects a 5% to 7% ridership increase but there is no capacity. It appears that this is a real waste and mismanagement of the money because it has absolutely no impact whatsoever on greenhouse emissions.

• (1725)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is really hypothetical. How do we know how good this budget is and what it will encourage until he helps us pass it and it gets out into the public. Just announcing these special incentives has been very positive in our communities. I think he may be quite surprised how many people might start using the transit passes.

We know that was put in place for the environment and we want people to continue to find different measures. It is an incentive. I think those things, by example, may be watched by other sectors. I think it will increase the ridership quite a bit because the nurses I know intend on taking the transit more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Blackstrap on making a speech that did not attack the former government at every turn. We are growing tired of hearing both sides of the House rehash the past all the time. For once, we heard a positive and forward looking speech that dealt with the budget instead of what the others did not do.

I did, however, find that the member was overdoing it somewhat. She made everything sound so great and wonderful that it was hard to believe. One might wonder if she is living on a pink cloud. This budget does have deficiencies in terms of measures that it should include.

Here is my question to my hon. colleague. Why not have modified good projects like EnerGuide instead of eliminating them? While that particular project is said to have cost 50¢ out of every \$1 to administer, it did help reduce greenhouse gases. Also, did anyone stop to think that some measures difficult to implement might have proven effective, despite administration costs of 50¢ out of every \$1?

Finally, why is there nothing in this budget for the homeless?

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, because the member complimented me for not attacking the former government and its programs, I find it difficult to comment on why we are not implementing EnerGuide. It is all about the last government and how poorly the program was administered. There are many comparisons on poorly administered programs by the Liberal government. As I want to keep on the high road I will only say that we dismissed and cancelled the program because it was not efficient, cost wise or otherwise.

• (1730)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly proud to have the opportunity to speak to the government's first budget. The 2006 budget is one that provides Canadians with hope; hope that our new government has departed from the ways of the past and is committed to doing what it said it would do; hope that their tax burden will continue to be reduced in a responsible way, one that reduces the debt, a true mortgage on our future; and hope that our new government will invest in the programs and services that are most important to Canadians, such as child care, health care, security, justice and responsible fiscal management.

I have to say that the people in my home community of St. Catharines also share some of this hope. For 13 long years the residents of my community have watched as budget after budget was brought forward, many of which served political interests in Ottawa but hardly any that served the interests of the people of St. Catharines. People in St. Catharines are hopeful that those days are gone. They see a budget that provides real results and that is good for their community.

I would like to take a closer look at some of the initiatives in the budget and share with the House some information of how the people of St. Catharines will benefit.

We all know that cutting the GST to 6% will provide each Canadian with a tax cut. Despite having promised to eliminate the tax 13 years ago, the Liberals will continue to defend the GST and say that it will not provide any real benefit to Canadians. I challenge the Liberals to say that to the people in my community who pay little or no income tax. What would their plan have provided these people, those who needed it the most? It would have provided them with nothing.

The Budget

In St. Catharines, the average family of four that makes a household income of \$60,000 could save as much as \$400 a year from this tax cut. Working families could also save as much as \$100 per year on gasoline purchases or save over \$500 on the purchase of a St. Catharines built General Motors vehicle.

In my community there are approximately 30,000 students that call St. Catharines home. Niagara College and Brock University have residences full of student who virtually live on fixed incomes, that is not to mention the 23,000 seniors and the 28,700 people who earn less than \$20,000 per year. These are the people who will benefit from the GST cut and I am proud to be able to deliver that tax relief on their behalf.

The self-proclaimed defenders of low income sitting across the way were so caught up in clinging to power for one day longer, they forgot to pass legislation to approve that tax relief. It never happened. I would like to take a moment to call upon members opposite to abandon the political rhetoric and do what they promised Canadians they would do more than a year ago, to join us this afternoon and vote for the legislation that will provide the tax relief they promised but never delivered. To vote against this budget is a vote against their own record and a vote against working families across this country.

If there is any doubt about what I am saying, I would refer the members to the finance committee report just two days ago where it was confirmed by government officials from Revenue Canada that this budget must pass for the previous government's tax cut to actually be put into legislation. If the Liberal members vote against this budget, they will be voting against the very tax cut they introduced, bragged about and campaigned on.

Let me speak to some further positive aspects in this budget. I mentioned seniors a moment ago. The 23,000 seniors in St. Catharines will see real benefits from this budget. We are proposing to double the current \$1,000 maximum amount of eligible pension income that can be claimed under the pension income credit. The results will be more money in the pockets of St. Catharines seniors who have worked so hard for our country.

Our new government will also allow the parents of the 30,000 children under the age of 16 in St. Catharines to claim a children's fitness tax credit of up to \$500 for eligible recreation and physical activities. This will help to keep our youth active and provide parents with the financial resources they need to keep their children enrolled in recreational programs, such as hockey, dance, soccer and gymnastics.

• (1735)

The hundreds of children at the Burtnik karate centre, where the leader of our party, the Prime Minister, visited during the election, are looking forward to it, along with their parents, who will be able to continue to keep their kids enrolled.

How could I mention children without mentioning the benefits that will be received by the parents of the 8,000 children under the age of six in St. Catharines through our new choice in child care allowance? The \$1,200 choice in child care allowance will put almost \$10 million into the hands of parents in St. Catharines to spend as they best determine to care for their children. Across the

Niagara region, the parents of more than 24,000 children under the age of six will receive almost \$30 million under this innovative plan, and that is just phase one.

The Prime Minister has also made it very clear that providing real choice for parents includes the creation of over 125,000 new child care spaces. Our new government will make the changes necessary to existing plans to reach that goal of 125,000 new spaces. That is phase two. It is a key component of our plan that cannot be overlooked.

In Niagara, for example, there are only enough spaces to service approximately 10% of the population. Our child care plan will provide support to all parents with children under the age of six, and we will create more spaces to provide real choice when parents are deciding how best to care for their children.

As we are a border community, safety and security are also a significant concern for the people of St. Catharines. Our new government will provide the investment and will hire and train more than 1,000 more RCMP officers in our country. These are important investments for the Niagara region. Under the watch of the previous government, it was slated to move several RCMP officers dedicated to policing, immigration, customs and drug offences. These new officers present an opportunity for St. Catharines and Niagara to work toward a more meaningful, 24 hour, seven day a week RCMP presence in the Niagara border region.

There are a few more highlights for St. Catharines. For those who pay \$75 per month to use the St. Catharines transit system, a transit tax credit will result in \$144 back in their pockets. That is almost enough to pay for two monthly passes.

There are 9,000 people in St. Catharines employed in trades. The tradespeople tool expense tax credit will help to cover the high cost of tools, boots and work accessories and will put up to \$500 back in their pockets to help keep them working and help keep the economy working.

Thousands of small businesses in St. Catharines will also benefit from this budget. An increased small business tax threshold and lower tax rates will mean the owners of these businesses will have more money to reinvest and contribute to the local economy.

In closing, the 2006 budget is great news for the people of St. Catharines and for all Canadians. Unlike previous administrations, our new government has delivered a budget that keeps the promises we made during the election. We are going to do what we said we would do.

I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to keeping its promises and providing real benefits to working families in our community and across our country. I look forward to having the opportunity this afternoon to stand in my place and vote in favour of this budget: in favour of tax relief, in favour of meaningful investment, and in favour of the people of St. Catharines.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member opposite. I commend him on his speech.

The Budget

He mentioned various sectors of the population in his riding that will benefit to a greater or lesser extent from the budget. I would suggest, of course, that it will be to a lesser extent, but unless I was not listening carefully enough, there was no mention of students. In particular, there was no mention of post-secondary or community college students. Of course, the member being from St. Catharines, he has Brock University in his riding.

I would like to ask the member how it is that students in his riding will actually benefit more than they would have under the Liberal plan. I suspect the hon. member will recall the Liberal plan, which would have given to all students, unconditionally, \$6,000 toward their studies. As I understand it, the Conservative plan will provide students with an \$80 credit for textbooks and with non-taxation of any bursaries or scholarships. Would the member comment on that?

• (1740)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question. I did mention the fact that there are over 30,000 students in the Niagara region, attending Brock University, Niagara College and post-secondary opportunities. I would be happy to restate the comments I made in my remarks, those being that in fact students will benefit. They are going to be able to, for the first time, if they are not actually earning any income, benefit from a tax cut that runs across all avenues, that cuts across everything, and that is the 1% decrease in the cost of the GST.

We are also going to provide a \$500 tax credit to help about 1.9 million post-secondary students with their textbook costs. Some may say that is a small token. It is an appreciative token. We are also going to expand eligibility for student loans. There is also a tax credit. This budget will allow them to purchase monthly transit passes and get a tax credit for it. Finally, we will make all scholarship, fellowship and bursary income tax free, exempt from income tax.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the budget deals with tax cuts, but it has very little to do with tax fairness. A book I am reading says that we lose an estimated \$7 billion to \$15 billion a year through what is called tax motivated expatriation, which is a lawyer's term for sleazy, tax-cheating loopholes in the corporate sector, for those who use offshore tax havens to shield their profits so they do not pay taxes in this country.

The book is called *Pigs at the Trough*. These corporate tax fugitives have been feeding at the trough for years. We used to have 13 of these tax treaties with offshore tax havens. We tore up all of them except for one, the very country where the former prime minister has his dummy, paper, tax fugitive companies.

Would my colleague agree with me in the interests of tax fairness that if we are going to have corporate tax cuts we should at least insist that Canadian corporate taxpayers pay their fair share of taxes?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Under the Standing Orders, a member is not to speak negatively about another member of Parliament. To suggest that the member for LaSalle—Émard was taking “tax-cheating loopholes” is very derogatory to the member. The member will also know that all of those matters were handled in blind trusts and had nothing to do with the member for LaSalle—Émard. I believe the member has violated the Standing

Orders and should withdraw the references to the member for LaSalle—Émard.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I want to be perfectly clear that the member for Mississauga South has misrepresented my words; I actually said “sleazy tax-cheating loopholes” that corporate tax fugitives take advantage of in order to avoid paying their fair taxes in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I think the member for Mississauga South might be entering into the waters of debate. I did not hear the member for Winnipeg Centre impugn any personal characteristics of the member for LaSalle—Émard. He was referring to the loopholes as “sleazy”, not the member for LaSalle—Émard. That was how I heard it, so I will allow the member for St. Catharines to respond.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question from the member for Winnipeg Centre. I would only say on the one point that I certainly agree that everyone should pay his or her fair share of taxes, whether they be corporate or individual.

I think what we are suggesting in the budget, and what we have suggested as a government, is that far too many of those same individuals are paying far too much tax and should not be paying more than their fair share. That is the point that I think the budget makes. Hopefully that is the point on which the member would concur with me: that it is time to offer tax relief and support the budget we have in front of us.

• (1745)

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague sits on the finance committee. One of the things we constantly hear from the party opposite is how they passed this or how they did that. Would he actually elaborate on what he has found out from his finance committee in terms of what Revenue Canada actually said about this alleged tax cut and how maybe we have really been misled?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

The finance committee has been a great experience the last couple of days. We have had deputations from Revenue Canada. The question was put on the fact that the tax implication going from 16% to 15%, which the former government introduced only through a ways and means motion, was actually never introduced into legislation.

That piece of legislation has actually been added to this government's budget and will mean that if the members opposite vote against the budget, they will actually be voting against the very tax decrease they believed was so good for so many Canadians.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate. I have certainly heard an awful lot this afternoon about tax cuts and tax credits and how that is going to solve all the problems that all Canadians have, all our communities have and all our provinces have.

The Budget

The only difficulty is that this is a rerun for some of us in this place. Not only have I heard that same message before, I have heard that same message from the very same finance minister in the province of Ontario, who was making exactly the same claims. If hon. members see me shivering from time to time when the finance minister speaks, it is just a shiver going down my spine from listening to this thing all over again.

Let us take a look at the case in point. Let us take a look at what the hon. finance minister did for the province of Ontario by following this holy grail of tax cuts, tax cuts and tax cuts.

What do we have in the province of Ontario after two majority terms of the Mike Harris Conservative government? We have an education system that is desperately in need of investment. We have a health care system that is desperately in need of investment. We have an environmental agenda that desperately needs money and investment.

Not only that, the Conservatives left the province billions of dollars in debt. After they had already gone to all the trouble of balancing things, they brought in all their tax cuts. That works fine in the good times, but in the bad times the tax cuts do not work.

What is the evidence? Again, I go right back to the Mike Harris Conservatives in Ontario. Their tax cuts came at a time when the North American economy was taking off. Ontario benefited from that, but it is very easy to stand up and say that all these wonderful things are happening because of tax cuts. What they were saying was, "The more we cut taxes, the more revenue the province has, and look how great this is". They did that for a number of years while they could get away with it.

The problem was that as soon as the American economy started to slow down, and eventually it tanked very briefly there, and the Conservatives in Ontario had another round of corporate tax cuts planned, they had to cancel them, to postpone them. Why? Because they could not afford them, they said. Yet that was the same government, and the same finance minister for part of it, that we now have at the helm of the finances of our country.

Those Conservatives had to postpone their tax cuts, having said that the more they cut taxes, the more revenue they had. They had to postpone their next round of tax cuts because they could not afford it. Yet, if we follow their own logic, as things got tougher and if cutting taxes generates more revenue, then they should have been cutting like mad when things got bad, because that would have increased all their revenue.

But no, reality caught up with them, and the reality is that tax cuts alone, although they have their place, are a fine political mantra, but they are no basis or foundation on which to build the kind of country that Canadians want, demand, expect and to which they are entitled. That is what we are seeing here again. That is why it is like back to the future for some of us.

Seven billion dollars in corporate tax cuts, with \$1.5 billion in tax cuts that already exist allowed to continue: those tax cuts, by the way, are for that really tough area of our economy, the gas companies and the oil companies. We know how much they are hurting these days, so it makes good sense to leave that \$1.5 billion tax benefit to them in place, does it not?

No, not if you talk to constituents of mine in Hamilton Centre. That is not what they are interested in. They want to know how this government is going to help them make sure that their talented children who are willing to work can afford to go to university.

• (1750)

Bill C-48, the NDP better balanced budget, provided money to go to tuition relief. The Conservatives, using the surplus from the last time, which is how the formula was worked out, put in almost that much money and kept it in that category. The only problem is they moved it away from being a benefit to reduce tuition and put it into post-secondary education infrastructure.

It is not that the infrastructure is not needed, but what should have happened was those tuition reductions should have stayed in place. They should have reduced the \$7 billion for their corporate friends and put it into the post-secondary infrastructure deficit. That kind of thinking is putting working families first and recognizing their needs.

They want to talk about cuts so much, it was not just taxes that the Conservatives cut. Programs have been cut, and we have only seen the beginning. If the initial calculations are right, we could be looking at upwards of \$2 billion, maybe more—

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: More.

Mr. David Christopherson: I hear the government member yelling "more", because that is what they like to do. They want to take money out of the system. It is a very strong philosophical differential between the governing Conservatives and those of us in the NDP. We believe the priority is working families and their communities rather than corporate friends. That is what the Conservatives have done. They have taken care of their corporate friends.

What exactly have they cut? They cut EnerGuide, a program for low income home owners to retrofit their homes and assist us in meeting our Kyoto targets. Just as important, and that was the beauty of this good program, it would have let us deal with a national priority and at the same time it would have helped an awful lot of seniors in Hamilton to stay in their homes. Their energy costs would not necessarily be driving them out of those homes. The government cut that. It was not as important as a corporate tax cut.

The Conservatives talk a lot about seniors. I have an email from one of my constituents and I would like to put it on the record. The email reads as follows:

As a senior on a pension, I listened with interest to the kind words in the budget about the contribution I've made to the country from my early years of working (32 years as a medical technologist in a hospital working shifts, weekends, holidays).

Then I took my income tax forms from this year—including the page amended by the Liberals that's been scrapped—and calculated how much of a benefit I would see from the amount for the pension income credit rising from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Guess what—I'll actually get the supreme privilege of seeing my federal tax GO UP by \$637.12. By my calculations, one has to spend \$40,000 to realize a \$400 GST savings to offset that federal tax increase. Since my income this year will include a one time payment of back pay earned before retirement—that GST savings comes at the expense of food, shelter and other necessities since I'll only earn about \$42,000 before tax total this year. And I'm probably one of the lucky pensioners. The Tories should skip the platitudes.

The Budget

I have never fumed so much over a budget since Mike Harris was Premier of Ontario and that was 90% of it; not just the part that I am personally affected by.

I do not have the permission to release the name, but it is there. I can show it to anyone who wants to see it.

They have done the calculations. We can hear what they are saying. People may not be outraged by this budget, but they are supremely disappointed and they should be. This was a missed opportunity to invest in what really makes Canada the greatest country in the world. All we have done, through the new government, is ensure that its friends in the corporate world get that much more of ordinary taxpayer money while ordinary citizens are left with spin and platitudes.

The budget is not good enough for working families. It is not good enough for my community of Hamilton. It is not good enough for my province of Ontario. I will proudly be voting against the budget.

• (1755)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member railed on and on about corporate tax cuts. I am somewhat confused because 90% of the \$20 billion of tax cuts, which Canadians will receive over the next two years, will go to families and individuals, not to corporations.

However, I would like to focus in on another suggestion the member made, and that had to do with environmental cuts. The member should not forget that the government was not elected to implement a failed Liberal agenda. The Conservative government was elected to implement a new made in Canada agenda.

We understand full well that the Minister of the Environment, her parliamentary secretary and her staff are working very hard to put the final touches on a made in Canada environmental policy. Why is the hon. member not patient enough to give us a little more time than about 100 days in the House to complete the job and ensure that it is done properly, unlike the way the previous Liberal government would have done it?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I will respond as best I can. First, rather than playing with percentages and trying to spin things out, he still cannot change the fact that \$7 billion is real money. I do not care how many percentages he wants to play with and all the other figures. The fact of the matter is that a tax cut is no different than an expenditure.

If a new program begins and it costs \$7 billion, it costs the treasury the same as if there were a \$7 billion tax cut. They are both expenditures. At the end of the day, we still have \$7 billion going for new corporate tax cuts and a continuation of the \$1.5 billion that is already going to the oil and gas companies.

What we need in the country is not more corporate tax cuts. We need a national child care plan that actually provides real spaces. We need money to be transferred to our provinces so we can actually train more nurses. We need to get more tuition relief in the hands of working families so more students can actually go to university. Those are the priorities that matter.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member wanted a national child care program, he should have thought twice before voting against the previous government and causing the election.

I know the member is very concerned about the environment, as are we. We have seen the cancellation of all the programs related to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change concerns. Even the EnerGuide is gone so low income Canadians cannot retrofit their houses and receive support.

Why has there been no discussion, and I think the member may agree, by the government about the high emitters such as the petroleum companies, the tar sands and hydro? Why do those that produce well over 50% of greenhouse gas emissions have absolutely never been mentioned by the government?

• (1800)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I was remiss earlier not to acknowledge that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from London—Fanshawe.

It is interesting that my friend from Mississauga South would raise the child care issue in relation to the election, given the fact that the Liberals had 13 years to implement a child care plan. Now they want to say that they were close to doing it and we pulled the plug. If the Liberals had been serious about bringing in a child care plan, they had over a dozen years, with a majority government, to bring in the kind of plan that we needed. We did not cost the Liberals the election. Their record cost them the election.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk with the hon. member a bit about his dissatisfaction with the Conservative government's universal child care plan. I know what the NDP is looking for. It is looking for more bureaucracy.

I was a councillor for the Regional Municipality of Niagara. The region of Niagara has an area within its health unit that looks after day care. The unit supervises it and handles questions of funding. It is all right there in Thorold, Ontario, and it is devoted to day care.

In province of Ontario, Queen's Park has a day care bureaucracy as well. It has people looking into the whole area of day care. There is nothing wrong with that.

The picture I get from the NDP is that it wants three bureaucracies. It wants three people supervising one space. Is that not the bottom line? It is not about looking after children and it is not about their best interests; it is about creating another bureaucracy. Could the hon. member answer that?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, the member should try that answer on families who are desperately waiting for child care spaces because they cannot get on with their lives. They have inadequate care right now. Those programs need investment.

The Budget

Obviously the member believes it is more important that there be billions of dollars in corporate tax cuts than to provide real child care spaces in a regulated setting. The member offers up the \$1,200 a year, which will help. What he cannot do is stand up and take a standing ovation for providing a national child care plan, which is really needed. You brought back a version of the old baby bonus and that is nice, but it is not what is really needed. You missed the opportunity. You took care of your friends and you left the children outside in the cold.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I hope the hon. member for Hamilton Centre was not implying anything that the Speaker had done. He knows he is supposed to address his comments through the chair. We will move on.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hamilton for sharing his time. It gives me the chance to raise some important issues regarding the impact on women by the Conservative budget.

I must say that despite the admonitions of the Minister of Justice today in question period that his government respects the equality rights of women, I have little faith that the words match the actions.

Besides the \$450 million that the Conservative government has allocated for aboriginal education, women, children and families, water and housing, there is no mention of money in the budget specifically allocated toward advancing women's equality. The budget does touch on issues that affect women, like child care, tax cuts, security, housing, immigration, aboriginal peoples and pensioners, but again there is nothing in the budget that specifically refers to the government's funding plans to address women's inequality.

The Conservatives' child care plan does not address the child care needs of working women. Twelve hundred dollars a year does not come close to covering the cost of child care. Families in my riding of London—Fanshawe have made it clear. They need child care spaces, not a taxable \$100 a month. The budget does not provide funds to create more child care spaces until 2007-08. We need to invest in our children now. To invest in children is to invest in our future.

The provision of child care is not about pitting one family against another with regard to child care choice; rather it should be about providing quality early learning. Whether a parent stays at home, works part time or full time, families are still looking for early childhood education to provide their children with the opportunity of socialization and the advantage of educational stimulation.

While the Conservatives claim that \$1,200 will provide a choice, I must argue that when no child care spaces are created, there is no choice. It would be ideal if all working families could afford to have one parent at home, but the reality remains that many families can only survive on two incomes. The government's child care plan reinforces gender inequality because the Conservative funding plan assumes that one parent, in many cases the woman, will stay at home. These women may well suffer the same inequity as their grandmothers. Fifty per cent of Canadian women 65 years of age and over live in poverty because they were not engaged in employment outside of their homes.

Another issue I have with the budget is that there is no EI plan to address the inequalities that women face. Because a large percentage of women work in part time jobs, marginal jobs and self-employment arrangements, many women are not eligible for EI. This creates two problems. These women are unable to access EI if they lose their jobs and these women are also ineligible for maternity leave when they decide to start a family.

I feel the budget shows very little support for women and suggests that the Conservative government's priorities lie elsewhere. The Minister for Canadian Heritage and Status of Women claimed in the House that the government would stand up for the equality of women. She said:

I can assure the member and all women in Canada that this government will stand up for the equality of women and their full participation.

The budget does not reflect the words by either the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women. It is clear that women are not a priority.

In order to comply with its international obligations and truly stand up for women in Canada, the government needs to fund research, legislation and programs in order to address the 26 recommendations made by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW.

Funding for Status of Women Canada according to the estimates has stayed relatively stagnant, except for about \$1 million transferred to the Sisters in Spirit initiative through the Native Women's Network to raise awareness of the alarmingly high rates of violence against aboriginal women in Canada.

Status of Women Canada needs more funding to address women's issues, especially those outlined in the CEDAW recommendations.

According to the estimates, the promote public policy program is being cut by approximately \$5 million, while there is an increase of about \$6 million for building knowledge and organizational capacity on gender equality. The large cut to the promote public policy program will prevent the development and implementation of federal initiatives that narrow the gap between women and men and expand opportunities for women. This cut in funding also means that there is only about \$2 million left to address the CEDAW recommendations.

● (1805)

Twenty-one million dollars is dedicated to develop the knowledge and capacity of a number of stakeholders so that they are better informed and able to address gender based issues of significance to Canadian society in a coordinated manner. Ten million dollars of this money is dedicated to grants.

The Budget

While women's organizations do need funding, the large adjustment between the two programs indicates that the government would rather have a hands-off policy when it comes to promoting women's equality instead of funding federal programs with direction and cohesion.

Again, this budget illustrates that women are not a priority for the government. Clearly it does not believe that government should promote women's equality. Instead, responsibility is passed over to the non-profit community.

I also need to speak about the budget's lack of funding for housing.

The one time payment outlined in the Conservative budget was in the NDP budget, Bill C-48, last spring. It is money that was already committed to be spent and falls \$200 million short of the budget which was passed last June.

I am very concerned as there is no mention in this budget about who will oversee the funding and ensure the money is spent by the provinces on much needed affordable housing. Previous allocations to the provinces and territories, about \$474 million, was never spent because the money had to be matched by the province.

My question remains, who is it that will oversee that money and make sure it is spent on affordable housing, and how is "affordable" defined?

Housing costs have reached an incredible high. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the cost of housing in Calgary has increased by 29.6% since last year. The cost of housing has increased across Canada. When compounded with rising mortgage rates, housing is becoming more and more inaccessible for many working families. According to a CBC report today, housing costs are expected to grow again next year. With rising costs, the need for affordable housing is not an option, it is an essential.

There is also no mention in this budget of a national housing plan that would ensure affordable housing is available in the long term. The government has no long term solution and Canada remains one of only two G-8 countries without a national housing strategy.

The Conservatives say they plan to make new housing affordable. The 1% cut in GST is their example. Their own numbers clearly show that the tax break will not make housing any more affordable, especially for those who need it most. Buying a \$200,000 home, and in my riding the average home is \$300,000, would provide a tax rebate of about \$8.25 a year over a 25 year mortgage. This does not make any home more affordable, nor is it a saving for those who even can afford to buy a house.

The housing money allocated to reserves is not going to address the housing needs of the first nations people. The \$450 million allotted may cover repairs needed on current stock, but it will not address the overcrowding or relocation needs in communities like Kashechewan.

We are pleased to see money from the NDP budget go to off reserve first nations housing. The money can be used to ease the current housing burden, but spread across the entire country, it will not come close to addressing the needs of those who most need it.

Too often, aboriginal people have seen money disappear into programs with no corresponding improvement in their standard of living.

This budget is not much more than sleight of hand. It pretends to help working families and women, but upon closer inspection, the so-called savings simply disappear into thin, cold air.

• (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I see quite a few members rising for questions and comments. If we could keep them rather brief, we could accommodate more members having the opportunity to speak.

The hon. member for St. Catharines.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the two previous speakers, the member for Hamilton Centre and the member for London—Fanshawe. They both served in the Ontario legislature with the Bob Rae government, where we saw a social contract that gave 60,000 Ontario civil servants less money. When the NDP ran from office in 1995, that party left over 200 tax increases, \$14 billion in debt, and worst of all, 1.5 million people on welfare.

When the member for Hamilton Centre said that his spine was cold, I would really like to have asked him how cold was his spine when he sat in cabinet and supported each and every one of those measures.

I ask the member for London—Fanshawe, how does she feel to go down that road in this country with what happened in the province of Ontario under that government? What kind of benefit would that be to the people of this country?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to have the chance to set the record straight. I was a member of a government that was suffering through the worst recession that this country has ever known. We have since found out that particular recession was something that even the international community did not fully understand and has not fully understood until the present time. The world was reeling and Ontario was in terrible trouble because it had lost half a million jobs due to a free trade agreement that a certain Conservative government had put in place.

In order to maintain the services of the province, the NDP had to do remarkable things. We could not rely on the federal government because the Conservatives and then the Liberals did nothing but cut, cut, cut transfer payments and reduced our ability to help. In fact, the Conservatives promised that there would be a training allowance for people who lost their jobs. We never saw a dime. In order to make sure that when the recession ended in 1994 there was an Ontario left, the NDP did what it needed to do. It—

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize to the member but we have to allow for other members to participate.

The hon. member for Brampton West.

The Budget

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wrote down what I was going to say but after listening to all this about going backward, I decided to change my mind. I would like the hon. member to know that I think that Bob Rae did a fine job given the circumstances.

The one thing we fail to realize in this House and one of the downfalls of this House is the arrogance of thinking that we all have the monopoly on knowing what is honourable, right and decent. None of us has the monopoly. You with the big silly grin may feel that you are much smarter than I am and that you are—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I do not think I was grinning. I remind the member for Brampton West that members are supposed to address all comments through the Chair, not directly to other members in the House.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Speaker, I also think the NDP is being intellectually dishonest. We had a Liberal-NDP budget, as much as we did not like it to be called that. If the NDP had waited three months, the day care would be in place.

However, I would like hon. members to know that for most women who go out to work, it is not a matter of choice and \$100 a month is going to do absolutely nothing to further their options to stay home to care for their children or go out to work.

I would also like to remind the NDP that on corporate cuts, we have to remember that one thing corporations do is create jobs. If people work, they can pay taxes and we can afford more programs.

I would like the Conservatives to please think about the mothers who do not have a choice and to think about the parents. The member spoke of the car, the sports and the rebate. What about those who cannot afford the sports or the car?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the member raised a number of points. I do not believe I have time to address all of them, but I would like to refer to one point and that is in regard to tax cuts.

About 18 months ago the World Economic Forum issued a report which said that if one wants to improve an economy and build a community, one does not invest in corporate tax cuts because that does absolutely nothing. Most of that money disappears offshore. If one truly wants to build a country or a community, one invests in the things that make that community strong: child care, education, working families.

Unfortunately, we have seen absolutely none of that in this budget. The only group to come out ahead in terms of this Conservative agenda are the corporations. In the months to come, families will start to realize that these so-called tax credits disappear, as I have said before, into cold thin air.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We probably only have enough time left for one speaker before we have to take the vote. I know many members are anxious for that, but if we could try to have a little bit of decorum for the next speaker and allow the Chair to hear the speech, that would be very much appreciated.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in case you find it in your heart to find some extra time, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brant.

When in opposition, most members of the House start their speeches by criticizing the government and in turn, members of the government will always begin their speeches by endlessly praising whatever piece of legislation is passing through the House at that given time.

As former chair of the finance committee, I will try to highlight and speak about what I heard from Canadians during last year's pre-budget consultation process and about how well the government's budget responds to the needs raised during that process.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

As you perhaps are aware, each year the Standing Committee on Finance usually presents to the House of Commons a report on the prebudget consultation. Occasionally, this is not possible and this was the case for 2005. Given the political circumstances, the committee was unable to present a report on the prebudget consultation.

[*English*]

To put the pre-budget consultation process in perspective, the committee held over 100 hours of hearings and heard from almost 650 witnesses representing 420 groups, individuals or organizations. Name it and we heard it. I heard every single word spoken except for one session in Winnipeg which I did follow up on and read the minutes of the meeting afterwards.

The purpose of the hearings held by the finance committee is to provide Canadians with an opportunity to tell the government what they would like to see in the next budget. While it can be exhausting for members of the committee, the pre-budget consultation is a vital exercise because it represents what is best about our democracy. Canadians from coast to coast to coast consult with elected members of Parliament who sit on the finance committee which in turn helps shape a great vision of Canada, a Canada that addresses the different needs of all its people.

This is a vision that is not a simple one but a necessary one for Canada to reach its potential. I am sad to say that the big plans for Canada spoken about during the pre-budget consultations have been turned into small potatoes by the Conservative government.

During the pre-budget consultation sessions, Canadians asked for national, comprehensive and long term strategies to reduce income taxes and to make Canada more competitive. They did not ask for an election budget filled with superficial tax cuts at the expense of solid programs, but unfortunately, that is what they received.

The Budget

We started the pre-budget consultation process by hearing from economic think tanks of all stripes, economists who sit on both sides of the political spectrum and who represent Canadians from all walks of life. Not one economist advocated a reduction in consumption taxes or the GST.

[*Translation*]

The GST is not levied on mortgage payments, rent, savings, food purchased at grocery stores, medical expenses, or many other essential items. For low-income families, a very small percentage of expenditures are subject to GST. Thus, Canadians with low incomes will benefit very little from the 1% reduction in GST.

[*English*]

These economists spoke about reducing income tax and instead the Conservatives raised the lowest income tax bracket from 15% to 15.5%. Did anyone suggest a reduction in income taxes, corporate or individual? Everyone did, even some of the more social groups who are realizing who is paying the bills in this country, the middle class.

We heard from cultural groups who stated over and over that in order to truly flourish, the Canada Council for the Arts should have its funding doubled from \$5 per capita to \$10 at a total cost of \$300 million. Instead, the government has chosen to only add \$50 million to the council, a sum that will not nearly be enough for Canada's arts sector. Increasing the council's budget to \$300 million seems simple enough, but I suppose we must remember that the government's priorities lie elsewhere.

Culture is not about negotiating. It is about the council needing \$300 million to preserve the Canadian arts and provide the opportunity for culture to grow and be part of the Canadian vision. It is not about simply throwing \$50 million at the cultural world and hoping it will go away.

The committee also heard from student groups who asked that the federal government lighten their debt loads, so that they could graduate without being thousands of dollars in debt. There are students in this country who begin careers as much as \$30,000 in debt, with post-graduate students easily having double the debt.

What our party proposed during the last election campaign was a visionary solution to offer a 50% rebate on tuition fees during the first year and then only in the last year of a student's university education would another 50% rebate kick in on tuition fees. This again is about a vision, a vision that speaks volumes.

How does the government help? It helps by offering a paltry \$80 credit on books. While this \$80 credit may be useful to students for a week, it will not nearly be enough to solve student debt troubles that we heard about during the pre-budget consultations.

Universities also appeared before the finance committee and asked for more research funding. The Liberals heard their calls and set aside \$2.5 billion for university research. This is consistent with a vision for Canada to continue to be a world leader in research and innovative initiatives. The answer from the Conservative government is to provide a mere \$200 million.

In an era when 70% of all new jobs being created will require more than a high school diploma, the Conservatives are once again demonstrating that they are oblivious to the need to invest in new

innovative and productivity-enhancing technologies. How will their simple plan help them once they realize that Canada has lost its place in the world? Their simple plan will be what? I ask: Why is the government's vision for Canada so short-sighted?

During the pre-budget consultations, the finance committee heard from environmental groups who highlighted the imminent dangers of climate change. Climate change is a reality and the government has a responsibility to its people to safeguard their health and the health of future generations. Why then has the Conservatives gutted the \$5 billion Liberal investment in environmental strategies in climate change in favour of \$400 million of local programs that are, according to the budget document, still being developed by the minister?

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges faced by humanity and the Conservative government has responded to that challenge by ignoring it, and using that money to pay for its small potato tax credits. What is the government's plan for climate change? It is not even a plan.

The Conservatives say they want to increase public transit use, but their simple solution to increasing public transit use is to give public transit users a credit on their monthly bus passes that the transit companies will likely clawback through increased fares. How does this help people in rural Canada that the Conservatives claim to know so much about when in fact many small communities do not even offer public transit. I am not sure, but it does not sound like much of a climate change plan to me. It sounds like attractive politics over sound policies.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the member.

[*Translation*]

It being 6:27 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of Ways and Means Motion No. 1.

[*English*]

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those in favour of the motion will please say ye.

The Budget

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Call in the members.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 6)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Asselin
Bachand	Baird
Barbot	Batters
Bellavance	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Cardin	Carrie
Carrier	Casey
Casson	Chong
Clement	Crête
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Faille
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Gagnon	Galipeau
Gallant	Gaudet
Gauthier	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guay
Guergis	Guimond
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest
Laframboise	Lake
Lalonde	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lemay
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Loubier
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	Lussier
MacKenzie	Malo

Manning	Mark
Mayes	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mourani
Nadeau	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Ouellet	Pallister
Paquette	Paradis
Perron	Petit
Picard	Plamondon
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Roy
Sauvageau	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich — 175	

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Beaumur	Bélanger
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Bevington
Black	Blaikie
Boshcoff	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Byrne
Cannis	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Easter
Eyking	Folco
Fontana	Fry
Godfrey	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Guarnieri	Holland
Hubbard	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Khan
Lapierre	Layton
Lee	Malhi
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Merasty	Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Neville	Owen
Pacetti	Patry
Peterson	Priddy
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan

Rodriguez
 Russell
 Savoie
 Sgro
 Silva
 Simms
 St. Denis
 Stoffer
 Szabo
 Temelkovski
 Tonks
 Wasylcyia-Leis
 Wrzesnewskyj — 113

Rota
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Siksay
 Simard
 St. Amand
 Steckle
 Stronach
 Telegdi
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Volpe
 Wilson

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the putting of the question on Ways and Means Motion No. 5.

* * *

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 5

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget, tabled in Parliament on May 2, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it agreed that the motion be adopted on division?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1900)

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to discuss the response from the Minister of National Defence to a question I asked him in the House on April 5. I questioned the minister about the agreement that was signed by the chief of defence staff with the government of Afghanistan governing the transfer of prisoners taken by Canadian Forces.

I am concerned about how this agreement was signed and about its provisions. First I want to discuss its signing and then outline legal opinions provided by experts in the field.

Rumours about the signing of the agreement began to circulate earlier this year. Initial attempts by legal experts and NGOs to examine the treaty were stonewalled. It appeared that the government was not comfortable with the contents of the agreement and refused to release it to the Canadian public. However, the

Adjournment Proceedings

government was forced to make the contents of the agreement public on March 30.

Two noted legal experts, Professor Amir Attaran of the University of Ottawa, and Professor Michael Byers, director of the Lui Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia, have written formal opinions on the agreement. Canadians who are watching tonight can find copies of these legal opinions on the website of the Polaris Institute at polarisinstitute.org.

I want to say that the concern New Democrats have is that the agreement potentially puts our Canadian Forces at risk. Indeed, the first day the House was convened, I requested an emergency debate on the matter. This agreement places Canadian Forces in a situation where they may be violating the laws of Canada and of the international community.

There are good reasons that we as Canadians follow the Geneva conventions. If our soldiers are detained by a foreign military or taken prisoner in another war, we demand and expect reciprocal treatment for our forces. Furthermore, Canadian Forces could potentially be taken before the International Court. I know that no one in the House would want to see that happen.

The first opinion by Professor Attaran concerns the implications regarding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter applies to most actions of the Canadian government, including the ability to make international defence agreements. Section 7 of the charter states:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

This section has been interpreted by the courts as severely limiting or abolishing the ability of our government to hand over individuals to a foreign government if there is a substantial risk of torture.

The Afghan government does have a documented record of torture. I want to be clear that we are committed to working with the government of Afghanistan to improve the welfare of the Afghan people. Afghanistan is coming out of a quarter century of civil strife and faces enormous challenges. In any state where there is extreme poverty and difficulty maintaining order, there will be the threat of torture.

The opinion of Professor Byers concerns the international dimensions of the agreement. In his opinion he states that the arrangement is clearly a treaty, that it is a written agreement between two countries which places rights and obligations on both parties. This is the dictionary definition and the legal definition of a treaty.

Professor Byers states that the agreement does not provide adequate protections against violations of the 1949 Geneva conventions. Geneva specifies that a number of acts "are and shall remain absolutely prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever". Among the—

● (1905)

The Speaker: I am afraid the hon. member's time has expired. I will move to the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising this question because it gives me another opportunity to highlight the excellent work being done by our Canadian Forces personnel.

I can assure the House that our men and women in uniform are helping the Afghan people bring stability to their country, strengthen governance and reduce poverty. The Afghan government invited us to their country and we are assisting them.

We are conducting UN recognized operations. We are working with 36 other countries in helping Afghanistan. We will not let the Afghans and the international community down. That is not the Canadian way. As the Prime Minister stated in Kandahar, "We don't cut and run".

The success of this mission is crucial to the international community and it exemplifies Canada's leadership on the world stage. The Canadian Forces are internationally known for their professionalism and their respectful attitude toward civilians. We are in Afghanistan to help Afghans, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The Canadian Forces treat all detainees in accordance with international law and the standards set by the Geneva convention. All Canadian Forces personnel deployed on international operations are provided with pre-deployment training on prisoner of war handling and the treatment of detainees.

On December 18, 2005, the Chief of Staff, on behalf of the Minister of National Defence, signed an arrangement with the government of Afghanistan, regarding the transfer of detainees from the Canadian Forces to the Afghan authorities. Under this agreement, our Canadian Forces transfer all persons detained by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan to Afghan authorities. This document is a bilateral arrangement that confirms that both participants will treat detainees in accordance with international law.

The Afghan government is committed to openness and transparency and has given access to its detention facilities to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and other international observers.

If the International Committee of the Red Cross advised us of some problems with transferred detainees, we would discuss the issue with the government of Afghanistan as they are the signatory to this arrangement.

Under international law, Afghanistan is the receiving state and is responsible to treat transferred detainees humanely and to track them.

The member opposite has made comments on the differences between the Dutch arrangement on detainees and our own arrangement. I can assure the hon. member that both the Dutch and the Canadian arrangements with the Afghan government are aimed at the same fundamental objective: assurances that detainees will be treated humanely.

Both governments support the principle that the Afghan authorities have the responsibility for handling detainees captured

in their sovereign territory. We signed an arrangement with a sovereign state and, as with every other member of the international community, we expect the Afghanistan government will respect its obligations.

I would like to take the opportunity given to me by the hon. member to stress that Canadian Forces personnel deployed in Afghanistan are doing an exceptional job to help that country get back on its feet, and Canadians can be proud of their efforts.

I am strongly behind our mission in Afghanistan. This mission is the right thing for the Afghani people and it is the right thing for international peace and security.

I can assure the hon. member that, whether in their treatment of detainees or in their overall commitment to the security of Afghanistan, the Canadian Forces are living up to this government's expectations and are also receiving praise from our allies.

● (1910)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross may watch over detainees who Canada has passed over to the Afghan government. The ICRC does not normally inform other countries when a particular country denies access to its detainees. It does not ensure that there will not be torture or inhumane treatment.

The agreement does not provide the chance for Canadian officials to visit or even receive updates. The government of the Netherlands negotiated an agreement that is much stronger. I do not understand why the government will not redraft the agreement to ensure that Canada is in compliance with our international obligations and the treaties that Canada has signed. It needs to be done, and I urge the government to reconsider.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I have every confidence that our arrangement with the Afghani government is certainly within the bounds of international law. I have no doubt about that whatsoever, but I want to comment further on my hon. colleague's suggestion that the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, would not have the opportunity to comment on any adverse treatment of detainees. That is its responsibility. It has been mandated with the obligation of tracking these individuals and ensuring that they are kept in a safe and secure environment.

I have every confidence that should an extraordinary circumstance occur we would be informed about it, and we could use our influence with the Afghanistan government to make sure that was corrected, if it were to ever occur in the first place. The reality is that we are talking about hypotheticals. We have no reason to be concerned at this point. I think I will leave it at that.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[English]

Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:12 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ron Born	
Mr. Cannan	1177
Hike for Hospice	
Mr. St. Amand	1177
Small Arms and Light Weapons	
Ms. Deschamps	1177
Chinese Canadians	
Ms. Davies	1178
Paul Boge	
Mrs. Smith	1178
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Malhi	1178
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	
Mr. Kramp	1178
Le Haut-Saint-François Newspaper	
Ms. Bonsant	1178
Anniversary	
Mr. Manning	1179
Maplehurst	
Mr. Maloney	1179
Atlantic Accord	
Mr. Keddy	1179
National Elizabeth Fry Week	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	1179
Baddeck Academy	
Mr. Eyking	1179
Alcan	
Mr. Bouchard	1180
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	
Mr. Szabo	1180
Research and Development	
Mr. Batters	1180

ORAL QUESTIONS

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Standing Committee	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1180
Mr. Harper	1180
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1180
Mr. Harper	1181
Official Languages	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1181
Mr. Harper	1181
The Environment	
Mr. Coderre	1181

Ms. Ambrose	1181
Mr. Coderre	1181
Ms. Ambrose	1181
National Defence	
Mr. Duceppe	1181
Mr. Harper	1181
Mr. Duceppe	1182
Mr. Harper	1182
Humanitarian aid for Palestine	
Ms. Lalonde	1182
Mr. Van Loan	1182
Ms. Lalonde	1182
Mr. Van Loan	1182
Darfur	
Mr. Layton	1182
Mr. Harper	1182
Mr. Layton	1182
Mr. Harper	1183
Justice	
Mrs. Barnes	1183
Mr. Toews	1183
Mrs. Barnes	1183
Mr. Toews	1183
Ms. Folco	1183
Mr. Toews	1183
Ms. Folco	1183
Mr. Toews	1183
Humanitarian Aid to Palestine	
Ms. St-Hilaire	1183
Ms. Verner	1183
Ms. St-Hilaire	1184
Ms. Verner	1184
Canada Post	
Ms. Gagnon	1184
Mr. Cannon	1184
Ms. Gagnon	1184
Mr. Cannon	1184
Natural Resources	
Mr. McTeague	1184
Mr. Lunn	1184
Mr. McTeague	1184
Mr. Lunn	1184
The Environment	
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	1184
Ms. Ambrose	1184
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	1185
Ms. Ambrose	1185
Agriculture	
Mr. Tweed	1185
Mr. Strahl	1185

Industry	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	1185
Mr. Bernier	1185
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	1185
Mr. Flaherty	1185
Public Works and Government Services	
Mr. Bains	1186
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	1186
Public Service	
Mr. Proulx	1186
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	1186
National Defence	
Mr. Dosanjh	1186
Mr. O'Connor	1186
Mr. Dosanjh	1186
Mr. O'Connor	1186
Agriculture	
Mr. Bellavance	1186
Mr. Strahl	1186
Mr. Bellavance	1187
Mr. Strahl	1187
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency	
Mr. Savage	1187
Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	1187
Justice	
Mr. Norlock	1187
Mr. Toews	1187
Public Works and Government Services	
Mr. Dewar	1187
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	1187
Mr. Dewar	1187
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	1188
National Defence	
Mr. Cannis	1188
Mr. O'Connor	1188
Official Languages	
Mr. Blaney	1188
Ms. Verner	1188
Points of Order	
Oral Question Period	
Mr. Bélanger	1188
Mr. Harper	1188
Privilege	
Parliamentary Precinct Flags—Speaker's Ruling	
The Speaker	1188

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Prentice	1190
Ms. Keeper	1190
Ms. Guay	1190
Mr. Layton	1191

Interparliamentary Delegations	
Mr. Lee	1191
Mr. Benoit	1191
Mr. Hubbard	1191
Mr. Guimond	1192
Mr. Patry	1192
Mr. Bezan	1192

Criminal Code	
Mrs. Grewal	1192
Bill C-271. Introduction and first reading	1192
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1192

State Immunity Act	
Mrs. Kadis	1192
Bill C-272. Introduction and first reading	1192
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1192

Hazardous Products Act	
Mrs. Kadis	1192
Bill C-273. Introduction and first reading	1192
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1192

Canadian Environmental Protection Act	
Mrs. Kadis	1192
Bill C-274. Introduction and first reading	1192
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1193

Business of the House	
Mr. Lukiwski	1193
Motion	1193
(Motion agreed to)	1193

Petitions	
Child Care	
Mr. Savage	1193
Refugees	
Ms. Folco	1193
Autism	
Mrs. Davidson	1193
Child Care	
Ms. Chow	1193
Mr. Rota	1193
Health	
Mr. Rota	1193
Justice	
Mr. Rota	1193
Child Care	
Mr. Boshcoff	1193

Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	1194

Motions for Papers	
Mr. Lukiwski	1194

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Budget

Financial Statement of Minister of Finance

Motion	1194
Ms. Guay	1194
Mrs. Chamberlain	1195
Ms. Chow	1196
Ms. Guay	1196
Ms. Brunelle	1196
Mrs. Chamberlain	1197
Ms. Brunelle	1198
Mr. Szabo	1198
Ms. Oda	1198
Mr. Ouellet	1199
Mr. Simms	1200
Mr. Ritz	1200
Mr. St. Denis	1202
Mr. Blais	1202
Mr. McGuire	1203
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	1204
Mr. Keddy	1205
Mr. St. Denis	1205
Mr. MacKenzie	1207
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	1207
Mrs. Yelich	1207

Mr. Szabo	1209
Mr. Ouellet	1209
Mr. Dykstra	1209
Mr. St. Amand	1210
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	1211
Mr. Allison	1211
Mr. Christopherson	1211
Mr. Fast	1213
Mr. Szabo	1213
Mr. Nicholson	1213
Mrs. Mathysen	1214
Mr. Dykstra	1215
Ms. Beaumier	1216
Mr. Pacetti	1216
Motion agreed to	1219

Ways and Means

Motion No. 5

Mr. Flaherty	1219
Motion for concurrence	1219
(Motion agreed to)	1219

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

National Defence

Ms. Black	1219
Mr. Hiebert	1220

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